

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Thursday 19 June 2003

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

Mr Speaker offered the Prayer.

VALUATION OF LAND AMENDMENT (VALUER-GENERAL) BILL

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 30 May.

Mr PICCOLI (Murrumbidgee) [10.00 a.m.]: The Opposition will not oppose this bill, which will establish a committee to oversight the Valuer-General's office. Prior to the election, and certainly over the past few years, the Opposition has made many comments about land tax and the valuation of land. Those comments have come as a result of complaints made to various members of the Opposition, and I am sure to members of the Government, about the amount of land tax that landholders are paying. Of course, land tax is associated with the valuation of land, and landholders have complained in many cases about the methodology used to arrive at those valuations. This is a significant impost on a lot of landowners, particularly those who are suffering from having to pay land tax on their own homes.

Prior to the State election the Opposition called for a review of the Valuer-General's office, a review of the methodology used when conducting valuations and the contracting out of valuation services—all the things that will be reviewed by the proposed committee. The Opposition welcomes the Government establishing a parliamentary committee, but we are concerned that the five-member committee—two from the Legislative Council and three from the Legislative Assembly—will be stacked with Government members. It will hardly be an independent committee. Perhaps it would be better to have a committee external to the Parliament, one that all members could be confident is truly independent.

Land valuation, land tax, and the associated rates that come with those valuations is an important issue that has been in the media many times. It has been raised in this Parliament and I am sure it has been raised with every member, as I said. It certainly deserves to be independently reviewed but I am afraid that a parliamentary committee run by Government members will not be independent. The Opposition is also concerned about the lack of detail in the bill about the committee. I would certainly like an explanation from the responsible Minister as to why the committee is to be established only for the duration of this Parliament. There is also scant detail about how the committee is going to function, how often it will meet and so on, but I am sure we will find out in due course. The Minister may like to enlighten the House on those issues. This is a very important issue that is of great concern to many of our constituents. Though the Coalition has those concerns, it will not oppose the bill.

Mr ASHTON (East Hills) [10.05 a.m.]: I support the bill. The creation of this joint parliamentary committee to oversee the office of the Valuer-General will promote greater transparency, and the reporting function of the committee will ensure that Parliament and the community are informed about the Valuer-General's functions. The joint committee will serve as a parliamentary link and will provide an accountability mechanism for the important role of the independent statutory officer, similar to the committees that oversight the Auditor-General and the Ombudsman.

I note the concerns raised by the honourable member for Murrumbidgee about the independence of the committee, but I am sure he would agree that committees that oversight the Auditor-General, the Ombudsman, and the Police Integrity Commission function well. I believe that the establishment of a committee to oversight the role of the Valuer-General and give more transparency to what he does is a positive step.

As members will be aware, parliamentary committees are an extension of this Parliament and they share its privileges. Parliament has traditionally created committees of its members to conduct investigations into a whole range of matters, some of which are complex. I, like many members, have had constituents complain to me about the valuations they have received from the Valuer-General, and I have passed them on. This committee will provide another avenue to which members can refer criticisms or raise concerns about valuations.

The committee membership will be drawn from the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly. The honourable member for Murrumbidgee's fear that the Government might always control this committee is not well founded—perhaps unfortunately for the Government at times. Therefore, it will truly be a much more representative committee than if its members were to be drawn from the Legislative Assembly only. Parliamentary committees can invite persons to answer questions and they can access expert advice and provide opportunities for the public to have direct input into the parliamentary process, in this case the oversight of the Valuer-General's office.

This committee will have the responsibility to report to Parliament on the exercise of the Valuer-General's functions as outlined in the Valuation of Land Act 1916, the Land Tax Management Act 1956, and the Premium Property Tax Act 1998. When those reports are tabled in Parliament, members will have the opportunity to debate them. This is a significant step in ensuring that the public retains confidence in the independence of the Valuer-General and the functions he performs. I commend the bill to the House and I thank the Opposition for its support.

Mr DEBNAM (Vaucluse) [10.08 a.m.]: I welcome the opportunity to say a few brief words on this bill and to outline a little history to members who may not be familiar with this topic. As the shadow Minister said, we will not oppose the bill but we have some concerns about the precise intentions of the Government, as well we should when we consider what has happened in the past eight years on this topic. A grave concern about land valuations arose when the Carr Government first came to office and looked at land tax revenue, which at that time was a little over \$500 million. Premier Bob Carr and the Treasurer Michael Egan, through their combined efforts, managed to double land tax revenue from, I think, \$530 million to more than \$1 billion, where it has hovered for some years. They did that in a number of different ways. At various times they increased the tax rate, but they also prostituted the valuation system. This bill is about establishing a committee. We are yet to see how effective it will be, but it probably will be a sop to everyone who has been concerned for a number of years with land tax and land valuations.

Let us go back and look at what happened in 1997. It was in that year that the Carr Government corporatised the Valuer-General's Office, and we ended up with a number of private practitioners doing land valuations and increased tax rates for land tax. The net result the following year was that the land tax bills for a number of property owners trebled or in some cases quintupled. That led to general outrage. Prior to the 1999 election, people became very concerned about what the Carr Government would do with land tax, whether it would keep spreading it right across the State, whether it would keep increasing the rate, and whether it would keep raking in revenue in an insatiable fashion. It did that until the 1999 election, when the Coalition made it an issue. The result was a commitment from the Carr Government to review the valuation system.

There was a review after the 1999 election—again because the Coalition pushed for it, as did Alan Jones. Bob Carr had to agree to have Julie Walton review the valuation system. That review was done but, unfortunately, the Government did not give Julie Walton all the papers. So, although she produced a very good report, it lacked some of the fundamental details that would have showed how the Government had manipulated the system to increase valuations and therefore send land tax revenue skyrocketing. As a result of further pressure, there was another commitment at the 2003 election to have Julie Walton again look at land tax and valuations. I understand that will happen, but we are yet to see whether it will bring about any sensible reform.

The committee to be established by this bill may, to some extent, provide an opportunity for members of Parliament to oversight exactly what is happening with land valuations and the implications for land tax. But perhaps it is simply an attempt to put a lid on the discussion of land valuations and land tax problems. If that is the case, clearly the Coalition will continue to pursue the Government on this issue. Eventually we will show that what Bob Carr, Michael Egan and Kim Yeadon did in 1997 was to orchestrate a rip-off of New South Wales property owners.

Mr HAZZARD (Wakehurst) [10.13 a.m.]: Obviously the Opposition will not oppose the bill, but I want to place on record my concerns about the current valuation process and whether this bill will address those concerns. As a member of Parliament of some 12 years, I have lost count of the number of times people have come to see me about their concerns with the valuation process. Clearly, the current valuation system leaves an awful lot to be desired. It took an individual to take this matter to the High Court to put the spotlight on the whole of the problematic valuation process. That, of course, emphasises that for years the Government has failed to get the valuation process right. The court highlighted the silly way the Valuer-General goes about valuing in certain instances, for example, placing a value on a somewhat unique block of land in an expensive-house area and trying to interpolate that value to all other properties in the area.

That anomaly came to light as a result of the efforts of an individual, but the Government had been told year after the year by hundreds of New South Wales residents that the valuation system did not appear to be honest and forthright. That should cause this House a great level of concern. In view of the fact that the Government has managed to get the system so wrong for so many years, I suppose any steps that could be taken to put a spotlight on this flawed system should not be opposed by the Opposition. But I very much doubt the bona fides of the Government in the steps it is now taking, while purporting that it will review the valuation process. The legislation is vague, to say the least, about how the committee will be established. It will consist of two members of the Legislative Council and three members of the Legislative Assembly, but that tells us very little. For instance, there could be five members of the Labor Party. I have been a member of this place during almost a decade of Labor government.

Mr Debnam: Disturbing.

Mr HAZZARD: It is disturbing. I have sat on a number of inquiries and seen just how the Labor Party can manipulate those committees. No matter how fundamentally important the issue is, when it comes to protecting the Labor Party, some Labor members are extraordinarily adept at putting aside what is the right thing to do for the community and placing focus and emphasis on what is the right thing to do for the Labor Party. Even last year's inquiry into the Department of Community Services was managed and manipulated by Government members of that Labor-dominated committee. That is not to say that some members of the committee did not have the right intent, but one or two members certainly managed to manipulate the evidence given to the committee, what was listened to, what was given weight, and the outcome of the committee.

Mr Debnam: Classic Bob Carr.

Mr HAZZARD: Yes, classic Bob Carr—all imagery, smoke and mirrors, but at the end of the day nothing significant was delivered. It worries me that the committee to be established by this bill may end up being a smoke and mirrors exercise by the Government. It may well end up being used by the Government merely as an opportunity to tell commentators in the public sphere that it has established a committee in an effort to come to grips with the problem of valuation. The fact may be that the Government has no intention of addressing the issue because the current valuation process has delivered massive amounts of quite unreasonable land tax to the Government.

I doubt that it will happen, but I would like to hear the Minister responsible for this legislation tell the House just how he will ensure that it will deliver an objective and fair committee process, one that embraces the principles of natural justice, one that enables people to give evidence before the committee in the expectation of a fair hearing, and one that will ensure the outcome will not be tainted. All I can see at the moment is a political exercise by the Carr Government to make it look like it is doing something. I do not hold any great hope that it will. I would like to hear the responsible Minister say that the committee will be constituted by an equal number of Coalition, Labor and Independent members. Of course, that is impossible given the current provision of the bill, which is for a committee of five members, obviously again to be dominated by the Labor Party. Really, the membership of the committee should have been broader.

Today we should have before us clear parameters on how the committee will operate, where it will sit, how often it will sit, what groups of people will be allowed to give evidence, what categories of evidence will be allowed to be given and over what range of topics, and how the committee will reach its conclusions. From experience I do not trust the Government. The legislation is nothing more than a sham exercise by the Carr Government. Our community is fed up with the outcomes, particularly, of inappropriate valuations—making wrong valuations and charging inordinate amount of taxes, which is the hallmark of this Government. Because the Government has a vested interest in maintaining high valuations that enable it to continue to charge inordinately ridiculous amounts of land tax, its motives must be highly suspect. I would like to hear from the Minister, or the person representing the Minister, how the Government will guarantee the community that once the committee is established it will do the job it is set up to do and provide not just a smoke-and-mirrors exercise for the Premier.

Mr NEWELL (Tweed—Parliamentary Secretary), on behalf of Mr Knowles [10.21 a.m.], in reply: I thank the honourable members for Murrumbidgee, East Hills, Vaucluse and Wakehurst for their contributions indicating the Opposition's support for the bill, even though some of the comments were politically motivated. The joint committee will serve as a parliamentary link and accountability mechanism for the important role of the independent statutory officer, similar to those of the kind that exist already for positions such as the Auditor-General and the Ombudsman. I reject the implication and criticism by both the honourable member for Wakehurst and the honourable member for Vaucluse that the Valuer-General lacks independence.

Mr Debnam: Point of order: To correct the record, we are not talking about the independence of the Valuer-General, but the prostitution of the valuation system by—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The honourable member for Vaucluse will resume his seat.

Mr NEWELL: The committee will exist only for the term of this Parliament because the Government is confident that will be sufficient time to address community concerns and restore the full confidence of the public in the office of the Valuer-General. However, a future parliament may reconstitute the committee. The honourable member for Murrumbidgee also commented on the process, make-up, and independence of the committee. Regardless of the nature of the committee, if Opposition members were not happy with a report then they would have the option of presenting a dissenting report. I commend the bill to the House.

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a second time and passed through remaining stages.

CANCER INSTITUTE (NSW) BILL

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 17 June.

Mr HAZZARD (Wakehurst) [10.24 a.m.]: I lead for the Opposition on the bill, which we will not oppose. Although we have some concerns about it we acknowledge that the impact of cancer on residents of New South Wales, indeed Australia generally, is extremely significant. Any steps the Government takes to focus on the treatment and prevention of cancer, and associated palliative care, should be welcomed. I am disappointed that the Government did not comply with the five-day rule to enable the Opposition to fully consult in a broader sense, but I understand that the Government has restrictions placed upon it by the upper House, which I find quite extraordinary. The Government has its own problems in the Legislative Council, which it should consider negotiating upon in that House. Stipulations about dates when legislation must be passed are quite ridiculous.

I have consulted with the Minister and his staff. I particularly acknowledge Dr Tamsin Waterhouse from the Department of Health, who has been integrally involved with various aspects of the preparation of the legislation. She has been quite helpful to both the Government and the Opposition. Although we have had limited time to consult, I acknowledge that a number of interested groups have lobbied the Government and various members of Parliament. Sally Crossing and Max Gardner from Cancer Voices New South Wales wrote to all parliamentarians indicating their involvement in the development of the bill from policy to legislation. The group has asked members of Parliament to deal with the bill on a bipartisan basis and support it.

The New South Wales Coalition parties have taken that message on board, although that was our intention. We believe that any steps taken to increase the focus on various aspects of cancer should as far as practical be bipartisan. However, in due course I will comment on aspects of the bill that need to be raised. I also acknowledge that I met with Dr Andrew Penman and discussed with him the issues from the Cancer Council's perspective. Whilst the Government was not overly enamoured about allowing me to see the various submissions that were presented to it, it allowed me some time to go through them, and I therefore had the opportunity to observe that none of the 38 submissions received opposed the development of the Cancer Institute.

The Cancer Council, understandably, may have had some concerns at the outset. It would appear from the comments of a number of people that there was some uncertainty about how the institute would operate and how it would coexist with the Cancer Council. However, I understand that those concerns have been largely addressed and that the Cancer Council is happy with the provisions that ensure that its structure will be a company limited by guarantee, and that it will therefore be able to pursue its charitable fundraising exercises and the important work it does in putting a spotlight on cancer in a broader sense.

Cancer affects almost every person in some way—through individual illness, or the effect on family, friends and loved ones. Around 12,000 people die of cancer every year in Australia, which is an unacceptably high number. It is therefore appropriate and necessary that governments, regardless of their political persuasion,

look carefully at the role it can play in reducing the incidence of the disease, and increasing the quality and quantity of life for those affected by it. Every dollar spent on cancer research, treatment and prevention is welcome.

I note that cancer funding has dramatically increased at a Federal level over the past few years. This is consistent with the recommendation of the Wills report that funding for medical research should double by 2005. I understand there has been a 70 per cent increase in Federal cancer research funding nationwide in just two years, from \$25 million to \$43 million. I understand also that recently the Garvan Institute in New South Wales received \$4.74 million over five years in Federal grants through the National Health and Medical Research Council's Program Grants Scheme. The funding will greatly assist in understanding the progression of prostate and breast cancers.

The Cancer Institute (New South Wales) Bill establishes a Cancer Institute, which will be charged with promoting cancer research, treatment and care. The institute's objectives will be to increase the survival rate for cancer patients and reduce the incidence of cancer, improve the quality of life of patients and their carers, and provide a source of expert advice on cancer control. The institute's guiding principles will include that there be partnerships between public and private sectors and the general community, that resources be utilised for the maximum benefit of the greatest number of people, and that there be an evidence-based, patient-centred approach to cancer care and treatment.

The bill provides for a rather vague board structure. It does not specify the proposed membership of the board—that is, who will be appointed and from what groups members will be appointed—it does not refer to whether board members will be remunerated and by how much, and it does not refer to the way in which members should go about determining the steps to be taken in applying the objectives and guiding principles of the bill. The bill establishes a number of committees to guide the institute's work, including an Ethics Committee, a Clinical Services Advisory Committee, a Quality and Clinical Effectiveness Advisory Committee and a Research Advisory Committee.

The bill sets out admirable aims for the institute—and no-one would want to dispute the good intentions behind the bill. However, the Coalition is concerned about the practical application of these desirable ideals, and about the potential duplication of administrative costs and bureaucratic red tape that can bog down otherwise admirable aims. Perhaps the Minister will address these issues in his reply. Labor's policy document entitled "Building a Better Health System—Labor's plans for better cancer care", released in March 2003 during the election campaign, promised a total of \$290.2 million for cancer research over the next four years. The policy document specifically states on page 3 that the funding is "in addition to the money currently spent on cancer".

While the bill is silent on funding, Labor's pre-election promise for the institute was for \$205 million over four years. On my reading of the budget papers, married together with the policy documents from Labor and the latest pronouncements in the press, it would appear that approximately \$53 million of the promised money is money already allocated to the health budget. In other words, the money is already in the forward estimates for the health budget. The community and the Opposition welcome any measures that provide a lot of hope and increased focus on cancer, and it is therefore a pity that the Government appears to be playing games with regard to the funding aspects and is not telling the community the truth. It would appear that \$53 million of the promised money is in fact not new money, because it is already in the forward estimates for the health budget.

The Minister is obliged to inform the House and the community why that \$53 million is being rebadged as new money. What component of the amount announced in Labor's policy document is new money, what is recycled, rebadged money, and what are the people of New South Wales really getting? If the Minister does not want his credibility and that of the Government badly tainted, he should clarify the matter. I do not refer to the usual Labor waffle that we hear in this place. The Minister is the new boy on the block in the Labor Party, so perhaps he has not yet been tainted by that expertise that Labor members develop in council meetings all over the State. Hopefully he will clarify the matter.

On a matter as significant as cancer research, treatment and prevention, it is important that the Minister exercise reasonable bona fides and inform us. If it is the case that the election campaign promise was a porky, the Minister should let us know about it now. Let us not kid people. The Minister would be fully aware that whatever he says in this House today, there are medical specialists all over the State—highly intelligent, very capable people—who know how every cent in the health budget is spent and exactly what is going on. If they

are made aware that the new Minister for Science and Medical Research has told the House porkies about this matter, rather than simply clarifying that the election promise was a porky, that will reflect on how the institute is welcomed in the medical field and the broader New South Wales community.

When the institute was first announced there was some concern about whether we were talking about a new bricks and mortar type place, an edifice somewhere that perhaps would be a focal point. However, that is not realistic and not reflective of the way medical research is conducted worldwide, let alone in New South Wales. The Minister simply cannot pick a highly expert research team and plonk it in a new bricks and mortar establishment. It would appear that that was the Minister's vision at the outset—it is an understandable vision for someone who is concerned about cancer—but at that time he may not have understood the way research teams work. At this stage it appears that we will not have a particular bricks and mortar location, although I understand from discussions with the Minister that a small group of people—I think about 30—may be required.

Mr Sartor: It depends on whether we do the registry. That could be enough.

Mr HAZZARD: The Minister says that it depends on whether we do the registry. There may or may not be a group of 30 people in a small office somewhere. The Minister has indicated that it is dependent upon whether the registry currently undertaken by the Cancer Council is to be part of the new institute. That reflects the fact that many issues still need to be sorted out. However, if there is to be a centre or an office, issues will arise about the location of that centre or office. I would like to hear the Minister's views of where the centre or office will be located. The House is entitled to know the Minister's initial thoughts and what is happening at present.

In terms of the institute's functions, the real drivers towards research and so on, I gather from the way the bill reads now that it is acknowledged that we cannot have a bricks and mortar centralised location for research. That does not make sense because excellent, expert research teams already operate at various locations—in hospitals, in universities and, indeed, in private organisations. Under this bill the Government seeks to better co-ordinate those organisations and teams. It seeks to support, encourage and achieve the sort of outcomes envisaged in the bill. I note that the Minister will determine whether or not the institute achieves its goals. I am not sure whether that is a fair dinkum approach.

Mr Sartor: What about the Parliament?

Mr HAZZARD: I understand that a report will be made to Parliament as well. Clause 29 states that the Minister will determine whether the institute achieves its goals and will report to Parliament on that. Although I do not doubt the Minister's intention of trying to move things forward, potentially he has a conflict of interest in the sense that he is allocating taxpayers' moneys to do things a little differently than they have been done in the past. If, at the end of the day, he assesses that his actions have achieved a better outcome for the residents of New South Wales—cancer patients and the families of people suffering from cancer in New South Wales—that may raise issues that the community will want addressed. Why should the community have faith that the Minister will independently assess what he has done?

Under clause 21 the Minister will be able to appoint an independent panel of experts to review the institute's performance. Perhaps the Minister could tell us his thought processes about how that independent panel of experts may be appointed. The bill does not provide any details on how, when or what criteria might be applied to this panel. The Coalition is concerned that, effectively, it will be entirely for the Minister to decide whether the panel is ever established. Without referring back to the bill, I think the wording is that the Minister "may" appoint the panel; the bill will not require him to appoint a panel. I would like to hear the Minister's intentions in that regard.

It is necessary to guard against the duplication of services and the erosion of resources through bureaucracy. There would be little point in re-creating the wheel. The Cancer Council has done a good job in many areas in relation to the difficulties associated with cancer. I would like to know how the Minister will ensure that, during the next few months while he is trying to clarify the responsibilities of the Cancer Council versus the new institute, services are not duplicated and that we are not simply throwing money into bureaucracy that does not achieve the outcomes we want.

The Coalition is concerned that individual research is already being undertaken, and that individual research groups may be dissuaded from pursuing some of their research if they do not receive any benefit from the accreditation provision in the bill. The bill appears to indicate that particular research groups must be

accredited in order to access the additional funds that will come forward. I am not certain how that will work, and I would be interested to hear what the Minister envisages for the accreditation process. Who will make decisions on accreditation? On what criteria will accreditation be applied? Obviously, there is a degree of competitiveness between research groups, and hopefully this new institute will address that. Sometimes research is duplicated and triplicated, and sometimes that is for good reasons. By the very definition of "scientific research", placing tight constraints on research groups, or saying that one group will not get money because another group is doing the same research based on criteria that may not be the most objective, may lead to a diminution of some of the enthusiasm for research in New South Wales.

I would like to hear the Minister's current thinking on that. I know from discussions we had on Monday about some of these issues that the Minister is of the view that these issues must be sorted out in the near future. However, if his thoughts on that have progressed, perhaps he could explain to the House what they are. If these issues still remain matters for conjecture or for discussion, perhaps it should be placed on the record that we are not yet certain about them. As the shadow Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, I should like to add another perspective. In the past few days there has been more publicity about the overrepresentation of indigenous people at risk of preventable cancers. According to a study by Professor Bruce Armstrong, head of the University of Sydney school of public health, cited in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 17 June:

... indigenous people have more advanced disease at diagnosis, poorer treatment and less access to preventative health programs.

I understand that the use of tobacco is 30 per cent higher among Aboriginal communities than among non-Aboriginal communities and that cervical cancer mortality rates are 10 times higher for indigenous women than for non-indigenous women. Also, the life expectancy of Aboriginal people is 20 years lower than that of non-indigenous people. These statistics are appalling. Therefore, I trust the Minister will ensure that once the Cancer Institute is established it will work closely with groups such as the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation [NACCHO], which is the national peak Aboriginal health body established by Aboriginal people as an expression of self-determination.

NACCHO has a membership of approximately 100 Aboriginal community-controlled health services throughout urban and rural Australia and operates to overcome barriers to giving Aborigines access to mainstream primary health care services. If we are to be successful in reducing the unacceptable incidence of Aboriginal cancer mortality, we need to ensure representation of groups which are most affected. It may well be that when the Minister appoints members of the board he will give some thought to the appointment of a member to represent Aboriginal health perspectives. I suggest that there are very capable indigenous people who could provide major input to the board. I also point out—and this does not fall specifically within my shadow ministry but rather within a broader sense of medical and cancer matters—that ethnic communities in New South Wales and throughout Australia experience particular problems.

I strongly suggest to the Minister that the board—and if not the board, certainly one of the committees—should reflect the specific needs of ethnic communities. I know that a committee will be appointed to cater for those communities, but I would prefer the composition of the board to include a member with clear understanding of and interest in problems specific to members of ethnic communities. I ask the Minister to indicate in reply his thinking on appointments to board positions. The issue must be raised because the bill, and eventually the Act—

Ms Saliba: Stop being wishy-washy. Tell the Minister that this is a great idea. Tell the Minister it is a brilliant institute.

Mr HAZZARD: Hopefully, the bill will reflect the Minister's direction on board appointments to address the specific problems I have mentioned. The enthusiastic member for Illawarra asked me to indicate—

Ms Saliba: I actually said that you are wishy-washy.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Illawarra will come to order.

Mr HAZZARD: The point is whether the institute will improve the prospects for prevention of cancer, the treatment of cancer and the palliative care for people who, unfortunately, cannot avoid the consequences of cancer. This bill has the potential to do that, but it is very wishy-washy, uncertain and unclear on a whole host of areas. Although all honourable members have a certain degree of enthusiasm and support for a better and more co-ordinated approach to be adopted, it is incumbent upon the Minister to clarify for the House and for the community how this bill will achieve better outcomes. The guiding principles and objectives of the bill set out lofty aims, but the Minister needs to specify how those objectives will be achieved.

On 27 April an article headed "The battle against cancer needs more than a Sartorian fix" was published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. I do not share the same level of cynicism portrayed by the article, but it is imperative for the Minister to broaden his approach to the issue. He should place equal, if not greater, emphasis on the prevention of cancer rather than on research for better solutions for cancer sufferers. I ask the Minister in reply to address how he envisages the bill will work towards improved prevention measures with respect to cancer. As I indicated at the outset, the Opposition will not oppose the legislation. Indeed, the Opposition supports any steps that will produce better outcomes. However, we seek an assurance that the bill will achieve the desired outcomes. I am hopeful that it will and the Coalition parties, in a collective and bipartisan spirit, will support the examination of any measures that will ensure cancer sufferers are given hope for the future. The Opposition will not oppose the legislation.

Mrs PALUZZANO (Penrith) [10.55 p.m.]: I support the Cancer Institute (NSW) Bill. Every year nearly 30,000 people receive the news that they have cancer and more than 12,000 of them die. At this year's campaign launch, the Government gave a commitment that \$205 million would be allocated over four years to the fight against cancer in New South Wales. Although this bill is getting on with the job, it is more than just figures on a page or millions of dollars; it is about people in New South Wales and their stories. The objectives of the bill are: to increase the survival rate of people who have cancer and decrease the incidence of cancer in the New South Wales community; to improve the quality of life of people who have cancer and the quality of life of their carers; and to provide a source of expertise in cancer control. The bill also outlines nine guiding principles.

It is important that I share with the House the stories of people to whom the aims and guiding principles of the bill address. One such story that highlights the aim of improving the quality of life of cancer sufferers and their carers comes from my previous life as a radiographer. Many years ago in Blacktown Hospital I came across a 33-year-old father who was suffering from advanced stages of lung cancer. Blacktown Hospital treated him commendably, but even though he was in the advanced stages of cancer, he and his carers had to sit with other patients in the waiting room of the radiography section when he was undergoing treatment requiring weekly X-rays. As a young radiographer, I perceived the need for treatment and services specifically designed to meet the needs of cancer sufferers.

An example of that type of facility is the Nepean Cancer Care Centre, but such facilities did not exist all those years ago. The Nepean Cancer Care Centre was opened in 1998 at a cost of \$6 million. It treats all types of cancer but its speciality is medical oncology, radiological oncology and palliative care. The centre had over 27,000 occasions of service in 2001 and 2002. This year alone it has conducted 30,000 cancer services. In contrast to the facilities available for the young man I referred to earlier, in 2003 the patients receiving medical oncology, radiological oncology treatment and palliative care are able to do so in a \$6 million dedicated stand-alone facility that is providing commendable nursing, medical and volunteer care.

Another example of the need to improve the quality of life for cancer sufferers and their carers is my father, who passed away from non-Hodgkins lymphoma. Prior to 1998 he had to be treated at Nepean Hospital. To undergo chemotherapy treatment he had to walk through the old wards, up flights of stairs and lifts, past all the general wards. If he were undergoing chemotherapy treatment in 2003, he would do so at the Nepean Cancer Care Centre. He would not be required to take the long route up stairs, in lifts, down corridors and into old inaccessible treatment areas. It is important that the bill provides facilities for people with cancer and their carers.

Effective cancer control requires a partnership between the public sector, the private sector and the general community. Another story from the Penrith electorate involves the Relay for Life, which was held on 12 April this year. People gathered at Howell Oval amid a mass of tents, marquees and barbecues. The public sector, the private sector and the general community gathered together to raise money for the Cancer Council's Relay for Life. I commend Penrith City Council. More than 50 council staff joined the crowd on that day. Four council teams undertook the 24-hour Relay for Life. The teams—the Chardonnay Shufflers, the Depot Dogs, the Council Trainees and the PCC 1—raised more than \$6,000, a significant amount of money.

Gino D'Angelis from the asset management team raised more than \$500. Ginny Frunks from the waste and community protection section spent her time at a local shopping centre seeking donations for the Relay for Life and raised nearly \$300. A person from the parks, construction and maintenance section ran 50 kilometres—more than 150 laps on the day. It was quite a significant effort from Penrith City Council. I commend the organiser, Michelle Kennedy. Cancer control requires those partnerships between local government and the public and private sectors.

Guiding principle (d) provides that timely, high-quality co-ordinated and multidisciplinary care should be available for all patients irrespective of geographic location, including appropriate networking of cancer-related services. Another story from Penrith outlines the importance of the geographic location. Prior to this year women in Western Sydney had to wait for a mobile breast screening unit. The mobile breast screening unit has travelled to the Penrith area for the past 10 years, and is a great service, but the mammography X-rays taken at the mobile clinic had to be developed at Parramatta, and that took time.

As a radiographer I know that you may not always get it right the first time, so if anything was wrong women were called back to the mobile breast screening unit, and sometimes they were not told why they were called back. That caused a woman called Lorraine some concern. She was called back only because the mammogram was not clear enough. The Carr Labor Government has now delivered a permanent facility to Penrith, in a location close to public transport and in a major shopping centre. The most important point about the permanent facility is that the X-rays will be developed on site while the patient is in the facility. If further X-rays are needed, that can be done without them having to be called back. Having an early detection cancer facility close by is very important.

Another story from Penrith concerns the Paluzzano family. Many years ago my husband's father passed away as a result of leukaemia. He had to travel from Penrith to the Prince of Wales Hospital with a young child and a wife whose English was limited. He was treated at the Prince of Wales Hospital and he passed away at that hospital. His wife had to travel on public transport from Kingswood with a young child to sit with her dying husband, and travel all the way back from the Prince of Wales Hospital every day for many months—in those days a journey of about an hour and a half each way. Having a palliative care facility close to home is very important.

The last story I will share with honourable members is not a personal story but one that deals with women's health and women's cancer. It shows what a difference the Cancer Institute will make. The Cancer Institute will co-ordinate and build on existing efforts for cancer control. It will also focus on research and clinical innovation, which are important in the fight against ovarian cancer. The incidence and mortality rates for ovarian cancer in New South Wales are interesting. In 2001 there were 356 new cases and 274 women died from the disease. Based on the 2001 figures, one in 114 New South Wales women will develop ovarian cancer. It is the ninth most common cancer in women in New South Wales. The co-ordination and focus of this bill is important if one takes ovarian cancer as an example.

Ovarian cancer is a silent disease. In its early stages the symptoms are quite vague. They include pain and swelling of the abdomen, changes in the menstrual cycle, gastrointestinal symptoms such as heartburn and nausea, tiredness and loss of appetite. These symptoms in women can be quite vague. The co-ordination and focus that the institute may bring are important because it may help in the intervention and early detection of ovarian cancer. The institute needs to proceed in accordance with its guiding principles and its aim. At the moment there is no test to check healthy women for the early stages of this disease as there are with cervical cancer, such as Pap smears. There are blood tests, but results of those blood tests show up more highly in people who have common gynaecological problems, so the early detection blood test result may be masked in women with endometriosis or fibroids. So the co-ordination and focus of the Cancer Institute on cancer research will be very important in the treatment of ovarian cancer, a silent killer of a number of women in New South Wales.

The bill is also significant as it marks the delivery of a key plank of the Carr Government's policy. I commend the previous Minister for Health, Craig Knowles, for his work and also those who have been involved in the delivery of this bill. I commend the bill because it is a commitment to improve cancer programs, and those cancer programs will help the people of New South Wales, the families of New South Wales and the total New South Wales family. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr OAKESHOTT (Port Macquarie) [11.09 a.m.]: I strongly endorse the Cancer Institute (NSW) Bill. Its object is to constitute a Cancer Institute, with the aim of enhancing cancer research and other cancer-control activities and of improving the care, treatment and survival chances of people with cancer. Although the Minister for Health is not in the Chamber, I am sure that the Parliamentary Secretary, the honourable member for Newcastle, and departmental officers will pass on my comments to him. There is a regional perspective to this legislation. The mid North Coast, and Port Macquarie specifically, has devised a very exciting cancer plan that is shaped around the oncology unit at Port Macquarie Base Hospital and the network provided by the chief oncologist and head of the Medical Staff Council, Dr Stephen Begbie. Much exciting work has been done in the past two years to improve regional treatment and to minimise problems for cancer patients and their families and carers.

I hope that the Cancer Institute, the Minister and the Government will recognise that there is broad community support for the various Cancer Council campaigns, including daffodil days, head-shaving days, Relays for Life and morning teas. One has only to examine the Cancer Council fundraising figures to realise that the mid North Coast is a major fundraising area. There is broad community support for further cancer research and co-ordination work, and specialist support from within the Port Macquarie community is also developing well. We have created what I and many in our area consider to be a model for regional cancer care. When considering the implementation of the cancer plan throughout New South Wales I hope that the Minister will note the cancer services being provided in regional locations such as Port Macquarie.

In the context of this debate I will mention some fundraising activities that I believe the Minister and the Government should consider. Former police commissioner John Avery, who has retired in the Port Macquarie area, has been a great advocate for Blue Gum Lodge. The local community has got behind this centre, which offers accommodation for individuals and their families who must travel to Sydney to receive radiotherapy treatment. Individuals such as Mary McLaren and the great restaurateur Tommy Jeffs have also played important roles in generating community support for the fundraising efforts and work of the Cancer Council.

This bill falls into line with the key health initiative on the mid North Coast at present: the development of two radiotherapy units at Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour. The State and Commonwealth governments have agreed to install a linear accelerator at both locations in the next five years, with a second accelerator to be provided for each unit in the following five years. That is an indication of local need for greater support and improved treatment for cancer patients. I mentioned those radiotherapy units in debate last night and referred to the submission that had been put to the Minister for Health about privatised radiotherapy services at Port Macquarie. I am most concerned about that issue.

Port Macquarie has survived one privatised model in our recent health history and we do not want to repeat that experience. I encourage the Minister for Health to rule out completely having a privatised service as the preferred model. I urge him to stick to the commitment given by the previous Minister for Health to develop two public radiotherapy units at Port Macquarie and at Coffs Harbour. I also take this opportunity to call upon the Commonwealth Government to allocate the \$72 million that it committed in its Baume report to spending on radiotherapy services. The Commonwealth Government has indicated that the mid North Coast will be a priority area yet we have not yet seen a zack. We do not know how much of that \$72 million we will receive.

The State Government has committed \$20 million, which is fantastic. A local committee is up and running and working on detailed plans for the provision of regional radiotherapy services. We are now seeking a commitment from the State Minister for Health that it will be a public facility. This will engender much community support and goodwill for the project. We also urge the Commonwealth Government to confirm exactly how much money it will allocate for the construction of these radiotherapy units. That is the key health issue on the mid North Coast at present and is in line with the Government's plans for more co-ordinated health services as represented by the establishment of the Cancer Institute.

I strongly endorse the bill and wish the Cancer Institute every success in the future. I am sure that every honourable member would know someone who has been touched by cancer. I mention in that context my cousin John Seccombe, whom the honourable member for Lismore knows very well. Our family is behind him all the way. Two of my neighbours in Port Macquarie were diagnosed last year with the same type of cancer at exactly the same time. In the past couple of weeks one neighbour, Evelyn Lynch, has been given a clean bill of health but the other, Marian Ramm, is still suffering from the disease. That is a good example of the lottery that is cancer. All we really have is hope. My hope is that this legislation will produce better outcomes and that fewer people will suffer from cancer in the future. I hope also that this disease will become less of a lottery in New South Wales, Australia and the world.

Ms SALIBA (Illawarra) [11.17 a.m.]: I support the Cancer Institute (NSW) Bill. Some 28 per cent of deaths in New South Wales each year are attributable directly to cancer. We have fantastic cancer services in the Illawarra, and where the director of cancer services, Dr Phil Clingan, and his dedicated staff treat about 5 per cent of the State's cancer cases. The rate of lung cancer is slightly higher in the Illawarra than in others parts of the State. The establishment of the Cancer Institute is important because, as the Minister for Health has outlined, this body will be a driving force in tackling cancer head on. Its role will be to foster collaboration and co-operation in cancer research. It will not necessarily conduct the research but gather information from the many different agencies that currently investigate the causes and treatment of cancer.

For example, the New South Wales Cancer Council does a fantastic job promoting protection from skin cancer. I had several sun spots removed from my nose last year. It was a painful procedure and my nose

remained in quite a bad state for some time. However, this treatment was necessary in order to prevent cancer forming later. There are no guarantees that this will not happen but I will have regular check-ups and, hopefully, experience no further problems. The establishment of the Cancer Institute is a step towards saving lives in New South Wales. If the institute saves just one life, it will have been successful. However, we hope its success rates will be far greater than that.

In 1999, not long after I became a member of Parliament, I had to deliver a eulogy at the funeral of a girlfriend of mine who was 43 years old and the mother of three young children. At the time of her death her youngest child, Caitlin, was about three or four years old and her two boys were in kindergarten and year 2. Those children lost their mother. She was diagnosed with breast cancer, the cancer was removed and she received treatment. She was given the all clear after her three-month, six-month and 12-month check-ups but, 16 months down the track, she became ill. She thought it was the flu but she discovered she had secondary cancer. Unfortunately, she opted for a megadose of chemotherapy to try to sustain her a little longer. The doctor said that, if she underwent chemotherapy, she might live for two years, but the chemotherapy killed her within two days. One of the hardest things I have ever done was to deliver the eulogy at her funeral. I support this important bill, which will enable the Cancer Institute to establish better ways of dealing with this disease. The explanatory note for part 2 states:

Clause 5 specifies the objectives of the Cancer Institute, which are to increase the survival rate for cancer patients, to reduce the incidence of cancer in the community, to improve the quality of life of cancer patients and their carers and to operate as a source of expertise on cancer control for the government, health service providers, medical researchers and the general community.

Clause 6 provides that in exercising its functions under the proposed Act, the Cancer Institute is to have regard to the guiding principles listed in the proposed section. Those principles include recognising that effective cancer control requires partnership between the public sector, the private sector and the general community.

Stakeholders must work together to find ways of achieving better outcomes for cancer patients. As a result of research we know how to protect ourselves from skin cancer, but we also need to establish ways to protect ourselves from other cancer. That research will be carried out by the important institute that will be established as a result of this bill. I commend the Minister for introducing this bill, which I am sure will be wholeheartedly supported by the Opposition. Every person in New South Wales should be aware that this Government is doing what it can to find solutions to their health problems.

Mrs HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [11.23 p.m.]: It gives me pleasure to speak in debate on the Cancer Institute (NSW) Bill, which has as its object:

... to constitute a Cancer Institute with the aim of enhancing cancer research and other cancer control activities and of improving the care, treatment and chances of survival of people who have cancer.

The bill will also enable the registration of the New South Wales Cancer Council as a company limited by guarantee and repeal the New South Wales Cancer Council Act 1995. The Opposition supports the bill, which will create such an institute. There are many reasons why I support the development of any proactive initiative to combat cancer. As a health professional I looked after many cancer patients. I also knew a number of people who, because of the severity of their illness, ultimately succumbed to the disease. I am the daughter of a man, Bill Rasmussen, who died of lung cancer three years ago. Recently I visited the Garvan Institute to attend its annual general meeting. Mike Hobbs, one of my father's friends, bought a chair that was dedicated to my father. It was quite a moving experience for me to sit in that chair. I support this bill because I am a compassionate person who desperately wants to relieve suffering. I am also a committed member of the community who seeks to support anything that will result in the early detection of cancer and access to the latest treatment. As a legislator I have the ability to influence the creation of a Cancer Institute that aims to enhance cancer research and other cancer control activities. The aims of the Cancer Institute are:

... to increase the survival rate for cancer patients, to reduce the incidence of cancer in the community, to improve the quality of life of cancer patients and their carers and to operate as a source of expertise on cancer control for the government, health service providers, medical researchers and the general community.

The guiding principles listed in the bill include "recognising that effective cancer control requires partnership between the public sector, the private sector and the general community". The explanatory note for part 3 of the bill, which relates to the management and staff of the Cancer Institute, states:

Clause 7 establishes a Board that is to govern the affairs of the Cancer Institute. The Board is subject to the control and direction of the Minister, except in relation to a report or recommendation made by the Board to the Minister.

Clause 8 provides that the Board is to consist of at least 7, but not more 10, persons appointed by the Minister. The chief executive officer of the Cancer Institute, who is called the Chief Cancer Officer, is also to be a member of the Board.

Clause 9 requires the Board to establish several committees which have the function of providing advice and assistance to the Board. Those committees include an Ethics Committee, a Clinical Services Advisory Committee, a Research Advisory Committee and a Quality and Clinical Effectiveness Advisory Committee.

Clause 10 provides for the Governor to appoint a Chief Cancer Officer as the chief executive officer of the Cancer Institute. The Chief Cancer Officer is responsible for the management of the affairs of the Cancer Institute, subject to and in accordance with the directions of the Board.

Clause 11 permits the Cancer Institute to employ staff and to arrange for the use of the services of any staff or facilities of a government department or public authority. The Cancer Institute may also engage consultants for the purposes of getting expert advice.

The explanatory note for part 4 of the bill, which relates to the functions of the Cancer Institute, states:

Clause 13 gives the Cancer Institute the power to request any person or body to provide the Cancer Institute with any information about cancer control that is held by the person or body.

Clause 14 requires the Cancer Institute to report to the Minister on its activities each financial year. The report is to be tabled in Parliament.

Clause 15 gives the Cancer Institute certain powers to acquire and dispose of land or other property. The Minister must approve of any acquisition or disposal of this land.

The explanatory note for part 5 of the bill states:

Clause 21 provides for the Minister to appoint an independent panel of experts to review, and report to the Minister on, the performance of the Cancer Institute in achieving its objectives.

Clause 22 protects members of staff of the Cancer Institute, members of the Board, members of a committee of the Board and any person acting under the direction of the Board or a committee of the Board from personal liability in relation to anything done in good faith for the purpose of executing the proposed Act.

Over a number of years I have had a great deal to do with the Cancer Council. I note that certain assets, rights, liabilities and staff will be transferred to the new Cancer Institute. Dr Andrew Penman, Chief Executive Officer of the Cancer Council, welcomes this bill and is happy about the amendments and proposed alterations to the Cancer Council. He said:

... that various activities in cancer control would be shared between the NSW Government's new Cancer Institute and The Cancer Council. Although many of these had been agreed, final negotiations were still taking place to cement the roles of the two organisations.

The new Cancer Act, including the creation of the Cancer Institute, will come into effect straight away. However, our Act will not be repealed until new corporate and legal arrangements are in place which allow us to continue our activities and services.

What impact will this transfer of assets, rights, liabilities and staff have on the Cancer Council? Dr Andrew Penman and his staff at the Cancer Council of New South Wales do a fantastic job. The Cancer Council looks after the important Pap test register and cancer register. In addition to its research activities, the council operates the Cancer Council Shop, the Cancer Helpline and it raises money in various ways. Annually the council organises Australia's Biggest Morning Tea, Daffodil Day and Pink Ribbon Day. It assists organisations such as Action on Smoking and Health [ASH]. Anne Jones, with secretariat assistance, runs ASH; she is actively engaged in researching access to tobacco products by children and the effects of the marketing of tobacco products on the community. I would not like to see those activities curbed.

Statistics from 2001 indicate that 29,964 new cancers were reported in New South Wales; 16,202 in males and 13,762 in females. In males the main sites were prostate, large bowel and melanoma of skin. In females the main sites were bowel, melanoma of skin and lung cancer. In 2001 12,331 people died from cancer: 7,004 males and 5,327 females. From those statistics it is obvious that we have to enhance cancer research and improve the care, treatment and chances of survival of people who have cancer. Rana Farache, a work experience student from Asquith Girls High School, is currently gaining valuable work experience in my electorate office. She came to Parliament with me yesterday. Rana's life was touched by cancer when one of her teachers was diagnosed with the disease and left the school. Rana, who also has close contact with a cancer sufferer, said:

A member of my family has leukaemia and without support from government or family he would not be here with us today. I think it's great that the Government is establishing a Cancer Institute.

As a health professional I have looked after people in hospital and in the community. I, too, have looked after very young people who are diagnosed with cancer. One young woman, Yvonne, aged 32, was diagnosed with breast cancer soon after the birth of her third child. Subsequently she suffered secondary cancer when her children were aged two, four, and six. The impact on the family when Yvonne succumbed to cancer was great indeed. A friend of mine who had two children died in her early forties from secondary cancer to cervical cancer. At those special times people in our community need to be cared for. Palliative care providers are special people and often very sick people place their lives in the carer's hands.

My father was an intelligent man who worked in the health industry for a long time. Basically, he placed his life decisions in the hands of medical people, fully trusting that they would make the right decisions for him. Many people take that step when they are very ill. I am concerned that thoracic surgery is not carried out at Hornsby hospital, in my electorate. My constituents may need the removal of nodes or lungs or tumours but are unable to access thoracic surgery at Hornsby hospital. To obtain that treatment they have to travel for some distance—a concern that will get ongoing attention from me. We all have compassion—none of us wants to see someone ill or suffering. The effects of cancer on patients and their family are often devastating, so we should do everything we can to alleviate that suffering.

Recently in my electorate the first Relay for Life was held—a fantastic event. It raised almost \$50,000 and created a lot of networking. It afforded people the opportunity to hear heartbreaking stories of mothers, fathers and children who have died from or are fighting cancer. We now have the opportunity to vote for the setting up of a Cancer Institute, which will seek to improve the chances of life expectancy by providing early detection and, hopefully, prevention of cancer. As I said, the Opposition supports the bill. I have asked a number of questions about the construction of the institute. I stress that we require publicly accountable benchmarks and we need to make it mandatory that the Minister appoint an independent panel of experts.

The bill is silent on funding but, as indicated by the honourable member for Wakehurst, a Labor pre-election promise was \$205 million over four years, which apparently is part of the \$290 million cancer package. I hope that the Government makes clear very shortly how much money will be given to this project. There would be better co-ordination of numerous individual research groups if the bill works the way it is intended in the prevention, treatment and palliative care of cancer patients. I point out that the bill may create additional bureaucracy rather than distributing funds on the ground. Individual research is undertaken by groups, including the Garvan Institute. Research groups could be impeded if funding is not handled well. It is intended that the Cancer Institute will operate only in New South Wales. It would be worthwhile exploring whether it could operate nationally, because it would be sensible not to duplicate cancer research. On balance this is a very good bill. Its objectives are to lower the death rate, to detect cancer early and to support research. I look forward to the progress of the development of the Cancer Institute.

Ms D'AMORE (Drummoynne) [11.36 a.m.]: The Cancer Institute (NSW) Bill introduces a key plank of the New South Wales Government's health policy for the March 2003 election—namely, the establishment of a cancer institute for the people of New South Wales. Cancer accounts for 28 per cent of all deaths, and almost 30,000 new cases of cancer are reported in New South Wales each year. Such a toll has a devastating impact on our community, and clearly warrants a focused and co-ordinated response. Guiding our efforts in the drafting of the bill has been the principle that our efforts in the struggle against cancer should be not only caring but also clever. The bill equips us with a new weapon in this battle, the New South Wales Cancer Institute, which will become the tip of our spear in the fight against cancer.

The concept of a cancer institute for New South Wales was first considered almost 60 years ago when the then Premier, Sir William McKell, allocated £350,000 for that purpose. On his appointment as Governor-General the idea lapsed. Today William McKell's proposal for a New South Wales Cancer Institute is an idea whose time has come. The concept of cancer control in the legislation encompasses a very broad range of activities, including research, prevention, diagnosis, care and treatment. The proposed institute will place itself at the heart of all aspects of cancer-related activities. It will become the State's driving force to tackle cancer head on. I stress that our goal is focused on outcomes. We want less cancer, fewer deaths from cancer and better care for those with cancer. The success of the bill will not be measured by the amount of money invested in these efforts, but in the number of lives saved and the improvements we deliver to the lives of those suffering from the disease.

In fulfilment of the Government's commitment, the bill establishes the Cancer Institute as a separate statutory corporation with a governing board of up to 11 members, including the institute's chief executive, who will be titled the Chief Cancer Officer. The board will be accountable, through the Minister, to the New South

Wales community. Appointments to the board will provide not only a mix of skills, including clinical and research professionals, but also people with consumer and patient perspectives. The board's primary focus will be on how the cancer effort can deliver better outcomes for the people of New South Wales.

Clause 8 of schedule 1 to the bill will ensure the transparency and probity of board decision making through appropriate management of any potential conflicts of interest. In addition, to enhance objectivity and independence of the institute's activities, under clause 21 of the bill the Minister may establish an independent panel of experts, including people drawn from outside New South Wales, to review and report to the Minister on the institute's performance in achieving its objectives. It is the Government's intention that an international review panel will be convened to periodically review the institute's performance.

Consistent with the need for accountability to the people of New South Wales, the institute will be required to provide an annual report to the Minister within four months of the end of each financial year for tabling before Parliament. The reporting requirements demanded of the institute are explicit. Its annual report to Parliament must include details of the outcomes achieved from the institute's initiatives during the financial year; details about trends in the incidence, mortality and survival rates of cancer; and an overview of cancer-related research in New South Wales during the previous financial year.

This annual report will be in addition to the annual financial reporting requirements required of statutory bodies receiving funding through the Health appropriation. Clause 6 provides a set of guiding principles for the institute in undertaking its functions. These principles recognise that accountability, equity, the optimal use of resources and appropriate linkages both within and outside New South Wales are essential to the success of the overall cancer effort. Most important, they recognise that at the centre of cancer effort, regardless of the form it takes, is the cancer patient. The role of the institute will involve the promotion of efficiency in clinical and research practices. There is no limitless supply of funds and, while some areas of activity will receive resource enhancement, the Government would expect value-for-money testing of programs and services to optimise the use of public funds.

I turn now to the provisions dealing with the functions of the institute, which are set out in clause 12. The institute will have broad functions in relation to all aspects of cancer research. The establishment of the institute offers an opportunity to identify current resources going to cancer-related research and advise on future priorities for research in this area. The institute will be able to conduct its own research where appropriate. It will be able to commission and sponsor research by other organisations. The institute will play a key role in fostering collaboration and co-operation across the various bodies involved in cancer research. In order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the cancer research effort in New South Wales and maximise the benefits of available research funds, it is proposed that the institute establish a publicly available register of bodies and individuals contributing to the cancer research effort.

Participation in the register will be voluntary, and participants will be able to provide a broad outline of their area of research. There is strong evidence that suggests that best practice principles in cancer control, applied consistently, will significantly reduce death rates from cancer. Take for example breast cancer, where application of screening programs and better treatment have led to a 10 per cent increase in survival rates for breast cancer sufferers over the past 20 or so years. A major role of the institute will be keeping abreast of the very latest developments and improvements in cancer control both in Australia and overseas, and disseminating these improvements and developments to organisations and practitioners in the field in a manner that ensures their comprehensive uptake.

Ensuring that the best health care is provided involves a systematic approach to the dissemination of relevant information. The bill allows the institute to develop its own clinical guidelines and protocols for use by health professionals and other health service providers or, where appropriate, to endorse a guideline or protocol developed by another body, whether in Australia or overseas. The institute will be able to accredit cancer control programs that meet specified standards. This form of benchmarking will encourage excellence in cancer control. The institute will also be able to sponsor innovative programs within the public health system as well as work with the Department of Health and the public health system for the further promotion of a patient-focused, seamless, multidisciplinary approach to cancer care.

Another priority for the institute will be fostering improvements in the prevention and early detection of cancer. Prevention can include both health promotion measures, such as programs to reduce the incidence of smoking, as well as campaigns for sun protection. The institute will play a role in identifying and disseminating the latest developments in cancer screening, such as recent developments in screening for bowel cancer, and

cancer genetics screening. It will be given a wide-ranging brief to review and evaluate existing programs and services, as well as new initiatives and pilots within the public health system. Recommendations of the institute for improvements to existing programs or new initiatives can be implemented by way of incorporation into the performance agreements between public health organisations and the director-general under the Health Services Act 1997.

It is also proposed to confer on the institute a policy, planning and review role in respect of cancer control. The bill sets out a specific and ambitious deadline by which the institute, in conjunction with the Department of Health, must develop a State cancer plan. It is envisaged that the plan will encompass the full spectrum of cancer control activities to be undertaken across New South Wales. This will include clinical initiatives and research projects, as well as prevention and information strategies. A State cancer plan is necessary to ensure an integrated statewide approach to cancer control. The 30 June 2004 time frame for the initial plan will give the necessary impetus for the institute to get on with the task of enhancing the State's cancer control effort.

The public funds which the institute will administer in each financial year will include not only its own operating budget; the institute will also have available funds for allocation to a range of cancer control activities such as research, innovative clinical programs and screening trials. One of the functions of the institute under clause 12 will be to submit recommendations to the Minister on how the funds it will administer in a particular financial year should be allocated. The establishment of the institute will enhance the expertise on cancer available to Government and the people of New South Wales. The institute will become a focal point for advice on all cancer-related matters. It will be able to receive specific references from the responsible Minister or the Director-General of Health, to provide advice and to undertake assessments of particular programs and services within the public health system.

The institute will also have a role in co-ordinating and managing statewide cancer data collection and analysis. It will be able to manage and utilise data collections based on identified patient data established under the notification provisions of the Public Health Act 1991. In addition, it is expected to review existing data collections with a view to identifying any gaps or other inadequacies. Where appropriate, it will be able to establish and maintain its own data collections, subject to relevant privacy considerations, and to utilise information from other sources in undertaking its own research and policy work. In recognition of the increasing use of complementary therapies by cancer patients, the institute will be specifically empowered to investigate and evaluate these therapies.

Complementary therapies, when properly applied, may enhance the quality of life for cancer patients. The institute will assess both their effectiveness and their safety, and provide patients and doctors with better advice on their use. Other functions proposed for the institute in relation to cancer control include the dissemination of advice and information to the public, and the training and education of health personnel. The success of the institute in achieving its objects will depend, in large part, on a consultative and collaborative approach across all sectors that recognises the institute's diverse range of stakeholders and the need to forge strategic partnerships and undertake joint ventures as part of its overall approach. Given its importance, a specific function related to consultation and collaboration has been included.

Honourable members will be well aware that community participation and fundraising provides an important component of the overall resources devoted to the fight against cancer. While the institute will itself be able to engage in such activities itself, more importantly it will foster such activities across the community by other organisations. In turn, the institute may be the recipient of funds raised by community organisations or funds otherwise donated to it for cancer-related purposes. There are many bodies engaged in activities associated with cancer relief. In order to maximise the benefits to cancer patients and their carers of the funds derived from charitable fundraising for cancer relief it is desirable to harness the energies of these various bodies to achieve co-operative outcomes and a transparent and comprehensive picture of how cancer charity dollars are applied. To that end—and similar to the proposal for a publicly available research register—the institute will be able to establish a voluntary register of such bodies and will be required to provide an overview of cancer-related activities in its annual report.

The Commonwealth Corporations Act 2001 provides a mechanism for statutory corporations such as the Cancer Council to become registered as companies and operate in future within the corporate framework. These provisions enable seamless transition from statutory corporation to registered company. It is proposed that the date of deemed registration of the council would be fixed by ministerial order, thereby enabling the timing of the transition to be set by the Minister taking into account the readiness of the Cancer Council and of the institute for transition.

Repeal of the Cancer Council Act will take effect simultaneously with or at a date subsequent to the deemed registration of the Cancer Council under Corporations Law. Before transition to registration under Corporations Law, a due diligence process must be undertaken to identify the current assets and liabilities of the Cancer Council in its current form as a public body. This will form the basis for working with the council to develop appropriate transitional arrangements in respect of the transfer of assets, liabilities and staff. Under clause 25 of the bill, comprehensive transitional regulations to provide for such transfer can be made.

Honourable members should note that there has been significant consultation on the proposals for the institute since they were announced before the March election. A copy of the proposed cancer strategy, which includes the establishment of the institute, has been available on the Department of Health web site for public comment. Submissions from interested organisations and individuals were considered by the department in developing the provisions of the bill. Forums attended by researchers, clinicians, consumers and other key stakeholders have been convened to discuss the proposed role and functions of the institute. To fully realise its potential requires the continued co-operation and goodwill of many organisations and individuals across New South Wales involved in the cancer effort. I urge honourable members to support this historic initiative and to lend their support. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr GEORGE (Lismore) [11.51 a.m.]: Every honourable member could recount stories about someone dying or suffering as a result of cancer. I will highlight some concerns about the situation in the north of the State. I am sure I also speak on behalf of the honourable members representing the electorates of Clarence, Ballina and Tweed. My concern is that our constituents suffering from cancer rely on services based in Queensland. I was very concerned yesterday to read an article in the *Northern Star* highlighting threats to the cancer radiation service provided in Queensland. The article states:

CANCER patients may be forced to wait longer for radiation treatment in Queensland with therapists planning to resign en masse next month.

United Radiation Therapists Group spokesman Hamish McLean said yesterday a 'significant number' of therapists would resign from July 4 after the State Government failed to resolve a three-year crisis.

Mr McLean said the next round of resignations at the Mater, Princess Alexandra and Royal Brisbane hospitals would force the cancellation of many treatment shifts and double the waiting list.

Queensland Health Minister Wendy Edmond said her department had begun talks with private health services to secure treatment for public patients in the event of a walkout.

Honourable members might ask what that has to do with New South Wales. If the walkout happens, I ask the Minister for Health and the Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Cancer) to keep an eye on the situation. It will impose enormous pressure on people in the north of the State undergoing cancer treatment. The State governments involved are both Labor governments. If the walkout happens on 1 July, I will be calling on the Carr Government to address the issue immediately with the Queensland Government because people in the north of the State depend on the Queensland system. Of course, this highlights the need for a therapy unit in the Lismore area. That need was recognised by the former Minister for Health, the Hon. Craig Knowles, when he announced prior to the election that Lismore was near the top of the list for the provision of such a facility. I reinforce the call for a radiotherapy unit at Lismore because the north of the State must be looked after, and we cannot depend on accessing the Queensland system. We need that unit as soon as possible.

I pay tribute to the Northern Rivers Area Health Service palliative care unit at Lismore. The team at that unit plays a tremendous role in providing services and support to patients and their families who are forced to use it. No honourable member could speak highly enough of the palliative care teams operating around the State. They provide comfort and support not only to patients but also to their families and friends. Two members of my family—my late mother and an uncle—have used the unit and I cannot commend it highly enough. I know that all members appreciate the work that these units do throughout the State. I also place on record the community's appreciation of the services provided to families of patients who want to spend their last few days at home. Many services are offered to assist families to keep dying loved ones at home, and I trust that the Cancer Institute will continue to support those services. They are essential in providing comfort to families of patients and patients who wish to stay at home.

Many people have commented about Relay for Life events. Casino held a successful event two years ago, Lismore held one last year and Ballina will hold one this year. I wish the organisers every success. Communities are very generous in supporting these events. We never know who has been touched by cancer, but when attending these events one sees many people wearing red sashes, which signify cancer survivors. We have many unsung heroes and quiet achievers. Like watching yesterday's welcome home march for service personnel returning from the Iraq conflict, seeing these people is very touching.

I also pay tribute to the BreastScreen NSW North Coast unit at Lismore, in particular to former service director Beth Trevan, whose work is being continued by Denise Hodgson and her team. The unit provides services throughout the district, from Port Macquarie to the border. They do a tremendous job in providing breast-screening services to people who probably would not travel to obtain them. I trust that the institute will continue those services. The unit even provides services to small communities of 200 people. I commend the bill and I am pleased to have the opportunity to do so.

Ms JUDGE (Strathfield) [11.59 a.m.]: I support the Cancer Institute (NSW) Bill. In the not too distant past cancer was a dreaded, dark illness—a diagnosis of which invariably represented a death sentence. Families rarely openly discussed the sickness and suffering of a relative. It was an enormous black period in the life a family, and bleakness would flow into the local community, rippling out without anyone knowing why. In my mother's time cancer was often talked about in whispers, though conversely, and oddly enough, it was given huge headlines when a person of fame fell victim to it. Young children, babies, young men and women, mothers, fathers, grandparents—I am sure most of us here have known families who have experienced the torment of a dying relative.

At the moment, many in my electorate of Strathfield in the Sydney's inner west are mourning the loss of Father Ezekiel Petritsis of St Nectarius Greek Orthodox Church, who died from lung cancer last Thursday. He was an important person in the Greek community and in the Burwood community generally. He was known for his generosity and hard work, and he always had an open-door policy at the church in Railway Parade, Burwood. He will be sadly missed. His funeral service is taking place today and prayers are being said in that church as we speak. My thoughts are with his family and friends at this difficult time. His compassion and leadership will be truly missed.

Cancer is an insidious disease which pervades the lives of three out every five people in this country. It has only been in relatively recent times, in the past 25 to 30 years, that medicine and science have come to understand more clearly the nature of cancer and its cruel ability to encroach on living organs in the body, destroying function and crippling the body. Through this understanding, successful treatments have emerged that have not only succeeded in immobilising the disease but in many cases providing a cure and prevention. Yet there is much more to be done because, despite the remarkable inroads, far too many people and families still suffer the agony of cancer affliction.

The Government is standing by its commitment to the people of New South Wales to establish the Cancer Institute. I support this bill wholeheartedly because it is a vital part of our society's battle against cancer. We need this institute to ensure the front-line fighters in the medical world have the support and resources to concentrate exclusively on finding cures that will lead to the eradication of cancer and an end to suffering by victims and their families. That is a goal worth pursuing with diligence, focus and resources. With the support of the Government and Minister Sartor, the State's first Cancer Institute will allocate \$205 million over four years to fight cancer in New South Wales. We are prepared to put our money where are policy is.

The Cancer Institute will be a statutory authority with a mission to increase the survival rate of people with cancer, reduce the incidence of cancer in the New South Wales community, improve the quality of life of people with cancer and their carers and provide a source of expertise on cancer control. I believe we have a responsibility to our families and communities, as well as to the medical and scientific faculties, to do everything we can to be proactive and support projects that lead to the successful treatment and eradication of cancer. It is important that the institute have broad functions to oversee the cancer control effort in New South Wales and enhance its effectiveness. The bill specifies 19 functions which empower the institute to support and encourage cancer-related research, foster best practice and evidence-based approaches to cancer control, undertake or commission innovative cancer programs, accredit programs, maintain research registers, provide the Minister with expert advice and evaluate the role of complementary therapies.

The institute's primary initial task will be to develop a State cancer plan by 30 June 2004, and it will be required to report annually to the Minister. The reports will be tabled in both Houses of Parliament. The Minister may also appoint an independent panel of experts to review the performance of the institute. I regard the work of the Cancer Council as profoundly important to the institute. Today many honourable members have applauded the work of the Cancer Council. I applaud the staff and volunteers of the council for their dogged and determined approach to raising funds, promoting anticancer projects, ensuring governments are up to speed on the latest breakthroughs—or, conversely, the problems with the cancer issue—and persistently reminding us all to take steps where possible to prevent cancer.

The Cancer Council deserves to be a major part of the institute, given its extensive knowledge of the cancer problem. The "Cancer in New South Wales—Incidence and Mortality 2001" report, which was launched this month, lists a number of interesting findings and statistics. Alarming, there were approximately 30,000 new cases of cancer in that year. That figure highlights the prevalence of this disease amongst the general community. According to that survey, the incidence of lung cancer, liver cancer and mesothelioma is on the rise in New South Wales. Those diseases have been traditionally regarded as male cancers. However, they are also increasing amongst women. Between 2000-01 incidence rates for lung cancer in women increased by 18 per cent. The outcomes for older women were particularly alarming, with lung cancer rates doubling amongst women aged 55 years to 69 years and tripling in women aged 70 years and over. The establishment of the Cancer Institute will go a long way towards centralising and furthering cancer research, care and treatment and other aspects of cancer control. I commend this bill to the House.

Mr KERR (Cronulla) [12.06 p.m.]: This is an important bill. It is unfortunate that the standing orders were not observed, the appropriate notice was not given, and the shadow Minister received no co-operation, because this matter transcends politics.

Mr Gaudry: That is why you are not being political about it.

Mr KERR: That is why I am not being political or partisan, but simply asking for procedural fairness in relation to the bill. According to information provided by the Cancer Council of New South Wales, in 2001 there were 29,694 new cases of cancer and 12,331 cancer deaths. That is a great tragedy and each of those deaths involved individuals and their families and friends who were touched by it. The people in the Sutherland shire have long rallied to fight against cancer even before this legislation. Recently, Julie Foldi organised a Relay for Life, with Dr Schag, the shire's favourite band. Among the musicians were Martyn Downs and John Holt. Honourable members would be aware that John Holt is a former world and Australian ironman. Bruce Baird, the Federal member, and I attended the rally, together with Brad McKay, a former captain of the St George Rugby League team, whom the Minister would be aware lost his wife through cancer. He spoke on that occasion. Some time ago Bruce Baird and I attended a bicycle ride that set out from Fitness First at Sylvania to raise money in the fight against cancer.

The Minister should be concerned about the rise in melanoma in Sutherland. In the past 10 years, according to the Cancer Council, incident rates for melanoma have risen by 20 per cent in males. The report of the New South Wales Cancer Council entitled "Cancer in New South Wales—Incidence and Mortality 2001" was released two weeks ago. Under the heading "Melanoma of skin" on page 42, the report states:

There were 2,959 new cases of melanoma of skin in NSW in 2001 (1,727 male, 1,232 female). This was 10.7% of all cancers in males and 9% in females. Of the 421 deaths from melanoma of skin, 271 were in males (3.9% of all male cancer deaths) and 150 in females (2.8% of female cancer deaths). Allowing for differences in age, males were 1.5 times as likely to be diagnosed with melanoma of skin as females and 2.2 times as likely to die from melanoma of skin.

Melanoma of skin ranked third in males and females for incidence and its mortality ranked tenth and eleventh respectively...

In the ten years from 1991 to 2001 the age-standardised incidence rates of melanoma of skin rose by 20% in males and mortality rates fell by 11% in males.

That shows the importance of prevention, a matter to which I will return shortly. Under the heading "International comparison" the report makes this sobering comment:

NSW incidence rates for melanoma in 1988-1992 (33.1 males, 25.6 females per 100,000) were at least twice those in other countries with the exception of non-Maoris in New Zealand (25.0 males, 29.8 females).

I return to prevention, a matter of particular interest to me and to the Minister because of the beachside nature of our electorates. I have instanced the statistics, each of which represents an individual tragedy, but clear prevention strategies would avoid a lot of pain and suffering. I call upon the Minister to address that issue in his reply. As the shadow Minister said, while the objectives of the bill are laudable, the mechanism for achieving those goals is lacking in detail. The Minister has heard the second reading speech of the shadow Minister and should reply to those matters. I should mention the tremendous work in melanoma done by Dr John Chapman from my area. This issue and this bill transcend politics. I call upon the Minister to guarantee that funding and resources are provided on an objective basis, and not on a partisan basis.

Might I say that because of the efforts of dedicated people in the Sutherland shire and elsewhere, funds have been made available for the fight against cancer. The Opposition supports the bill. The shadow Minister, because of his interest in and knowledge of this matter, could have provided even greater assistance in

addressing this issue had he been consulted earlier and had the notice required by the standing orders been given, thus enabling stakeholders to be consulted. I appreciate that the Minister is new to this Chamber, and I appreciate what Gerry Gleeson said when he worked for the Public Accounts Committee, but it benefits everybody if the rules of this place are followed. That allows greater input to a worthy subject. I certainly spoke for the shadow Minister when I said he is happy to co-operate in the great venture being undertaken in this process. We want to ensure, as they say in Cronulla, that cancer is a word, not a mandatory sentence.

Mr McLEAY (Heathcote) [12.14 p.m.]: I support the Cancer Institute (NSW) Bill, which will help to realise the concept of the then Premier, Sir William McKell, when almost 60 years ago he allocated £350,000 for the purpose of what will now be the Cancer Institute. His idea lapsed when he became Governor-General. But the institute is now to be established with clear objectives. They are to increase the survival rate of people with cancer, to reduce the incidence of cancer in the New South Wales community, to improve the quality of life of cancer patients and their carers, and to provide an expert resource on cancer control. Those goals are outcome focused.

The institute will be a statutory corporation with a governing board and a chief executive officer, who will be the Chief Cancer Officer. They will provide an annual report to the Minister for tabling in Parliament. Therefore, we will have transparency and accountability, and the opportunity to monitor the effectiveness of the institute. I am confident that we will also be able to use this opportunity to measure the benefits that will be driven by the Cancer Institute. I am confident that each year we will be able to take check and count the lives saved, monitor the reduced incidence of cancer in New South Wales, see the quality of life improve for patients and their carers, and probe the expert resource control on cancer control.

In New South Wales in 2001 there were 29,964 new cases of cancer, with 16,202 cancers being diagnosed in males and 13,762 in females. In New South Wales in 2001 there were 12,331 deaths from cancer. There were 7,004 deaths in males and 5,327 in females. What are the most common cancers? For males, they are cancers of the prostate, at 24 per cent; cancers of the large bowel, at 14 per cent; and cancers of the lung and melanoma of the skin, both at 11 per cent. The most common types of cancers in females were cancers of the breast, at 29 per cent; cancers of the large bowel, at 15 per cent; melanoma of skin, at 9 per cent; and lung cancer, at 7 per cent. Leukaemia and cancers of the central nervous system were the most common malignancies in childhood.

The most common causes of cancer death are: for males, lung cancer, at 22 per cent; prostate cancer, at 13 per cent; and large bowel cancer, at 12 per cent. The most common cancers causing death in females were those of the breast, at 16 per cent; lung cancers, at 14 per cent; and cancers of the large bowel, at 13 per cent. The median age of diagnosis of cancer was 67 years for males and 64 years for females. These figures are from the "Cancer in New South Wales—Incidence and Mortality 2001" report compiled by the New South Wales Central Cancer Registry, which is managed by the Cancer Council of New South Wales and funded by NSW Health.

This bill will have an impact on the Cancer Council of New South Wales. Before the recent State election, the Labor Government announced that it would create a new initiative in cancer control called the Cancer Institute. This bill brings the institute into being. At the same time, the Government and the Cancer Council have together agreed to repeal the 1955 Cancer Council Act. This Act has meant that there has always been a formal relationship between the Cancer Council and the New South Wales Government. However, it has been argued that the Cancer Council has been financially and strategically independent for at least 30 years. Repealing the Act will confirm that independent status.

The Cancer Council is fully committed to continuing and improving on the services and functions it has always carried out. Those include cancer prevention campaigns like Slip, Slop, Slap and anti-tobacco programs, patient information and support, such as its helpline, to support programs and print materials. The council will continue funding of vital cancer research, being a voice for the people of New South Wales in ensuring that they get the best when it comes to cancer treatment, prevention and education. Because the specific roles of the Cancer Institute and the Cancer Council are still being worked out, there will be some changes in their responsibilities. They will let all of their supporters know the details when they have them.

It should be clearly stated that the Cancer Council of New South Wales welcomes the new Act. The Cancer Council tells us that one in three people in Australia will develop cancer. That is a tragic statistic. Whilst cancer research and care of patients and support for families is not new, I hope this bill can ensure that in New South Wales there will be a force that will tie it together, give new focus and be the driving force, so that people like my beautiful cousin Lisa Saad may have survived her leukaemia and I would have been able to know her better.

In summary, the New South Wales Government has committed \$205 million over four years to lessening the impact of cancer on the New South Wales population through better services, more research and greater investment in prevention and early detection. The institute will be responsible for allocating funding to new cancer control initiatives. As I said earlier, it will have its own board, will be government funded and will be accountable to Parliament. It will drive New South Wales organisations so that we will have less cancer, fewer deaths from cancer and better care for those with cancer. I commend the bill.

Mr FRASER (Coffs Harbour) [12.20 p.m.]: I support the legislation from a very personal perspective, because I know the value of cancer care in New South Wales. Those who work in the industry deserve and need the support of all governments to ensure that the necessary care, especially in regional New South Wales, is available. Most members of this House would be aware that prior to my coming into this place my wife, Kerry, had cancer. She was given a death sentence. I ask all members of the House to take into account the diagnosis, assessment and care she received at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital [RPA], and then her opportunity to receive seven months of chemotherapy—which is absolutely horrific—prescribed by RPA in Coffs Harbour. At the time we had three young children, the youngest of whom was 2½ and the oldest of whom was about 10, and a full-time business to run. It was a fairly traumatic and stressful time.

I commend all the workers in the oncology and palliative care units, and everyone else involved with cancer care at the Coffs Harbour hospital. It was a godsend that my wife was able to undergo her chemotherapy in Coffs Harbour. Unfortunately, Kerry then had to choose whether she would receive radiotherapy treatment in Brisbane, Sydney or Newcastle. She chose Newcastle because we had family in the area with whom she could stay. But it is interesting to note that a large number of people in regional and rural New South Wales, once they have completed chemotherapy and the tumour or tumours have gone, would rather take the risk of not undergoing radiotherapy in a major metropolitan area rather than spend seven to 12 weeks away from their families.

Two of my dearest friends whom I had known for more than 20 years, Greg Empson and Geoff Arthur, died from melanoma and brain tumours respectively. Because of their types of cancer, they spent an inordinate amount of time in Sydney away from their families. When Greg died a number of years ago his children were only young. He had his lymph glands removed at RPA and, as Parliament was sitting, I was able to visit him. Melanoma is a really hideous cancer. Because brain tumours are difficult to treat with chemotherapy, Geoff also had to leave Coffs Harbour to access appropriate treatment. Their families could not be with them, and therefore they could not support them on a daily basis.

I place on the record the enormous amount of work that my wife and others have done in Coffs Harbour. Kerry set up the Cancer Council Shop and, as I said to Dr Penman, I was very disappointed when it was closed. I cannot understand why it was closed, because it was making a great profit. Coffs Harbour continues to have great Cancer Council services. The work that Pattie Delaney and Amy Fitzgerald do for the Relay for Life and day-to-day services is fantastic. But the retail outlet provided a shopfront for mothers to buy swimsuits with long sleeves to reduce the risk of their children developing melanoma. It also supplied sunscreens to schools, sporting organisations and everyone else. For a number of years, as I have said on numerous occasions in this House, I have been concerned about the lack of funding for basic cancer care services, via the health budget, in rural and regional areas.

I commend Rotary for its bowel cancer scanning program. Unfortunately, those who have a positive result may wait for up to three or four months before undergoing a colonoscopy. Liability rests with the Government if, because of long waiting lists and lack of funding, people cannot have a colonoscopy when they need it. Dr Bill Ross, a magnificent surgeon who is well known by many in this Parliament, specialises in cancer treatment. He told me that some mastectomies could not be performed because of lack of funding. At one stage he funded a mastectomy nurse for three months out of his own pocket because the money was not forthcoming in the budget. I hope the \$205 million that is tacked onto the legislation will be distributed throughout regional and rural New South Wales to ensure that people like Bill Ross are given the necessary money to provide the care that people in regional communities rightly deserve, instead of their having to fly to Sydney to undergo operations and access treatment.

I am concerned about the future of the radiotherapy unit announced on Saturday 16 November in the Coffs Harbour *Advocate* by the former Minister for Health. I presented a petition with 28,000 signatures to this House about the unit. As the honourable member for Port Macquarie said this morning, a radiotherapy unit was promised for both Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie. I commend Greg Jenke from Baringa Private Hospital, Pattie Delaney, Sandra Casson, Dorothy Hayes, mayor Leslie Schraer, chamber of commerce president Peter

Lubans, and Neville from Lions—if I forget people please forgive me—for their work in lobbying for the radiotherapy unit and getting signatures. We want an assurance, as given by the Minister, that the units will be built.

This morning I listened with interest to the honourable member for Port Macquarie call on the Commonwealth Government to provide funding for the capital construction of the units. In November last year the then Minister for Health, Craig Knowles, came to Coffs Harbour and announced that the State would wholly and solely fund the units. Yet the honourable member for Port Macquarie is now saying that the Federal Government should put in some money for capital construction. He knows full well, because he has had the same briefings that I have had, that Commonwealth funding is on a fee-for-service basis.

Mr Maguire: Under the HPG.

Mr FRASER: As the honourable member for Wagga Wagga quite rightly says, under the health program grant. I commend the honourable member for Wagga Wagga, who was the president of the committee, for his great work in raising \$4 million to build a radiotherapy unit in his electorate. Our committee saw his unit, but I did not. I went to Bendigo and Ballarat. Regional community facilities are fantastic. I do not want the honourable member for Port Macquarie to use this House and act as an apologist for the State Government not providing the necessary funding promised by the former Minister for Health, Craig Knowles, to build these units. A later announcement by the former Minister for Health in the *Advocate* appears under the heading, "Knowles promises radiotherapy plan will still go ahead". In a media interview on 21 November last June on the ABC the former Minister for Health said:

I just want your listeners to understand, the Commonwealth contribution here amounts roughly to the grand total of about between \$250,000 to \$500,000 per machine, per annum, out of a thing called a Health Program Grant.

He continued:

... and you'll find that the Commonwealth contribution, out of our \$30-odd million contribution, is going to be roughly between \$250,000 to \$500,000 a year.

The compere went on to say:

Alright, can I clarify then, the \$30 million that you announced is guaranteed by the New South Wales Government to fund both the shared facilities, one in Port Macquarie, one in Coffs Harbour. They will definitely go ahead and that funding will definitely be there.

Craig Knowles answered:

That's correct ... But, in the end, it'll be \$30 million out of the State budget - give or take a couple of million dollars - that will build these facilities, and I'm very proud of that.

I believe it is dishonest of the honourable member for Port Macquarie to suggest that the Federal Government needs to contribute to the construction of these facilities. He knows—just as I do and as the then Minister said publicly—that the funding from the Federal Government is structured. I make a plea to Minister Sartor and Minister Iemma: Do not sell the people of the North Coast short. The Ministers will find that I am an extremely strong advocate for cancer services on the North Coast, and I make no apology for this issue being extremely personal: the majority of the people I mentioned this morning have suffered from cancer or have had a relative who has suffered from cancer. Some survived, some did not.

Some people in the region will not have radiotherapy because it means spending inordinate time away from their families and their support. The establishment of radiotherapy units will enable them to have radiotherapy treatment. Having that treatment service available in their home town and ensuring that they have family support is extremely beneficial—I can say that from personal experience. We appreciate the \$205 million but we must have a commitment from the Government that it will keep to the timetable for the construction of the radiotherapy units in Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour.

I note with interest that Mr Oakeshott recently wrote to ask for our support on matters of mutual benefit on the North Coast. Well, Robert, I am saying to you now: Do not become an apologist for the Government. Do not turn around and call on the Federal Government for funds just for the sake of politics. Make this Government honour its promise to provide the infrastructure. The Federal Government has already stated very clearly that it will continue the HPG grants and that it will give us a service on the North Coast that we deserve. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr WEST (Campbelltown—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.32 p.m.]: Campbelltown Hospital recently commissioned new chemotherapy chairs and they are making a real difference to people in Campbelltown. This is the first time cancer services have been made available locally so that people do not have to travel an hour or more to Westmead or to other areas to access services. Similarly, later this year we will bring radiotherapy online and that will make an equally important difference to people who need radiotherapy. These are all important reforms introduced by the Government.

I spoke recently to a patient in Campbelltown who had undergone a mastectomy. She was pleased that she was able to access local services of a high quality at Campbelltown Hospital. Not having to travel, and being able to have her friends with her when she was having treatment, physiotherapy and follow-up procedures was making a real difference to her. While this cancer treatment is essential and important, it is the result of painstaking and detailed research over many years. This bill is the next step. It recognises that still more needs to be done in the treatment, prevention, and diagnosis of cancer. Indeed, there is not even consensus among the establishment as to whether some testing for cancer is actually counterproductive in that it gives false hope or false reassurance, and that some tests may do more harm than good. We need more research, and the Minister and the Government are leading the way in helping to gain the upper hand on understanding cancer.

This is not a war on cancer; we cannot expect results overnight. There are no smart bombs for cancer and we will not get quick results; it is a long-term commitment. It involves a vision for health that may indeed extend beyond my lifetime, but it is a commitment that this Government is willing to make. Importantly, this bill sets up the structure for this vision. I understand that this concept is supported by the Cancer Council, the leading cancer agency in New South Wales. Dr Penman, the Chief Executive Officer of the council, said:

The Cancer Council warmly welcomes the Government's announcement of the new Government Cancer Policy and associated funding. The announcement ensures that the next four years will be a busy and exciting time. The Government's stated commitment to cancer control is very heartening for all of us who are working in the field.

The massive injection of funds into cancer has the potential to make a huge difference to the lives of people throughout NSW. We believe that the new cancer package has the potential to lower the cancer death rate by 30 per cent if it is directed to the right areas.

We have an ambitious aim at the Cancer Council to defeat cancer. We look forward to working in partnership with the Government to realise this aim.

That is what the bill is about. We are all touched by cancer at some stage in our lives. As the Cancer Council suggests, one in three of us or those we love and care about will be affected. I am reminded of a dear friend, Jim Harris. I used to go with him on bush walks. He had a family and a business and he had a great love of life. One day he went to see the doctor and he was diagnosed as having an inoperable brain tumour. He put up a good fight but he finally passed away. My hope is that through this bill and through the institute that the Government is setting up the news for people like Jim might not be so bad. For those we cannot cure, the research might at least give us ways to ease their suffering and pain and provide better cancer management techniques. I congratulate the Minister on bringing McKell's vision to reality and on introducing this bill.

Mr APLIN (Albury) [12.36 p.m.]: I support the bill. As the honourable member for Campbelltown said, who could oppose a measure that might help to alleviate something that has touched most of us in this State in some form. I note that the objectives of the Cancer Institute are to increase the survival rate for cancer patients, to reduce the incidence of cancer in the community, to improve the quality of life for cancer patients and their carers, and to operate as a source of expertise on cancer control. In one of the guiding principles, effective cancer control requires a partnership between the public sector, the private sector, and the general community. I have spoken to my constituents about this matter and therefore I speak from experience in my region, and I commend that guiding principle. I call on the Government to insist that the community is involved, not only in the metropolitan areas of the State but also in the regional areas, where community involvement and caring for sufferers is absolutely vital.

I talk from personal experience in Albury and the border region. I use that description of the area advisedly because one has to recognise that in the Albury region we are in fact known as Albury-Wodonga, as many of the area's activities spread across the border. I draw the attention of the Minister to the fact that we want the Cancer Institute to deliver services in that region because we are a common region. Under provisions currently before the Government, we are hoping to establish a health agreement which spans the border. By virtue of that agreement, involvement in cancer research, cancer prevention, and cancer treatment will be embraced.

In 1989 the first ever Camp Quality—which involved two States—was held at Lake Hume Resort in Albury. As a result of the work of groups such as Rotary, Lions, many business houses, and many other

community groups in the Albury-Wodonga region, a large number of children suffering from cancer were brought together for the first time. Fundraising was at an all-time high and it enabled a camp to be held the following year. The involvement of the community in its affiliation with the people who run cancer treatment and research is absolutely at an all-time high.

Last October Relay for Life was held in the Albury-Wodonga region for the first time, and I was personally involved in the organisation and delivery of that event. Another such event is planned for 18 October this year. This year's event will be held in Wodonga, whereas the inaugural event was held in Albury. Relay for Life demonstrates the commitment of the border community in working together to defeat the scourge of cancer, because all funds raised are donated to cancer research. Thirty-eight teams participated in last year's inaugural event, which raised some \$63,000. This year the benchmark has been lifted—we are aiming for 50 teams and \$80,000—and so the benchmark will increase as the event gathers momentum and support.

I commend Rotary for its involvement over many years in the delivery of bowel scanning services to our border community, something I have been personally involved in. However, it is not good enough to simply look at what has been achieved; we need to consider the statistics relating to cancer. In New South Wales in 2001 there were 29,964 new cases of non-melanoma cancer; 16,202 cancers were diagnosed in males and 13,762 in females. In the same year there were 12,331 deaths from cancer in New South Wales, 7,004 in males and 5,327 in females. Four cancer sites accounted for 60 per cent of new cancers in males. In New South Wales in 2001 there were 3,843 new cases of prostate cancer, and 922 men died from the disease.

The incidence of prostate cancer is declining. In fact, new statistics show that between 1991 and 2001 mortality rates from prostate cancer fell by 19 per cent. I welcome that. It is evidence of the reduction techniques which result from increased cancer research and hopefully will flow from the establishment of the Cancer Institute. However, the incidence of lung cancer has increased significantly among older women, an issue that needs to be thoroughly investigated. Bowel cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths in males and the third in females; hence my earlier reference to the bowel scanning services being conducted into the Albury-Wodonga region and many other regions. There were 4,331 new cases of bowel cancer in New South Wales in 2001.

There were 2,698 new cases of lung cancer in New South Wales in 2001, and in that year 2,326 people died from the disease. Lung cancer is the second most common cancer in males and the fourth in females. It is a most unpleasant form of cancer. I speak from personal experience, for a good friend of mine passed away last year suffering from lung cancer. There were 4,067 new cases of breast cancer in New South Wales in 2001. In that year 862 women and 9 men died from the disease. These statistics are particularly apposite, because at this time Breast Screening New South Wales is devolving its breast screening services from Calvary Hospital to the Greater Murray Area Health Service. Breast screening services will also be established in Wagga Wagga and Albury under the auspices of the area health service. I call on the Government to ensure that these services are in no way diminished and that staff continue to be employed to deliver this extremely important service in the Albury-Wodonga area.

In New South Wales in 2001, 252 women were diagnosed with cervical cancer and 82 women died from the disease. Based on 2001 figures, it is estimated that one in 177 New South Wales women will develop cervical cancer by the age of 75. I could list many other statistics relating to cancer. The importance of the establishment of the Cancer Institute is that it will embrace the work of the Cancer Council. As the honourable member for Campbelltown stated, the Cancer Council may have had reservations initially about the establishment of a Cancer Institute but it has now welcomed the legislation and the establishment of the institute. Dr Penman from the Cancer Council of New South Wales stated:

... this change of legislation will allow us to free ourselves to focus even more on what we do best, which is deliver help at a community level.

I endorse that comment. The Chairman of the Albury-Wodonga Cancer Foundation, Mr Eric Turner, is also the Secretary of the Border Cancer Support Group. The Albury-Wodonga area has a private hospital in Wodonga which provides cancer treatment services, and similar services are also provided at Albury Base Hospital. The Relay for Life event combines the forces of the Cancer Council of Victoria with the Cancer Council of New South Wales in working together. I call on the Government to ensure that the Cancer Institute takes account of the fact that cancer knows no boundaries, and that where a crossover occurs Albury and Wodonga are included in the services of the institute. The Mercy Health Service is committed to delivering palliative care and is working together with the Greater Murray Area Health Service to establish 10 palliative care units. I call on the Government's support in ensuring that this absolutely vital service continues to be provided for our region. The

community wants to help defeat cancer by helping to raise funds for cancer research, prevention and treatment. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr PRICE (Maitland) [12.46 p.m.]: I support the Cancer Institute (NSW) Bill, and I congratulate the Minister on his enthusiasm in embracing it and his intention to ensure the implementation of the legislation. My wife and I are both cancer sufferers—I suffer from bowel cancer and my wife is getting over the effects of breast cancer—so we have a very keen interest in cancer-related research projects, not only locally but also across the State, as well as nationally and internationally. I agree with the intent of the proposed changes, and look forward to those changes being implemented as soon as possible. The Cancer Institute will certainly give the committee a status that it formerly did not have. I am sure it will also help to amalgamate the various research bodies across Australia that are committed to the treatment and elimination of the various forms of cancer that we have discovered in our society.

It has been my privilege to assist in a number of areas in the lower Hunter with the opening of various facilities for cancer treatment. In particular, I was privileged to open chemotherapy treatment clinics at Newcastle Mater Misericordiae Hospital and Lingard Private Hospital, both of which are currently fully occupied by cancer sufferers. I should like to pay tribute to Dr Geoffrey Kellerman, a recently retired professor of medicine at Newcastle University, who played a significant role with the Cancer Council for many years. I also pay tribute to Dr Steve Ackland for his work at Newcastle University through the Mater Hospital, and Dr Tony Bonaventura, who are deeply committed to the treatment of cancer.

Dr Ackland is also heavily involved with significant cancer research not only in Australia but also together with associates in New Zealand, Canada and the United Kingdom, as well as having links with the United States of America. Fortunately the Hunter Valley is linked significantly with a number of worldwide cancer research institutes, particularly those relating to breast cancer and bowel cancer. For obvious reasons, I have a particular interest in both areas of research. The mammogram detection system has been extremely significant in breast cancer research. Without that testing mechanism my wife's breast cancer would not have been discovered until it was too late, due to the location of the tumour.

The use of nuclear medicine in the detection of cancer in the lymph nodes is significant. Nuclear medicine is now being used much more widely, which has an impact on a woman's need for intrusive surgery under the arm. All of these advances are significant, but they can only be supported with money. Research is vital. We need the brightest people involved in research, and we need to ensure that the result of that research is recognised and exploited not for commercial opportunity and profit but for the common good. I believe that those who are dedicated to the cause will receive a direct benefit from the Government's commitment of some \$207 million for research over a period. This is a great step forward and one that I fully support. I congratulate the Minister, the Government and Cabinet on their decision. It was a bold decision that will put New South Wales ahead in Australia, and indeed significantly ahead of many other countries involved in research. I commend the legislation to my colleagues, and I look forward to its speedy passage.

Mr MAGUIRE (Wagga Wagga) [12.52 p.m.]: The compassion and interest that has been shown, during this debate clearly demonstrates that honourable members have great feelings about this bill and the issues it will address. I support the bill and its intentions. I understand from the contributions that have been made—and some of them were very emotional—the effect that cancer has on the people we represent and, importantly, on our friends, family, et cetera, because cancer will affect one in three people. Many previous speakers have gone through the basic information contained in the bill. I shall raise some points about the bill, which I hope the Minister will address in his reply.

First, I put on the record the need for radiotherapy services in country areas. Indeed, the honourable member for Coffs Harbour raised the issue of creating a radiotherapy centre in his community. Honourable members will recall that in 1999 I first raised in this House the need for radiotherapy cancer services in Wagga Wagga. Over two years I reported to the House the progress we were making in a public-private partnership to build a radiotherapy cancer centre in Wagga Wagga. Honourable members were very helpful and supported the work I was doing with my community and with the previous member for Wagga Wagga, Joe Schipp, who was the chairman of the radiotherapy centre. Honourable members even contributed money to fundraising appeals.

The Riverina community raised \$4 million to build a radiotherapy cancer centre. The partnership included oncologists from St Vincent's Hospital, who then provided some \$5 million in linear accelerators and expertise to run the centre. All the pundits said that it could not be done. However, I can tell the House that it can be done and has been done. Indeed, I put it to the Minister and the Government that the Riverina

radiotherapy centre is an ideal model that could be used for other centres seeking to provide radiotherapy treatment. However, it needs a contribution from the community. It also needs support from the Federal Government, not in the form of capital works funding but in the form of ongoing funding, which is a critical point. As the honourable member for Coffs Harbour said, a health program grant [HPG] is necessary to treat patients and to help fund the centre's longevity.

I acknowledge the assistance I received from the previous Minister for Health in helping to establish this radiotherapy centre. I shall now put on the record some challenges that still exist if the centre is to prosper. It is unfortunate that centres must prosper out of cancer, but obviously they need to be financially viable. Chemotherapy services for public patients are available in the Greater Murray Area Health Service at Wagga Wagga Base Hospital, and radiotherapy services are provided as a result of an HPG and an agreement made between the State and Federal governments to treat public patients in the private facility. Everyone can access the facility. However, we have a problem: It is necessary to finalise the agreement to provide chemotherapy treatment in the private centre.

It has taken us 12 months to get to a point at which we can get final agreement and sign off on that agreement. That is one challenge that perhaps the new organisation should address. I ask the Minister in his reply to tell me whether he envisages the organisation addressing that kind of challenge. Also, I should like to know about the make-up of the board of up to 11 members. How will the board members be chosen? How will people be nominated? Will people be selected by the Minister? What are the criteria, et cetera? Those issues are important. As I said, there is support for the initiative put forward by the Minister, but I think the public will want to know how he intends to nominate people, et cetera.

The objects of the bill are to increase the survival rate for people with cancer, to reduce the incidence of cancer in the New South Wales community, to improve the quality of life for cancer patients and their carers, and to provide an expert resource for cancer control. I acknowledge that that should be the thrust, and I am sure that all honourable members will support and agree with that. I should like to know about the public funds that the institute will administer each financial year, including its own operating budget. I should like the Minister to tell me how much the operating budget will be and what kind of structure that will fund. The Minister in his second reading speech pointed out that the institute will become the focal point for advice on all cancer-related matters.

I believe the radiotherapy centre created by the Riverina community is a perfect model for other centres that the Government might wish to create. I invite the Minister to visit the radiotherapy centre at a time convenient to him and to the Minister for Health. As I said, there are some issues—chemotherapy is one and accommodation is another. Once we create these centres, other issues arise that need to be addressed. I note that the State Government has provided some \$300,000 for accommodation. Although that is not capital works funding, it is nevertheless important funding because the organisation needs to be funded from year to year. Basic mathematics show that \$300,000 over 10 years is \$3 million. An HPG grant can be any amount from \$500,000 up to \$1 million, depending on how many patients are treated.

Another issue I raise is the Isolated Patients Transport and Accommodation Service. The Minister for Health recently reduced the distance that people can claim from 200 kilometres to 150 kilometres. That is important because many people are unwell after treatment and need to be able to stay in accommodation that is provided, hence the need to permanently fund accommodation. Those who are well enough to travel after treatment do so, and that is also a great burden. It is a great cost that families must fund. Importantly, the accommodation issue is all about keeping families together.

When we embarked on the project to build the radiotherapy centre we held a meeting, which was attended by some 2,000 people. The honourable member for Coffs Harbour has been very active in his community. Indeed, I understand that he is on a committee looking at providing a radiotherapy centre in his community. He sent a committee to visit the Wagga Wagga radiotherapy centre. Establishing a centre will require funding from his community, and some fundraising efforts will be required to reduce the capital costs of the building. The real cost is in the infrastructure. If the cost base can be reduced, it will be possible for oncologists to provide a viable, continuous operation for years to come through access to the necessary funds and services. When the radiotherapy centre was being discussed, the doomsayers who were frightened by the figures said that it would not be viable. By reducing the initial cost of a building through fundraising, projects can be made viable.

I suggest to the honourable member for Port Macquarie, who called on the Federal Government to provide funds for capital works, that he should roll up his sleeves and do some work. The fight against cancer is

a community issue that should be the responsibility of us all. The degree of participation in this debate has demonstrated a feeling of ownership of this important issue, so members need to roll up their sleeves, get involved and work with the Cancer Institute. I point out also that the Minister stated in his second reading speech:

There are a plethora of bodies engaged in philanthropic activities associated with cancer relief. In order to maximise the benefits to cancer patients and their carers of the funds derived from charitable fundraising for cancer relief, it is desirable to harness the energies of these various bodies to achieve co-operative outcomes and a transparent and comprehensive picture of how cancer charity dollars are applied.

I would be grateful if the Minister in reply would indicate whether the organisations to which he has referred will be required to contribute funds to the institute and whether they will be required to submit financial statements to comply with reporting requirements. Those matters need to be addressed. Many variables have to be taken into consideration when discussing ways to combat cancer. As time for this debate is limited and more honourable members wish to make contributions, I simply repeat the genuine invitation I have extended to the Minister to visit my electorate. I urge the Minister to accept that invitation as, I am sure, honourable members of all political persuasions will put aside politics on this important issue. I am more than happy to host that visit and to arrange for the Minister to meet those involved in fundraising for accommodation and to visit the relevant sites. The Riverina community has embarked on fundraising to reach a target of between \$1.5 million and \$2 million. I ask the Minister to deal with the issues I have raised. I have outlined but a few of the matters that are relevant to the cancer debate and I ask the Minister to deal with the ones I have outlined.

It would be beneficial if Cancer Institute professionals and staff were to take the opportunity to visit Wagga Wagga at some time in the future to see what has been done. My constituents and I are more than happy to assist in any way possible if it means that the provision of radiotherapy services to regional and rural areas of New South Wales will be enhanced. In conclusion, I emphasise the desperate need for hospice care in Wagga Wagga and surrounding districts. The Wagga Wagga electorate has wonderful services and facilities for palliative care. Indeed, as honourable members have noted during debate, the whole community appreciates the efforts of the carers and staff who administer that care. The Wagga Wagga community has raised funds for organisations dispensing treatment, but the area does not have a hospice. I mention that because it is a subject that should be discussed. I will take the matter up with the Minister when he visits Wagga Wagga. He will then be able to see that the community has a vision and a plan for what needs to be achieved.

Over the past five years since I have been the member for Wagga Wagga, the community has demonstrated its commitment to fundraising for the establishment of the radiotherapy facilities. Although I recognise the Government's commitment to recurrent funding, the facilities have not cost the New South Wales Government an enormous amount for capital works or in up-front funding, but more needs to be achieved. I seek the Minister's assistance in removing the politics that inevitably result from competing interests among organisations by encouraging the Cancer Institute to pull together private and public efforts. If the Minister will do so, I believe that the incidence of cancer will be reduced while research into cancer and the provision of cancer services will be enhanced. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Stewart.

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

PETITIONS

White City Site Rezoning Proposal

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

Jingellic to Holbrook Road Upgrading

Petition requesting funding for the upgrading of the Jingellic to Holbrook road, received from **Mr Maguire**.

Windsor Road Traffic Arrangements

Petitions requesting a right turn bay on Windsor Road at Acres Road, received from **Mr Merton** and **Mr Richardson**.

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**.

Redfern and Surry Hills Bus Services

Petition requesting improved bus services in Redfern and Surry Hills, received from **Ms Moore**.

Circus Animals

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

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

MILLENNIUM TRAINS

Mr BROGDEN: My question is directed to the Premier. Given that the Premier has now had 24 hours to obtain a briefing, will he advise the House whether the total cost of the Millennium trains project remains at \$658 million or has its actual or forecast cost increased since 31 December 2002?

Mr CARR: The Auditor-General answered this question but I will spell it out to the House again. I am advised that the commercial settlement between the State Rail Authority and the manufacturer referred to on page 31 of the Auditor-General's report set the cost of the project at \$658 million for all three stages. The Auditor-General went on to report that there was no change to the maintenance component of the contract. I am advised that the Government is not contractually committed to proceeding with the third tranche of the trains. The cost of the Millennium trains for stages one and two now totals \$466.2 million, with the Government having until the end of the year to determine whether to exercise the option on the third tranche of the trains.

Yesterday the Minister for Transport Services visited the EDI Rail plant. He spoke to the makers of the Millennium trains, the workers and company representatives. He asked EDI and the State Rail managers to explain why there were continuing problems with the trains and what strategies they were putting in place to fix the problems without inconveniencing commuters. Solutions were discussed late this afternoon and the company has until the end of today to agree on a way forward. As the Minister for Transport said yesterday, the problem lies with the management. That is undoubtedly the case. The Government stands by what the Minister for Transport said. Contrast that with the statement of the Leader of the Opposition in the media at the weekend when he tried to put the blame on the workers at EDI. What a disgrace his comments were!

Mr Brogden: Point of order—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Does the Leader of the Opposition have a point of order?

Mr Brogden: Yes, Mr Speaker.

Mr SPEAKER: What is the member's point of order?

Mr Brogden: The only person I have sought to blame in relation to this issue is the Premier. This is the fault of the Premier and he should take responsibility for it.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. I call the Leader of the Opposition to order because of his unruly behaviour.

Mr CARR: All honourable members saw what EDI workers said about the statements of the Leader of the Opposition. When one interviewer put it to him that he had offended good workers who had done their job, the Leader of the Opposition, on Sunday night radio, said—

[Interruption]

Opposition members have to hear what he said. The Leader of the Opposition, when referring to the workers, said:

They're from the union movement and I'm from the Liberal Party.

What a disgrace! No wonder the Leader of the Opposition turns his back in this Chamber. He is ashamed of what he said about good workers on whom he was trying to dump responsibility.

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

Mr CARR: What the Leader of the Opposition said was class warfare. He said, "They're from the union movement"—looking down on them and despising them because they are a unionised work force. The Leader of the Opposition said:

They're from the union movement and I'm from the Liberal Party.

What a disgrace! I have done a little more research on the fated rail projects when our friend the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party—

Mr Hazzard: Point of order: The Premier has forgotten that he put his fingers up to workers in this Parliament and said, "Go to hell as far as your workers' rights." Workers have not forgotten that he is not a Premier for the workers.

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

Mr CARR: I was going to take this opportunity to say something about the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party, but I thank the House for its attention.

NURSING HOME CARE

Mr COLLIER: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Health. What is the latest information on aged care and public hospitals in New South Wales?

Mr IEMMA: The honourable member for Miranda has a genuine interest in aged constituents in Sutherland shire. The generation of people in their late seventies, eighties and nineties is perhaps the greatest generation of Australians. They grew up in the Depression, they fought the Second World War and they built Australia in the post-war reconstruction period. In short, they were the people who created modern Australia. We owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to that generation. They deserve, above all, a nursing home system that treats them with care, respect and compassion. The dimension of that challenge and the even greater challenge posed by the ageing of the baby boomer generation was starkly laid out in the Commonwealth Government's intergenerational report which was released last year. The report states that a key challenge for the Federal Government is:

... developing an affordable and effective residential aged care system that can accommodate the expected high growth in the number of very old people (people aged 85 or over)...

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

Mr IEMMA: The Commonwealth is responsible for the allocation of nursing home bed licences. Without a licence, nursing homes simply cannot operate. More importantly, the Commonwealth funds this area. It has accepted—using its own formula—that there should be 90 beds for every 1,000 persons aged over 70. New South Wales falls far short of the Commonwealth's benchmark—by more than 7,000 nursing home beds. Worse, the number of aged care beds operating in New South Wales has actually fallen by 2,000 in the last year—from 51,000 to 49,000. The effect is obvious to all those who visit our busy public hospitals. Instead of treating our older citizens with the quality care that they deserve in a nursing home, they are forced to wait in an acute care bed in a public hospital. Put simply, they deserve better.

On any given day in New South Wales, around 900 patients are left in acute care public hospital beds waiting for a nursing home placement—these are people who have done so much to build this country and this State. For example, in places like the Prince of Wales Hospital, 16 beds are occupied by aged care citizens who are waiting for an aged care nursing home placement; at Sydney Hospital, 3; St Vincent's, 9; Sutherland shire, 8;

and St George hospital, 8. That is a total of more than 40 in the inner eastern and south-eastern areas and in the Sutherland shire. In northern Sydney there are 68 and in the Hunter there are more than 70. The situation in the Hunter is reaching crisis proportions. On the Central Coast 68 patients are still waiting.

The problem is worse in rural areas. In some rural areas hundreds of elderly patients are unable to access nursing home beds, with waits of more than 12 months. Every day the equivalent of 30 hospital wards are taken up by patients who are waiting for a nursing home bed and care. The inconvenience to those aged citizens is great, but so is the cost to the taxpayer. It costs around \$354 a day to keep a patient in an acute care bed in a public hospital; whereas it costs around \$80 a day to care for a patient in a nursing home bed. The Commonwealth has abandoned these people. Its policies are an irrational waste of taxpayers' money.

Public hospital beds are for ill people. Public hospitals have a small army of medical experts on hand to make sure that ill people get better. Nursing homes are able to focus on quality of life, supervision and low-level care, where required. As the name suggests, these homes are places where people live and receive the appropriate level of care. People should not be abandoned in public hospital beds while they wait for the Commonwealth to adjust its formula for allocating nursing home beds or provide funding for additional beds.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Upper Hunter will resume his seat.

Mr IEMMA: Nursing homes, which are designed and managed as a social setting to provide the care that these people so richly deserve, offer things like social networks, activities and peer support which are needed for emotional, social and physical health. Dumping people in public hospital beds is no substitute and it is just not acceptable. Health Ministers in other States and I have been fighting the Commonwealth hard in our negotiations on the health care agreement to get a better deal for aged citizens who have done so much for this country. But the Commonwealth refuses to even discuss the matter.

Mr O'Farrell: Point of order: My point of order is relevance and the operation of this Parliament. What is the Minister going to do to get brain-injured people out of nursing homes? There are hundreds of young brain-injured people in aged care facilities who ought to be in group homes.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the Deputy Leader of the Opposition to order. There is no point of order. I call the Deputy Leader of the Opposition to order for the second time.

Mr IEMMA: The Commonwealth Government has refused to discuss aged care funding and nursing home places at every meeting of health Ministers. Indeed, the Commonwealth's health Minister refused to attend, let alone allow her officials to discuss proper funding of aged care places for senior citizens in public hospital beds who have been abandoned by the Commonwealth. What makes this even worse is that a very successful pilot project was run in the Hunter involving the Baptist Community Service providing transitional care in Royal Newcastle Hospital. The service was established five years ago and involves the Commonwealth funding 28 transitional places and the Hunter Area Health Service funding rehabilitation services.

That innovative pilot project was a partnership—one of the few occasions on which we got cooperation from the Commonwealth. One would have thought that the Commonwealth would have embraced the concept of that successful pilot project and investigated how it could roll out other projects across the country. The Commonwealth could have adjusted its health care agreements to provide more pilot projects, and rolled them out across the nation. One would have thought the Commonwealth would attend the meetings and put on the table a program to roll out those projects across the nation. But, no, it did not do that. The Commonwealth was asked to extend that successful Hunter project, but it said no; and, even worse, it withdrew 50 per cent of the funding. The Commonwealth still has a pilot project that works, but when it was given the opportunity to roll out the project and make it a permanent part of our health care agreements, it said no.

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

Mr IEMMA: Not only that, the Commonwealth's response was to withdraw 50 per cent of the funding for the pilot project. I will keep repeating that and will keep telling the Commonwealth why the current health care agreement is so inadequate and that it fails to meet the needs of our elderly citizens. On 31 July this issue will be at the top of the agenda of a meeting of the health Ministers when we attempt to renegotiate the health care agreement. It is that kind of situation that has led some of our eminent clinicians to take up the fight with us against the Commonwealth. Today on radio, and as quoted in the *Australian*, Dr Nigel Lyons spoke about the abandonment of our elderly citizens in public hospitals. He said:

[It] is having an enormous impact on the system. It begins with our ability to accept ambulance drop-offs and backs up through the whole hospital system putting pressure on staff and resources.

The Commonwealth might try to ignore it, but doctors and nurses and the States will not ignore it. We will fight for a better deal on health care funding so that we can look after the elderly citizens who have done so much to build this country.

EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES ASSISTANCE

Mr STONER: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Regional Development, representing the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries. Can the Minister explain to drought-affected farmers in the Armidale and Northern Tablelands districts why New South Wales Agriculture failed to lodge on time a vital new exceptional circumstances application to the Federal Government? Why have some farmers been excluded from the new application?

Mr CAMPBELL: What a hide! The Leader of the National Party has the gall to talk about exceptional circumstances. Every member of this House and every farmer in this State knows that the problem with exceptional circumstances funding is the way in which the Federal Government seeks to apply it—or, rather, the way it seeks to avoid its responsibilities and not apply it.

Mr Stoner: Point of order: The question is specifically about the New South Wales Government's responsibility to lodge an exceptional circumstances application on time.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the National Party has been a member of this House long enough to know that that is not a point of order.

Mr CAMPBELL: Time and again there has been debate in this place about the hard work of this Government. Time and again the Premier has demonstrated how the New South Wales Government has prepared submissions and how the Federal Government has totally and absolutely ignored them. It is absolute hide, gall and hypocrisy for the National Party to try to score some cheap points on this issue.

Mr Stoner: Point of order: My point of order is relevance. My question was specifically about the Armidale and Northern Tablelands districts and an exceptional circumstances application for those districts. I ask you to direct the Minister responsible to answer the question.

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

MILLENNIUM TRAINS

Mr O'FARRELL: My question without notice is directed to the Premier. If the Premier now believes that EDI Rail is responsible for the Millennium train contract why did the Government, last November, not insist it pay the State tens of millions of dollars in liquidated damages, as provided for by the project's contract? Instead, the State paid EDI Rail up to an extra \$114 million for the defective trains. The Government cannot have it both ways.

Mr CARR: What a joke! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition, as chief adviser to Bruce Baird, was responsible for the tilt train fiasco. He was responsible also for the city to airport rail link; that was \$600 million of taxpayers' money spent on a project that he had Bruce Baird tell the House would not cost a cent. His excuse is that he was not at work that day.

Mr Brogden: Point of order: Today the Premier has admitted a further \$11 million in the blow-out for the Millennium train. When will he answer that question?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. Before the Premier continues his answer, I point out to the Leader of the Opposition and other members of the Opposition that on a number of recent occasions they have sought to take points of order when clearly no point of order was involved. They were using a deliberate tactic to interrupt the flow of the answer being given. I warn the Opposition that any further frivolous points of order will result in calls to order and the members involved may not be in the Chamber at the conclusion of question time.

Mr CARR: When we hammer the Leader of the Opposition with responsibility for the disastrous transport policies under the former Coalition Government his excuse is, "I wasn't at work that day."

Mr O'Farrell: Point of order: Under Standing Order 138 the Premier simply has to say "Yes" or "No" in answer to the question "Did you pay an additional \$114 million for trains that you say are now duds?"

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. I remind him that he is now on three calls to order. He had previously been called to order twice, and he has now taken a frivolous point of order.

Mr CARR: As to his personal explanation on Tuesday—

Mr Tink: Point of order: I refer to page 42 of the standing orders relating to questions seeking information. Standing Order 138 states that an answer shall be relevant to the question asked. Mr Speaker, the point of order raised by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition was in order, and I trust that Standing Order 138 still applies under your Speakership.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Standing Order 138 applies, provided a point of order has substance. The point of order had no substance. The Premier was answering the question he was asked. So far as I am concerned, there was no substance in the point of order taken by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition.

Mr CARR: The honourable member for Gosford will be next on his feet. All this stuff from Barry O'Farrell—"I didn't know, I wasn't there, I wasn't at work that day, the day of the tilt train, the city to airport rail link"—

Mr O'Farrell: Point of order: I refer to Standing Order 138. What is factual is that my question asked the Premier to say whether EDI was awarded another \$114 million last November despite his claim earlier in question time that it is responsible for the fiasco. Yes or no, Bob.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! If the Deputy Leader of the Opposition stopped interrupting the Premier with points of order, the Premier be able to complete his answer.

Mr CARR: All this stuff from the Deputy Leader of the Opposition—"I was not at work on the day, I know nothing about the project"—do you know who he is? Have you ever seen *Hogan's Heroes*? It is Sergeant Shultz—"I know nothing. I see nothing. I know nothing". I stand by the answers I have given and I stand by the figures in the Auditor-General's Report.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Before giving the call to the honourable member for Londonderry, I warn all members that those who have been called to order are now deemed to be on three calls.

ROADS AND TRAFFIC AUTHORITY CRASH CAM TECHNOLOGY TRIAL

Mr SHEARAN: My question is to the Minister for Roads. What is the latest information on Crash Cam?

Mr SCULLY: The House would be aware that in October last year the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] began a trial of the Automated Incident Recording System technology or Crash Cam. The camera is designed to automatically film crashes at intersections where there are high accident rates. The footage can then be used to identify improvements to those intersections and reduce accidents. A microphone is attached to the camera, and it triggers recording for the four seconds before and the four seconds after sounds associated with accidents such as screeching tires, breaking glass and the distinctive thud of metal on metal. The trial camera was originally placed at the intersection of Oxford Street and Crown Street in Darlinghurst last year. Its use at that location allowed the RTA, along with its developer, ITS Australia, to modify and refine the system's technical components to make it more effective.

Following those modifications a second, 33-day, trial in March this year took place at the intersection of Darling Drive and Pier Street off-ramp at Darling Harbour. This is a complex intersection involving an overpass above a roundabout at which cars, trucks and cyclists coming off the overpass via the off-ramp interact with traffic already in the roundabout. Unfortunately, from time to time there are accidents and a number of near misses. During the trial four crashes and 20 near misses were captured by the camera. The camera footage was analysed and changes were made at the intersection, including improvements to signage associated with the roundabout and removal of hazards within the central island of the roundabout that restricted sight lines through the intersection. The camera will also be used to monitor those changes to the intersection to assess their effectiveness.

Many accidents on the road network go unreported, particularly minor accidents. Certainly, in most cases near misses are not reported. The advantage of Crash Cam is that it can record 24 hours a day, seven days a week all accidents and near misses. This enables analysis to improve the safety of intersections. About \$260,000 has been spent trialling the technology. It is already proving to be innovative and effective. I have told the RTA that I expect it to continue the trial and to continue to monitor where Crash Cam can be used. The trial has shown that the system allows early identification of road safety problems through video of crashes and near misses. The technology will assist the RTA and police to find answers to why vehicles are going through red lights or stop signs and why there are accidents with cyclists—why accidents or near misses are occurring. I congratulate the RTA on its innovative and creative approaches to road safety. The system will provide useful data in the future about all the things that need to be done to improve safety on the road network.

POLICE PROSECUTORS

Mr CRITTENDEN: My question is to the Minister for Police. What is the latest information on the role of police prosecutors in New South Wales Local Courts?

Mr WATKINS: The Prosecuting Branch of NSW Police is the oldest in Australia: it started in 1941. With 62 years of proud service, police prosecutors perform a vital task in our community. Members would be aware that at the recent election the Carr Government gave a commitment to police prosecutors. That is why I am pleased to advise the House today that from the start of next month prosecutors will achieve a major landmark in their history. From 7 July police prosecutors will no longer need to seek leave to appear in Local Courts; they will have the right of appearance under changes to the law to come into effect on that date. Approximately 180 police prosecutors work in New South Wales and 50 are in training at any one time.

Honourable members may not be aware of the enormous amount of work undertaken in our court system by police prosecutors. I am advised by the Ministry for Police that more than 90 per cent of New South Wales prosecutions are undertaken by police prosecutors. They also appear in criminal matters for a variety of other agencies, including the Environmental Protection Authority, the Roads and Traffic Authority, the Department of Transport and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Apart from appearing in local criminal courts, they appear in the Coroners Court, the Licensing Court, the Administrative Decisions Tribunal and other courts.

The recommendation from the police royal commission to abolish police prosecutors was one of the few recommendations of that commission that was not supported by the Government. This was for a variety of reasons, including the benefits NSW Police derives from having a prosecution branch. It was also because the Government believes that the spirit of the recommendation from the police royal commission could be addressed in a different way, by enhancing the independence of prosecutors. NSW Police takes its prosecuting responsibilities very seriously. Prosecutors have a very high level of independence in the New South Wales system. But they are also subject to stringent oversight. Not only are they, like all police, subject to the NSW Police Code of Conduct and oversight by the Police Integrity Commission and the Ombudsman; they also are required to comply with Director Of Public Prosecutions prosecuting guidelines, Bar Association rules and court practice directions.

Special training programs are run to ensure that prosecutors have a very high level of skill. For instance, senior prosecutors run a 12-month comprehensive prosecutors education program. It consists of a mixture of in-class training and other teaching. After three months of classroom learning prosecutors start undertaking minor court matters. Training includes 26 discrete learning units on evidence law, 39 on offences and 21 on procedural law and professional standards. After 12 months a prosecutor is considered to be qualified. The quality of our police prosecutors is now so high that for the past three years they have won the New South Wales Law Week debate. The changes to the law that will come into operation next month are important for the administration of criminal justice in this State. They will put prosecutors on the same footing as their counterparts in other States and they send a clear message that the Government and the community value the work that prosecutors do every day in New South Wales.

WATER MANAGEMENT PLANS

Mr PICCOLI: I direct my question to the Minister for Natural Resources. Given his announcement this week postponing water sharing plans, will he guarantee that in the meantime the water property entitlements that have already been negotiated by irrigators, including those in the Murrumbidgee and Murray valleys, will remain secure?

Mr KNOWLES: What a delightful question. It might have been asked by a member of the Government. I refer the honourable member to my answer specifically addressing that question in this place two days ago. I have the transcript of that response, which states:

I want to make it clear that this is not an open invitation for everyone to renegotiate the essential content of the water sharing plans. However, as I have said in this Chamber, I have shown a preparedness to consider the specific issues in, and the concerns ...

I also pointed out:

During the six-month period, the provisions of the Water Act 1912 will continue to operate—

Mr Piccoli: What about after that?

Mr KNOWLES: We will look at it after six months. The response from honourable members is a shame because just a week ago at a party conference the Leader of the National Party said that its members should stop whingeing and whining. He told them that they should set themselves up as a new breed with positive concepts. However, within a couple of days they are back to whingeing and whining. Why can they not be like their Federal counterparts? Yesterday, in response to my announcement, the Hon. John Anderson, Federal parliamentary Leader of the National Party, stated:

It is extremely encouraging news. It shows that the New South Wales Government is taking the water issue seriously and wants to see it resolved in the best interests of farmers, the environment and the wider community. A six-month delay in New South Wales will be inconsequential if we can get this right as a nation and initiate workable solutions that will benefit the economy and the environment for generations.

The honourable member mentioned the Murrumbidgee and Murray valleys and the irrigators in those areas. What did Murray Irrigation Ltd [MIL] have to say in response to the announcement? The heading on the company's press release says it all: "MIL supports delay on water plans". I went to Finley and met with MIL representatives. We had a good day and I learned a great deal. The company responded in kind by stating:

MIL found Minister Knowles to be accessible, and taking a common sense approach to these issues. MIL looks forward to working with the Minister in the future.

The honourable member for Murrumbidgee could almost be a member of Country Labor. However, he cannot seem to read *Hansard*.

Mr Stoner: Point of order: I refer to Standing Order 138 regarding relevance. The question is specifically about what will happen in six months. Will the Minister guarantee resource security for irrigators beyond that point?

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

Mr KNOWLES: I addressed that issue two days ago. The news from the bush is good. Honourable members opposite should read today's edition of the *Land*.

Mr Piccoli: Say it, Craig: you won't change the plan.

Mr KNOWLES: The honourable member will never be in government to change the plan. Tuesday's announcement has attracted support from around the State. Even those organisations that have mounted legal challenges against the plans have acknowledged that this is the way to go. That demonstrates that this is the way forward. The Deputy Prime Minister's ringing endorsement yesterday demonstrates how out of touch and irrelevant honourable members opposite really are.

LONG BAY CORRECTIONAL COMPLEX FORENSIC HOSPITAL

Mr ASHTON: I direct my question to the Minister for Health. What is the latest information on the provision of a forensic hospital at Long Bay gaol?

Mr IEMMA: Earlier this year the Minister for Justice announced the Government's intention to redevelop the Long Bay complex with the construction of a new 85-bed prison hospital to provide regular health services to prison inmates and a separate new 135-bed forensic hospital. The original plan was that the

Department of Corrective Services would develop the new prison hospital at Long Bay separately from the forensic hospital. Since that announcement, the Government has identified significant benefits from the delivery of both projects in a single package. The joint construction of the two hospitals will allow for construction and cost savings and will minimise disruption to the Long Bay site. The estimated construction cost of the forensic hospital is \$58 million. It will consist of patient accommodation, administration and storage facilities and rehabilitation and recreation facilities.

I make it clear that health services will continue to be provided by Corrections Health Service [CHS] and custodial services will be provided by the Department of Corrective Services. Nonetheless, the Government intends to call for expressions of interest for the private sector to design, construct, finance and operate selected services at both hospitals. Those services will include ground maintenance, utility supply and management, cleaning and domestic services, waste management and pest control, and building and equipment maintenance. All clinical services and specialist programs will continue to be provided by CHS and the Department of Corrective Services will continue to provide custodial services for the prison hospital.

In line with best practice, the forensic hospital will be staffed by CHS. The Government will pursue this model, which will enable it to maintain responsibility for the delivery of health services while giving the private sector an opportunity to deliver savings through the provision of construction, financing, maintenance and some ancillary services. It is all about maintaining the balance between private and public sector initiatives, whilst retaining responsibility within the public sector for core services. The advantages for us is that we will get the new facilities that had been planned and we will operate all key help and corrective services facilities in line with public expectation.

PLASTIC BAGS PHASE-OUT

Mr BARR: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for the Environment. What is the Government's response to recent calls for a phasing out of plastic bags at supermarkets?

Mr DEBUS: I have taken part in national discussions of environment Ministers, which were chaired by the Federal Minister, Dr Kemp. At those meetings—especially the most recent meeting, which occurred several weeks ago—national environment Ministers agreed that we would progress a number of measures calculated to reduce the use of plastic bags. These measures would be addressed particularly to the large users of plastic bags: Woolworths, Coles and similar enterprises. We indicated that if there were not satisfactory voluntary arrangements made by those manufacturers in the coming several months at the next national meeting of environment Ministers we would seriously consider the introduction of mandatory sanctions of one sort or another—be they legislative or of some other nature. In any event, we would introduce measures that no longer relied on the voluntary compliance of the major users of plastic bags but measures that would assist the appropriate reduction in their use. These measures were strongly supported by Dr Kemp and the State Ministers.

RETAIL LEASES ACT REVIEW

Ms SALIBA: My question is directed to the Minister for Small Business. What is the latest information on the Retail Leases Act?

Mr CAMPBELL: I thank my colleague from the Illawarra region for her interest in this issue. I have had a number of conversations with her about retail leases, particularly for small businesses operating in large shopping complexes. A thriving retail sector is vital to the economy of New South Wales. It provides an essential service for the community and creates employment opportunities across the State. The Australian Retailers Association estimates that 80,000 small retailers lease their premises in New South Wales. The Retail Leases Act, initiated by Labor when it was in Opposition in 1993, brings some balance to the relationship between small retail businesses and their landlords. The principal aim of the Act has been to foster good leasing practices and improve the poor relations that historically existed between retail lessors and lessees.

Essentially, the provisions of the Act ensure that retail leasing arrangements are clear and transparent to both parties, enable potential retail tenants to have access to sufficient information to make informed business decisions and are entered into from a position of reasonably equal bargaining strength. The Act also provides a practical low-cost system of resolving disputes between landlords and retail tenants. I am pleased to say that in its eight years of operation the Act has become well accepted by both small retail businesses and commercial property owners. The Government's Retail Tenancy Unit has been offering plain-English advice and guidance to help resolve potential problems between retail tenants and landlords at the earliest possible time. Last year the

unit took 7,000 calls. The great majority of issues raised have been resolved quickly and informally over the phone. Only 280 disputes between retail tenants and property owners had to be handled formally last year. More than 80 per cent of those disputes were successfully mediated by the Retail Tenancy Unit.

It is pleasing to note that a more equitable relationship between retail tenants and property owners has come about as a result of this Act. For example, the operators of a small bakery business in Cowra were faced with a decision by their landlord, the owner of their shopping centre, to lease out a section of the centre to a major supermarket with a bakery section. Thanks to the dispute settling mechanism provided by the Retail Leases Act, this small business was able to enforce a clause of its lease preventing the owner of its shopping centre from leasing any other part of the centre to a competing bakery. In another example, the operators of a juice bar—tenants in a Sydney central business district shopping centre—were concerned that the centre's renovations were discouraging potential customers. By exercising their rights under the Retail Leases Act, they were able to ensure that the renovation work would not take place during the morning and midday meal times, and that arrangements were made to give potential customers convenient access to the food court. The Government remains committed to the principles of the Retail Leases Act

The Act has brought considerable stability to the everyday lives of lessors and lessees alike, and has reduced the potential for expensive litigation. However, we need to ensure that this important legislation continues to effectively meet the needs of retail small businesses and commercial property owners. That is why I have released an issues paper as part of a Government review of the Retail Leases Act. The review, which will take submissions from the community and feature a series of meetings in regional areas, will make sure the Act is working as well as possible. These meetings will be held in Coffs Harbour, Wagga Wagga, Dubbo, Newcastle, Wollongong, Orange, Tweed Heads, Armidale, Sydney and Parramatta. I encourage retail tenants, landlords, industry associations and anyone else with an interest in retail tenancy to obtain a copy of the issues paper and make a submission.

Questions without notice concluded.

SPEEDOMETER ADJUSTMENT PROSECUTIONS

Ministerial Statement

Ms MEAGHER (Cabramatta—Minister for Fair Trading, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Commerce) [3.17 p.m.]: I inform honourable members of a recent decision in the Tweed Local Court involving the Office of Fair Trading and a Tamworth hire car business. The rental company was convicted for misrepresentation under the Fair Trading Act. It had been found to have altered the speedometer on 11 vehicles. On Tuesday the court found that Aborian Pty Ltd, trading as Thrifty Car Rentals Tamworth, had to pay fines of \$27,500 and costs of more than \$3,000 for winding back the speedometers of 11 ex-hire cars prior to selling them. The court found that during five months in 2001 Aborian sold the 11 cars after winding back the speedometers. In total, the cars were wound back more than 184,000 kilometres. Five of them were wound back more than 20,000 kilometres—equivalent to a trip around Australia.

Fair Trading became aware of the wind-backs after a complaint from an observant motor dealer who purchased one of the vehicles at auction. Further investigation by Fair Trading located a total of 11 vehicles sold by Aborian that had been wound back. Fair Trading has scored a number of victories on this practice during the past year. One dealer was ordered to pay more than \$100,000 in fines and compensation for winding back the speedometers on 33 cars, while another was ordered to pay \$67,000 in fines and compensation for tampering with 23 cars. Buying a car is the second largest purchase most consumers will make in their lifetime. The speedometer reading on a vehicle is often a big factor for consumers looking for a second-hand vehicle. Many of those consumers are young people buying their first car, and they are prepared to spend just that little bit more for a car with a low speedometer reading. Speedometer interference is a high priority for Fair Trading and we will continue to prosecute people who attempt these scams.

Ms HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck) [3.19 p.m.]: The Opposition is pleased that some prosecutions in this State are working. Of course, there is never any excuse for winding back speedos, given the risks that young people face when making the very important choice of which motor vehicle to purchase. They want to be assured the vehicle they will purchase has a reputable source and has not been tampered with. The Opposition holds those values very highly. Tampering with second-hand cars is an inexcusable offence. We applaud the fact that Thrifty has been successfully prosecuted in relation to this most serious offence, and we trust that in future rental companies will take note of prosecutions that have taken place, in the hope that those prosecutions will deter others from proceeding along a similar path.

TRIBUTE TO MRS ADELE CHAPMAN-BURGESS

Ministerial Statement

Dr REFSHAUGE (Marrickville—Deputy Premier, Minister for Education and Training, and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs) [3.21 p.m.]: I am sure honourable members would like to join me in congratulating Mrs Adele Chapman-Burgess, who will graduate with a Bachelor of Education degree from Sydney University tomorrow. This is a remarkable story involving a remarkable woman, and it is one of the great success stories of indigenous education in this State. Mrs Chapman-Burgess is an Aboriginal woman. She is also the mother of 11-year-old quintuplets—the only Aboriginal quintuplets in Australia and, as far as I am aware, the only indigenous quintuplets in the world. Mrs Chapman-Burgess is with us in the gallery today, along with her children Erika, Jack, Louis, Georgia and India. With the support of her husband, Ian, Mrs Chapman-Burgess has raised her children while also studying for her degree.

Mrs Chapman-Burgess's studies required regular visits to Sydney University, away from her family and friends, but she persevered and has achieved her dream. The Chapman-Burgess quintuplets are now in grade 5 at Glen Innes Public School. Mrs Chapman-Burgess teaches modern history, ancient history and Aboriginal studies at Glen Innes High School. She is a fine teacher who enjoys the respect of staff, students and the greater school community. Apart from her own studies, she is an active participant and mentor in the Anaiwan Enrichment Project, named in honour of the Anawain people, who are the traditional custodians of that part of the State. That project identifies indigenous students who have particular skills and, through the use of mentors, it helps the students to develop those skills and achieve their potential. It is interesting that all five of the Chapman-Burgess quintuplets have been assessed as fitting the criteria of the project.

Mentors participating in the project include some of Australia's most famous indigenous people. I understand that mentors have included Olympic sprinter Cathy Freeman, Senator Aidan Ridgeway, Parramatta rugby league player Dean Withers, Australian netball player Sharon Finnen and Professor John Lester of Newcastle University. So they cover a very wide range of skills and activities, but in all cases the mentors are people that the young students look up to and respect. Mrs Chapman-Burgess certainly deserves her place among them. We congratulate her on her achievements, and her family for supporting her achievements, and for the excellent, positive role model she is for indigenous students throughout New South Wales.

In my dual roles as Minister for Education and Training, and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs I am totally committed to ensuring that indigenous students like Mrs Chapman-Burgess have every opportunity to reach their potential. The New South Wales Government, in partnership with the Aboriginal community, has made significant ground in achieving our goal of educational equity for Aboriginal students. For example, Basic Skills Tests literacy results show that Aboriginal students' average scores in years 3 and 5 have increased since 1996. In numeracy, their Basic Skills Test scores have also increase. But we certainly need to do significantly better. The gap is still there. The gap needs to be removed. With the work of people like Mrs Chapman-Burgess we should be able to achieve that.

Mr HAZZARD (Wakehurst) [3.23 p.m.]: The Coalition also congratulates Mrs Adele Chapman-Burgess. As shadow Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, I am delighted to congratulate you and each of your five children. I saw their picture in the paper this morning and thought, "Wow!" You are a very brave lady in lots of respects. To India, Jack, Louis, Erika and Georgia, congratulations to you guys too. Well done! Because whatever your mum has done, you have helped your mum get there. So it is a partnership between not just the children but also between you and your mum—and, of course, Ian. When you get home you will find a call on your answering machine—I rang to congratulate you when I saw the item in the paper. It is absolutely delightful to have you here and be able to congratulate you on behalf of the Coalition.

I saw that tomorrow you are going to appear in the Great Hall of Sydney University. I have had the pleasure of standing in the Great Hall. It has a lot of history and there is a sense of esteem when standing in the Great Hall. But, particularly to the boys and girls, I would say that there is also a rich and great history in the 40,000 years of Aboriginal people in Australia. Tomorrow should be a glorious day for the whole family—not just because of the immediate achievement but because of the achievements that have come from 40,000 years of fantastic history of Aboriginal people in Australia.

Towards the end of his comments the Minister for Education and Training, and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs said a few words about Aboriginal outcomes in New South Wales and Australia. I must say briefly that the Coalition would like to see a lot more work done by this Government in supporting Aboriginal people. I

have had the great pleasure of visiting Tranby Aboriginal College quite regularly, and I have seen the good work that Aboriginal people are doing to educate other Aboriginal people. However, the Government has an obligation to do much more. I get a little irritated with the hypocrisy in statements we hear from time to time such as, "We are doing enough," or, "We are doing so much for Aboriginal literacy," when the previous Minister for Education and Training, John Watkins, just last February pulled the pin on a study that was going to tell us that Aboriginal children miss out a lot in regard to literacy skills and opportunities. But, that aside, congratulations to all of you, and thank you for coming and sharing this occasion with us today.

SEXUAL SERVITUDE

Ministerial Statement

Ms NORI (Port Jackson—Minister for Tourism and Sport and Recreation, and Minister for Women) [3.26 p.m.]: I make this ministerial statement in my capacity as Minister for Women. I am very pleased, and relieved, to see the first arrests and charges laid under the Commonwealth's laws relating to sexual servitude. Honourable members may be aware that two people have been charged with sexual servitude and deceptive recruiting offences after information provided by NSW Police led to their arrest in Auburn. I am advised that on 14 June police from Auburn received a complaint from three Indonesian women who claimed they had been deceptively recruited to come to Australia and had been held in sexual servitude. The Australian Federal Police and immigration authorities were then notified, and two arrests were made. I commend NSW Police on the prompt action they took in this matter, which reflects how seriously our police consider these issues. This professional co-operation between State and Commonwealth authorities is something we should continue to strive for.

Last month I announced the establishment of a New South Wales working party into the sex slave trade. I would like to thank the honourable member for Heffron for chairing this committee on my behalf. One of the key objectives of the working party will be to provide recommendations on how best to support victims to achieve successful prosecutions. It will look at how these women are dealt with once they are identified and the co-operation between State and Federal agencies. The working party has met twice in the past month and has taken several submissions from a variety of sources. While I do not want to pre-empt the outcomes, what has become clear so far is the need for Commonwealth authorities to provide more support and protection for victims. As I understand, this is the first case where charges have been laid under the Commonwealth's Criminal Code Act 1995 relating to sexual servitude. Obviously, we will be monitoring this case very closely. I would like again to commend NSW Police and the Commonwealth colleagues for the good job they have done. I understand the NSW Police State Crime Command is closely monitoring this case as part of its Strike Force Chauffeur inquiry into sexual servitude offences.

Mrs SKINNER (North Shore) [3.28 p.m.]: This matter was covered in this morning's press. I join with the Minister for Women in deploring this kind of activity and in commending the Commonwealth police and other agencies involved for acting so quickly on behalf of these three Indonesian women. I also commend the *Daily Telegraph* for running a series of articles about sexual servitude—articles that may well have led to these women understanding there was action they could take. The Australian community will not tolerate sexual servitude, and its citizens were quite shocked when they became better informed about the extent of such activity. It is a pity that it exists at all. I hope that all agencies will work together to try to prevent people from being brought into our country for this purpose. The Coalition is happy to work with the Government and any other agency to put a stop to such a practice.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Supplementary Answer

EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES DROUGHT ASSISTANCE

Mr CAMPBELL: I provide the House with a supplementary answer to a question asked earlier by the Leader of the National Party. At 5 June the total drought relief provided by the New South Wales Government was \$83.9 million. I will supply further information to the House about applications for exceptional circumstances assistance for the north of the State. The Commonwealth rejected an initial application for this region—surprise, surprise—and this only reinforces what I said earlier. The New South Wales Government lodged a revised application on 30 May. But, once again, stringent Commonwealth eligibility criteria have delayed assistance. Red tape and the bureaucracy of the Federal Government are delaying the process. The applications were lodged as soon as the necessary data could be compiled.

The first application referred to Armidale, divisions C, D and part of division B of the Armidale Rural Lands Protection Board—the area east of the New England Highway from the divisional boundary in the north to the divisional boundary in the south. The matter was discussed at a meeting on 5 June between New South Wales Agriculture and the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry-Australia Economic Circumstances [AFFAEC] Task Force. The second application referred to Northern New England, divisions B, C, F, G and H of the Northern New England Rural Lands Protection Board and those parts of division A not already included in the Northern New England-North East exceptional circumstances area—the area north of the Bruxner Highway.

The matter was discussed at a meeting on 5 June between New South Wales Agriculture and the Commonwealth AFFAEC task force. The National Rural Advisory Council will reportedly visit the areas in early July. A Commonwealth decision will not be forthcoming until after the National Rural Advisory Council inspection. That reinforces my earlier point that the red tape of the exceptional circumstances application process of the Federal Government is delaying this area from being declared an exceptional circumstances area and delaying funding flowing to an area affected by the drought.

CONSIDERATION OF URGENT MOTIONS

Georges River Catchment

Mr GREENE (Georges River) [3.32 p.m.]: The Georges River catchment covers 800 square kilometres and impacts on the lives of in excess of 1.5 million people. The catchment covers 14 local government areas, which is a significant amount of New South Wales. In excess of one-quarter of the population of New South Wales live in the Georges River catchment. In addition, programs funded by the State Government have impacted significantly on improvements to the Georges River catchment. In considering this motion we will examine programs across New South Wales that have significant environmental impact, and that is why it is important for us to consider this matter today. Last night the shadow Attorney General spent considerable time referring to the Georges River electorate. If the area is so significant to the Coalition, it is important that its members support my motion for urgent consideration because it will give them an opportunity to talk more about the Georges River.

Grafton Base Hospital Public Cataract Surgery

Mr CANSDELL (Clarence) [3.34 p.m.]: This matter is urgent because the Northern Rivers Area Health Service has reduced the volume of public cataract surgery in Grafton Base Hospital from 360 cases last financial year to 150 cases this financial year. Currently, 315 cases are on the hospital's waiting list. Therefore, the decision to reduce the number of operations effectively increases from 12 months to 2 years the waiting time for this essential surgery. A reduction to 150 cases a year means that the hospital will be unable to meet the demand for cataract surgery. Eventually, waiting time will blow out to well beyond two years. The matter is urgent because a reduction in cataract surgery will affect the most vulnerable and needy in our communities. It is most urgent because the Minister for Health has to realise that he must counsel the Northern Rivers Area Health Service to reverse its decision to cut numbers for cataract operations.

We might well ask how long the waiting lists have to be before the Minister for Health will provide adequate funding to meet the demands of the population in the Clarence River area. The matter is urgent because cataract surgery is not like many other procedures: it is usually critical and urgent. Related to this issue is the draft review of operational funding for general nursing and allied health and support services within Grafton Base Hospital. This matter is urgent because of widespread dissension about the conclusions in the draft report, particularly the cost to Grafton Base Hospital of various surgical procedures. For example, the report says that Grafton Base Hospital pays \$496 for an intraocular prosthesis when other invoices show that the same prosthesis can be purchased for \$180 plus GST.

The report also claims that the cost of cataract surgery at Grafton Base Hospital is \$3,324 when in reality in November last year the cost of cataract surgery at Grafton Base Hospital was \$1,114. It is a gross misrepresentation. The matter is urgent because of the serious disparity in the figures. Is it possible that the figures have been used to justify halving the volume of cataract surgery from 315 cases last financial year to 150 cases this financial year, which will result in an increase of more than two years in the waiting list for new patients? The matter is urgent because the Minister may not be aware that for an amount of \$1,413, Grafton Base Hospital provides cataract surgery at a cost 30 per cent cheaper than its peer hospitals at \$2,259. There may be a case to ask the Minister for Health to inform the House how much money was wasted on the inaccurate report of the operational funding for general nursing and how many patients could have had cataracts removed had that funding been used more wisely.

The matter is urgent because Grafton Base Hospital senior staff consider the audit process used to prepare the report to be seriously flawed. They have grave doubts about costs for preoperative pathology quoted in the report, and they question the credibility, viability and value of other recommendations in the report. The first recommendation in the report is that prosthesis costs associated with these procedures should be scrutinised and that reasons for Grafton Base Hospital's substantial cost differential identified and, if possible, remedial action completed. It can be demonstrated that the recommendation is wrong. The matter is urgent because, if the Government accepts the figures in the health care report, many people in need of cataract surgery will be denied it immediately and will have to wait for more than two years to undergo it. Nothing could be more urgent for these people than for the Government to determine why the cost of cataract surgery at Grafton Base Hospital is misrepresented and is so far from the reality.

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

The House divided.

Ayes, 49

Ms Allan	Mr Greene	Mr Pearce
Mr Amery	Ms Hay	Mrs Perry
Ms Andrews	Mr Hunter	Dr Refshauge
Mr Bartlett	Mr Iemma	Ms Saliba
Mr Black	Ms Judge	Mr Sartor
Mr Brown	Ms Keneally	Mr Scully
Ms Burney	Mr Knowles	Mr Shearan
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	Mr Orkopoulos	Mr Ashton
Mr Gibson	Mrs Paluzzano	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 J. H. Turner
Mr Fraser	Mr Page	
Mrs Hancock	Mr Piccoli	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Hartcher	Mr Pringle	Mr Maguire
Mr Hazzard	Mr Richardson	Mr R. W. Turner

Pair

Mr Hickey

Mr George

Question resolved in the affirmative.

GEORGES RIVER CATCHMENT

Urgent Motion

Mr GREENE (Georges River) [3.47 p.m.]: I move:

That this House notes the environmental improvements by the State Government to the Georges River since 1995.

The Georges River is a great local asset. Cleaning up the river and protecting the foreshores has been one of the Carr Government's highest priorities. The Georges River covers 14 local government areas, with more than 1.5 million people—that is, 25 per cent of the population New South Wales—living in the catchment. The Georges River has a catchment area of 800 square kilometres, with a waterway area of 12 square kilometres. The river varies in width from about 30 metres near Liverpool to approximately 1,500 metres near its mouth, adjacent to Dolls Point in Botany Bay. It has 2.038 square kilometres of mangroves, 0.268 square kilometres of seagrass and 0.247 square kilometres of salt marsh.

A commonly quoted cliché is that the best things in life are free. But, as we all know, everything comes at a cost. Similarly, the simple pleasures of enjoying the sound of a free-flowing river, the sight of the sun reflecting off sparkling water, or enjoying a picnic with family or friends on the riverbank also come at a cost. But it is a cost that the Government is more than willing to pay to protect and improve the wonderful lifestyle to which many Australians, particularly families, have become accustomed.

The water quality in the Georges River is affected by both the level of development in the surrounding catchment and the level of tidal flushing. Humans have only so much control over nature's wonders, and similarly, with water quality, we can only do our best. During dry weather, bacterial contamination upstream of Salt Pan Creek has made the water quality of upstream locations a potential problem, but samples show that the contamination levels are low to moderate. In wet weather, water quality with respect to suitability for recreational activities is reduced. Bacterial levels are generally higher in wet weather than during dry weather. At most sites along the Georges River bacterial levels were generally lower in 2002 than median levels measured in previous years.

The Carr Labor Government's Stormwater Trust grants have led to a cleaner Georges River. I am proud to report that in my electorate approximately 50 per cent of the local Georges River catchment area is now covered by gross pollutant traps [GPTs] and wetland projects. Prior to 1995 there was almost nothing, which meant that rubbish flowed straight into the Georges River. Gross pollutant traps, litter baskets and wetlands have been installed at strategic positions in Oatley, Riverwood, Peakhurst, Lugarno and Hurstville central business district to stop pollution from reaching the river. There are also eight GPTs and three litter bins scattered along the edges of Kogarah Bay. The Stormwater Trust grants to both Hurstville council and Kogarah council have played a significant role in the improved quality of the Georges River. Examples of the use of program grants include Hurstville council using a grant of \$100,000 to fund a program titled "Catchment Care at Hurstville". Under the direction of council staff, 15 primary schools are involved in developing an integrated school and council stormwater action project that will have significant environmental benefits.

Hurstville council is using a Stormwater Trust grant of \$80,000 to undertake an environmental audit of the Peakhurst industrial area. This audit will assess the impact of land use operations on the lower Georges River catchment and seek to minimise any detrimental effects these premises may have on the river. Kogarah council has used grants to treat stormwater entering the Georges River through Oatley pleasure grounds, Poulton Park, Donnelly Reserve and Quarry Reserve at Hurstville Grove. The Roads and Traffic Authority's State Environmental Improvement Programs are another example of the Government delivering on its commitment to a cleaner Georges River.

The following programs are producing significant benefits for the river. Some \$104,051 has been spent on installing a gross pollutant trap and creating wetlands in Johnstone Street Reserve between Johnstone Street and Ogilvy Street, Peakhurst. Some \$95,000 has been used to instal a gross pollutant trap in the car park of Hurstville council's new \$8 million expanded leisure and aquatic centre. This will treat run-off from King Georges Road and Forest Road, Hurstville. An amount of \$90,597 has been spent on installing a GPT at Pearce Avenue Reserve, Peakhurst, treating stormwater flowing into Salt Pan Creek.

We are fortunate to live in an area with such a beautiful environment, but we must work to protect it. Just as important as improving water quality in the Georges River is improving access to the river for our community. Increased access to the Georges River provides more and more people in our community with

exposure to the wonders and enjoyment of our river. The more exposure the Georges River has to local residents, the more they will learn to appreciate it and seek to protect its natural beauty. That is why the Georges River Foreshore Improvement Program has been such a success. Since my election in 1999 the Georges River Foreshore Improvement Program has allocated \$5.6 million for 40 projects, generating more than \$11 million in partnership expenditure to restore and protect water quality and the foreshores of the Georges River.

Some \$285,000 was allocated to Hurstville council for access to Lime Kiln Bay at Oatley and Peakhurst. This project developed a network of all weather foreshore access routes and rehabilitated degraded areas by expanding bush regeneration. Scores of local residents have reported to me on the beauty of this walk. Some \$338,000 was given to Kogarah council and, when combined with an Environment Protection Agency Stormwater Trust grant, the Moore Reserve wetland became a reality. This project involved structures to divert and reduce erosion, pollution and silting. It includes a wetland to prevent pollution, particularly nutrients, reaching the river. It has also improved access and regenerated bushland. Oatley and Hurstville Grove residents are particularly pleased with this development.

A grant of \$70,000 was made to fund a study based on the concept proposed by Dr Peter Tralagga to develop and extend the Great Southern Walk with a Georges River walking trail. The study developed guidelines for strategic cross-catchment planning and a system of sustainable foreshore open space links and access, such as trails, walkways, boardwalks and cycleways. The need for councils to recognise the possibility of linkages is of great importance. A grant of \$476,000 was made for Hurstville council's Edith Bay Lugarno boardwalk and jetty. Council is enhancing community access to the foreshores by building a boardwalk and pathway, which will include the site of the heritage ferry crossing jetty.

Council is also carrying out bush regeneration to protect the foreshores of Edith Bay and the Georges River. New signage will enhance community appreciation of environmental and heritage values. An additional grant of \$96,000 for this project has allowed for the construction of an artificial wetland and wetlands observation deck. The project will improve stormwater quality flowing into Georges River and enhance pedestrian access and community participation and education. A grant of \$98,000 was made for Kogarah council's Moore Reserve leachate collection and treatment system to improve local water quality. Of course, these are only a few of the projects funded in my electorate. Other members whose electorates also border the river could give numerous other examples of similar successful projects undertaken since 1995.

The treatment programs I mentioned previously have resulted in better water quality for the George River. The access improvement programs mean that people do not have to own an expensive home to enjoy our magnificent local waterfront and improved water. The Foreshore Scenic Protection Area initiated by Hurstville City Council is an example of the Georges River being protected from overdevelopment. This protection resulted from community activism led by local residents, such as Ted Cooper and Sharyn Cullis, and supported by Hurstville council, particularly councillors Philip Sansom and Joanne Morris. I was happy to put the community's concerns before the then Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning, who readily agreed to the strengthened codes. The end result has been the prevention of overdevelopment along our foreshore areas, thereby lessening the impact that development has on the condition of the Georges River.

The Government is being successful, yet we must do more, particularly with sewer overflows and industrial discharges, in our bid to revitalise the Georges River, which is Sydney's largest catchment and one of our most splendid scenic jewels. We want people to fully appreciate and enjoy all the magnificent features the Georges River and its tributaries have to offer along the many kilometres of foreshores. More than one million people who live in the catchment and visitors are benefiting from cleaner water, a restored and attractive foreshore environment and better access for family recreation. Successfully improving water quality, protecting mangroves and regenerating bushland mean employing best practice standards. Ultimately, the projects to which I have referred will result in local flora and fauna habitats improved and maintained, and the water quality of the river enhanced. It will mean that those who live in the Georges River basin will have cleaner, healthier, more enjoyable places for recreation and the opportunity to appreciate our natural environment.

I thank Hurstville City Council and its mayor, Councillor Vince Badalati, for their enthusiasm in improving the Georges River; Kogarah council and Mayor Jim Taylor for their involvement; Rob Clarsen and the Lugarno Progress Association for their promotion of the Edith Bay project; Dr Peter Tralagga for his vision and foresight; Oatley Flora and Fauna Society for its ongoing promotion of environmental issues, particularly the Lime Kiln Bay project; and Sharyn Cullis, Secretary of the Georges River Environmental Alliance, for her passion in raising awareness of the standard of water quality, access and other factors that impact on the river.
[Time expired.]

Mr RICHARDSON (The Hills) [3.57 p.m.]: While I was listening intently to the honourable member for Georges River I was trying to work out why this motion is being debated, why it is urgent. When one compares this issue to hospital services in Clarence, it is fatuous that we should have to listen to the tirade of drivel from the mouth of the honourable member for Georges River. It is true that many of the programs to which he referred may well be beneficial, as indeed they are across the whole spectrum of New South Wales. Clearly, constructing boardwalks and installing gross pollutant traps are not restricted to this Government. The previous Coalition Government put a very effective clean waterways program in place. That is when we started to clean up our rivers, beaches and waterways.

I was listening for the substance in the contribution of the honourable member for Georges River. He started by giving us a geography lesson about where the river is, how long it is and the fact that the catchment is 800 square kilometres. However, he hedged the numbers a bit. At one point he said that the population of the Georges River catchment was one million; at another point he said it was 1.5 million. He spoke about the wonderful picnics that one can enjoy along the Georges River. After listening to his contribution, I have to conclude that he has plenty of time for picnics: He is out to lunch most of the time.

I wish to address some specific issues relating to the Georges River, in particular the report of the Independent Inquiry into the Georges River-Botany Bay System by the Healthy Rivers Commission dated September 2001. The honourable member for Georges River referred to the fact that bacterial levels in the river were lower in 2002 than they had been during the previous year. Why might that have been the case? Could it have been that there was less precipitation in the catchment? The honourable member for Southern Highlands might be able to remind me whether there was a drought on at the time. I think there was, so it is not surprising that there would be lower bacterial levels in the river in 2002. The Healthy Rivers Commission was less effusive than the honourable member for Georges River about the health of the river and about what needs to be done.

In particular the commission referred to the need for environmental flow releases from the Woronora Dam. I am sure that honourable members are aware of the pressing need for environmental flows throughout all our waterways. In fact, that is one of the most contentious issues facing our nation currently. Environmental flows have not been released from the Woronora Dam down the Georges River in accordance with the recommendation that was made by the Healthy Rivers Commission. The commission also referred to the fact that pricing mechanisms alone have been shown to have a limited effect on the demand for water and that there will need to be a greater reliance on demand management if security of the water supply system is to be maintained without creating the need to augment storages. That is true, and it means that we will have to use less water. It is also true that if rainfall in the Sydney Basin could be collected and used for non-potable purposes, such as washing cars, flushing toilets and watering gardens, a great deal of drinking water could be saved.

Ms Megarrity: Point of order: My point is relevance. I am not sure what the use of potable water or the reuse of non-potable water has to do with the environmental quality of the Georges River, the subject of the debate. That, together with statements on the Woronora Dam's river releases, which were totally incorrect, causes me to ask you to draw the attention of the honourable member for The Hills to the substance of the motion.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Saliba): Order! The honourable member for The Hills should confine his remarks to the substance of the motion.

Mr RICHARDSON: I was referring to the report of the Healthy Rivers Commission into the Georges River and Botany Bay system. That is relevant; it is an issue that the Government needs to address. The Government will have to examine ways of collecting rainwater that falls in the Sydney Basin but ends up in our waterways and is then flushed into the Georges River, among other water courses, creating enormous problems during times of heavy rain. That is waste water. It is water that pollutes our waterways, the Georges River, the Hawkesbury-Nepean waterway, the Cooks River and Sydney Harbour, but it is water that could be used to augment our water supply and for all sorts of other purposes.

Through Sydney Water the Government introduced a rainwater tank rebate system in October last year; it is one of our best-kept secrets. The scheme commenced on 20 October last year and it ceases on 30 June, in 11 days time. The rebate applies only to tanks of 2,000 litres capacity and so far only 500 people have received rebates ranging from \$150 to \$650, depending on the size of the tank and whether the tank is connected to a toilet or a washing machine. It is obvious that scheme is but a drop in the ocean as far as the Georges Rivers is concerned. The Government will have to do more if it intends to provide environmental flows that were referred to in the report of the Healthy Rivers Commission.

I was disturbed to learn from the Auditor-General that overall New South Wales rivers are the unhealthiest in the nation. In his report entitled "Protecting Our Rivers," which was released in May this year, the Auditor-General quoted a Commonwealth Government report, "Australian Catchment, River and Estuary Assessment", that showed that 34 per cent of New South Wales Rivers are significantly impaired compared to only 20 per cent of rivers in Victoria, 17 per cent in Queensland and 20 per cent in Tasmania. There is a huge difference between the health of New South Wales rivers and those in other States. That is an indictment of the Government's mismanagement of the environment portfolio. The Government has not got that right yet. I obtained information, to which I will refer, from Sydney Water's web site today. Sydney Water is less than effusive about the quality of water in the Georges River. The following appears on the web site:

During dry weather, the lower estuarine site at Woollooware Bay ... was suitable for primary- and secondary-contact recreation on most sampled days (more than 75 per cent).

That means that on 25 per cent of those days, the water was not suitable. The honourable member for Georges River referred to Salt Pan Creek. The following also appears on Sydney Water's web site:

Low to moderate levels of dry weather bacterial contamination at locations upstream of Salt Pan Creek have made the water quality at these upstream locations unsuitable for primary-contact recreation on more than 50 per cent of sampled days.

I emphasise that those assessments were made during dry weather. Another extract from the web site states:

Algal blooms were recorded at all sites in the upper estuarine section of the Georges River.

One has to ask why there would be algal bloom at all sites. It is fairly easy to see why. As I understand it, there are more than 2,000 stormwater discharge points and 351 points of sewage effluent overflow into the Georges River. They are creating the problem. For those reasons the Government stands condemned for its mismanagement of the environment of the Georges River.

Mr COLLIER (Miranda) [4.07 p.m.]: The Georges River forms the northern boundary of my electorate. It flows into Botany Bay and is regarded as one of the jewels in the crown of the Sutherland shire. It is the river that George Bass and Matthew Flinders rowed along and mapped in 1795. It is the same river on which Henry Lawson rowed in the 1920s and from which he came ashore to the original Como Hotel to entertain its patrons. It is the same river in which I fished as a kid and it is where I taught my son, Michael, who is present in the gallery, to fish, just under the Como rail bridge near the junction of the Georges River and the Woronora River. That junction is a place of indigenous significance, for it is where the bitter water people of the Georges River met the sweet water people of the Woronora River.

The Georges River occupies an important place in my electorate's local history and culture, indigenous and non-indigenous, and in the personal histories of many people in the shire. Over the years it has played an important role in commerce, industry and, of course, recreation. Sadly, the health of this once pristine river was neglected for years and both the foreshores and the environment suffered. One only needs to cite as proof the example of the Georges River oysters. Oyster farms were once the pride of the shire and oyster farming was one of the first industries in the area. Oyster farming flourished until 1994 when the Fahey Government was in power. Despite what the honourable member for The Hills has said about the Coalition's marvellous environmental programs, in 1994 the QX parasite first appeared and wreaked devastation on the industry.

Since then we have made great strides in protecting and preserving this great river, which is an important part of our heritage, and its foreshores, not just for the million people who live along the Georges River catchment, or the thousands who use it for recreational purposes, but for future generations of shire residents and Sydneysiders. Great strides have been made by the Carr Government, by the 14 councils that border the catchment, and by the many individuals, families and environmental groups who care about the future of the Georges River. They are all working together for a better, cleaner and healthier Georges River.

In 1999 the Carr Government announced a four-year \$6 million Georges River foreshore improvement program. The program has generated partnerships and projects of environmental and heritage significance which can and will benefit those living in the catchment. A fine example of this is the Como Pleasure Grounds Heritage and Environmental Trail project, which is currently under way in my electorate. This is a joint project with Sutherland council, which is using a \$290,000 grant from the State Government under the Foreshore Improvement Program to rehabilitate the environmental and cultural heritage of the historic Como Pleasure Grounds. The project highlights indigenous culture and heritage, and it seeks to protect the natural environment, improve public access, and enhance recreational activities. It also seeks to reduce the potential adverse impact on water quality and to address significant degradation that has resulted from past activities.

Following community consultation, council has adopted master plans for the trail and conservation management. Stage one of the project construction is due to commence soon. This is one of the projects in which the State Government has been involved that are aimed at improving the Georges River and its environment. In October 2001 the Government announced an \$11.5 million project to upgrade 20 sewage pumping stations across the shire. The upgrades will limit the potential sewage overflow into the Georges River and its tributary, the Woronora River. I understand that environmental flows are now being released into those rivers, contrary to what the honourable member for The Hills said. That is happening in wet and dry weather. The result of the \$11.5 million project is improved water quality and a less polluted, less threatened Georges River, a cleaner Botany Bay and, in the long-run, cleaner shire beaches.

In March 2002 the Government announced grants totalling \$407,000 to the shire council to repair and upgrade waterways, including the Georges River. That involved two projects: one to increase the retention and re-use of stormwater in the shire so there is less polluted run-off into our river, and a second that targets vehicle-related businesses in the shire to minimise their pollution entering the lower Georges River catchment. There are other projects under way, one of which reduces run-off from local golf courses, which occupy 20 per cent of the foreshore land along the Georges River. One of those golf courses is Kareela, in my electorate of Miranda.

The State Government has also invested about \$800,000 in a program to remove derelict oyster leases along 18 kilometres of the Georges River. Under the program, debris will be removed from about 46 leases, covering 78 hectares of the river; and abandoned leases will be removed, thereby increasing and improving the recreational amenity of the river and removing navigational hazards. The Carr Government has done much to improve the amenity of the Georges River catchment.

Ms SEATON (Southern Highlands) [4.12 p.m.]: I congratulate my colleague the honourable member for The Hills, the shadow Minister for the Environment. In this debate he has done something that members opposite have not: he has drawn to attention that the Government is accountable for delivering the outcomes that the community wants, and delivering outcomes for taxpayers that demonstrate value for money. We have heard nothing from the Government about outcomes.

I would also like to hear the honourable member for Georges River—if he is so desperately interested in the health and welfare of the Georges River—tell the House what he personally did during the previous term of the Government to try to convince his colleague the Hon. Eddie Obeid—our friend Eddie—who was then the Minister for Mineral Resources, to put in place some decent environmental controls with regard to mining the area underneath the headwaters of the Georges River. If members opposite were serious about protecting the water quality and the long-term sustainability of the Georges River, they would take a very strong interest in the welfare and management of the catchment in the headwaters of the Georges River.

The experience I have had as the local member for Southern Highlands—which includes the Appin area, which of course is the headwaters of the Georges River—is that the community there has been desperately concerned about the Government's lack of management, lack of accountability, and lack of standards. I remind members that an excellent report was written some time ago by the Cataract River task force, which was a body of the upper Nepean catchment management committee chaired by Tony Ross. That committee was part of the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment management trust group. I am sure that members on the other side of the House will be on the ball and will say, "No, that is the Nepean River, not the Georges River," but the importance of this is that the Cataract River report was absolutely relevant to what later happened in the upper Georges River, at Marhnes Hole and Jutts Crossing.

The recommendations of the Cataract River task force referred to the mining-induced surface cracking of the river bed, which has accelerated the drainage of some rock pools—a process that became evident when combined with low river flows. We then all looked at the Cataract River and said, "This is an absolute disaster. It should have been avoided. What lessons can we learn from this before we go and mine under Marhnes Hole, Jutts Crossing and all of the areas that form the headwaters of the Georges River?" I said, and many members of the community said to the Government, "We want to know that you will guarantee that, whatever approvals you give for mining under the Marhnes Hole area, there will be no repeat of the Cataract River-style cracking that caused a huge amount of drainage, environmental damage, methane release, and fires in the river bed."

The Hon. Eddie Obeid did absolutely nothing to provide those guarantees. I acknowledge that BHP Billiton has done everything it can to work within its licence. To my understanding it has never exceeded its licence. To its credit, in recognising community concern it has undertaken a lot of community consultation and put in place a lot of community work. The fault lies with the Carr Government and with Eddie Obeid when he

was the Minister for Mineral Resources, because he never tried to put in place standards that mining companies needed to uphold and work towards. They simply did not bother to consult with the community, to understand the community's concerns, or to fully understand the impact on the upper Georges River catchment.

This has resulted in the cracking of Marhnes Hole—which is a much-loved waterhole in the Appin area—and dangerous falls of rock. BHP has done what it can to manage the tensions and pressures with some specifically engineered slot technology, but, nevertheless, Marhnes Hole and Jutts Crossing have been damaged. BHP is working with the community but, at the end of the day, the accountability lies with the Carr Government.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Mills): Order! It being after 4.15 p.m. business is interrupted for the taking of private members' statements.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

TWEED HEADS CBD TASK FORCE

Mr NEWELL (Tweed—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.18 p.m.]: I report progress on developments with the Tweed Heads CBD Task Force. Members may recall that the task force was instituted last September-October by the previous Minister for Planning following a request from myself and others in the Tweed area to formulate a plan and a task force to revitalise the Tweed Heads CBD. Due to developments in the Tweed CBD area over the past five to six years, a lot of the commercial area has been run down, and a lot of the businesses that established there because it was such a lively commercial area have departed for other sites, particularly to the new shopping centres in Tweed Mall and in South Tweed at Tweed City.

I do not blame the banks and shops that moved to other areas, because they need to be where people go and it made good commercial sense for them to move once the decision had been made to allow the other developments to go ahead. The CBD was run down, it was lacking in life, and there was very little commercial or recreational activity there. The car yards that had once thrived along the Bay Street area also moved, and consequently the area looked very neglected. There was a great deal of angst that the gateway to New South Wales was being neglected, and the Minister at that time, Andrew Refshauge, responded with \$120,000 funding for a CBD task force to employ a project manager, and this was enthusiastically taken up by the local community. Funding was also available to allow studies to be undertaken to ensure that decisions were taken with the right background information.

The CBD task force has been functioning for six months or more and it has gained the backing of the local community. I do not resile from the fact that at the start there was some angst in the community as to what direction the task force would take or whether it would decide on a sensible plan that the committee would accept. Some major high-rise developments were planned for the area. One of them, the Latitude 28 site, was refused consent by Planning NSW. The owners of other sites are working with the CBD task force and the local community, which strongly indicated what it felt were sometimes inappropriate developments. I am pleased to report that in its six months of operation the task force has gained a great deal of public support, including from the local chambers of commerce, the local progress associations, and the local community.

So far there have been three rounds of community consultation. The first was in February with the stakeholders, the owners, and other businesses already in the community. Eighty invitations were extended for that consultation meeting and all but three invitees attended. That indicates the level of enthusiasm and support in the community. A second round of consultation was held with some further stakeholders, and again it was enthusiastically attended. Recently at Minjundal Museum we consulted with the Aboriginal community, the original stakeholders in that area, if I can put it that way. In the short term, that community has appointed two spokespeople to look at some of the development plans. The task force has already accepted the tender for an economic development study. A number of these studies have been done in the past and consequently this will not take a great deal of time and effort. It will be done professionally, and some of the previous studies will be taken on board to ensure that the best information is gathered.

Jack Evans Boat Harbour has been recognised as a major focal point. In 1992 a plan for it was prepared as well. Some of that early work was good but it needs to be updated, and that is being re-examined by a special subcommittee and experts from the local community. Overall, I am delighted that the Tweed Heads CBD task

force is forging ahead. By any standards it has the backing of the local community, and the newspapers are reporting positively on the work that has been done so far. I congratulate Magdy Youssef, the project officer, who has done such a great job to get it where it is today. [*Time expired.*]

Miss BURTON (Kogarah—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.23 p.m.]: I congratulate the honourable member for Tweed on his hard work in ensuring that the Tweed Heads CBD task force initiative got off the ground, and on his continuing representations in this place for the people of Tweed. It is good to see the community working together for the betterment of the local area. I wish the task force and the community ongoing success with this initiative.

APRIC PTY LTD PITTWATER ROAD, DEE WHY, DEVELOPMENT

Mr HAZZARD (Wakehurst) [4.23 p.m.]: I am extremely concerned about a situation that has arisen at Dee Why. Like many areas of Warringah, Dee Why has been under extreme pressure to facilitate additional development. That pressure has been driven primarily by the Carr Government. The complex of units at 910 Pittwater Road, Dee Why, received development application approval from Warringah Council on Thursday 15 September 2000. Many purchasers then entered into contracts subject to the completion of the building and subject to the registration of the strata plan. As is often the case, purchasers are very much at the mercy of developers and the ultimate vendor of the properties. In this case a huge problem has arisen. It appears to be a case of a developer who is footloose and fancy free with promises, a private certifier who does not understand his private certification obligations, and a distinct shortage of men of honour in dealing with the community.

I am advised that a number of residents have suffered markedly from the activities of the developer, Apric Pty Ltd, and the private certifier, McKenzie Consulting. Mr Rex Horne facilitated the purchase by his son of a unit in this complex. After settlement, which occurred a couple of months ago, he and his son tried to park their small four-cylinder car in the car space. They found it impossible to access the car space. That caused them to take out their measuring tapes and see what they had. Despite the fact that Australian standards require a minimum car space of between 2.4 metres and 2.6 metres, they found they had a 2.25 metre-wide car space. It gets worse. They can reverse the car into the car space but cannot get out of the car because the door cannot be opened, and they cannot move the car forward into the car space.

The developer is keen to extract the maximum dollars out of the development, and after contracts were entered into the approved plans were changed by a private certifier. The current Government introduced the private certifier plan—no doubt with the right intention—but at the time the Coalition warned that there may be problems with private certification. Here is a case study of incredible problems. What has happened is not unique to Mr Horne. Other people in the complex entered into contracts to purchase units. In one case people purchased a unit with two car spaces but ended up with only one. Another family purchased a unit with two bathrooms but finished up with only one. Another family purchased a unit with a large balcony but ended up with only a half-size balcony. Warringah Council has done no wrong here: it approved a development that complied with the requirements of the State Government. The private certifier, McKenzie Group Consulting of level 6, 189 Kent Street, Sydney, gave the final certification for council on 31 March—apparently happily and wilfully taking part in changing all these things that had been promised to purchasers.

Car spaces, bathrooms and balconies were all subject to the changes shown on the map. To make matters worse, the company, Apric Pty Ltd, is now advertising additional car spaces for sale—it reduced the size of the car spaces that were purchased in order to provide additional spaces to flog. It is about extracting every last dollar from this development. This company and the private certification system have a lot to answer for. I ask the State Government to look closely at what has happened. In particular, I ask the Department of Fair Trading and the Minister for Fair Trading to see what can be done to help these families. [*Time expired.*]

Miss BURTON (Kogarah—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.28 p.m.]: Although Opposition members imply that councils comply completely with State Government guidelines, we all know that council codes specify the number, location and height of developments. The fact that the company was allowed to build at that location is a matter for the council and its codes. It is not as though the council was abiding by some State Government policy. However, I take on board the concerns raised by the honourable member for Wakehurst about private certification. I know that penalties apply if approved plans are changed. The honourable member has outlined a serious situation, which I will refer to the Minister for Fair Trading. We definitely need to address the sorts of practices that the honourable member for Wakehurst described.

EASTLAKES WOMEN'S BOWLING CLUB AUSTRALIA'S BIGGEST MORNING TEA

Ms KENEALLY (Heffron) [4.29 p.m.]: I pay tribute to a dedicated group in my community that is working at grassroots level to support the challenge that this Government is meeting head on: fighting cancer. I congratulate the Eastlakes Women's Bowling Club on its tremendous efforts to raise money for the New South Wales Cancer Council. This year marks the third year in which the Eastlakes Women's Bowling Club has hosted Australia's Biggest Morning Tea in aid of cancer research. This year's event was held on Wednesday 21 May at the bowling club on Florence Avenue. I was honoured that the club invited me to attend the event and I was pleased to do so.

The club's morning tea was a resounding success, raising more than \$2,700 for cancer research. More than 200 members of the local community attended, including the club's patron, long-time member and my neighbour Mrs Dulcie Coyne, who has been a resident of Eastlakes for more than 65 years. Mr Brad Timms, the co-ordinator of the Australia's Biggest Morning Tea program, also attended. Mr Timms spoke to the people of Eastlakes about the outstanding research that is being conducted as a result of fundraising efforts like those of the bowling club.

I believe it is a wonderful tribute to the Eastlakes community that the bowling club should sponsor such a successful event in order to raise awareness and funds for urgently needed research into such a devastating disease. I am a resident of Eastlakes and I have spoken before in Parliament about what a friendly and wonderful community it is. The efforts of the women's bowling club testify to that. As we know, the Premier has directed that a Cancer Research Institute be established in New South Wales to fight the battle against this disease. The Cancer Council, which co-ordinates the Australia's Biggest Morning Tea program, has welcomed this initiative. The chief executive officer of the Cancer Council, Dr Andrew Penman, said yesterday that the cancer institute Act will allow the Cancer Council to "focus more on what we do best, which is to deliver help at the community level".

I am confident that with the help of community organisations such as the Eastlakes Women's Bowling Club the Cancer Council will continue to deliver much-needed and much-appreciated community assistance. I congratulate Mrs Coupland, the president of the bowling club; Mrs Margaret Power, the club's secretary; and Mrs Dearing, the club's treasurer. I also congratulate all the club's members, who made beautiful jams, pickles and cakes for sale and contributed gorgeous handmade and donated items for a fancy goods stall. In addition, there were amazing cakes and treats for the morning tea itself, including the best cheesecake I have ever tasted! Organisations such as the Eastlakes Women's Bowling Club are the heart and soul of our local community. I believe this Government's efforts to tackle cancer head on are bolstered immeasurably by the work being done in our local communities. I thank the Eastlakes Women's Bowling Club for its work. Through its efforts it has both benefited our local community and strengthened our resolve in New South Wales to fight cancer and build better lives for cancer patients.

Miss BURTON (Kogarah—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.35 p.m.]: I thank the honourable member for Heffron for her comments. During the time that I have known the honourable member she has worked hard for her local community. Her constituents are lucky to have her and I am sure that she will continue to represent them well in this place. I extend the Parliament's congratulations to the Eastlakes Women's Bowling Club. Many of us have lost a family member or friend to cancer. I know from personal experience that it is a devastating disease, and we must do everything possible to find a cure. The Government is doing all that it can—we debated this morning the Cancer Institute (New South Wales) Bill—to find a cure and to provide better care for cancer patients. Community support is also important, and in that context I thank the Eastlakes Women's Bowling Club for its hard work and commitment in support of its local community.

COFFS HARBOUR BYPASS

Mr FRASER (Coffs Harbour) [4.34 p.m.]: I raise again this afternoon the issue of roads in the Coffs Harbour area, specifically the Coffs Harbour bypass. This issue has divided our community. The Government announced the bypass in an attempt to assist the then Australian Labor Party candidate, the mayor, in a Federal election campaign. As I have said before, the associated public consultation process has been a sham. I refer honourable members to a letter to the editor that appeared in today's edition of the *Advocate*. It concerns Tim Patterson, a Connell Wagner representative appointed by the Government, and Ken Oldfield, the then manager of the Pacific Highway project employed by the Roads and Traffic Authority. The letter states:

I refer to a letter to the editor by A. Jary published 26th May. The writer refers to the first public meeting in Woolgoolga called by the RTA to discuss the Woolgoolga bypass. It states "... a comment was made by one person that he had overheard a conversation between the RTA representatives on the flight to Coffs Harbour, but did not divulge what he heard."

I was the person on the flight referred to and the conversation was between a very senior RTA staff member and a senior staff member of Connell Wagner, the firm of consultant engineers employed by the RTA. The conversation started in the airport terminal and continued across the tarmac and on the plane until we reached Coffs Harbour.

Part of the conversation centred on how the RTA was going to achieve the decision on the upgrade route that *they* wanted. This would be the route that was the cheapest, would be politically best for the Minister, and hence favourable to the careers of parties involved. It would also be to the advantage of Connell Wagner, who were being paid a substantial fee for the project. If the RTA was pleased with the services of Connell Wagner on the project, there were other similar projects that Connell Wagner could benefit from.

The Connell Wagner staff member asked how they were going to control the public meetings and the public consultation process to achieve *their* desired results. This was explained to him by the RTA rep. including giving detailed examples of other projects where they had used particular strategies and tactics to successfully manipulate the residents and achieve *the result they wanted*.

They stated they had to have an apparent public consultation process so when the residents objected to their decision on the preferred route, they could justify their choice by saying that the community consultation process had been followed.

After hearing this conversation and attending the first public meeting, I was horrified of what the RTA staff (in conjunction with PlanningNSW) intended doing, and the underhand methods planned to achieve those plans. To attempt to achieve a fair outcome for Woolgoolga I became a member of the Woolgoolga Community Focus Group (CFG) and attended all meetings. I have also attended the Value Management Workshop, the Pacific Highway Planning Strategy Forum and many other meetings on the by-pass.

Unfortunately, during the last 18 months the actions of the RTA and Planning NSW have been in total accord with the plan discussed on that flight. The preferred route is the cheapest option. The fact that it will have a very severe impact on Woolgoolga, and its residents is not a factor that the Steering Committee thinks relevant. The ARUP report into the review process recommended that the Steering Committee have public representation on it to improve "transparency in the process". Council General Manager also recommended this. The RTA and Planning NSW have refused this recommendation. They do not want the residents to know what is going on in the decision making process. They have refused repeated attempts to have observers present.

The fact that the overwhelming majority of residents prefer another option is not considered. It is a long time before the next State election. However Council elections are only next year!

As I said earlier, this man is prepared to sign a statutory declaration. The government process, which is supposed to be transparent and in the interests of the people New South Wales, has been white-anted. I want the Minister to refer this issue to the Independent Commission Against Corruption [ICAC] or to some other body and to have it fully investigated.

Mr Orkopoulos: You do it.

Mr FRASER: I will refer this matter to the ICAC, just as I have referred matters to it in the past. When a senior official of the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] and someone employed by the Government conspire to pervert a public consultation process to save the Government money the matter should be referred to the ICAC. I call on the Minister to have this matter fully investigated and to ensure that this process is open and transparent. People in the Coffs Harbour electorate deserve better than they have been offered so far on this issue.

Miss BURTON (Kogarah—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.39 p.m.]: Time and again Opposition members make accusations about cover-ups and collusion. Opposition members quote from many documents that prove to be false. If the honourable member for Coffs Harbour has evidence to show that things are not being conducted correctly and that corruption is involved, he should refer the matter to the proper authorities and not make allegations in this House.

Mr Fraser: That letter was printed in the Coffs Harbour *Advocate*.

Miss BURTON: The honourable member is aware of the processes of this House. If he has any evidence of corruption he should refer the matter to the Independent Commission Against Corruption. We will see what occurs as a result. The honourable member for Coffs Harbour, under parliamentary privilege, makes allegations and tries to score political points because he cannot adequately represent his local electorate.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Mills) Order! The honourable member for Coffs Harbour has made his private member's statement. He should listen to the response of the Parliamentary Secretary.

Miss BURTON: If this matter is as serious as the honourable member is alleging, he should refer it to the proper authorities. He has been in this House long enough to know what processes have to be followed.

GAN GAN ARMY CAMP SITE SALE

Mr BARTLETT (Port Stephens) [4.41 p.m.]: Tonight I refer to the Commonwealth Government's proposed sale by tender of Gan Gan army camp which is located in my electorate between Nelson Bay Road and Gan Gan Road. The land, which occupies about 97 hectares, is located approximately four kilometres from Boat Harbour and three to four kilometres from Nelson Bay. In 1916 the Commonwealth Government resumed about 3,000 hectares of land in the Port Stephens area for the east coast naval base. The Gan Gan army camp was included in that area. The Commonwealth built the army camp in the Gan Gan area in 1942 and, as such, it has some heritage value today.

In 1955 that land was transferred from the State to the Commonwealth. The Federal member for Paterson, Bob Baldwin, is now claiming that the State has an obligation to bid for this block of land which was given to the Commonwealth by the State in 1955. I have ascertained that the Commonwealth formally acquired the land by way of notice in the Commonwealth *Government Gazette* on 31 March 1955, although the area had been in use for defence purposes from the early 1940s. In May 1942 the then New South Wales Premier advised all State agencies that they should act "in a generous manner" when the Commonwealth required land for defence purposes and should not seek to make a profit in these circumstances. I have established that, to date, the Commonwealth has never paid any money for this land.

There is considerable community resentment about the proposed sale by tender of this land. This 97-hectare block is a significant component in a vegetation corridor between Tomaree National Park and Tilligery Nature Reserve. The land contains candidate old-growth forests of Sydney sand apple blackbutt that have been largely undisturbed for 50 years. These forests are a known and predicted habitat for a number of threatened species. The community has always regarded this land as part of the natural area of Port Stephens electorate. The land, which adjoins Tomaree National Park, would fit in well with the existing Tomaree National Park, which was established in 1983-84.

As I said earlier, the community is up in arms about this proposed land sale. Two hundred people attended public meetings to protest about the proposed sale by tender of this land, which was given to the Commonwealth for military purposes during the war. Presumably the State Government will have to bid against anybody interested in purchasing this land. The State does not feel morally obliged to buy land that was given to the Commonwealth at a time of need—land that is a great habitat for different species of flora and fauna in the Tomaree area. Port Stephens is renowned for its water and for its environment. This is a direct attack on the Port Stephens environment.

I say to the Federal member for Patterson who is demanding that the State buy back this land from the Department of Defence: Represent the people of Port Stephens, secure this land and include it in the national estate. The land in question has a high conservation value. On 17 November 1999 the Department of Defence was advised by the National Parks and Wildlife Service of its longstanding interest in Gan Gan army camp. The National Parks and Wildlife Service urged the Commonwealth to set aside a large portion of land for conservation. The Federal member for Patterson claimed that there has been no attempt by the State to purchase this parcel of land.

Miss BURTON (Kogarah—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.45 p.m.]: I pay tribute to the honourable member for Port Stephens for the hard work he does in his electorate. Once again the Federal Government is attempting to make this State pay. It is abrogating its responsibility and it is trying to blame the State Government. The Federal Government will not come clean on its part of the deal or live up to any of its funding arrangements. It is gutting funding from education and health in New South Wales. It has no respect for the environment or for the community of Port Stephens. Once again the Federal Government is trying to pass the buck to the State Government. The Federal Government has responsibility for these issues. We often debate urgent motions in this House condemning the Federal Government for not doing the right thing by the people of New South Wales. This is just another example.

NAROOMA BAR SAFETY

Mr CONSTANCE (Bega) [4.47 p.m.]: A matter of concern to the far South Coast community of Narooma is the condition of the Narooma bar, at the entrance of the Wagonga Inlet. Last Monday members of the Narooma community and I ventured out on a charter vessel to inspect the Narooma bar, which has been the subject of much debate and contention at various levels of government over an extended period. In July 2000 the State Government commissioned a report under the guise of the Department of Public Works and Services. That

report, prepared by the Manly Hydraulics Laboratory, stated that five deaths had occurred at the Narooma bar up to that time. Since then, another six deaths have occurred. The Government has taken no action to address either the problems identified within the report or safety aspects at the bar.

The report found that 42 accidents had occurred at the bar in the 20 years prior to publication of the report. Of those accidents, 83 per cent had resulted from an outgoing tide and 90 per cent had occurred when the swell was at a height of 1.8 metres or above. The majority of accidents occur when boat owners leave the Wagonga Inlet. Very few accidents relate to commercial vessel operators. The Government should ensure that certain commonsense steps are put into operation immediately. At present it is not compulsory to wear a life jacket on recreational craft crossing a bar. Therefore, I call on the State Government to amend the Maritime Services Act 1935, in particular, the Water Traffic Regulations, to make it compulsory for life jackets to be worn when recreational craft cross a bar. Indeed, the Narooma bar should be covered specifically by regulation because of the significant number of deaths that have occurred. Such regulation would go some way towards alleviating the negative perceptions within the Narooma community.

Narooma is a wonderful place, but we do not want its reputation to suffer simply because people on recreational boats do not wear life jackets when crossing the bar. In addition, information should be provided to recreational boat owners so that they have a better understanding of the conditions that they may face at the Narooma bar. It is a sad reality that many boat owners who venture to the far South Coast become impatient to put their brand new boats in the water regardless of the prevailing conditions. It is imperative that we enforce the wearing of life jackets. Tony Casu, Vice-President of Eurosouth, is head of the subcommittee that is working on the Narooma bar problem. Many other issues need to be considered further down the track, but, in the short term, it is imperative that we regulate for the compulsory wearing of life jackets by all recreational boat users.

Miss BURTON (Kogarah—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.52 p.m.]: The honourable member's comments about the wearing of life jackets and the issuing of information to recreational boat owners are relevant to the safety of boat users at the Narooma bar. I ask the honourable member to provide further background information, which I will take to the Minister on his behalf.

SWANSEA ELECTORATE COMMUNITY

Mr ORKOPOULOS (Swansea) [4.53 p.m.]: All honourable members know that community building involves the inclusion of every section of the community in the process of identifying that community's strengths, needs and problems, leading to worthwhile programs and policies to build a better future. And so it is with the Swansea community, when some two years ago the Swansea Chamber of Commerce held public meetings that brought together hundreds from the local community to address a range of issues facing the Swansea district. Among the many needs that were identified were problems associated with young people and families, and as a result a youth and family services team called Help for Adolescents and Families in Life, known as HAIL, was formed. The team began a three-part process of promoting a stronger community for families in Swansea.

The first stage involved consultation with local relevant service providers, schools, agencies—including police—community groups, clubs and church groups, in order to establish a community network. The second stage was involvement in Lake Macquarie City Council, recreational facilities and community and drug action team strategies, which were part of the Government's drug action program. This stage also included information and awareness sharing, particularly in relation to families in the community. The third stage involved the compilation of funding applications to generate resources for a locally based mentoring program to help address risk factors in identified youth and family groups.

In August 2000, as part of the third step in that process, an application was made to the Attorney General's Department Crime Prevention Division. In September 2002 some \$30,000 was granted to Lake Macquarie City Council to fund a joint initiative of the Swansea and District Chamber of Commerce and the Family Action Centre of the University of Newcastle. The pilot project to be conducted in the community is the revised version of the plan. The pilot project entitled "Developing Resilience in Boys (a strengths approach)" is a program for certain identified boys, designed to develop their resilience, self-confidence, motivation and connection to their communities.

The project is a crime prevention initiative that aims to decrease participation in antisocial and criminal activity by young people, to increase the interaction and understanding between young people and the general community, and to prevent early school leaving. One of the great features of the program is that all feeder

schools to Swansea High School are participants in the project. Teachers and executives at the school identify boys at risk and include them in the program. Part of the program involves hiring a co-ordinator, who will manage the program and recruit male mentors for the boys. This fundamental and basic need is being met. The "strengths approach" to dealing with boys at risk is a positive step in addressing antisocial activity. The Swansea Chamber of Commerce, the community, the school community and the Family Action Centre should be congratulated on their positive approach to dealing with the problems.

Miss BURTON (Kogarah—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.58 p.m.]: I congratulate the honourable member for Swansea on the hard work he does in his local area and on his excellent representation on behalf of the people of Swansea. I congratulate the Swansea Chamber of Commerce, the Family Action Centre and the Swansea community on this initiative. It is a fine example of the Government's commitment to local communities. Many local communities have unique or specific problems, and government policies and government money need to be tailored to those needs. I refer, for example, to the recent announcements by the Premier in relation to Dubbo and Wilcannia, crime prevention strategies, implementation of the initiatives from the Drug Summit, and the Families First initiative. I thank the honourable member for Swansea for his private member's statement because it shows that on the ground, at the grassroots level, the community is embracing these initiatives and they are working. They are helping communities to overcome their specific problems and to meet their specific needs. I wish them success. We look forward to the honourable member reporting to this House on continuing progress in this area.

CLARENCE ELECTORATE PUBLIC DENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr CANSELL (Clarence) [5.00 p.m.]: It is with much concern that I raise in the House today the dire state of dental health services in my electorate of Clarence. Since being elected I have been approached by an alarming number of people requiring general and emergency dentistry as well as oral surgery. It would appear that people requiring dental treatment through the public dentist are assessed by a computer and placed on a waiting list. In the meantime, those requiring urgent work are left to suffer in extreme pain, not knowing when they will be able to have treatment. Eventually they receive a letter in the mail advising them to contact the dental clinic. Those requiring general dental treatment are then pushed further and further to the back of the waiting list and all but give up on receiving treatment.

It has also come to my attention that there is no public oral surgeon based in Grafton, Lismore or Coffs Harbour and that people requiring oral surgery have to seek the services of a private dentist to undertake the dental work required. The majority of these people are low-income earners, many of whom are unemployed, and pensioners who do not have the capacity to pay for the procedure to be undertaken by a private dentist. Alternatively, they would have to travel several hundred kilometres or more to Sydney to receive treatment. Prior to the State election in March the new state-of-the-art \$495,000 Aruma dental unit was opened in Grafton. It was lauded by the former Minister for Health, the Hon. Craig Knowles. It was intended to reduce dental waiting lists but, from the number of people I have coming into my office every week, I do not believe waiting lists have declined.

Also, back in November 2002 the chief executive officer [CEO] of the Northern Rivers Area Health Service stated that this would be one of three centres of excellence in New South Wales and would provide improved access to a range of specialist services likely to include orthodontic and paediatric services as well as oral surgery. The CEO also stated that it would provide professional development opportunities for both private and public oral health staff, and support the recruitment and retention of oral health professionals. The former Minister for Health said, "This will become the Mecca for regional dental excellence." Tell that to the elderly lady from Yamba whose gums are shrinking and whose only option is to have all her teeth removed to relieve the pain, who takes three packets of Panadol a week and who looks like having to wait 12 months; or the middle-aged woman from Woolli who is in constant suffering and who has also been forced to wait at least 12 months before she can get any relief.

I understand that the three-chair dental clinic is to house a full-time dentist and visiting specialist. However, I am told that at present only one locum dentist is performing work at the unit, and that dentist will depart in July. We will then have to wait until a new dentist is recruited to the area, at which time we will be put on the backburner again and dental care waiting lists will grow even further. It seems that now that the election is over we have a state-of-the-art building with a Third World dental service. It is time that we as a parliament stopped playing politics with people's pain and suffering and that the Labor Government accepted the responsibility of ensuring that adequate dental health care is available for everyone, not just the wealthy.

Miss BURTON (Kogarah—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.04 p.m.]: As the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health I am happy to take on board any further information that the honourable member has in relation to the State Government's responsibility. However, I might add, because the honourable member is new to this place, that dental health is not just a State government responsibility. Back in 1996 the Federal Government, the Howard Liberal Government, slashed \$36 million from the Commonwealth dental health program in New South Wales. Waiting lists blew out from six weeks to five years.

The State Government is concerned about the situation: we do not think anyone should have to wait for dental care. We know that people have gum problems and have had to wait on the public health list for quite some time. However, that was not the situation prior to 1996 when the Howard Liberal Government abolished the Commonwealth dental health program. The program should be restored to assist this State in delivering quality dental health care to the people of New South Wales. But, as has been demonstrated in this House time and again, the Federal Government does not want to live up to its responsibilities to the people of New South Wales.

FAIRFIELD HARNESS RACING CLUB

Mr TRIPODI (Fairfield—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.06 p.m.]: The Fairfield Harness Racing Club, which has served the Fairfield community for many generations, has been earmarked for closure by Harness Racing New South Wales. As background to the issue, Harness Racing New South Wales is an independent commercial body responsible for the future direction of the harness racing industry in this State. The proposed closure is alleged to be part of the organisation's future strategic plan for the entire State. Following the Government's acquiescence to the request by the harness racing industry the Government agreed to separate the regulatory and commercial functions of the industry. To this end Harness Racing New South Wales is a fully-fledged commercial entity.

That said, as the member of Parliament representing the area that houses the facility, I am appalled that Harness Racing New South Wales has made such a critical decision without once consulting me or any significant stakeholders in the Fairfield community. I expect that the organisation, as a commercial entity, will operate to the highest standards of probity and social commitment. Indeed, in line with other industries, Harness Racing New South Wales is obliged to act in a socially responsible manner. Amongst other things, this means gauging the feelings and attitudes of the affected community. The organisation is obliged to act in a socially responsible manner. This includes preparing a full community impact statement that takes issues such as employment, social infrastructure and recreational facilities into account.

Fairfield is the only track in metropolitan Sydney that has the ability to grow in the future. There is no evidence to show that the Fairfield operation is unprofitable. The strategic plan shows that Fairfield is the only harness racing track that has been targeted for closure. Fairfield has the highest turnover after Harold Park. It is the only track other than Menangle, which is currently not used, that has the potential to physically grow. Only three weeks ago I met with the executive of Fairfield Harness Racing to discuss how to fund a 1,000-metre track. The Fairfield track has a new betting auditorium, one of only two in existence in New South Wales, Randwick being the other. Last year Fairfield Harness Racing paid back 66 per cent of collections in prize money. This year the figure is 76 per cent, and 81 per cent is being budgeted for next year.

I am concerned that the big players in the industry have targeted Fairfield because we get more horses racing than our competitors, including Harold Park. Even this week, Harold Park had the embarrassing situation of having to run six-horse races. Meanwhile, Fairfield always has plenty of horses to race in all its events. Fairfield City Council is currently in the process of spending \$750,000 to \$1 million on car parking facilities at the track. The State Government has recently built the bus transitway very close to the track, making it readily accessible to members of the public. It is located close to efficient access and transport connections.

My concern is that, as the local member representing those affected, the first I heard about this was a report in yesterday's edition of the *Fairfield Advance* that this important and longstanding facility would be closed down. I understand that commercial decisions are made, but my concern is that this decision does not have a commercial basis. The Fairfield facility has been targeted because it has the potential to grow and it is very competitive. The big boys who run this industry are concerned that Fairfield is viable and a threat to them. It is a large facility and it has been operating for a long time. Most importantly, the people who own and run horses love coming to Fairfield. It is an integral part of our community and this decision is an enormous shock to many people involved with the racing track.

The Fairfield Harness Racing [FHR] Club advised me today that 50 jobs could be lost as a result of this decision. As I said, I have no problem with decisions being made on a commercial basis. FHR is confident that

if strict commercial criteria were applied, it would be more than competitive and would be able to put up a reasonable argument for the facility to remain open. The public consultation process has begun and I will back FHR in its submission. I will ensure that the proponents use proper criteria rather than gang up and beat up FHR. [*Time expired.*]

Miss BURTON (Kogarah—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.11 p.m.]: Even though I live in the St George area, I am aware of the Fairfield Harness Racing Club. It is a well-utilised community facility, it is financially viable and it is important to the fabric of the Fairfield community. I lend my support to Fairfield Harness Racing to continue operating in the local area.

CROWN OF THE HILL COMPLEX

Mr HUMPHERSON (Davidson) [5.11p.m.]: I speak on behalf of many thousands of residents of Forestville living in the vicinity of the Crown of the Hill complex, and specifically on behalf of Jack Chen, the proprietor of the small convenience store-supermarket in the complex. Mr Chen has been requested to vacate the premises by the managing agent, L. J. Hooker Commercial, as part of a wider proposal involving the Crown of the Hill liquor store. The operator of the liquor store wishes to expand the business into the area occupied by Mr Chen's store.

After due consideration, I am happy to support the 400 to 500 residents who have signed a petition. Mr Chen and I have a copy of the petition, which I undertook to forward to the Minister for Small Business. I also undertook to raise this matter in Parliament. We must determine the most effective way to achieve a balance between market forces and commercial opportunities and realities that face all business operators and the needs and interests of a local community. The Crown of the Hill complex comprises just two outlets—the bottle shop, which until recently was owned by Theo's Liquor but was purchased by Coles Myer Ltd, and the convenience store-supermarket, which has been owned by Jack for seven years.

A convenience store of some form or another has been on the site for at least 40 years. It is in Arthur Street, which is one of the oldest streets in the area. The supermarket is an intrinsic part of the community. Many thousands of residents have no other convenient outlet from which to purchase general groceries and convenience items. Their only alternative is to travel about one kilometre to the Forestville shopping centre. Many people walk to the shop to buy general groceries and walk home, and others who live a little further away use their cars. However, they face the inconvenience of having to cross Warringah Road and go through a number of sets of lights. As a result, they support the retention of the supermarket.

It is in the community's interests to retain this small business. Obviously, the owners of the complex, Theo's Liquor and Coles Myer, want to expand its already large and thriving liquor outlet. However, if the business is expanded it will not offer any more to the local community; it will draw customers from areas further afield. The local community has an interest in retaining the supermarket. Warringah Council must give approval and parking must be made available. Given that, the council should support the community and refuse to grant approval for the expansion of the liquor business. Customers visiting the complex use perpendicular parking spaces on public land—that is, publicly owned community land. The council and the community have every right to tell Theo's Liquor and Coles Myer that they want the supermarket retained and not expanded as a regional business.

On 11 June Jack Chen was given one month's notice to quit the premises. I will do all I can to help him. I have spoken to Warringah Council and it is examining what can be done to preserve the convenience store business. It will use what power and influence it has with regard to development approvals. Theo's Liquor and Coles Myer are not acting in the local community's interests. I appreciate that they are making commercial decisions, but I do not support what they are doing. The local community is best served by the retention of this thriving small business in Forestville.

ETTALONG BEACH PUBLIC SCHOOL SEVENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY

Ms ANDREWS (Peats) [5.16 p.m.]: Today I place on the record important events that were recently held at Ettalong Beach to celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of Ettalong Beach Public School. On Friday 6 June a parade was held through the main street of Ettalong Beach. Participants in the parade then proceeded down Picnic Parade to Ettalong oval for a day of pleasant activities. The main participants in this parade—a rare event for this normally quiet central business district area—included more than 700 students of the school, accompanied by staff and parents. The highlight of the parade was the presence of the Ettalong Beach vintage

fire truck, which was manned by a number of retired and current firefighters. These firefighters joined in the spirit of the celebrations by wearing their old but well-maintained black serge uniforms and heavy brass helmets.

Bruce Kingston was one of the participating retired firefighters. Bruce is a well-known local identity and was one of the 45 original students enrolled when Ettalong Beach Public School opened its doors on 6 June 1928. Captain Vince Wiegold, a retained firefighter and now stationed at the Umina fire station, was recently awarded an Australia Firefighting Service Medal. Vince was in his element as a crewman on the fire engine. He is a very popular local resident, who does much good in the local community. I congratulate him on being a very worthy recipient of an Australian honour award.

On the following day, Saturday 7 June, more than 1,000 people, including former staff and students, congregated in the schoolyard for another day of celebrations. I was pleased to participate in that event. A large birthday cake was jointly cut by Taliesha Orr, the youngest pupil at the school, and Mrs Joyce Morante nee Adams, who at the age of four was one of the original intake of 45 students in 1928. Two other members of the Adams family, Lily and Frank, also enrolled on 6 June 1928. In all, eight members of that family attended Ettalong Public School and seven of them were in attendance at the seventy-fifth anniversary celebrations.

The 45 students who enrolled on the first day came from Woy Woy Public School—the first school established on the Woy Woy peninsula, which, even in those early days, was expanding at a rapid rate. That growth dictated the need for a second primary school in the area. Ettalong Public School opened with a temporary teacher, Mr Samuel Young. The current principal, Mr Bruce Donaldson, has been a driving force behind a number of innovative programs aimed at delivering a very high standard of education to all the students. The school has progressed from the use of blackboard and chalk as the main tools in teaching students to the modern day use of state-of-the-art computers. In fact, one of the original classrooms has been renovated to accommodate this latest technology.

The school places significant emphasis on literacy, and students are encouraged to make good use of the well-stocked library. During the celebrations the library was set up for a walk down memory lane. There were photographs dating back to the school's humble beginnings, right up to the present day. All the classrooms featured a large number of photographs. The celebrations attracted former students, many of whom still live locally, while others travelled long distances from around the State and interstate. Many old friendships, forged while attending the school all those years ago, were rekindled on the Friday and Saturday. A number of former teachers and auxiliary staff also attended the various anniversary events.

Some of the credit for the success of the school's celebrations must go to Mother Nature—the weather on both days was delightful, with the sun shining brightly and the temperature mild. A number of persons did, however, work extremely hard to ensure that the seventy-fifth anniversary of one of the best schools on the Central Coast was not allowed to pass unnoticed. Special thanks must go to the Principal, Mr Bruce Donaldson; Mrs Megan Smith, who has taught at the school for many years; members of the school's parents and citizens association, especially President Nicola MacLachlan, Secretary Liz McMinn, and Treasurer Shelley Ridgeway, and the school captains, Amy Jones and Sam Workman-Brown, who are wonderful ambassadors for their school. The captains did an excellent job as masters of ceremonies for the special event held at the school on Saturday.

I commend all the students for their wonderful artwork, which was on display in the school's assembly hall. The display was organised by Sharlene Percival, a teacher at the school. Teachers, parents and former students participated in making a beautiful quilt which depicted many aspects of the school community throughout the years. The quilt project, which was co-ordinated by Jenny Laughton, one of the parents, was an invaluable contribution to the display. The celebrations concluded on the Saturday night with a well-attended cocktail party held at the Ettalong Memorial Bowling Club. I congratulate Ettalong Public School on its seventy-fifth anniversary and I wish the school every success for the future.

HORNSBY LEGACY

Mrs HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [5.21 p.m.]: Today I want to speak about Legacy, and in particular Hornsby Legacy. Legacy is an independent, voluntary organisation dedicated to the welfare of the families of Defence Force personnel killed in war or other hazardous service, in peacekeeping operations or in accidents whilst training for war, or who have died subsequently. Today, with more than 134,000 widows and 1,900 children and special needs dependants enrolled Australiawide, Legacy is more active than ever. The Legacy

family comprises families of deceased war and peacekeeping veterans from World War I through to the present day. Legacy embraces service personnel serving in East Timor, Afghanistan, Iraq and other world trouble spots, standing ready to assist families should the worst happen.

How does Legacy help? The needs of war widows have changed. Many of them require special care in their advanced years, and Legacy is committed to providing that care. Legacy provides advice and practical assistance in many forms, including locating accommodation, holidays, general housing, maintenance, welfare, and medical and social support. Legacy is also concerned for the welfare of children and special needs dependants. Legacy children receive support with their education, attendance at holiday camps, pocket money and other special requirements to ensure that they are given the same opportunities as any other family. For special needs dependants of Legacy widows, Legacy provides recreational and educational outings to aid self-development. Outings and activities include picnics, harbour cruises and bus trips.

Legacy's personal service includes the role of members, known as Legatees, who keep in touch with families and widows to ensure that they are soundly advised and given every possible means of support. Traditionally, Legatees were returned servicemen, but today membership extends to other men and women who are personally dedicated to maintaining Legacy's ideals. Legacy is uniquely Australian. It is not a charity in the usual sense. It is simply an expression of the Australian spirit of mateship and comradeship—a recognition of the need to help the families of comrades who are no longer alive. Legacy, now in its eightieth year, began as the Remembrance Club in 1923 in Hobart after World War I, when Major General Sir John Gellibrand formed a club to help former comrades who were struggling to re-establish themselves.

The Hornsby Legacy family, which is one of 28 divisions comprising Sydney Legacy, comprises 759 widows, 7 children and 10 special needs dependants. Of those 759 widows, 17 are World War I widows—a war that has been over for 85 years. They are getting on in years and need special care. The seven children—two in primary school, one in secondary school and four in tertiary education—are being assisted by Legacy, and the 10 special needs dependants are, in the main, intellectually handicapped and aged between 30 and 60.

On 7 June the following office-bearers were elected for the Hornsby division of Legacy: Chairman, Legatee Dick Tucker; Deputy Chairman, Legatee Steve Hopwood; Secretary/Pensions, Legatee Phil Tomlins; Treasurer, Legatee Marty Salmon, Welfare Chairman, Legatee Allan Low; and Appeals Chairman and Liaison Officer of the Ladies Club, Legatee Norm McFarland, who is a very active Legacy worker. I had great pleasure in working with him last year when he raised thousands of dollars selling badges on Legacy Day. I will work with him again this year. The Property and Office Manager is LeeAnne Murphy; Comradeship, Legatee Deryck Giblin; and the newly created position of Community Services Officer, Virginia Harvey.

The Hornsby Widows Club is run by Mary Rogers, the Rosemary Club is run by Wynn Redden, and the Poppy Club is run by Susan Maples. The Hornsby Widows Club was originally for non-working widows and the Rosemary Club was for working widows, but they have similar functions and provide a valuable service to Hornsby widows. The Poppy Club is important for the frail aged ladies. I extend my gratitude to and commend the workers involved in Legacy. The number of people able to provide the Legacy service is decreasing; they are looking at broadening their horizons.

SUTHERLAND DISTRICT TRADE UNION CLUB

Mr COLLIER (Miranda) [5.26 p.m.]: It is with great pleasure that I speak about a highly respected registered club in the Sutherland shire: the Sutherland District Trade Union Club. Affectionately known as the Tradies, the club is located in the heart of my electorate at Gynea. On Friday 30 May my wife, Jeanette, and I were present at the Darling Harbour Convention Centre to witness the Sutherland District Trade Union club named New South Wales Club of the Year for 2003. A State finalist in five of the six sub-categories, the Tradies also won the club industry's top award for excellence in responsible service of alcohol, marketing and community service. Registered in 1962, the club now has more than 32,000 members and employs 140 staff, with additional workers also being contracted to carry out catering and cleaning. Many of the contract staff and employees live and work in the Sutherland shire.

For more than 40 years the Tradies has provided safe, affordable and comfortable recreational and entertainment facilities for its members. The club has recently undertaken major renovations and that has been reflected in its growing membership base. In three years, membership has increased from 8,000 to 32,000. The Tradies is taking a responsible approach to the increased membership of the club with the construction of a three-storey, 360-vehicle car park, which will remove patrons' cars from nearby residential streets. I am proud to

be a member of the Tradies club. The club's slogan, "Supporting the Community", characterises what the Tradies is really all about. The prestigious Clubs NSW 2003 Award for Excellence in Community Support publicly acknowledges the value the Tradies places in supporting the shire community.

This is a community club, the profits of which are returned to the shire through employment, provision of services, support for local sporting organisations and institutions, and donations to charities. In the financial year 2001-02 the Tradies returned almost \$300,000 to the shire. In 2002, for example, the club co-ordinated a major fundraising drive to raise more than \$70,000 for the establishment of a Lifeline service for the shire. During the Christmas 2002 bushfires the Tradies fed and accommodated 500 shire residents evacuated from their homes. The Tradies has also established a strong working relationship with the Wesley Counselling Service. A major beneficiary of the Tradies has been the Elouera Surf Life Saving Club, in particular its annual surf awareness clinic. I recently had the pleasure of presenting some of the 400 children who attended the clinic with their certificates of completion. I was also delighted to be present at the launch of the Elouera surf club's newest surfboat, aptly named after Tradies club President, Mr Graham Hill.

The Tradies also provides scholarships to local high school students under its Southern Cross Peace Scholarships program. Other groups and institutions to benefit from the Tradies' generosity in 2002 include Amelie House, Bridge Youth Refuge, Gynea Community Aid, Gynea Neighbourhood Watch, Gynea North Public School, Jacaranda Cottage, Jubilee Australia, Little Athletics Sutherland, Margaret House Respite Care Services, the "One Life One Chance" shuttle bus service, Parent to Parent Association, the Royal Blind Society, St Vincent de Paul Society, Sutherland Shire Community and Information Service, and the Sutherland Shire Family Support Service. At a time when many within our community are critical of gaming, the Tradies has introduced the internationally recognised BetSafe program, providing 24-hour gambling counselling to its patrons. The Tradies is also a member of the Sutherland Shire Liquor Accord, and works very closely with the Sutherland shire licensing police. The Tradies has a comprehensive set of procedures and policies to deal with any issue that might arise from gaming and alcohol.

The Tradies is headed by 12 directors, with Mr Graham Hill as president and Mr Tim McAleer as general manager. United with a professional management team, Graham, Tim and the directors have strongly driven the club to the success it continues to enjoy today. My congratulations also to the vice-president, Maurie Taylor, and club directors Robert Sharkey, Ken Smith, Robert Taylor, Barry Pursell, Mark Noble, Phillip Bowering, Dennis McHugh, Brian Thompson, Ronald Crawley and Karen Howell on their outstanding contribution and extraordinary efforts to make the Tradies the State's premier club. I also congratulate the assistant general manager, Tracey van Rossum, the financial controller, Tony O'Connor, and all members of staff on their professionalism, dedication, commitment and contribution to the shire community. The Tradies is a valued and important part of the social fabric of our shire. I commend the Tradies, its staff and directors on their activities. It is, as I have said, a club I am truly proud to have in my electorate of Miranda.

SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS ELECTORATE ADDITIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

Ms SEATON (Southern Highlands) [5.31 p.m.]: One of the most important issues in my electorate is the need for an additional public high school in the Southern Highlands between Picton and Bowral. I have raised this issue many times in this Chamber because of its importance to me and my community. However, the Labor Party has said for several years now, reinforced during the last election, that it does not believe we need another high school. It has been Liberal policy for at least three years, reiterated by the Leader of the Opposition last year and, therefore, the Liberal Party joins the community in its belief that we need an additional public high school in the Southern Highlands. It is our policy to build it. If we had been in government, it would have been built in this term.

Tonight I speak about a matter that disturbs me greatly in the answer I received today in response to a question on notice. In that question I asked what criteria the Government would want fulfilled in order to justify the construction of an additional high school in the Wingecarribee-Wollondilly area. I also asked the Minister for Education and Training whether he believed that the figures justify an additional high school. I am disappointed that the answer I received is again in the negative. It gives me no hope that this Government has any intention of building an additional public high school. The answer I was given was that "the Department of Education and Training has said that the existing secondary facilities can continue to accommodate enrolments" and that "demographic and enrolments trends do not support an additional secondary school in the Southern Highlands at this time."

This is a blow to people in my community. It will be a blow to all of the people whom I met during the last three months of the election campaign when door-knocking and talking to people. They volunteered to me

their concerns about overcrowding at Picton and Bowral high schools and said they sincerely wanted an additional high school built. At Bargo last Sunday a local woman, Kay Small, who is a very respected member of the community, asked me, "How are we going on the additional high school?" She has identified an area in Bargo that she believes would be perfect for an additional high school. We also have the Renwick site at Mittagong, where there is a high school building that has been all but abandoned for many years now, except for a couple of its classrooms that are used for the Highlands special behaviour school. That school has a world-class sports hall and playing fields, and they are not being used to their capacity.

I am amazed that the department says the existing secondary facilities can continue to accommodate enrolments. I invite departmental staff to visit Bowral and Picton high schools, which have many demountable buildings, toilets that are not up to code, and canteen and toilet facilities that do not meet the needs of those schools. Parents tell me that despite being extremely impressed with the teaching staff and other activities at both those schools they want their children to attend a school that is less crowded, that has a more peaceful and less stressed environment, where the playgrounds and playing fields are not full of demountables, and where there is room to move. It is extraordinary that, although they are in a country area, both the Bowral and Picton high school sites are choc-a-block full of buildings. One could be forgiven for thinking we were in the inner city of Sydney. It is ridiculous.

In addition, the Government should know that both the Anglican and Catholic school organisations have recognised this need—which the Government has failed to recognise—and that both the Anglican and Catholic secondary education groups are keenly interested in extending options for additional independent school facilities in the Southern Highlands. I know that the Anglican community has bought a site at Tahmoor, and that the Catholic schools are interested in extending what they offer in the Southern Highlands and Wingecarribee shire. I congratulate them on that. They recognise the need and are moving to meet it. I do not understand why the State Government fails to see that blindingly obvious need. The answer to question No. 88 on yesterday's *Questions and Answers* is an insult to the families who want public school choices in our community in the future and are not being given those choices by this Government.

MOREE BURRUL WALLAAY BOOK LAUNCH

Mr MILLS (Wallsend) [5.36 p.m.]: I was very pleased to accept an invitation from the Aboriginal community of Moree to attend Yaama, Back to Moree Day on Saturday 31 May. The centrepiece of the day was the launch of the book *Burrul Wallaay* on the history of the Big Camp. Some 1,500 people attended the launch, including Aboriginal elders, local Aboriginal community families and quite a few former locals who had come back for the day. In attendance also were many local dignitaries, including Dick Estens, the mayor and many of the councillors. The honourable member for Barwon, Mr Slack-Smith, had told us all about the *Big Picture* story on Dick Estens only a few days previously, and about the successful Aboriginal employment program in Moree.

The book launch ceremony was opened by Aboriginal elder Lyle Swan, who welcomed us to country. We were welcomed also by Yeena Thompson and her daughter Charlotte in the Gamilaraay language, which unfortunately, not enough local Aboriginal people speak. It would be wonderful to see the Gamilaraay language being taught in local schools, but that is not yet happening. Speeches were made by a number of people, including Jacki Huggins from the Reconciliation Council of Australia; Dr Meredith Burgmann, President of the Legislative Council; and Christine Robertson, a member of the Legislative Council.

I also had a few words to say, as did David Aber, the general manager of Moree Plains Shire Council; Grant White, regional manager of the Northern Regional Library and Information Service; June Hollands, wife of the late Stanley Hollands, headmaster of the mission school; and Diana Gall, wife of the late Dr John Gall, who served the medical needs of the Moree mission for many years. The book was launched by Mrs Gwen Bridge. Before the thank-you from the author, researcher Noeline Briggs-Smith, who did a great job, there was a recital of a 45-verse poem by Ellen Draper. The poem is reproduced in the book and attempts to mention all of the local Aboriginal families in some good running verse, such as:

The gambling school still carries on, it's a tradition to this town,
old faces just ain't there anymore, I notice this when I sit down.

Now they've seen the hatred and the racism, and they took it in their stride
they fought it hard and to their fullest, and they fought it side by side.

There are the Duncans, Swans and Frenchs, Coplands—Smiths come in there too,
Drapers, Wrights and Stanleys, Craigies to name a few.

Munros, Haines and Cutmores, chuck 'em all in the pot,
Gillions, Greens and Levys, they were a motly lot.

The poem continues to list the Aboriginal families who fought for Australia in the wars. A number of Aboriginal families have migrated from the Kamilaroi region to the Hunter Valley. I know them and their community leaders in the Hunter well. Quite a few photographs of their relatives—for example, the Wright and Craigie families—are in the book. Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir wrote an excellent foreword to the book, in which she said:

Burrul Wallaay, the second volume in the Reconciliation History of the Moree Aboriginal Reserve, is a major contribution to Australian history in both the national and a local context, and particularly in regard to the Kamilaroi people of the area ...

The painful issues associated with past experiences of the imposed restrictions, exclusion and relative isolation for a significant period from the mainstream community are courageously addressed. However, the strength of Aboriginal kinship and the growth of positive interaction with members of the non-European community also enrich this history, and will provide encouragement and hope for the way ahead together, in our journey of reconciliation.

The Moree District has already demonstrated considerable progress in this regard, providing a model for others.

I congratulate the author and Aboriginal researcher, Noeline Briggs-Smith, and the Aboriginal Consultative Committee of the Northern Regional Library and Information Service, which is funded by four local government areas with some State assistance, on volume two of the book. I purchased a copy of the first book, *Winanga Li*, written four years ago, which I donated to the Parliamentary Library. I received the second book as a gift, and donated it also to the Parliamentary Library. The surprise at the end of the show was that the mission school has now had 40 university graduates ranging from those who started studying in their 60s to those who started studying when they left school. They were all presented with a certificate to congratulate them on their achievements of higher education. I congratulate the Moree Aboriginal mob for a great book that will add to the history of Australia.

NESTLE-PURINA DUBBO DONATION

Mr McGRANE (Dubbo) [5.41 p.m.]: Last Monday, 16 June, I attended a function to mark the extraordinary donation of \$200,000 to the city of Dubbo from Nestle-Purina. It is an outstanding example of corporate citizenship and is in keeping with the way the company conducted its business while in Dubbo. The donation will be used by the Dubbo Police and Community Youth Club [PCYC] to create a legacy for the Dubbo city by enabling our youth to gain skills and participate more fully in the future of Dubbo. Personal stability in employment and the confidence to engage young people with skills in the community is much needed. The \$200,000 will go towards the installation of education and training equipment in the new PCYC. The PCYC State board has provided a \$2 million grant and \$2 million will be raised locally to construct a new PCYC.

Nestle-Purina was originally Purina Meats, a global company involved in the production of pet food. In 1999 Bonny Pet Food of Dubbo sold its business to Ralston Purina, a subsidiary of Purina USA, a family-owned business very similar to Fletchers of Dubbo. Ralston Purina came to Dubbo as a result of Roger Fletcher's involvement. It was a great coup at the time for employment in the city of Dubbo: something like 40 people were employed and a \$16 million building was constructed to develop Ralston Purina pet food operations in Australia. Previously, Ralston Purina served the South-east Asian market from its United States-based companies. When the company set up in Australia it was more easily able to service its Asian market. The big plus was that the pet food ingredients were products grown in Australia. Mutton is the main ingredient of the pet food. In December 2001 Nestle purchased Ralston Purina, which then became known as Nestle-Purina. Unfortunately for Dubbo, Nestle had a plant in Blayney, which was better suited for the new business. In December 2002 the Ralston Purina plant in Dubbo was closed.

The general manager of the plant approached the mayor and me to say that the company felt it was letting down the citizens of Dubbo because of a corporate decision made overseas. He felt that the company should give something back to the city. At the time the general manager indicated that the company would give the city a gift of \$200,000 to be used for job creation. The mayor and I decided to put to the board of Nestle-Purina that the \$200,000 would be best spent on improving employment opportunities for the city of Dubbo and providing equipment at the new PCYC. It is unusual for a multinational corporate citizen such as Nestle-Purina to give something back to the city it is leaving. The company very generously paid the employees at the Dubbo plant their entitlements, plus more. It is a leading example of what corporate citizens should do when they leave the community. It was a great day for the city of Dubbo. On behalf of the citizens of Dubbo I congratulate Nestle-Purina on its generous gift to the city of Dubbo.

DROUGHT

Mr R. W. TURNER (Orange) [5.46 p.m.]: Once again, I remind the House that the drought in New South Wales is far from over. Although I acknowledge that Sydney has had considerable rain in the past few weeks, not much of it has fallen in the catchment area and more is needed. However, last week when I was on the North Coast I noted that the community was rather thankful that the rain had finished for a few days. The rain has been patchy. Although some small farm dams have accumulated a considerable amount of water, most of the major dams—such as Burrendong and Wyangalla in my electorate—are down to about 9 per cent. The water levels are dangerously low: we need good rain over the winter. An article appearing in today's *Western Advocate* under the headline "Drought: It's a long way from being over" reads:

Rural Australia has been dealt a major blow with the Bureau of Meteorology warning a break in the drought would be patchier than first thought.

In its latest seasonal outlook released earlier this week, the bureau slightly reduced the chances of good rains and at the same time predicted increased temperatures.

After predicting better than normal rain for most of NSW last month, the bureau has now backed off.

It says there is a 45 to 50 per cent chance of average falls for NSW, Victoria and South Australia.

The news comes as no surprise to Greg Simpson from the Bathurst Rural Lands Protection Board.

Yesterday he was busy signing off on a large number of drought rebate claims from struggling local farmers.

"Around the Central Tablelands the drought is a long, long way from being over," Mr Simpson said.

"Most of our farmers are now steering a survival course in an effort to get through this winter.

"Then when spring does come they have to wait further until their pastures start to regenerate," he said.

"This news from the bureau is the last thing they want to hear."

An article appearing in the *Central Western Daily* of 16 June reads:

Orange City Council is considering tightening water restrictions. Under the proposed new restrictions, sprinklers and automatic watering systems would be banned.

The ban would be for public and private gardens and for golf clubs and bowling clubs.

Currently the restrictions, introduced late last year, limit sprinkler use to between 7am and 10am and from 4pm to 7pm. Hand held hoses and buckets are permitted at any time.

Those arrangements will be scrapped if a proposal by council's water manager Wayne Beatty is supported at next week's council meeting.

Mr Beatty's plan allows the use of drip and macro spray systems and buckets and hoses between 3pm and 6 pm

He said yesterday as the weather cooled consumption had dropped significantly from a summer high of 30 million litres a day to 11 million litres a day this week.

The problem is however, that the reservoirs are not receiving any inflows.

"Due to low water storage levels in Suma Park (43.3 per cent) and Spring Creek (17.2 per cent) and without good winter rainfall, Orange may find itself with an inadequate water supply for the oncoming spring and summer," Mr Beatty's report to council said.

The local orchardists and vineyard operators totally emptied their farm dams in an effort to get through the last summer. Unless we get very good rainfall to fill up those dams, come next spring and summer the orchardists and vineyard operators will be in dire straits. A lot of time and ratepayers' money has been spent on tree planting programs in most local government areas, including Orange, and those programs have now been put on hold. A considerable number of the trees that have been planted over the past few years are succumbing to the drought and are dying. Landcare groups have spent many voluntary hours planting out trees, and a considerable number of those trees are also dying. Once again I bring to the attention of the House that the New South Wales drought is far from over.

REDFERN, EVELEIGH AND DARLINGTON STRATEGY PLANNING FRAMEWORK

Ms MOORE (Bligh) [5.51 p.m.]: I raise serious concerns about the proposed Redfern, Eveleigh and Darlington [RED] Strategy Planning Framework. Since the infamous area known as The Block came into Bligh in 1999 I have urged the Government to address the human degradation, urban blight and criminal activities, including street violence, centred in this area. All these activities impact badly on surrounding communities, particularly those in Chippendale, Darlington and Redfern. Following my requests to the Premier for a systematic response, I welcomed the March 2002 announcement of the Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project and have worked with project staff. Some 12 months later, the RED Strategy Planning Framework plans have been put on limited display for comment, with the study area now expanded to include areas south-west to the edge of Newtown, east to South Dowling Street at Moore Park, and all of Waterloo.

I place on record my extreme concern about the proposed major development, inadequate information and consultation, failure to address entrenched social problems, unclear plans for The Block and public lands, and failure to address heritage issues and provide new open space. After assessing the limited information, I have a sense of foreboding about the RED strategy. I expected a sensitive and comprehensive strategic plan in which all proposals would be fully explained with clear rationale and detailed benefit. I am disturbed that the impetus of the current exhibition seems to be to develop and cash in on public land south of Central railway station.

I am very concerned that an uninformed community faces a controlled and tightly scheduled master plan, which does not allow considered assessment and comment. Although the project director has assured me that there will be full public consultation, the written material states that a draft planning framework will next be submitted to Planning NSW, along with an outcomes report from the three public information sessions. This allows for only a short statutory exhibition period for real consultation during the ministerial approval process—too late for significant changes.

Whilst I welcome increased public activity, wider streets and routing traffic underground will not resolve the social degradation, drugs and crime that blight the area around Redfern railway station. The RED strategy must also contain proposals to improve safety and amenity, and tackle the entrenched social problems. Local residents have been promised improvements to The Block since at least 1988, yet they have seen decline and degradation. The current plans displayed for The Block, with multi-level housing and hostel accommodation, look disturbingly like a return to 1950s Housing Commission schemes.

Increased employment to meet local area needs is essential to resolve the precinct's problems, but the plan does not address badly needed employment for young people, Aboriginal people and blue collar workers. Local employment needs will not be met by an extension of the central business district office-type employment. The RED proposal ignores heritage issues, despite the railway heritage at the Australian Technology Park, North Eveleigh and Redfern railway station. The plans show the station flanked by two development sites and a podium as a base for high-rise development. Local residents are unable to adequately assess development plans that fail to include use, height or floor space ratio information. An exhibition guide suggested that the TNT towers, a 1960s aberration, is the probable benchmark.

I support proposals that Redfern railway station serve as a community hub, with pedestrian space, better pedestrian links and access to the surrounding area, a second southern access from the station, linking the University of Sydney and the Australian Technology Park, as well as landscaping and undergrounding of power lines to main streets. But the community needs to be included fully in the planning. The suggested undergrounding of Regent Street and Gibbons Street should be investigated. However, the community must assess impacts such as the proposed road tunnels exiting onto Abercrombie Street, Chippendale. Proposed shuttle buses and light rail for high-volume routes are not detailed or linked with heavy rail. These plans can only be considered in the context of wider public transport corridors and movement, which are also not included in the display material.

The lack of significant new public open space is of serious concern given the large public land-holdings in the area, the proposed increase in population and employment, and the lack of existing public open space. Public land must not be used to provide private benefit for developers at community cost, and the RED strategy should ensure that this is not the outcome of redevelopment. I am very concerned about the lack of information on the threatened loss of publicly owned land for short-term financial benefit, and the displayed information fails to address this. Rather, it merely identifies potential sites for development, including existing Department of Housing dwellings—a proposal that will shock public housing tenants. The current RED proposal fails to

address the fundamental concerns of the precinct and the community. I request that the process be halted and a new program of genuine consultation, with full disclosure of information and specific plans, replace the current flawed strategy.

Private members' statements noted.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Private Members' Statements: Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Motion by Mr Scully agreed to:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to provide that at the sitting on Friday 20 June 2003 up to 22 private members' statements be taken.

SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Mr Scully agreed to:

That the House at its rising this day do adjourn until Friday 20 June 2003 at 10.00 a.m.

The House adjourned at 5.59 p.m. until Friday 20 June 2003 at 10.00 a.m.
