

# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Thursday 26 June 2003

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

**Mr Speaker** offered the Prayer.

## POLICE INTEGRITY COMMISSION AMENDMENT (REPORTS) BILL

### Second Reading

**Debate resumed from 29 May.**

**Mr TINK** (Epping) [10.00 a.m.]: This bill amends the Police Integrity Commission Act to require the author or authors of a Police Integrity Commission [PIC] report to be identified. Since this bill was last debated the Inspector of the Police Integrity Commission has had a report tabled in the Parliament relating to the Operation Malta report—the source of the problem this bill seeks to address—entitled, "Report on Practices and Procedures of the Police Integrity Commission". In that report the Inspector of the Police Integrity Commission concluded that my proposal is not necessary because the commission is not a court. His conclusions appear at page 78 and further comments appear at page 106 of the report.

I was present yesterday evening when the Inspector of the Police Integrity Commission gave evidence in public session to the joint parliamentary committee. He gave his evidence with great distinction and not without a little good humour. Nevertheless, I disagree fundamentally with his position and remain deeply troubled by the approach on this matter of both the inspector—with great respect to him—and the PIC. It is more important now than ever that the Parliament deal with and support this bill, ironically and particularly given the views of the inspector.

It is important that I acknowledge the candour of his remarks. He was asked whether Operation Malta went off the rails and my notes state that his reply was, "That assertion is open." I have no doubt that Operation Malta went right off the rails, and it is interesting that the inspector concedes that is an accurate assertion. The Inspector of the Police Integrity Commission said also that the PIC does not make a judgment in the same way that a court makes a judgment, nor does it make findings of fact that are binding. The inspector believes the fundamental distinction is that one involves opinions and recommendations. He said an opinion—opinions appear in the Operation Malta report—can be nothing more than a recommendation, whereas a judgment is binding.

Mr Kerr put to him that the opinions in the Operation Malta report are detrimental to Mr Brammer, a key person of interest, and the inspector conceded that one could take that view. He conceded also that another view could be that the allegations on which the report was based were without foundation. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, an opinion or a recommendation in a document that is made public and taken up by the media can be just as damaging, devastating and ruinous to a person's reputation as a formal judgment. That is my fundamental point of difference with the Inspector of the Police Integrity Commission on this matter. The report on Operation Malta has been just as devastating as any judgment to the people who were adversely mentioned in that report.

In some ways one could argue that the opinions in the report were more devastating than a judgment given the nature of the media interest in it. Commissions of inquiry have become the norm in New South Wales. Indeed, it is right and proper to have entrenched within our law the Police Integrity Commission, the Independent Commission Against Corruption [ICAC] and the Ombudsman. They should be part of the fabric of the assessment of conflicting evidence on matters of public importance brought to the Parliament and to the media by way of reports. However, it is vital that we understand and accept that an opinion, a recommendation or even a finding of fact may be just as devastating as a judgment—although it might be slightly different in terms of its formal legal consequences—and because it is someone's opinion at some point it is important that the author of the report be identified.

It is clear that in many instances in the Operation Malta report evidence is assessed and adverse comments are made but no conclusion or finality is given to them. That is because the people who heard the

evidence were the best able to write this report, but did not do so. At page 25 the report states that there were conflicting versions of what was said at the meeting in 1999. Seddon gave evidence on the one hand, and Ryan denied it on the other. There is no conclusion about that conflict of evidence. That is because the people who wrote this report, who are still unknown to us, were not competent or able to come to a conclusion because they did not hear the evidence and could not make a judgment on the demeanour of Seddon and Ryan as to who was telling the truth.

At page 35 a reference is made to a vital meeting that took place on 10 April 2000 involving the present police commissioner when he was an assistant or deputy commissioner. A significant and fundamental conflict of interest occurs between Mr Moroney and a number of the people at that meeting. It was said that Mr Moroney made comments that were adverse to the reform process. The difficulty is that no finding was made about who was telling the truth at that meeting. For example, no conclusion was drawn about whether Mr Moroney or Mr Herring was right. The report allows the conflicting versions to hang in the air. Why? Because the people who wrote this report did not see Mr Moroney or Mr Herring give their evidence and were not in a position to assess who was right and who was wrong. There are other examples in this report of a similar nature. We do not know who wrote this report, who made findings and who drew conclusions of fact. For example, there was a conflict between a witness called Holmwood and Seddon and at page 64, paragraph 5.76, the report states:

The Commission is of the view that Holmwood's evidence is to be preferred.

We do not know who at the commission made that preference. The commission is not a human being—it is a statutory body, it cannot form opinions or views. People at the commission formed opinions, people acted and reported in the name of the commission, and we do not know who those people were. That is very unfair, and it is particularly unfair to Seddon in this instance, because the conclusion was made against him. Adverse findings were also made against Mr Brammer that were devastating, because of the way the press reported them. Mr Brammer does not know who formed the devastating conclusion about him mentioned in paragraph 8.36 of the Operation Malta report. It was not a judgment or a binding outcome that had the force of law. At the beginning of the twenty-first century this document tabled in Parliament generated great media interest and arguably its contents as reported in the media were far more devastating to Mr Brammer and his reputation than probably 95 per cent of judgments written in this country. I do not think the inspector is coming to grips with that reality.

I plead with the inspector and the PIC to realise that reports of the commission that are made public can be just as devastating and important, in some cases more so, than formal judgments of courts. At the parliamentary committee session yesterday, the inspector was very frank when he conceded, having conducted significant inquiries of his own to address a number of complaints about the Operation Malta report, that he did not know whether Commissioner Urquhart who conducted the hearing had input into the report. The inspector is the watchdog set up by this Parliament to keep an eye on the workings of the PIC and to deal with complaints. Yet, he does not know the extent of the involvement of the commissioner who heard the evidence presented to the Operation Malta inquiry in the writing this report. That remains a very unsatisfactory state of affairs.

The overwhelming complaint in relation to the Operation Malta report is the way in which it falls short in dealing with the evidence, the conflicts and the myriad issues that were raised. The inspector cannot say the extent to which the person who heard the evidence was involved in the writing of the report. In the High Court of Australia in *Abalos v Australian Postal Commission* (1990) 171 CLR 167, Justice McHugh, quoted with approval from *S.S. Hontestroom v S.S. Sagaporack*, which stated:

... not to have seen the witnesses puts appellate judges in a permanent position of disadvantage as against the trial judge, and, unless it can be shown that he has failed to use or has palpably misused his advantage, the higher Court ought not to take the responsibility of reversing conclusions so arrived at ...

The inspector would say that this judgment relates to the judicial system and is totally irrelevant to the PIC. However, the principles set out by the High Court in that judgment are just as applicable as a matter of commonsense to the PIC as a matter of law is to the courts. The matter of commonsense, as stated by the highest court in the country, is that to see the demeanour of the witness is the key to forming conclusions about who is and who is not telling the truth in sworn evidence. In relation to the Operation Malta report and any other reports of the PIC, the person who hears the evidence and sees the demeanour of the witness is effectively in the broad sense in the same position as a judge who hears evidence, albeit in slightly different proceedings.

If it is the case that the person hearing the evidence did not write the report, as appears plain here, then whoever wrote the Operation Malta report is in practical terms at the same disadvantage as an appellate judge. Several people on a committee wrote this report without seeing the witnesses give evidence. That is a

fundamental flaw in the way this report was produced. With great respect to the commissioner, it troubles me deeply that the PIC fails to acknowledge the commonsense importance of having the people who hear the witnesses give their evidence be the same people who write the reports. In Operation Malta, furious disagreements occurred between witnesses on fundamental issues of fact. The person who sees those people giving evidence is the only person who can come to a view as to whose evidence is to be preferred. The PIC writes many reports on matters relating to policing systems and to some extent, policing policy.

To the extent that the PIC deals with general public interest issues, the demeanour of witnesses and so on is not so acute. However, in this case it is hard to imagine an issue coming before the PIC in which the demeanour of witnesses and the conflict of evidence would be more acute. The idea that the people who write the reports do not see that demeanour of witnesses is troubling. The idea that people are unable to form judgments when they should be the ones to do so, in the examples I have given and in other examples, or who form judgements when they are in no position to do so, is equally troubling. If I understood the commissioner correctly, he said last night that the PIC does not make binding findings of fact. Yet, the PIC has the same powers as the ICAC. going into the details of the matter again, for example, in the ICAC report on the Tripodi matter—for want of a better example—there were findings of fact and they were stated as such in the report. In any case, it is open to the PIC to do exactly the same thing. It is vital that the identity of the person who makes the findings be known. I believe that the ICAC commissioner did the right thing in this respect. In the third paragraph of her letter presenting the report to the Parliament she stated:

I presided at the hearings which were conducted for the purposes of this investigation.

That is a plain statement of who was responsible for this work. There is no such statement in the Operation Malta report. Another matter I raise is how the PIC got into this mess, which should also be troubling all members of Parliament. I will go into detail because it is important that it be on the record. When the PIC was running out of time, back in June 2001, the then Minister for Police, Mr Whelan, and I, as shadow police Minister, agreed that the commissioner's term should be extended, which could only be done by statute. Mr Whelan, on behalf of the Government and with the full support of all members of Parliament, brought forward the Statute Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill. I spoke on the bill when it was debated in Committee on 29 June 2001. The purpose of the bill was to amend the Police Integrity Commission Act to provide that:

... the person holding the office of Commissioner immediately before the commencement of this subclause may hold the office of Commissioner for terms totalling no more than 6 years.

In plain English, all members of Parliament agreed that the commissioner's term and all his powers should be extended to enable him, first, to conduct the hearing and, second, to write the report. That was the unanimous intention of the Parliament. Did that come into force? It did. This morning I received a copy of the Police Integrity Commission Act 1996 Reprint No. 2. The clause on which Mr Whelan, the Parliament and I agreed appears on page 87 of the Act. This morning I also asked Parliamentary Counsel whether that provision ever came into force. The reply was, "It came into force. It commenced on assent to that Act, which was on 17 July 2001."

So, as at 17 July 2001 an Act of this Parliament was in force, with the support of all members of Parliament, to give the commissioner power not only to continue hearing the matter but also to report on it. What happened then? I only found out about this when the report on Operation Malta was tabled in the Parliament just before the recent election. According to page 164 of that report, on 20 August 2001 the then Acting Commissioner of the PIC, Mr Sage, by instrument appointed Judge Urquhart as an assistant commissioner. However, Mr Sage specifically precluded him from writing the report by including in the instrument of appointment a statement that he would not have the powers provided in section 11 (5) of the PIC Act, which are the reporting powers.

That is a disgrace, and it has never been satisfactorily explained by the PIC or by anyone who has anything to do with that body. The question is: Why did Mr Sage, by instrument, execute something to limit Judge Urquhart's powers to report to this Parliament on something that the whole Parliament not only agreed to but legislated to give him full powers not only to hear but to report on? Why was the will of Parliament circumvented by the Acting Commissioner of the Police Integrity Commission on 20 August 2001? That is what it amounts to. This Parliament is still waiting for an explanation about why the instrument was signed and brought into force, and why the Parliament's wish that he report was thwarted in that way. I do not know why that occurred, but we need to know the answer.

The instrument was unnecessary. It was not the Parliament's intention, but its effect was devastating. The effect was to actively and proactively prohibit the only person then involved in the Operation Malta inquiry

from writing the report. It prohibited the only person who had sat and watched all the witnesses from drawing conclusions openly and transparently about who was to be believed and who was not to be believed. The effect was to deliberately put into the hands of people other than the only person who saw the demeanour of the witnesses the power and responsibility for drawing all those conclusions. The Operation Malta report turned out to be a disgraceful mess at least in terms of its incompleteness, its lack of findings on key issues, its failure to come to conclusions on matters it should have come to conclusions on, and its devastating, defamatory conclusions about people such as Brammer.

To this day those people do not know whether Mr Sage or someone else was responsible for writing the Operation Malta report. All we know is who did not write the report. We do not know why the Parliament's will was thwarted. We do not know why people who did not hear the evidence were given the task of writing the report. This should never happen again. The PIC still owes the Parliament an explanation about this chain of events. Let this never happen again. Legislation such as this is not necessary for the other statutory bodies established by the Parliament. The ICAC and the Ombudsman know what to do. Apparently, in this instance the PIC does not know what to do, and that is the only reason this bill is before the House

I am troubled because the Inspector of the PIC—I have great respect for him—continues to draw a distinction, for material purposes, between a judgment and a commission report. I simply ask the inspector to consider at the consequences of this type of report at the beginning of the twenty-first century. He should consider the power of the court of public opinion and the power of the media, which I do not step back from for a minute. The media is an integral part of accountability in this day and age, but it is not reflected in the ongoing attitude that somehow commission reports are different from judgments in their impact on people in the court of public opinion, in the court of the media and in the consequences for people's reputations. I commend the bill to the House, although it should not have been necessary. The individuals who have suffered devastating consequences from being written about in particular ways need to know who made the findings. Those who made the findings must, as individuals, be publicly accountable for their work. I commend the bill to the House.

**Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Newell.**

## **TRANSPORT ADMINISTRATION AMENDMENT (PARRAMATTA RAIL LINK—PROPERTY GUARANTEE) BILL**

### **Second Reading**

**Debate resumed from 8 May.**

**Mr TINK** (Epping) [10.30 a.m.]: I am very pleased to support this bill, which was introduced by the honourable member for Davidson. This bill is similar a bill previously before the Parliament, and its concepts are based on amendments that I attempted to make some time ago to the Government's legislation enabling the Parramatta rail link to be built. This effectively provides for an M5 East-type of property guarantee for those affected by the building of the rail link. Its concepts are specifically drawn from the M5 East-type of property guarantee.

The honourable member for Davidson and I went to a public meeting held in my electorate but attended by a number of people from the the honourble member's electorate. None of us could understand why such a property guarantee could not be given. That is particularly so because the Government and the Parramatta rail link consortium are saying that property values will not be affected in the long term, that that is the history of these types of projects and therefore there is no problem. I believe that property values are affected in the short term. The longer-term effects do not become apparent until the link is completed. People are still living their lives inside the time frames of major infrastructure projects—particularly those initiated by this Government, because they seem to become lost in the never-never.

People will want to buy and sell their properties well within the time parameters of the announcement of a particular part of the rail link and the completion of the rail link, when the impact or lack of physical impact on their property is known. That can take a decade. The reality is that many people want to buy and sell their properties, their major asset, well within that decade. I have been told by real estate agents in my electorate—as, I am sure, has the honourable member for Davidson—that there is no question that the drawing of a line through a property indicating the route of a rail link will adversely affect the value of that property in the short term. If what the Government says is true—that in the long term there is no negative impact on property values—the Government is best positioned to take that risk. People who had no warning prior to buying their properties that

this rail link would be constructed under their properties cannot take that risk, particularly if they want to buy or sell in a local market whilst the project is yet to be completed.

The other fundamental point I want to make is that it is impossible to know whether any credence can be given to any undertakings the Government now gives about this rail link—whether it be in relation to property values, noise or vibration. Why is that? Because when this project initially was before the Parliament it was sold as a Parramatta to Chatswood project. The legislation then put before this Parliament was based on the premise of a Parramatta to Chatswood rail link, and we all voted on that basis. When the matter went before the planning department for the critical environmental impact and assessment process and was made subject to about 269 conditions, all submissions about it were made—and, I assume, considered by the planning department—on the basis that it would be a whole project.

When voters went to the polls in March this year they did so on the understanding that had been given to them that the Parramatta to Chatswood rail link would be an entire project. Of course, we now find that the assumption we were all under has been trashed. In the budget papers just tabled, all reference to the Parramatta to Epping section has been dropped—in contrast to the references made in the previous year's budget papers. The project that was put through this Parliament as being one from Parramatta to Chatswood, environmentally assessed as being one from Parramatta to Chatswood, and voted on by the electorate as being a Parramatta to Chatswood rail link, is now half the project that was proposed—with all its consequential and knock-on effects. The biggest knock-on consequence is the Government's credibility on absolutely everything it says about this rail link. First and foremost for me, as I think it is for the honourable member for Davidson and for the honourable member for Willoughby, is the impact on the people most directly affected by the project, that is, the owners of property under which the rail link will be built.

If we could not believe the Government because it said it had a whole project but was prepared to deliver only half of it, if we could not trust the Government to put to the planning department the real project that the Government had in mind—not the so-called bigger project that it had in mind—how can we believe the Government when it speaks about property guarantees? It has given a guarantee that there will be no drop in property values, without being prepared to back up its words with legislation. How can we believe all the promises that the Government makes about regenerated noise? How can we believe what the Government says about spending money on improvements to tunnelling, acoustics and keeping noise levels down?

Indeed, if money is now the problem, to the extent that half the project has been cancelled, how can we believe what was said in the other place on behalf of the Government, I think by the Hon. Eddie Obeid, about how silly it would be to give property guarantees and that the money would be put into property improvements instead? If the Government now says it does not have the money to complete the whole project, how can it be trusted when it says it will put money into improvements? This bill is as important now as it ever was, if not more so. It will provide the only guarantee that people directly affected by the rail link will have. Existing property owners had no prior notice of the proposal, and not one word that the Government has said about property values and property rights and work to be done can be believed if the Government has lied about the project overall.

**Mr PRINGLE** (Hawkesbury) [10.38 a.m.]: I support the positions taken by the honourable member for Epping and the honourable member for Davidson. This bill seeks to enshrine in legislation one of the most important principles of a democratic society: that government decisions that may be in the best interests of the wider community should not adversely impact on individuals. If they do adversely affect some individuals, just compensation should be available to those individuals. People need choices—not to have their options taken from them by government or by bureaucracy.

During the planning stages of this project I was contacted by many individuals who were concerned about the potential impact of the project on their homes—their most important asset—not just a place to live in, not just a part of their superannuation, but in many cases the source of the sense of security a home provides. These people are often the more mature members in our society. They may not want to move from their homes now, but they want the choice. They want to be able to move from an area if they are adversely impacted. They worry that the underground rail link may turn out to be much worse than is predicted, worse than has been identified in the impact statement and other documentation. Often the fear of major problems occurring is just as much a cause of stress as the problems themselves.

The bill seeks to give residents and their families—often parents, grandparents and children are involved—peace of mind and a sense of security. There appears to be no funding for the second and perhaps

more important part of the project, but in the overall scheme the money we are talking about here is insignificant. If the Government can compensate the National Parks and Wildlife Service for the impact of the project—and I fully agree with the Government doing that—surely it can compensate individuals. The bill also sets an important precedent for other major capital projects that I hope will see the light of day in the near future. In particular, I am talking about the proposed north-west rail link, which will join Epping and Beecroft with Castle Hill and the rapidly growing north-west sector of Sydney.

Just like the Parramatta rail link—or is it now the Epping rail link—much of the proposed north-west rail line will be underground in tunnels. So exactly the same problems and fears will occur on that project as have arisen for the Chatswood to Epping rail link. It is important to set up a legislative framework, as happened for the M5 East construction, that does not hinder the project but gives peace of mind to people who live above or adjacent to the proposed north-west rail line and those who may potentially be affected. As the honourable member for Davidson and the honourable member for Epping said previously, surely the residents of north-western Sydney should have the same entitlements, the same options as those who live near the M5 East. I commend the bill.

**Ms BEREJIKLIAN** (Willoughby) [10.42 a.m.]: I support this bill, which arises from the Coalition's continued commitment to ensuring that residents and property owners adversely affected by the Parramatta rail link—now the Chatswood to Epping rail link—and particularly by the tunnel from Chatswood to Epping, have an opportunity to seek financial compensation for any loss. The Government has cut back the project, and uppermost in the minds of many residents is uncertainty. People may have considered moving to my electorate on the basis that there would be a rail link to Parramatta, but that is no longer happening. There have been a number of issues associated with the project from its inception and more recently further concerns have arisen that impact on properties and on people's decisions about investments.

The passage of this bill will remedy a deliberate oversight by the Government when it introduced the legislation to give effect to the project in 2000. The bill will enable residents whose land was taken from them for the construction of the Epping to Chatswood railway tunnel to seek compensation. In effect, it is a buyback scheme to enable affected residents to sell their properties if they wish or to be compensated for the effects of the tunnel. Moreover, the residents whose land is to be taken for the tunnel have now received advice that council records in relation to their properties and their land titles will be permanently altered and that development can proceed. The Government does not seem to understand the stigma and uncertainty this causes residents, so it has an obligation to compensate residents for the consequent lowered market value of their properties. After all, many of these homes are long-term investments. I strenuously support the bill. I reiterate that additional uncertainty and concern has been caused to many residents because the project has now been altered to the Chatswood to Epping link. This bill will go a long way towards alleviating the concern that the Government has created in the community.

**Mr MERTON** (Baulkham Hills) [10.45 a.m.]: I support this very important legislation, which gives to people who will be affected by what erroneously is called the Parramatta to Chatswood rail link, but is now the Epping to Chatswood rail link, the right to fair compensation for any detrimental effect the rail link may have on their properties. It is not simply a question of the detrimental effect. If a property is earmarked to have the rail link running underneath it, there will be buyer resistance at the time of sale, and a stigma will attach to it because of prevailing uncertainty. Many people will walk away from that property and buy elsewhere. The arrangement proposed in the bill is fair. It allows people to have their properties purchased at prices they would attract if there were no such underground rail facilities, and it allows reasonable relocation expenses. A similar operation existed for those who lived next to the M2.

The whole show has become a sham and a litany of mismanagement and deception that has misled the community. At one stage this project was heralded by many people in Parramatta as an amazing opportunity to link Parramatta with Chatswood. Parramatta, one of the fastest-growing central business districts in Australia, was to be connected to the thriving Chatswood area with a direct rail link. The proposed link was to be the answer to many people's dreams, something that for years they had hoped for. The Government, in typical fashion, has diluted and watered down the project until it is no longer what it seemed to be. The project is like the products that are advertised on late-night television—they sound pretty good until they are delivered, and then they are entirely different. The people of Parramatta are disillusioned and shattered. What they thought was going to be a viable rail link between Parramatta and Chatswood will not be built. Instead there will be an Epping to Chatswood link. I support the bill. The shadow Minister has done an excellent job in seeking reasonable compensation and a fair deal for the people affected. Just as importantly, I am asking for a fair deal for those people who rely on Parramatta as their base so they can have direct rail access to Chatswood.

**Mr HUMPHERSON** (Davidson) [10.48 a.m.], in reply: I acknowledge and thank honourable members representing the electorates of The Hills, Epping, Hawkesbury, Willoughby and Baulkham Hills, who spoke on behalf of their constituents and raised their concerns about the Parramatta to Chatswood rail link. In responding to this bill the Government said very little, but if what it said is correct there will be no adverse consequences if it supports this bill. No financial impost will be lost on properties above or near the rail tunnel. There will be no adverse impact by way of vibration or noise, and in fact property values may appreciate. If that is correct, The Government has no reason to object to the legislation. If one believes what the Government has said, this measure may well be redundant, because there will be no need for people to sell their properties at an affected value.

But the Opposition does not believe or trust the Government. I can say with certainty that the people who live on or near the rail corridor do not believe or trust the Government. There will be an effect, and it has already manifested itself in some areas. People's properties have been valued at about \$50,000 less than they were prior to the effect of the rail link becoming known. Some areas will be affected by noise, particularly properties that are 15 metres or less above the rail tunnel. There is the potential for structural impact on property. Some properties will be affected by vibration. People's rights to improve their land have already been affected because the depth below the surface to which they can drill for foundations will be affected. The Government has stolen those rights. Property below the surface has been stolen without due notice, proper consultation and, more importantly, compensation.

If it was good enough for the Government to compensate people in the southern part of Sydney affected by the M5 East tunnel by enabling them to sell their properties at an unaffected value and move away from an area that was not earmarked for a tunnel or adverse impacts from major infrastructure when they first bought the property and established their lives there, and if it was good enough to do the same for those affected by the M2 in the northern part of Sydney, then it is good enough to apply that principle to people who will be affected by the Parramatta to Chatswood rail tunnel and any future road or rail projects. I note that neither the honourable member for Ryde, the Hon. John Watkins, nor the honourable member for Parramatta has contributed to the debate even though their constituents may be affected by the rail tunnel.

The honourable member for Parramatta may hope that the second part of the tunnel does not proceed, but the honourable member for Ryde has been absent from the debate before, during and after the election campaign. Their failure to reflect the concerns of their constituents is very sad. There seems to have been a great deal of pain and cost for little or no gain now that the project will constitute only a Chatswood to Epping rail tunnel. Many of the great benefits of the project will never be realised. It is clear that the Government is walking away rapidly. As the honourable member for Baulkham Hills stated, there has been an enormous deception. But perhaps that was always the plan. The project was sold to the wider community largely on the basis of the benefits to Parramatta and the surrounding region. It is the people of Parramatta and the surrounding region who have been abandoned.

This is a matter of principle. When major infrastructure comes anywhere near people's properties, should adversely affected property be taken away without people being compensated fairly? We seek to give back to those people a right they should never have been denied. If this project proceeds and impacts adversely on them they should have the right to relocate at no financial cost to them. If honourable members choose to vote against this bill they will vote against that very principle. The Government should not steal land or people's rights. It should not take away what people have worked for all their lives, nor should it take away their amenity of life. The Coalition will continue to pursue that principle, regardless of the outcome of the vote.

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

**The House divided.**

**Ayes, 34**

Mr Aplin  
Mr Barr  
Ms Berejiklian  
Mr Brogden  
Mr Constance  
Mr Debnam  
Mr Fraser  
Mrs Hancock  
Mr Hartcher  
Mr Hazzard  
Mrs Hopwood  
Mr Humpherson

Mr Kerr  
Mr McGrane  
Mr Merton  
Ms Moore  
Mr Oakeshott  
Mr O'Farrell  
Mr Page  
Mr Piccoli  
Mr Pringle  
Mr Richardson  
Mr Roberts  
Ms Seaton

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

*Tellers,*  
Mr George  
Mr Maguire

**Noes, 45**

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

**Pairs**

Mr Cansdell	Ms Burney
Ms Hodgkinson	Mr McBride

**Question resolved in the negative.**

**Motion negatived.**

**Pursuant to resolution business interrupted.**

**APPROPRIATION BILL****APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL****APPROPRIATION (SPECIAL OFFICES) BILL****STATE REVENUE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL****Second Reading**

**Debate resumed from 24 June.**

**Mr BROGDEN** (Pittwater—Leader of the Opposition) [11.00 a.m.]: Over the past eight years Labor's Treasurer has finished every Budget Speech with the boast that he has delivered "every inch a Labor budget". The 2003-04 budget is no exception. He is right. This is a classic Labor budget: tax is up, debt is up, waste is up, and promises have been broken. This is a budget that will be remembered for only one thing—Labor's failure to give the people of New South Wales any tax relief. This will be remembered as this Premier's greediest budget—a budget in which he took an extra \$830 million in stamp duty from families, home owners, farmers and businesses and did not give a single cent back. It is a budget that fails to cut tax and fails to prepare government for the future.

This budget has all the hallmarks of a lazy and arrogant Government. It confirms again New South Wales as the highest taxing State in the country. It continues a culture of waste and overspending, with the budget documents confirming that the Government overspent its own budget in 2002-03 by more than \$1.4 billion. This budget ensures that now more than ever single people, young couples and families are kept out of the property market and stopped from owning their own homes. It delivers not one cent in tax relief, and it fails to honour the promises made to the people of New South Wales.

Let us not forget what Labor hid from the public before the election. Labor hid its plan to cut 1,000 jobs in the Department of Education and Training; it hid its plan to remove workers compensation exemption



from trainees; it hid new charges on TAFE students and tax increases on pubs and clubs, it hid a \$3.2 billion deficit in WorkCover, and it hid another multibillion dollar loss in the State's Superannuation Fund—run up by their trade union mates. The Premier and the Treasurer hid all of those things—just like Labor hid safety concerns over the Menangle rail bridge, safety issues surrounding the Millennium train and cutbacks to elective surgery in the bush. They hid it all, just like the Premier hid his third-rate front bench during the election campaign.

Last year the Premier declared himself Bob the Builder. As the cover-ups unfold day after day they reveal one thing—that after nine budgets, Bob can't fix it. Now we see cover-ups and lies form part of the budget. It should be noted that for possibly the first time in the State's history, a New South Wales Treasurer has handed down a partial budget. Only scant details have been provided for the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources, the Department of Lands, the Department of Commerce, the Department of Sport and Recreation, the Department of State and Regional Development, the Environment Protection Authority, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Ministry of Transport, the Transport Safety and Reliability Regulator, the Ministry of Energy and Utilities, and even Treasury itself.

The fact that the New South Wales Treasury cannot even account for itself shows how far standards have slipped in New South Wales under Labor. We do not have the details for more than \$4.5 billion in spending. Those figures, unbelievably, are still a few months away. Little wonder the Auditor-General himself has raised questions about this process. This is a budget that does not deliver on Labor's election promises and does not deliver in any way, shape or form real tax relief for the people of New South Wales. This Treasurer has failed to manage costs and failed to provide any real tax relief.

In four years there has been \$5.5 billion in cost overruns, with the overruns in 2002-03 totalling \$1.4 billion. We see this inability to manage projects right throughout the Government. It is not just Sydney Water's \$61 million bungled computer billing system or the more than \$100 million cost blow-out in the Millennium train project. In four years New South Wales has seen \$5.5 billion dollars in overspending, which is more than the entire budget of the 11 agencies and departments left out of the Egan budget mark I for this coming year.

The Treasurer's approach is that cost overruns do not matter, as the costs can always be covered from unexpected revenues from the property boom. That is a lazy approach by a lazy Treasurer. The people who are paying for his laziness are the home buyers of New South Wales. The Treasurer boasts about keeping the budget in surplus. It would be a fair boast if he had managed to do it without raising taxes. But the budget surplus next year will be largely built on tax increases and this year's surplus is built on an \$830 million tax windfall from stamp duty. Without this \$830 million windfall, this budget would have been in deficit to the tune of \$631 million.

All we have seen in this budget is another greedy reach into the pockets of New South Wales residents and more new taxes and charges that the Premier and the Treasurer did not tell anyone about before the election. As we like to say in the Coalition, the Premier has never seen a tax he did not like and the Treasurer has never seen a tax he did not hike. When it comes to stamp duty, the Treasurer hides behind his old double-speak line that New South Wales has one of the lowest stamp duty rates in Australia. We know the truth; we live in the most expensive city in the nation, and the Treasurer's deceit does not work any more.

Who did he blame for this? This Treasurer, who has over the years blamed John Howard, Peter Costello, John Fahey, Nick Greiner and international events, has now found someone else to blame for the Government's stamp duty crisis. He now blames Adam and Eve. He might blame them for his stamp duty slug, but the people of New South Wales know who to blame: the Premier and the Treasurer. If the Treasurer were to visit any Sydney auction this weekend he would not be able to look potential buyers in the eye and repeat his claim that stamp duty is low. He knows that is not true, but he just will not admit it. It is time for the Premier and the Treasurer to get their hands out of home owners' pockets.

The Labor Government's approach to the budget is dishonest. When it comes to stamp duty it always underestimates stamp duty revenues because it does not have the courage to admit what it expects to collect. Honourable members should consider this Government's record. In 1997 the Treasurer said that the budget would raise only \$1.6 billion in stamp duty, but during the year he dug his hands in the pockets of home buyers and took another \$253 million. In 1998 he did it again and said he would take only \$1.6 billion, but then dug his hands in and took another \$386 million. Each year since then he has done the same thing. In 1999 he budgeted for \$1.7 billion in stamp duty and, surprise, surprise, he ripped out another \$681 million. Last year this so-called windfall surged to \$830 million.

The Treasurer says he will be taking only \$3.4 billion in stamp duty in this coming year. We do not believe it. Labor's greed is clear for the world to see. Since 1995 the consumer price index has risen about 25 per cent, house prices in Sydney have risen 130 per cent and stamp duty has risen by more than 200 per cent. While house prices have doubled, stamp duty has tripled. In more than 100 suburbs in Sydney, the average house buyer is paying in excess of \$20,000 stamp duty. Stamp duty on an average house in West Hoxton increased from \$1,332 in 1995 to \$14,390 by March this year. That is a 980 per cent increase. Stamp duty on the average unit in Tempe has increased from \$2,022 in 1995 to \$11,690. That is an increase of 478 per cent. In Parramatta stamp duty has increased from \$4,265 in 1995 to \$15,848. That is a 271 per cent increase. In the inner west of Sydney home buyers pay stamp duty amounting to \$20,000 in Petersham, \$22,000 in Leichhardt and Glebe, \$28,000 in Five Dock and Drummoyne, \$35,000 in Balmain and \$39,000 in Haberfield.

The Labor Government's record on stamp duty is to keep taking the money without giving a single cent back. The people of New South Wales have woken up to its big con on stamp duty. What other Australian Government would take \$20,000 to \$30,000 from the pockets of ordinary people in one hit without blinking? Let us be honest, people are not paying these taxes only once; they are paying them twice because, almost inevitably, the mortgages are bigger as a result of the stamp duty and for every day families, couples or single persons have a mortgage around their necks they are paying off the Treasurer's stamp duty. I say enough! The Coalition stands for affordable home ownership. It stands for making home ownership a real and affordable option for young people, singles and families. It will fight against an out of control tax take that is making home ownership unaffordable for too many families. I believe government should not impede the opportunity for ordinary people to achieve the great Australian dream of owning their own home.

The Treasurer has projected more than \$2 billion in surpluses over the next four years. Today I foreshadow that the Coalition will introduce into the Parliament a plan that will use less than 50 per cent of the budget surplus to reduce stamp duty on property transfers. Over the next four years this plan will cut \$880 million out of the Government's \$14 billion stamp duty tax take. That is \$880 million that will not leave the hands of home buyers. This is a responsible plan because it keeps the budget in surplus. The Coalition plan for stamp duty cuts will equalise the city and country thresholds for the First Home Plus Scheme at \$300,000 in the first year. We went to the election with a commitment to equalise that rate recognising that country New South Wales is no longer immune from the property boom and that country residents should not be disadvantaged by this scheme.

From 1 July 2004 the Coalition will cut stamp duty on transfers by 5 per cent, from 1 July 2005 we will cut stamp duty transfers by 7.5 per cent, and from 1 July 2006 we will cut stamp duty transfers by 10 per cent. This stamp duty plan is responsible stamp duty relief without in any way forcing the budget into deficit. The plan means that people who purchase an average Sydney house costing \$460,000 after 1 July next year will save over \$800 in stamp duty. If they paid the same amount for a property after 1 July 2005 they would save \$1,200, and if they paid the same amount in July 2006 they would save a total of \$1,600. This Government must cut the stamp duty rate and take in New South Wales. It can also do its part by further identifying ways of cutting government waste and to use those savings for stamp duty relief. It should go through this \$35 billion document with a fine-tooth comb to see how it spends the people's money. It should see how many potential Millennium train money wasters it includes.

I will highlight just one area of government waste today; that is, government advertising. According to the respected advertising publication *Adnews*, the New South Wales Government ranks as the seventh biggest advertiser in the nation. It estimates that the Government spends at least \$65 million to \$70 million on direct television, radio and print advertising. As we saw with regard to the Millennium train, the Government also spent large amounts of advertising dollars below the line that was not covered by the *Adnews* figures. When totalled with below-the-line items, this Government spends more than \$100 million a year on advertising. That makes it the seventh biggest spender on advertising in the nation, but it advertises predominantly in only one State.

This Government spends more on advertising in New South Wales than companies such as McDonalds, Coca Cola, Optus, Holden, Toyota, Qantas, Cadbury and Kellogg spend nationally. What is it selling? It is selling lemons and a con! This Government developed and produced television advertisements costing \$200,000 for the Millennium trains but never ran them because they would have breached fair trading laws. I am not talking simply about community service or safety announcements here; I am talking about a public relations machine run by a Labor Government using taxpayers' money and so out of control that it spends more on advertising than McDonald's. It could cut that advertising program and use the money to provide stamp duty tax relief.

The Coalition is committed to tax reform, cuts in stamp duty and keeping the pressure on this Government to deliver those cuts over the next four years. I promise the people of New South Wales that this issue will not go away; the Coalition will not let it go away. The difference is clear and the choice for the people of New South Wales is clear; that is, between a high-taxing Labor Government and a Coalition that supports and will drive the case for tax reform for the citizens of New South Wales.

This Government used to be on its game, but now it is tired and greedy. In its first term the Government displayed enthusiasm, vigour, and a willingness to tackle issues. If this budget proves one thing, it is that this Government is no longer on its game; it is just bored and lazy. Let us look at unemployment. Since July 2000 New South Wales has lost 30,200 full-time jobs. During the same period 11,400 full-time jobs have been created in Victoria, 16,700 have been created in South Australia, 27,700 have been created in Western Australia, and 46,000 have been created in Queensland. Every State, except New South Wales, has created new full-time jobs since July 2000.

The gross State product forecasts from each State Treasury show an outlook for 2003-04 in which New South Wales will trail again, with growth forecasts lower than every other Australian State except South Australia. New South Wales has forecast growth in 2003-04 of 3.25 per cent, whilst Tasmania is expected to grow by 3.5 per cent, Victoria by 3.75 per cent, Queensland by 4 per cent, and Western Australia by 4.5 per cent. After eight years under Labor, New South Wales is expected to grow at a slower rate than the boutique State of Tasmania. One will not find in this budget one initiative to create jobs and bring investment to New South Wales. It is a failure that Labor might be able to escape with at the moment, but it is one that will savage New South Wales if ever again our country enters an economic downturn. That is the price we will pay if this Government continues to backslide on reform, and on chasing jobs and creating investment.

This Government once had State debt in its sights—now it has become all too hard for it. According to the budget papers, net State debt will rise from \$16.3 billion in June 2003 to \$20.5 billion in June 2007. And Labor has done it in the most deceitful way: by forcing government trading enterprises in the electricity and water sectors to take on more and more debt on behalf of the taxpayers and citizens of this State. That is how Labor played the trick on this one. But it cannot avoid the fact that under this Labor Government we will end this term with a \$4 billion increase in the State's debt—a debt that future generations will have to bear. As at June 2002 State sector unfunded superannuation liabilities totalled \$11.7 billion, and they are forecast to rise to \$14.8 billion by June 2007.

As I have already acknowledged, this Government was once on its game. What a tragedy it has become; it has become a mere shadow of its former self. The sins of Labor's sloth are demonstrated by no job creation, massive overspending, increasing debt, huge tax increases, no stamp duty cuts, and no real drive or direction for New South Wales. I have no doubt that after this ninth budget people will say of this Treasurer, as they will say of this Premier: After one too many budgets, neither man had the wisdom to know when to go.

**Mr STONER** (Oxley—Leader of the National Party) [11.24 a.m.]: The slick presentation of the Carr Government's budget fails to hide what again amounts to a gross betrayal of country and coastal New South Wales communities. Behind the appropriately black budget booklets is very little good news for the communities outside of metropolitan New South Wales. This is a budget of deception and arrogance—it continues eight years of Labor's spin over substance. Labor's claim that 36 per cent of all spending on capital works and road maintenance will take place outside metropolitan areas is errant nonsense. For example, a quick analysis of the budget documents shows that just 27 per cent of TAFE major works will be undertaken in country and coastal areas. Less than 5 per cent of NSW Police's major capital works will take place in country and coastal areas. In the capital works budget of Juvenile Justice, not a cent will be spent in country and coastal areas out of a budget of \$45 million.

These examples show the farce of the Premier's claimed level of 36 per cent of capital works expenditure. It must be noted that 60 per cent of the State's roads are located outside metropolitan areas; hence Labor's claim is a sham. What strikes me most is the wasted opportunities. Labor has promised for eight years that it will deliver better services for country New South Wales, yet this budget confirms that we are paying record taxes and our basic services continue to be neglected. Why is it that we still have major waiting lists for surgery at our hospitals, our classrooms are in a state of disrepair, our towns are less safe, and country and coastal roads are inadequate? Why is it that since the Carr Government was elected in 1995 it has massively increased the tax take, for very little return to the average person on the street? The figures are astounding.

Since 1995 payroll tax has increased by 63 per cent, land tax by 145 per cent, contracts and conveyances by 209 per cent, insurance duty by 76 per cent, lease duty by 133 per cent and gaming taxes by

22 per cent. Labor has failed to capitalise on the excellent economic framework provided by the Federal Coalition Government to achieve this State's full potential. Thanks to the Howard-Anderson Government, Australia has the lowest interest rates, inflation and unemployment in decades. Why then will Western Australia, Queensland, Victoria, Tasmania and the Northern Territory beat this State's economic growth on 2003-04 estimates? Had Labor not received the \$1.5 billion in unexpected revenue, this budget would have been \$1.3 billion in deficit. These are figures we will not hear Labor talking about. Nor will we hear it crowing about the \$5.5 billion that the Government has spent since 1999-2000, which is more than it budgeted for, or the \$6.5 billion that the Government has received since 1999-2000, which is over and above what it expected to receive.

These are large figures; they are almost beyond comprehension for many of us. But these dollars, if used effectively and efficiently, could have made significant gains in our economic and social wellbeing. I say again, it is the wasted opportunities that disturb me most. I just hope that this Government does not have to operate in a slower economic environment. I have visions of Federal Labor's disastrous economic reign under Paul Keating. The people who have funded Labor's binge of spending and mismanagement, home buyers, are no better off after this budget. Despite collecting \$830 million more in transfer stamp duties than forecast—in other words, a total of \$3.5 billion—Labor will not return one cent of that windfall.

The average home buyer now pays significantly more stamp duty than they would have paid in 1995. For example, in Tweed Heads stamp duty has increased by 100 per cent, in Orange by 83 per cent, and in Bathurst by 55 per cent. I commend the Leader of the Opposition for today outlining a plan to tackle the high rates of stamp duty that we face in this State. Under the Coalition's stamp duty plan, \$880 million from the \$2 billion in projected budget surpluses over the next four years would be put aside for stamp duty relief; stamp duty rates on property transfers would be cut by 5 per cent on 1 July 2004; the stamp duty cut would increase to 7.5 per cent from 1 July 2005; the cut would then increase to 10 per cent on 1 July 2006; and, importantly for the equity of non-metropolitan residents, the city and country thresholds of the First Home Plus Scheme would be equalised.

The stamp duty plan can be implemented immediately. It is economically responsible, using less than half of the money from the projected budget surpluses. The First Home Plus Scheme currently provides concessions on stamp duty and mortgage duty for first home buyers purchasing a property worth less than \$300,000 in metropolitan New South Wales or \$250,000 in country New South Wales. This means on a \$235,000 property, a first home buyer in the country pays up to \$3,000 more in stamp duty and mortgage duty than a buyer in the city. On a \$260,000 property, a first home buyer in Sydney receives a concession of up to \$2,600, while in country New South Wales the buyer receives no concession.

Under a Coalition Government, a first home buyer in country and coastal New South Wales will get the same concessions provided to a first home buyer in the city. This initiative would be particularly beneficial for young people living in country areas, and others who are purchasing their first homes outside the metropolitan area. In fact, making home ownership more affordable in country regions will help stem the population drift to the major cities. This is fresh vision versus a lazy and arrogant Government that will not be able to get out of its own way if there is an economic downturn. Labor has again increased its tax take in this Budget and failed to return a cent to taxpayers. Despite the Treasurer's broken promise to cut payroll tax to 5 per cent in 1999 and to 4 per cent in 2000, he has now announced plans to broaden the payroll tax base, squeeze more out of stamp duty and increase gaming taxes to claw in more revenue. I note the comments of the Chief Executive Officer of the State Chamber of Commerce, Margy Osmond, in relation to payroll tax:

We simply cannot be competitive with other states or other cities in the region with such a low payroll tax threshold of \$600,000 and such a high rate at 6%.

The failure to address this will cost New South Wales jobs as we continue to be the least competitive state in terms of payroll tax.

I turn now to specific budget items. Infrastructure is not a priority for the Government. I note that only one new police station is to be built in rural New South Wales, despite places like Orange and Kempsey being in desperate need of new facilities. Grain branch lines continue to be neglected by the Government. Despite their economic importance, Labor's chief rail bureaucrat recently recommended the closure of various grain rail lines across country New South Wales. Labor has been running down restricted lines and has adopted a fix-when-fail approach to maintenance, despite the fact that the lines carry about 75 per cent of the export grain crop of New South Wales to port.

Our rail infrastructure is vitally important for farmers and the rural and regional communities that rely on them. Without those rail lines this grain would be transported via road, leading to increased road maintenance

costs and road safety concerns. Restricted lines and branch lines must remain operational and capable of completing the task of transporting grain during the peak harvest times. Country and coastal New South Wales need an infrastructure plan to ensure they are in a position to grow and prosper over the coming decades. Labor has no vision for infrastructure and country and coastal New South Wales are poorer for it.

In relation to the health budget, growth is half that claimed by the Minister for Health, and this year's allocation for capital works is Labor's lowest ever commitment to health capital works. It is the old Labor trick of inflating health spending. Despite claiming an 11 per cent boost to health funding, the real increase is half that figure. In 2002-03 \$8.8 billion dollars was spent in health. This year funding will be increased to \$9.3 billion—an increase of \$491 million or 5.6 per cent. Given that the budget papers reveal that the full-year cost of the nurses' pay increase is \$530 million, Labor is again trying to con people about the real amount being allocated to health services across New South Wales. When Labor was elected, capital works expenditure represented 10.4 per cent of total health spending; it is now down to just 4.9 per cent.

This year's allocation for capital works is the lowest percentage of total health spending since Labor was elected. There is no money in this budget for the construction of the promised Queanbeyan and Bathurst-Orange-Bloomfield hospitals. Despite a lot of Labor rhetoric about its commitment to cutting the death toll on our roads, the budget does nothing to address this issue. The New South Wales Roads budget suffered a funding cut that totalled almost \$100 million in real terms. Ironically, the New South Wales Minister for Roads, Carl Scully, has delivered this cut to the total roads program, despite endorsing the National Road Safety Strategy 2001-10, which recommended:

Further investment in safer roads is highly justified on both social and economic grounds. Road investment improves road safety through general road improvementstypically new roads are safer than old roads.

It seems that further deterioration of our road network, particularly in rural, regional and coastal areas of the State, is inevitable under Labor. I remind the Government that a quality road network is a vital foundation for regional development.

Labor's spin over substance is readily illustrated again in the education portfolio. TAFE students and trainees are the biggest losers in this year's education budget. From January, the cost of a TAFE graduate diploma course will increase from \$700 to \$1,650 a year, while a top-level TAFE certificate course will rise from \$260 to \$750 a year. A hike in TAFE charges does not send a good message to those who want to further their education. Young people will be the most affected, including higher level non-apprentice or trainee students, and the Government's decision to force employers to pay workers compensation premiums for traineeships will act as a clear disincentive to employment. It will impede the ability of businesses to take on new employees and it will undoubtedly cost jobs for young people in non-metropolitan New South Wales.

Hard-working small business people across rural and regional New South Wales already operate on tight margins and small profits. Sydney Labor has just signalled its intent to make running a business even harder. The effect of Labor's new measures is to put the brakes on regional employment. While the Premier may argue that some employers were rorting the current scheme and, therefore, it was necessary to shift the cost to employers, in reality he is penalising the majority of honest employers for the actions of a few, instead of plugging the loopholes. The Premier should be encouraging jobs in country and coastal areas, not increasing charges on employers who are willing to provide much-needed job opportunities for young people. Mark my words: there will be fewer jobs available for young people in country New South Wales, where youth unemployment is already too high, as a result of Labor's regressive policies.

Labor has also failed to provide any relief for businesses paying exorbitant workers compensation premiums. In fact, they recently moved to include superannuation in workers compensation premium calculations. It should also be noted that the Government's claim that it injected an additional half a billion dollars into the education budget this year is a con. The reality is that last year the Government spent \$466 million more on education than budgeted by the Treasurer. The money allocated in this year's budget is only \$75.75 million more than the amount spent last year. Of that, \$35 million is needed to fund teachers pay increases, and \$26 million is needed to cover inflation on operating expenses. To pay for its election promises the Premier has started a slash-and-burn exercise at the Department of Education and Training, revealing last week that 700 education jobs will be cut. Many of these jobs will undoubtedly come from country and coastal New South Wales.

This State remains 90 per cent drought-stricken, and the level of desperation is increasing. Yet Labor abandoned farmers in this budget. The budget papers reveal that the Government intends to review its drought

assistance measures in December. Without a black-and-white commitment from the Government to farmers on drought assistance, I am concerned the Government will just walk away at the end of the year. Why has the Government based its decision to continue drought support funding only until December on the flawed findings of the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics? Why has it cut grants from the Rural Assistance Authority to farmers by 40 per cent?

The Premier cannot have it both ways. The Treasurer cannot claim there is a \$43 million budget surplus while the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries states that drought assistance will be paid beyond the end of the year 2003. Farmers must be assured that there will be State-based drought relief for a full financial year. We all hope the drought breaks soon, but even if it does, recovery for farmers and their communities will take years. Even if it were to rain today in drought-affected areas, pastures will not immediately recover over winter and restocking is a process that can take two years. It will be some time before many farmers receive any income. The contribution of the Department of Agriculture to drought relief through the Drought Regional Assistance Program is down by almost \$6.5 million for the next financial year. Compare that to the budget's substantial increase for other portfolio areas, such as the \$23.5 million boost in expenses for the National Parks and Wildlife Service. That indicates the skewed priorities of the Government, which, incidentally, refused to allow desperate graziers to have access to fodder in selected national parks during the drought.

I am also concerned that the forecast expenditure on grants and subsidies by the Rural Assistance Authority is scheduled to fall by more than \$20 million in the coming financial year. Surely the ongoing provision of grants and subsidies is essential during a period of prolonged drought. I note the comments of the Federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Warren Truss, who quoted the New South Wales Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries on 3 June promising farmers tens of millions of dollars in new assistance. As noted by Warren Truss, it seems that the Hon. Ian Macdonald has little influence over his city-centric Cabinet colleagues. Any hope that the Carr Government would match the Federal Government's commitment to drought-stricken farmers in New South Wales has evaporated. I was interested to read the comments of the New South Wales Farmers Association on the budget. Association President Mal Peters said:

... it seems the New South Wales Government is prepared to abandon country New South Wales to its fate, without any real effort to cushion the impact.

I note Labor is also cutting 40 staff from the Department of Agriculture. As yet we do not know the budgetary details with respect to natural resources. The Government has failed to provide budgetary comparisons with previous arrangements. I look forward to those figures being released in late August. They will help show whether the Government is continuing down a path of rhetoric on natural resources or putting the necessary resources in place to help land-holders and their communities cope with change. It is outrageous that in the coming financial year only an extra \$1 million has been allocated to the budget of the Department of Lands for bushfire hazard reduction and weed and pest management on Crown land. That is a disgrace, given the horrific Christmas bushfires that cost landowners millions of dollars in lost assets, property and stock. Further, feral animals and noxious weeds are running rampant on Crown land, yet Labor is not doing enough to tackle this serious problem.

The tourism industry in New South Wales is worth more than \$23 billion to the State's economy and employs, both directly and indirectly, more than 300,000 people across the State. However, funding to tourism is cut in this budget. Expenditure is down by 8 per cent on last year to just over \$52 million. Given the unstable international travel market, particularly with the onset of severe acute respiratory syndrome, Australian would-be international travellers are looking closer to home for their holiday. This funding cut makes it harder for New South Wales to compete with other States and makes it harder for operators within the tourism industry to survive. Our regional communities stand to gain a great deal from domestic tourism.

Rural and regional New South Wales has capitalized on tourism in the wake of the disappearing traditional employment base. It should be promoted more aggressively in the wake of fears about international travel, yet Labor has cut funding to the tourism industry. The right conditions and incentives would result in New South Wales going ahead in leaps and bounds, but instead a golden opportunity has been lost. For eight years the tourism industry has been disappointed by Labor's lax approach to an industry vital to the New South Wales economy. Our country and coastal communities, which are becoming increasingly dependent on the tourist dollar, have again been let down. We sought from the budget a framework for country and coastal communities to grow and prosper. Again, Labor has failed to deliver.

We remain the highest taxed people in Australia. The standard of our services is going backwards while the tax take continues to head skyward. The Premier and his Labor colleagues should get their hands out of the

pockets of country and coastal residents and start managing this State's finances better to deliver real economic and social benefits to those areas outside metropolitan New South Wales. If we have better management of government, we can have both better services and tax relief. That is the test for any New South Wales government.

**Mr GAUDRY** (Newcastle—Parliamentary Secretary), on behalf of Mr Knowles [11.46 a.m.], in reply: I commend the bills to the House.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Bills read a second time and passed through remaining stages.**

#### **HORNSBY AND KU-RING-GAI HOSPITAL RADIOLOGY SERVICES**

**Mrs HOPWOOD** (Hornsby) [11.46 a.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that the antiquated equipment used to develop film in the Hornsby hospital X-ray department prevents chest X-rays being taken promptly;
- (2) notes the Minister for Health's promise to provide funding for replacement of the outdated system at Hornsby hospital; and
- (3) urges that this funding be provided to a state-of-the-art digital system for the production of X-ray film to improve services to patients and the local community.

I impress upon all honourable members the extreme importance of this motion. A few weeks ago I raised in the House the urgent need to examine and act upon the prospect of Hornsby hospital not being able to function without the ability to take even the most basic X-ray—not even a chest X-ray. Subsequently I moved a motion and yesterday I succeeded in having the motion reordered. In the meantime the problem with X-ray facilities at Hornsby hospital has escalated. I have received more and more information about the need for modern, rather than antiquated, facilities for our patients. I thank all honourable members who have given their support and I look forward to convincing a seemingly reticent Government that it must consider the allocation of sensible expenditure for adequate equipment to meet the needs of patients.

The lack of modern facilities flies in the face of the recent testaments of the Department of Health that, at the very least, the best health care will be provided in this State. It appears that the best health care will be given only if the Government so desires. It may depend also on where the health facility is located, but I very much hope that is not the case. The ability of patients to be adequately and efficiently serviced in the X-ray department of Hornsby hospital is being threatened by short-sighted decisions about the purchase of replacement X-ray processing equipment. This motion urges the management of the hospital to alter its position with respect to the purchase of this equipment so that today's X-ray system, rather than yesterday's, can be installed in the hospital's X-ray department.

It is beyond belief to even contemplate that managers in our 2003 health care system could decide to lower standards of care by purchasing old equipment. When it came to my attention that the current film-based X-ray processing system at the radiology department of Hornsby hospital was about to become obsolete due to a lack of available film, I knew instinctively that I must act quickly. The company that previously provided the film no longer makes it. That indicates the age of the current hospital facilities. The Minister gave a supplementary answer to my question in which he stated that he had been advised that one of the film-processing units at Hornsby hospital is in need of replacement and that a replacement unit is currently being sourced. He stated that the expectation was that the replacement unit was to be installed by the end of this financial year.

Here we are at the end of the financial year and it appears that the staff and patients of Hornsby hospital, as well as the wider community and the surrounding suburbs, are about to be let down by the hospital's managers. An order for a replacement has been made, but the quality of the order indicates the value placed on the staff and patients alike. The replacement will be a dinosaur. It is distressing to note that the problems with the replacement will be that an antiquated processing unit will be bought that also relies on film. The only reason the current processing unit could continue to the end of June this year was that Westmead, which has a new computerised digital processing unit, had no further use for its excess film and Hornsby was able to access

it. To purchase an antiquated replacement processing unit that is 15 to 20 years old with \$186,000 of taxpayers' money is a waste and should be prevented. A new computerised system will cost in the vicinity of \$460,000. It would be state-of-the-art, set up the hospital for the future, and offer patients and doctors efficient, cost-effective and environmentally friendly X-ray services.

Images would be stored on computer and not on film. The argument must be made immediately and agreement reached upon so that the equipment order can be changed. Doctors can treat patients without having to wait for films to be developed and without reports that X-rays are missing in a pile somewhere. One doctor I spoke to expressed great frustration with the old system; he had experienced many occasions on which films could not be found on a ward round. Computerised technology is the way forward and the purchase of old equipment is not. The decision to acquire an antiquated X-ray processing system is an unwise way to spend our money.

This motion needs to be passed so that it will be possible to overturn a poor decision for a commonsense one. Surely the order for the replacement processing unit can be altered to buy what should be in place in the X-ray department at Hornsby hospital. I shall now read a letter to the editor of the *Hornsby Advocate* dated 5 June 2003 that was given the honour of being the letter of the week due to the extremely serious nature of the content, as well as the potential and actual problems contained therein if modern equipment is not purchased. The writer, John Robinson, a past chief radiographer of the radiology department of Hornsby hospital, said:

I was the past Chief Radiographer of the Radiology Department and read with dismay and great sorrow the relegation of the community of Hornsby Ku-ring-gai to a dinosaur technology.

All the surrounding hospitals, Ryde, Royal North Shore and The Adventist Hospital, and their local community reap the benefits of having a computed radiography (CR) system and are in turn, linked to a computerised network system which allows the transmission of images, reports and other results to wards and departments within their hospital and then to other hospitals.

I now work at The University of Sydney and we are installing a computed radiography system as the radiography students will be disadvantaged, and we wouldn't be honouring our duty to them, if they don't gain a good knowledge of the system.

They are widespread throughout Sydney, NSW and Australia.

Why is the Hornsby community, the patients and staff of Hornsby Hospital once again offered a second rate service?

One point that wasn't mentioned in the article is that an x-ray processor does present an occupational health risk to the radiology staff due to fumes from the chemicals used to process the films whereas the computed radiography system has no risk. The other significant point, and an overwhelming advantage of the computed radiography system is that virtually all x-ray exposures will result in a diagnostic image, different to the film system, thereby reducing the radiation burden to patients and staff.

Come on NSW Health, where is your compassion for the Hornsby Ku-ring-gai community and why are we the poor cousin in the Northern Area Health Service?

**John Robinson, Hornsby**

I shall extrapolate a few lines. It should not be "duty to not only students"; it should be "duty of care to patients and staff". The writer mentioned a second-rate service, when I thought we were aiming for a first-rate service. As for the occupational health and safety risks, all management should shudder at the thought of problems in those areas. I am not sure that I need to elaborate on the radiation burden. The reason given for Hornsby hospital's inability to purchase a unit that offers computerised digital technology is the lack of viewing screens around the hospital. That unlikely cop-out has been proffered as something that would prohibit the hospital from being able to utilise computerised technology.

Royal North Shore Hospital and Ryde Hospital have computerised facilities, with few if any viewing screens, so that is not a viable excuse for denying Hornsby hospital access to modern equipment. The impact on patients is undeniable. They need the best available facilities. In short, there is a double standard. Royal North Shore Hospital, Ryde Hospital, Westmead Hospital and Sydney Adventist Hospital have computerised technology. Why is it that Hornsby hospital will be in receipt of yesterday's technology? I urge all members to support the motion because action is needed in this budget session so that the true facts of the matter can be put forward and the needs of the local Hornsby community can be served. It is essential that \$186,000 of our money—yours and mine—is not wasted on old facilities. We owe it to the patients, staff and local communities that access Hornsby hospital. The logic for purchasing antiquated equipment is unfathomable. I again urge members to support the motion.



**Miss BURTON** (Kogarah—Parliamentary Secretary) [11.55 p.m.]: The Government opposes this motion. However, I welcome the opportunity to speak on this matter, as the Minister has previously, in light of the record \$605 million allocation to the Northern Sydney Area Health Service announced by the Treasurer on Tuesday.

**Mrs Skinner:** What about Hornsby hospital?

**Miss BURTON:** I will get to that. The allocation in the budget is an 11.7 per cent increase on the current year's allocation. It will ensure that the people of northern Sydney continue to receive the best level of care that our health professionals can deliver. The Minister first addressed this matter on 21 May. The honourable member for Hornsby incorrectly, and quite irresponsibly, claimed that X-ray facilities at Hornsby hospital faced imminent closure. That statement is plain wrong; it has simply never been the case. Hornsby hospital has ordered a new film processing system, and is currently awaiting delivery of that system. It is not an antiquated processing unit that is 15 to 20 years old, as the honourable member for Hornsby suggested to the House.

**Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Mills):** Order! There are too many interjections. The honourable member for North Shore may seek the call later.

**Miss BURTON:** The honourable member for North Shore has just embarrassed herself. No wonder she wants to interject! It is a brand new processing unit that will more than adequately service the needs of the Hornsby community and surrounding areas, just as the hospital has done since its opening. I am advised that lengthy discussions took place between the area health service and the hospital, and an areawide approach to the implementation of computerised radiography is currently being developed.

**Mrs Hopwood:** Why is Hornsby out of the loop?

**Miss BURTON:** You are out of the loop! The Northern Sydney Area Health Service has sourced a project officer to develop a strategy for the efficient, integrated implementation of this technology across the area. That project officer is expected to commence work in late July. This is the only rational, commonsense approach when it comes to implementing new technology in an effective manner. I mentioned that Hornsby hospital has delivered an expert level of care to the local community service it first opened. I point out that Hornsby hospital was opened in 1937, and this year it celebrates its seventy-fifth anniversary. It has an average available bed number of 293, more than 18,000 admissions each year and 311,000 non-inpatient occasions of service. The hospital has more than 1,000 staff. It is a teaching and district hospital, and is linked to Royal North Shore Hospital for a range of tertiary level services.

**Mrs Hopwood:** Who wrote this?

**Miss BURTON:** This is purely for your benefit. The range of acute-care services includes coronary and intensive care, neurosurgery, orthopaedic, general medical, surgical, obstetric, mental health, paediatrics and emergency services. Non-acute services include community health, dental and podiatry clinics, child, adolescent and family health, drug and alcohol services, health promotion, rehabilitation, and aged care. The area health service capital works budget for the current year includes \$1.5 million of the total redevelopment cost of \$16.4 million for the upgrade of Hornsby hospital obstetrics, paediatrics and emergency departments. The project includes construction of a new two-storey facility, site infrastructure and demolition of existing buildings.

Major recurrent funding initiatives for 2002-03 include \$1.19 million to provide Hornsby and Ku-ring-gai hospital with improved orthopaedic, intensive care and acute care facilities. Many general wards in the hospital have been refurbished to include additional single rooms with ensuites, isolation facilities and more energy efficient lighting and airconditioning systems. In the past three years the intensive care unit, the theatre complex and the day surgery units have all been upgraded. That establishes that this hospital is far from a poor cousin. The rehabilitation centre has been upgraded with an additional clinic room, a kitchen servery area and a plaster room.

**Mrs Hopwood:** Point of order: I have grave concerns about the debate coming from the other side of the Chamber. It is not relevant to the motion.

**Miss BURTON:** You do not understand.

**Mrs Hopwood:** I understand perfectly. I understand everything about Hornsby hospital. I live in the area. The motion refers to the X-ray facilities.

**Miss BURTON:** The honourable member would not have moved the motion if she knew what she was talking about.

**Mrs Hopwood:** I know what I am talking about, and that is why I moved it.

**Miss BURTON:** To the point of order: What I am saying is definitely in line with the motion and with all the allegations made by the honourable member.

**Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Mills):** Order! At this stage the Parliamentary Secretary is in order. However, I have taken careful note of the wording of the motion moved by the honourable member for Hornsby.

**Miss BURTON:** It is high time that the honourable member for Hornsby started to back the efforts of the staff and the future of the hospital, and stopped denigrating the efforts of the hospital, which provides quality care to the Hornsby community.

**Mrs SKINNER (North Shore) [12.01 p.m.]:** I congratulate the honourable member for Hornsby on bringing this vitally important matter to the attention of Parliament. I am sickened to hear from the Parliamentary Secretary that the Government will dismiss such an important issue, particularly in the way she has. To suggest that the honourable member for Hornsby is somehow denigrating the staff is ludicrous. It is the staff at the hospital who brought this matter to the attention of the honourable member for Hornsby. The honourable member worked as a nurse in the hospital and has been actively engaged in the hospital for a long time. She did more than simply read statistics off the Government's web site. Anyone can do that.

The motion relates to X-ray equipment at the hospital, equipment that the doctors have written to the local newspaper about. For the Parliamentary Secretary to suggest this is not of concern to the staff and the people who will be patients of the hospital is not only ill-informed but dishonest. The Parliamentary Secretary used that magic word "integration". Integration is a code for shutting down the level of services provided at a district hospital such as Hornsby hospital and relocating those services somewhere else—in this case to Royal North Shore Hospital—under the guise of networking. This is what is happening to Hornsby hospital and what will happen to the other smaller district hospitals such as the Blue Mountains hospital. The Government is reducing the level of service to outlying district hospitals.

The Hornsby community has one of the fastest-growing populations in the State, and it is an ageing population. This hospital must have access to high-quality, latest technology X-ray equipment. To suggest that it is acceptable for a hospital to rely on outdated X-ray equipment that uses film, when even the film is not made any more, is ridiculous. That not only provides an inferior quality outcome to the patients and the dedicated doctors and nurses who are being asked to use equipment they should not have to use, but it also represents a very poor investment. We are spending money on equipment that is costly to maintain, will require expensive film, and is out of step with other hospitals. As the honourable member for Hornsby said, other hospitals in the area have access to better equipment, as do other hospitals across the State. Why not Hornsby hospital? The reason is that Hornsby hospital has been earmarked by the Government as one of the district hospitals that will have its services reduced. One wonders whether in the end this hospital will be anything more than a band-aid station, a place where minor procedures will be done, and attention will be focussed more on geriatric care.

The Government has abandoned Hornsby hospital. It has abandoned the doctors, who are being asked to use yesterday's technology, as described by the honourable member for Hornsby. The Hornsby community is well served by its local member of Parliament, a woman who has worked in the health system in various guises over many years. She visits her hospital regularly, and I have visited the hospital with her. She has the ear of doctors and nurses at the hospital and she represents patients who come to her on a regular basis. For the Parliamentary Secretary to suggest otherwise demonstrates her naivety, her lack of experience, and her gullibility in accepting typed-up words from the Minister. If the Parliamentary Secretary wants the truth, she might do well to visit the hospital and speak to some of these doctors.

**Mrs Hopwood:** We can arrange that.

**Mrs SKINNER:** The honourable member for Hornsby says she will arrange that. I am sure she will address that in her reply. It is a great shame when this House is subjected to misinformation such as that put out by the Parliamentary Secretary. I know she will want to correct the record after such a visit, having had the

opportunity to speak to the doctors and see for herself the antiquated equipment and X-ray film at Hornsby hospital. That equipment is not the latest technology and is not serving the people of Hornsby.

**Mrs HOPWOOD** (Hornsby) [12.06 p.m.], in reply: I am in a state of total shock because of the attitude of the Government in relation to the purchase of antiquated equipment to be placed in a hospital that should be on a computerised network with other hospitals. It is absolutely disgraceful that Hornsby hospital has been singled out, and not just in relation to X-ray facilities. The thoracic surgery fiasco also leads me to believe that this hospital is being downgraded by stealth. Obviously the Government does not care about the patients, the staff, or the community that the hospital serves. It is in a geographical position where it must be able to offer state-of-the-art, modern, up-to-date facilities and services. It is at the end of the F3. Hornsby hospital is a very busy hospital and services a large area.

As far as not supporting the hospital staff, the staff have contacted me. They are appalled that old equipment might be purchased for the hospital. If the Government is serious about keeping valuable staff in this hospital, it must not treat them as second rate. These doctors and nurses want to be given the best equipment to deal with the issues confronting their patients. Hornsby hospital is obviously out of the loop and will remain there if the Government does not provide the X-ray department with the best available X-ray facilities. It makes one wonder why the Government put \$16.4 million into a new accident and emergency, paediatrics and maternity unit if it is not going to provide the X-ray department that services these other departments with the best available equipment. The intensive care unit relies on up-to-the-minute facilities for its patients, and with the X-ray department being downgraded and the lack of thoracic surgery, the critical mass is falling.

The intensivists and the staff that will be working in the accident and emergency department, in the theatre with anaesthesia, and in the intensive care unit have great fears for the future. Already questions are being asked by the intensivists about whether doctors will come out and be trained at Hornsby hospital in the future. The efforts of the staff have been exemplary. They are the ones who contacted me about this very serious matter. The expenditure of \$186,000 of our money on yesterday's equipment is a travesty. I urge the Government to reconsider the purchase of this equipment before the end of the financial year and before the order is filled, and to acquire computerised technology. We owe it to the patients and the staff and the local communities, including those outside the Hornsby electorate, who access Hornsby hospital. I urge all members to support this motion.

**Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.**

**The House divided.**

**Ayes, 35**

Mr Aplin  
Mr Barr  
Ms Berejiklian  
Mr Brogden  
Mr Cansdell  
Mr Debnam  
Mr Draper  
Mr Fraser  
Mrs Hancock  
Mr Hartcher  
Mr Hazzard  
Ms Hodgkinson

Mrs Hopwood  
Mr Humpherson  
Mr Kerr  
Mr McGrane  
Mr Merton  
Ms Moore  
Mr Oakeshott  
Mr O'Farrell  
Mr Page  
Mr Piccoli  
Mr Pringle  
Mr Richardson

Mr Roberts  
Ms Seaton  
Mrs Skinner  
Mr Slack-Smith  
Mr Souris  
Mr Tink  
Mr Torbay  
Mr J. H. Turner  
Mr R. W. Turner  
*Tellers,*  
Mr George  
Mr Maguire

**Noes, 45**

Mr Amery  
Ms Andrews  
Mr Bartlett  
Ms Beamer  
Mr Black  
Mr Brown  
Miss Burton  
Mr Collier  
Mr Corrigan  
Mr Crittenden  
Ms D'Amore  
Mr Debus  
Ms Gadiel  
Mr Gaudry  
Mr Greene  
Ms Hay

Mr Hickey  
Mr Hunter  
Mr Iemma  
Ms Judge  
Ms Keneally  
Mr Lynch  
Mr McLeay  
Ms Meagher  
Ms Megarrity  
Mr Mills  
Mr Morris  
Mr Newell  
Mr Orkopoulos  
Mrs Paluzzano  
Mr Pearce  
Mrs Perry

Mr Price  
Dr Refshauge  
Ms Saliba  
Mr Sartor  
Mr Scully  
Mr Shearan  
Mr Stewart  
Mr Tripodi  
Mr West  
Mr Whan  
Mr Yeadon

*Tellers,*  
Mr Ashton  
Mr Martin

**Pairs**

Mr Armstrong  
Mr Stoner

Ms Allan  
Mr McBride

**Question resolved in the negative.**

**Motion negatived.**

**RURAL DOCTORS**

**Mr BARTLETT** (Port Stephens) [12.18 p.m.]: I move:

That this House notes that:

- (1) the Federal RRMA classification system for the provision of doctors in rural areas has become too unwieldy;
- (2) the Federal Minister for Health should devise a more user-friendly system; and
- (3) the role "inducements" now play in securing general practitioners to rural areas is pitting rural communities against one another.

As a rule of thumb the Federal Government funds general practitioners [GPs] throughout New South Wales and Australia through the Medicare levy. Doctors are funded by the Federal Government, and State governments fund hospitals. However, many doctors work in hospitals as visiting medical officers [VMOs]. There is a link between GPs and the State hospital system. The problem I am facing in Port Stephens and other areas of the State is that single-practitioner GP services are no longer financially viable. This situation first emerged in regional and rural New South Wales, but it is now occurring in the urban areas of the Port Stephens electorate.

Soldiers Point is one of the most beautiful areas of the world. I worked with Dr Terry Linsell four years ago in an attempt to attract a doctor, but we were unsuccessful and he joined a combined practice. Dr Soraya Felix of Medowie told me two years ago that if she did not get extra help she would have to close her surgery. She claimed that she was working seven days a week and was on call almost 24 hours a day. She had almost double the average patient list and had not had holidays and was not doing the required GP training. If she could not do that training she would lose her licence. We have not had a doctor in Karuah for two years. Dr Soh, who had been working in Mayfield for 25 years, closed his doors overnight and went to a joint practice on the Central Coast. He could not succeed as a lone practitioner in general practice. That is the history of Port Stephens and that is why I have become involved in this issue.

The Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Area Scheme [RRMA] is the avenue through which rural doctors are funded, and payments are based on their distance from a city or large centre. Funding is provided for a variety of services. In Noosa, which is the most urban, cosmopolitan, well-developed area in Queensland, doctors are paid about \$25 a visit. However, a doctor at Karuah, which is 60 kilometres from Newcastle, is paid \$17.85. The scheme no longer works for doctors working in more urbanised rural and regional areas of New South Wales because it is based on distances and not on need. The RRMA classification system has become too unwieldily and it is not giving us what we need. It also creates anomalies, and attracting overseas-trained doctors is made more difficult. A town with a RRMA 2 classification cannot have an overseas-trained doctor because that requires a RRMA 4 classification. Small communities need a user-friendly review process and a flexible appeal system that allows them to crack some of the bureaucracy which has been created and which is not allowing us to attract doctors.

Some communities in New South Wales are now supplying doctors with a house and surgery, outfitting the surgery, providing four weeks annual leave and two weeks training leave, and guaranteeing their income. I spoke to Mr Mark Lynch from the New South Wales Rural Doctors Network last night and he provided me with some interesting information. The Wentworth shire is facing the same problems that we are facing in Karuah in trying to attract a doctor. It provides a building, puts the doctor, the receptionist and other staff on the council payroll, provides a housing subsidy, and allows the doctor to provide an outreach service 70 kilometres away at a settlement and to be the VMO at the local hospital, which is what it wanted.

Cobar shire is building a medical centre and Walgett shire is buying homes and surgeries for doctors. Doctors come in on an easy entry, gracious exit basis—that is, a walk in, walk out basis—because there is no capital gain or value for doctors going to a rural area and they get locked in. When Dr Felix leaves Medowie and

when Dr Soh leaves Mayfield they will not sell their businesses; they will simply walk away empty handed. There will be nothing to sell because no-one will want to buy those businesses. Doctors get no capital gain and they cannot pass on the goodwill that they have built up. They are not willing to go to towns, buy houses and surgeries, set them up and employ people because at the end of the long, hard days there will be nothing to sell.

Inducements offered to attract GPs to rural areas are pitting rural communities against one another. Meetings with Karuah residents and Hunter Health have determined that if the community wants to attract a doctor it must supply a house and a clinic, outfit the clinic, guarantee income, and provide four weeks annual leave and two weeks training leave. That is a revolution in the operation of the rural medical system. This phenomenon is now emerging in urban areas like Mayfield. The Belmont and Nelson Bay polyclinic is reliant on VMOs. The Hunter area is short about 25 GPs who would normally provide VMO services in hospital emergency departments. That shortfall in services will have a real impact on the State health system.

**Mrs HOPWOOD** (Hornsby) [12.28 p.m.]: In speaking to the motion in relation to doctors and medical and other health services in rural areas, I remind the House that the Federal Government is working, and has worked, very hard to implement initiatives to provide medical facilities and services to encourage doctors to go to and stay in rural areas. In its 2000 budget the Federal Government allocated \$562 million to the rural health budget—the largest-ever rural health budget. Since 1996 the Federal Government has spent \$2 billion— an enormous amount of money—on targeted rural health and aged care programs.

There is a huge list of Commonwealth Government initiatives to improve the availability of health services in rural communities. In partnership with rural and regional communities around Australia, the Commonwealth Government is working hard to improve access to quality health and aged care services. Since 1996 a number of programs have been introduced to strengthen the regional health work force, improve rural health education and training opportunities, and deliver improved health services for country Australia. Improved health services for country Australia have been a major plank in the Federal Government's health budgets. In 2002-03 the Federal Government is continuing its commitment to provide sustainable rural health services for the future. Obviously, this works hand in hand with making it attractive for doctors to move to rural towns.

I have personal experience in relation to rural doctors because my brother-in-law is the local doctor in Dunedoo. He has been there for 10 years or so, he has purchased his home, and he is part of the wider community. His children have gone to local schools and schools in Dubbo, and his wife and five children have settled in and are very much part of that community. He manages to get away on breaks with his family by arranging for a locum to stand in. Undoubtedly he works hard—he is the only doctor in that town, and he is responsible for an aged care facility, as well as a hospital and the surgery list—but he certainly is not complaining, and he acknowledges that the Federal Government is supporting him.

The huge list of services and other initiatives that the Federal Government is providing includes multipurpose centres. The Federal Government is concerned about the retention of doctors in country areas. To this end, it provides funding for the employment of allied health professionals, including registered nurses and visiting specialists. It also provides funding for regional health services and scholarships for doctors to train in rural areas. In 1996, 8 per cent of medical students were from regional areas, and in 2001 and 2002, 25 per cent of medical students were from rural and regional areas. The Federal Government also provides Higher Education Contribution Scheme relief for the study of medicine, as well as an incentive payment of \$60,000 over and above doctors' income for rural training. In fact, there is an increase of 4.7 per cent in the full-time equivalent of doctors in rural areas, which shows that the Federal Government initiatives are working.

The Federal Government has also set up across rural areas a network of universities and clinical schools to provide the necessary educational support for people who wish to train as doctors for rural areas. One-quarter of medical students go out to rural areas for training. I refer to the More Allied Health Services Program. When I was the Executive Director of the Australian Podiatry Association I held lengthy discussions with the Rural Doctors Network about initiatives to encourage doctors to stay in rural areas. The provision of allied health services is one of those initiatives. In 1996-97 the president of the Podiatry Association and I put together a project. We talked with the Far West Area Health Service about creating a fly in, fly out podiatry service because we realised that rural areas do not have enough podiatrists, physiotherapists and occupational therapists and that doctors will obviously be more attracted to those areas if ancillary services are available.

However, the Far West Area Health Service decided not to take up the project, and it was therefore left to the Division of General Practice in the Bourke, Brewarrina, Walgett, Lightning Ridge, Cobar area to

implement the program. Now, three or four years later, the Division of General Practice continues to work with the Podiatry Association, and a system of fly in, fly out podiatry services still exists. I am pleased to say that the service has now been extended to Broken Hill, Finley and other towns in the southern area of the State. If we work together with the Federal Government in providing initiatives for rural areas such as the More Allied Health Services Program and other health services, we will attract doctors to rural towns. The State Government has not been as proactive as it could be in thinking outside the square. It has not put into practice initiatives that will service local communities, providing health services and encouraging doctors to stay in rural areas.

Yet another Federal Government initiative is Healthy Horizons: A Framework for Improving the Health of Rural, Regional and Remote Australians. The program provides direction for developing strategies and allocating resources to improve the health and wellbeing of people in rural, regional and remote areas of Australia. Healthy Horizons identifies seven interdependent goals to focus national activity and planning on high-priority issues for the health of those people. The seven goals are to improve highest priorities first; to improve the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in rural, regional and remote Australia; to undertake research and provide better information to rural, regional and remote Australians; to develop flexible and co-ordinated services; to maintain a skilled and responsive health work force; to develop needs-based flexible funding arrangements for rural, regional and remote Australians; and to achieve recognition of rural, regional and remote health as an important component of the Australian health system.

The Commonwealth provides funding for doctors to drive quality outcomes. It also provides funding for the Practice Incentive Program, which enables rural doctors to get loadings on their activities in providing health care. The Commonwealth Government also provides funding to the Rural Doctors Network, which locates and places overseas-trained medical students. The Commonwealth Government's policy initiatives strengthen the health work force and address retention issues, and thereby increases the access of people in rural and remote areas of the State to health services. The 4.7 per cent increase in the full-time equivalent of doctors in rural areas demonstrates that the policies of the Commonwealth Government are working. I am disappointed in the criticism by the honourable member for Port Stephens of the Commonwealth Government. I understand the concerns of the community, but I believe it is incumbent upon the State Government to look outside the square and to work more closely with the Federal Government to create opportunities that improve the health of the people in rural and remote areas of the State.

**Mr MARTIN** (Bathurst) [12.38 p.m.]: I am pleased to support my colleague the honourable member for Port Stephens on this very important motion. The State Government has been proactive in helping to get doctors into rural areas. It is acknowledged that part of the problems affecting doctors generally is the Medicare rebate. Last year Country Labor asked the Federal Government to increase the rebate to doctors in rural and remote areas by 30 per cent. It has not done so, and we will continue to keep the pressure on.

The previous State Minister and the current Minister have been looking at innovative ways to help. The recently announced GP Employment Entity Grants, which the Minister for Health referred to a short time ago, are intended to be one-off grants to help support communities in which there have been particular difficulties with the general practitioner [GP] work force. Expressions of interest were called throughout the rural area health services, the Rural Division of General Practice, the Rural Doctors Network and the Rural Doctors Association. About 30 proposals were received and assessed by an expert panel. The criterion was the way in which each project might benefit the local community. Of the projects announced by the Minister in the past week 11 were successful, and they received funding ranging from \$123,500 to \$200,000.

It is important to note that this funding does not go to individual practices but to the Division of General Practice, area health services, or in many cases local councils, which will oversee the development of the project. The cost of developing a practice has been a concern of the State Government, and the GP Employment Entity Grants tackle that problem. For example, the Greater Murray Area Health Service received \$190,000 to purchase equipment such as computers, office equipment and medical supplies, to establish a GP facility on the site of the Finley Hospital. This will make it possible for current and future GPs to practise in Finley without having to outlay money to establish and maintain their own practice. This Government is helping in a very proactive and practical way.

In the Macquarie Area Health Service, the Dubbo Division of General Practice received \$200,000 to refurbish the Swift Street Medical Centre to encourage and support GPs to move to Wellington. The Outback Division of General Practice will oversee that money, and will assist with the co-location of Cobar's three doctors into one facility. The synergy in the doctors working together and the savings that will be made will encourage them to stay there while they wait, belatedly, for the Federal Government to do something about the Medicare rebate that will make it easier for them to support themselves.

In the Mid Western Area Health Service, the Central West Division of General Practice has just received \$200,000 to establish a legal entity for the specific purpose of employing salaried medical practitioners to provide GP services, especially in those areas where practice vacancies have been hard to fill. Once again, that is a proactive and innovative way to help get doctors into rural areas. The funding from the State Government has been spread right around the State. Further north, the New England Area Health Service has received \$200,000 to redevelop staff accommodation in Gunnedah, and to assist in providing a medical centre to be used by local and visiting medical specialists, doctors, and allied health professionals. Mulwaree Shire Council has received \$134,950 to provide a new GP facility at Marulan to ensure an ongoing service to the community.

Across this project there are very practical ways of setting up facilities so that doctors who come to practise in these country centres know that they can walk in and have up-to-date facilities and the support of the community. But underlying all this, as the honourable member for Port Stephens said, the problems will continue unless the classification system is made more workable. For example, in the more affluent places on the coast the rebate is \$25 but in other areas where doctors are dealing with the same problems it could be \$17.50. How can that be justified? We want the Federal Government to address that issue. In the meantime, the Government and the Minister will continue to do everything they can to ensure that rural doctors are kept working in rural areas.

**Mr GEORGE** (Lismore) [12.43 p.m.]: I disagree with the honourable member for Bathurst, who believes that this problem is associated only with remote areas. In the Lismore electorate we have a little town called Nimbin, which has had the same problem. Under the Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Areas [RRMA] classification we could not attract doctors to the area because of the problem. However, we did not just sit back and blame the Federal Government. We got together as a community. Chris Crawford of the Northern Rivers Area Health Service, the Division of General Practice, the Rural Doctors Network, the Federal member of Parliament, the Mayor of Lismore city, Merv King, and I got together and organised a meeting with other representatives of the community to try to solve this problem. As a result, the Northern Rivers Area Health Service was able to attract funding of \$194,000 from the State Government to create an entity at Nimbin to replace the doctor.

Dr Dan Oxlee's resignation from the public health system on 28 May created a lot of angst in the Nimbin area. There are about 400 residents in the town of Nimbin itself, and the population that supports the town is about 4,500 within a few kilometres of that area. Dr Oxlee's resignation left the town without a doctor. In the past three years there have been a total of four doctors there, and there are none now. With the creation of this entity a pool of eight doctors will be accessible to the Nimbin community. The Division of General Practice and the Rural Doctors Network have worked hand in hand to make sure that there is a pool of doctors to support the town and the community. The first sod has been turned to provide a new multipurpose service [MPS] at Nimbin as well.

The problem is not isolated to the RRMA. The small town of Kyogle in the Lismore electorate, which previously had four doctors, now has three doctors, and they are fast approaching retirement age—in fact, some say they are over the age of retirement—so the same problem will arise there. Urbenville, another small town west of Lismore, which is covered by the Northern Rivers Area Health Service, has one doctor. Further south of Urbenville there is a little place called Bonalbo. The doctors in that area do a tremendous job and offer support to the community. However, those doctors are also facing retirement. These isolated areas will face the same problem as Nimbin in attracting doctors, although they are not as isolated as some of the remote areas referred to in this debate.

Entities such as that in Nimbin will be created by the community in co-operation with the Government, the Division of General Practice, and the Rural Doctors Network. They will provide support to offer those communities the continuation of a service that they are entitled to. Sadly, for some unknown reason, in these remote areas those who are involved in making decisions believe that people can just catch a bus to the nearest hospital or doctor for their medical appointment. But we do not have such bus services, and it can be a two-hour trip by car to the nearest hospital or doctor. People do not have the luxury of a transport service between these communities. It is up to the State Government, the Federal Government, all tiers of government, with the other divisions I have mentioned, to join together as a community to provide medical services in these remote country areas. Services should be available, irrespective of whether they are one hour or half an hour from a major town. People in rural and regional areas cannot depend on public transport to travel to medical facilities, because it does not exist. I am very pleased that we have been able to solve the problem at Nimbin.

**Mr TORBAY** (Northern Tablelands) [12.48 p.m.]: I am pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to a debate that may assist with the provision of doctors to rural and regional areas. I congratulate the

honourable member for Port Stephens on moving the motion. I agree with the comments of previous speakers that this is a community issue. Indeed, all levels of government must work with community organisations towards reaching a constructive solution. My electorate comprises seven council areas and there are many communities within those areas. I commend the New England Area Health Service on working closely with the local community and industry in an attempt to attract doctors into rural and regional communities in my electorate. I highlight the enormous contribution by the local area health service on behalf of Emmaville, a small town that was given an area-of-need status.

The community was able to obtain the services of an overseas trained doctor. The people were happy with that doctor but, regrettably, he has now moved on and the community must again go through the process of trying to attract another doctor. The local area health service is making considerable efforts but this is difficult because of bureaucracy and red tape between various agencies. I hope that this motion encourages all levels of government to consult on ways to achieve better solutions. They need to ensure that both State and Federal programs are effective, not isolated. Programs must go hand in hand and a bipartisan approach must be taken to encouraging doctors into regional communities.

The need for doctors in country areas has also been debated at conferences. Indeed, a recent conference in Tamworth passed a resolution that doctor provider numbers should be allocated by area and that doctors must practise in a particular area. Spouse employment, quality of life and access to support and resources are all issues that must be addressed. Doctors who practise in small communities have little support, and that problem must be resolved. We have heard a little about overseas programs in which doctors are pooled. The honourable member for Lismore referred to a similar program at a local level. Incentives, such as the payment of fees, are used to attract doctors to rural and remote communities.

Indeed, this problem does not exist only in rural and remote communities; cities such as Armidale and Tamworth are struggling to retain their doctors and specialists. It is important to make every effort to acknowledge the fundamental importance of attracting skills, and support for those skills, to rural communities, particularly those smaller communities that are desperate for such services and facilities. It is not only the State and Federal governments that have been under the spotlight on this issue. On numerous occasions local councils have been called upon to take action. Inverell Shire Council has an area-of-need status and is looking for overseas-trained doctors. Recent announcements have been made with respect to that and local councils have had to use considerable ratepayers' funds to provide incentives to attract medical practitioners to their local areas. I hope that this debate will encourage people at all levels to work together in an attempt to achieve desirable solutions for our communities.

**Miss BURTON** (Kogarah—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.53 p.m.]: I agree with the comments of the honourable member for Lismore, the honourable member for Northern Tablelands and the honourable member for Bathurst that this is not a political debate. The responsibility for health services rests with both the State and Federal governments, and when one government is not pulling its weight it should be called to account. The honourable member for Hornsby said that the Federal Government is pulling its weight, but that is not so. The honourable member for Lismore gave the classic example of funding for Nimbin. The Federal Government told that town it did not qualify for assistance. The State Government then had to work with the community and provide financial support for retention of a general practitioner in that area. I give full credit to the Nimbin community for its work.

People in rural and regional areas are entitled to adequate services. The actions of the Federal Government with respect to Medicare and the unresolved insurance crisis are disgraceful. It has failed in its obligation to create incentives for doctors to move to rural locations. As a result, more and more of the burden has fallen on State governments. Also, the role of private hospitals with respect to training specialists in the larger teaching hospitals is minimal. This is important, given the Federal Government's pursuit of private health care. Bob Birrell of Monash University released a report yesterday that was prepared on behalf of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons. The report states:

In the case of the Coalition Government, there appears to be a strong preference for limiting Government obligations for hospital care to the least affluent sections of the community and an accompanying interest in moving as much as possible of the ask to the private health system ...

That is an unambiguous statement that the Commonwealth's privatisation of health care is damaging training opportunities for surgeons. More private health surgical procedures will mean fewer surgeon training opportunities in the public system. In this sense, the Commonwealth's pursuit of the privatisation of health is a guaranteed long-term failure as there is an inbuilt disincentive to train. New South Wales trains one-third of all



trainees in Australia. In 2003 there were 220 surgical trainees in New South Wales out of a national total of 604. Yesterday the Minister announced rural initiatives totalling \$2.6 billion, which were warmly welcomed by the Australian Medical Association and the Rural Doctors Association.

These grants will assist communities to retain general practitioner services in areas such as the Greater Murray, the Hunter, the Macquarie, the mid-western, the New England, the Northern Rivers and the southern areas. The budget has increased by \$244 million on last year's budget for regional and rural New South Wales—more than 10 per cent. This year's budget allocates more than \$150 million for ongoing rural and regional capital works projects, including \$11.3 million for the \$15.3 million Bourke Hospital and Health Service redevelopment, \$68.3 million for the Central Coast, \$4 million for Coledale Hospital, \$6.3 million for Hay Hospital and Health Service, \$5.2 million for Henty Hospital and Health Service, \$12.9 million for the Illawarra Area Health Service, \$7.4 million for Kyogle Hospital and Health Service, \$7 million for the Milton-Ulladulla Hospital, \$16 million in Newcastle, \$7.8 million towards the Young Hospital and Mercy facility co-location; and \$3.8 million for phase one of the Rural Hospital and Health Service Program. The State Government is committed to assisting country towns, which, by their nature, have to struggle and work hard to attract doctors.

**Mr BARTLETT** (Port Stephens) [12.58 p.m.], in reply: I thank honourable members representing the electorates of Kogarah, Hornsby, Lismore, Bathurst and Northern Tablelands for participating in this debate. I thank Coalition members for their support of the motion. As no amendment was moved, I assume that they support the motion as it stands. The honourable member for Lismore made some good points about how the local community worked together to attract doctors to Nimbin. I point out that about 20 communities in Newcastle and the Hunter are putting together inducement packages to attract doctors to the Hunter.

Putting these packages together continues to push up the ante, so there is a constant roll-out of inducements. In my opinion the bottom line is that there are not enough doctors in the system at present. I take on board everything honourable members said about what the Federal and State governments are doing to address the problem. In a media release on 29 April the former Mayor of Moree, Councillor Mike Montgomery, who is also the President of the Australian Local Government Association, said:

Australia needs more than 1,000 additional GPs in rural and regional Australia to address the shortfall.

As I said, that is the bottom line. The Federal Government supplies the general practitioners and the State Government backs up the hospital system. Hospitals will get into trouble down the track when visiting medical officers are not available to man them, because the general practitioners are not there. We now have communities in the same area health service trading off inducements, and the system is not working. Councillor Montgomery further said:

Access Economics estimates the shortfall to be between 1,200 and 2,000, with at least 700 more needed in country areas. The shortage of nurses in regional areas also needs to be addressed.

ALGA would also like to see the Federal Government provide more assistance to rural/remote shires to recruit and retain medical practitioners/medical services in small rural towns...

Despite everything the honourable member for Hornsby said the Commonwealth is doing, the bottom line is that the system is not working in the area I represent, because I cannot get general practitioners into the area. The honourable member should not claim that it is the State's problem, because the Federal Government—

**Mrs Hopwood:** I did not say that. I said we should work together.

**Mr BARTLETT:** I am saying that we should listen to the honourable member for Lismore, who said that the Lismore community had worked together and produced a result. About 20 communities in the Hunter are trying to do the same thing, and it simply pushes up the level of inducements. As my motion states, the Federal RRMA classification system for the provision of doctors in rural areas has become too unwieldy. It is simply no longer working when distance from the city is used as the means of allocating the money paid to doctors.

The Federal Minister for Health and Ageing needs to devise a more user-friendly system so that communities that do not have doctors can crash through. The amount of knowledge I now have on RRMA and doctors is unbelievable, and the red tape involved in overseas-trained doctors and the like becomes mind blowing. As my motion further states, the role that inducements now play in securing general practitioners to rural areas is pitting rural communities, and urban communities as well now, against one another. So rich

communities have been able to get a general practitioner, and poorer communities are no longer able to get a general practitioner.

**Motion agreed to.**

*[Madam Acting-Speaker (Ms Andrews) left the chair at 1.04 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]*

**BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

**Alcohol Summit: Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders**

**Motion by Mr Scully agreed to:**

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to permit the Premier to move a motion in relation to the Summit on Alcohol Abuse forthwith.

**ALCOHOL SUMMIT**

**Mr CARR** (Maroubra—Premier, Minister for the Arts, and Minister for Citizenship) [2.15 p.m.]: I move:

- (1) That this House, recognising the problem of the abuse of alcohol in the community and its impact on society, agrees to hold a Summit on Alcohol Abuse, at Parliament House, involving members of both Houses of Parliament and invited community representatives, in order to:
  - create a better understanding by members of Parliament and the community of the causes, nature and extent of the problem of alcohol abuse.
  - better inform members of Parliament and the community through a forum bringing together a range of alcohol experts, public health experts, law enforcement, industry and community representatives who reflect the spectrum of views on alcohol.
  - examine existing approaches to the problems arising from alcohol abuse and consider new ideas and new options in a bipartisan forum.
  - consider evidence regarding those strategies that work and those that do not, and in particular, to consider:
    - the effectiveness of existing New South Wales laws, policies, programs and services.
    - the cost to the community of alcohol-related harm.
    - the impact on human services and their effectiveness in responding to problems and needs.
    - the effectiveness of current resource allocations in targeting the problem of alcohol abuse.
    - the role of Commonwealth Government agencies, programs and strategies.
  - implement specific strategies to ensure the views of women, young people, Aboriginal people, rural and regional communities and people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities are fully represented at the Summit.
  - identify ways to improve existing strategies, programs and services.
  - build political and community consensus about future policy directions which target alcohol abuse and deal with its impact.
  - recommend a future course of action so that the best and most cost-effective strategies, policies and programs, both long and short term, are available to address and impact on the problem of alcohol abuse.
- (2) That the services of the Parliament of New South Wales be provided for the hosting of the Summit on Alcohol Abuse from Tuesday 26 August 2003 to Friday 29 August 2003, with plenary sessions in the Legislative Council Chamber and working groups convening in the various meeting rooms.
- (3) That the Summit be chaired by Mrs Kerry Chikarovski and the Hon. Neil Blewett.
- (4) That members of both Houses attend as parliamentary delegates and fully participate in all proceedings in accordance with the proposed Summit rules to be agreed on by the Summit.
- (5) That the non-parliamentary delegates and associate delegates, as invited by the Premier, be admitted to participate in plenary sessions and working group meetings in accordance with the Summit rules to be agreed on by the Summit.

- (6) That this House request the Summit to provide a communiqué outlining an agreed framework and directions for the Government to consider.
- (7) That the resolution be forwarded to the Legislative Council.

Our aim with the Alcohol Summit is to find fresh ideas to deal with a problem that causes immense social and economic harm. When I spoke about this concept earlier I quoted statistics, for example, about the number of police incidents that are alcohol-related. New South Wales has made significant progress battling illegal drugs, and we will maintain that effort. However, we must also initiate a new focus on alcohol abuse—how to prevent it, how to help people who are dependent and how to promote a culture where alcohol is used responsibly. The motion provides honourable members with an idea of the scope of the Summit and how it will operate. I will not be able to attend the final day of the Summit as the Prime Minister has called a Council of Australian Governments meeting in Canberra. However, the Special Minister of State, who is responsible for co-ordinating policy on alcohol abuse, will represent me. The New South Wales Summit on Alcohol Abuse is a serious attempt to understand the issues, to assess the current responses and to agree on new approaches. I encourage all members of Parliament to participate.

**Motion agreed to.**

## **MINISTRY**

**Mr CARR:** I advise the House that in the absence of the Minister for Gaming and Racing, who is ill, the Minister for Health will answer questions on his behalf.

## **MENTAL OLYMPICS GOLD MEDAL**

### **Ministerial Statement**

**Mr CAMPBELL** (Keira—Minister for Regional Development, Minister for the Illawarra, and Minister for Small Business) [2.23 p.m.]: As the Minister for the Illawarra I am proud to inform the House that four outstanding young people have done their region and their country proud. Tristan Arnold from Oak Flats, Justin Tan from Corrimall, Sally O'Donnell from Austinmer and Kathryn Mullany from Cambewarra have won gold for Australia in the Mental Olympics—The Future Problem Solving Competition in the United States of America. This competition has 250,000 participants worldwide. These four Illawarra geniuses took on 60 teams and won. I am sure all members of this House share the pride that they and their families feel at the moment.

These four brilliant young people worked incredibly hard for their success. They have had outstanding support from their school community at the Illawarra Grammar School. With the help of their coach, school librarian Jan Hales, the four students spent six months preparing for the challenge, which was based on the topic "Worldwide Communication". The problem they had to solve was whether, if all the world communication depended on satellites and the satellite system collapsed, they could devise a secure and efficient communication system that did not need satellites. They did it. In just two hours they came up with a range of futuristic high-technology options to get world communication back on an even keel.

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

**Mr CAMPBELL:** This was world-class problem solving from young people who are clearly thinkers and leaders of the future. I know that all honourable members will join me in congratulating these outstanding young achievers and acknowledging the distinction they have brought to their families, their school, their region and, above all, themselves.

**Ms SEATON** (Southern Highlands) [2.25 p.m.]: On behalf of the Opposition I have great pleasure in joining the Government in congratulating these young people—Tristan, Justin, Sally and Kathy—on their outstanding achievement in winning gold in the Mental Olympics. All honourable members who visit their local schools would know of the enormous wealth and depth of talent, both intellectual and creative, in all our young people in every school throughout New South Wales. I am particularly pleased about the great results that these four young people from the Illawarra have achieved. They have done their school, their region, their State and their country proud.

It is important to note that the people of the Illawarra are proud of the University of Wollongong and its connections in southern New South Wales. It provides fantastic facilities for further education of our young

people, particularly through the new Innovation Centre and other university facilities. I know that we will benefit from the intellectual contributions of these four young people. I hope that they stay in the Illawarra and find future careers there. Perhaps they will become teachers or mentors to other young people in the Illawarra. The Opposition has great pleasure in commending the achievements of these young people.

## PETITIONS

### **Lidcombe Hospital Heritage Precinct**

Petition objecting to the proposed use as a private school of the heritage precinct at the former Lidcombe Hospital site, received from **Mrs Hopwood**.

### **White City Site Rezoning Proposal**

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

### **Bushfires and Hazard Reduction**

Petition requesting an inquiry into the causes of bushfires and their relationship to the lack of hazard reduction, received from **Ms Hodgkinson**.

### **Spit Bridge Traffic Arrangements**

Petition opposing the proposal to add a two-lane drawbridge next to The Spit Bridge, and calling for a responsible and holistic solution to the transport, traffic, and freight needs of the area, received from **Mrs Skinner**.

### **Castle Cove Bus Services**

Petition requesting a regular daily bus service between east Castle Cove and Wynyard, received from **Ms Berejikian**.

### **Cudgen Creek Seaway**

Petitions requesting that the Cudgen Creek seaway at Kingscliff be cleared of silt, received from **Mr Cansdell**, **Mr Fraser** and **Mr R. W. Turner**.

### **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

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### **RAILCAR COSTS**

**Mr BROGDEN:** My question is to the Premier. How can he justify yet another budget blow-out with the cost of 41 outer-suburban railcars increasing from \$135 million, as reported in last year's budget, to \$171.5 million, as revealed in Tuesday's budget?

**Mr CARR:** The Government recently signed contracts for the delivery of 41 new outer-suburban railcars and 14 new Hunter railcars. The tender prices quoted by the market for both projects were higher than originally anticipated. However, as most honourable members well know, it is not until the tender process is complete that the price is set. The contract price for both projects has not increased.

## HOSPITAL EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS

**Mr GREENE:** My question is to the Minister for Health. What is the latest information on triage in New South Wales hospitals?

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

**Mr IEMMA:** One of the Government's top priorities is to provide additional support for nurses and doctors working in our hospital emergency departments. They are incredibly busy places and the personnel are under extreme pressure. That is why during my short time as Minister I have made it a priority to visit as many of our emergency departments as possible. What I found confirms the official information provided to me about the level of activity in these facilities. That is why Tuesday's budget provides further support for two major initiatives announced last year that are designed to improve the efficiency of emergency departments. More importantly, they provide support for the doctors and nurses who work extremely hard in these departments under extreme pressure.

We all know the reason for the increased pressure on these facilities: Bulk-billing rates are in free-fall and Medicare is in crisis. As the rate of bulk-billing goes down, attendances at emergency departments go up because people can no longer afford the cost of basic medical services. As after-hours general practitioner services are withdrawn, people look for cost-effective ways to obtain basic medical care and that puts pressure on emergency departments. Our ageing population is suffering from increasingly complex conditions and that also puts pressure on emergency departments, as does the onset of winter. The message being sent by senior emergency department clinicians is that we must support them with innovative ways to deal with those increased pressures.

That is why my predecessor last year announced support for the trial of two initiatives: first, the introduction of emergency medicine units at major metropolitan hospitals and, second, the introduction of rapid emergency assessment teams. Emergency medical units [EMUs] provide treatment for people who do not require inpatient hospital admission, and an observation area for tests to be carried out on them. The rapid emergency assessment teams are made up of senior clinicians and nurses, who provide rapid assessment and commence treatment for triage categories 2, 3 and 4 patients, which are the major component of patients attending hospital emergency departments.

I can report that since announcing the pilot, the results have been extremely encouraging. It is because of those encouraging results that last Tuesday the Government announced a commitment to further support the EMUs and rapid assessment teams. With respect to triage category 1 patients, who may have life-threatening conditions, the Government is meeting its target times in 100 per cent of cases. As I have said, triage categories 2, 3 and 4 patients are the major component of patients attending hospital emergency departments, and that is why the Government has targeted resources to the EMUs and rapid assessment teams to assist those patients. I am pleased to advise the House that the percentage of triage category 2 patients seen within the target time frame increased from 75 to 76 per cent. For triage category 3, the percentage of patients seen within the target time frame increased from 46 per cent to 56 per cent. For triage category 4, the percentage of patients seen within the target time frame increased from 48 per cent to 59 per cent.

Truly outstanding results have been achieved at some of the State's local hospitals. For example, at Fairfield Hospital the percentage of patients in triage category 3 seen within the target time frame increased from 61 per cent to 82 per cent, an improvement of more than 20 percentage points—something that I am sure the honourable member for Fairfield will endorse. At Gosford Hospital the percentage of patients in triage category 2 seen within the time frame increased from 43 per cent to 64 per cent, again an improvement of more than 20 percentage points. At Prince of Wales Hospital the percentage of patients in triage category 2 seen within the target time frame increased from 61 per cent to 86 per cent, an improvement of 25 percentage points. At Mount Druitt hospital the percentage of patients in triage category 4 seen within the target time frame increased from 50 per cent to 76 per cent, an improvement of 26 percentage points.

**Mr Amery:** A good local member.

**Mr IEMMA:** That is right. The honourable member for Mount Druitt is a good local member who represents the interests of the doctors and nurses of his electorate. At Bankstown hospital the percentage of patients in triage category 3 seen within the target time frame increased from 49 per cent to 76 per cent, an

improvement of some 27 percentage points. These figures demonstrate the Government's success in improving the waiting times for people presenting to hospital emergency departments. More importantly, they provide confirmation of the need for the Government to continue to support the efforts of the doctors and nurses in hospital emergency departments, who are working under extreme pressure.

The Government will continue to support those doctors and nurses by providing the resources they need to continue doing the work they are doing, improving the quality of care for the patients of the State's public hospitals and reducing waiting times in emergency departments as our hardworking doctors and nurses continue to grapple with the increased pressures placed on them. This is further evidence of the sort of support that should be coming from the Commonwealth and should be on the table on 31 July, when all the health Ministers gather for yet another attempt to urge the Commonwealth to put more resources into public hospitals so they can continue their work in supporting the doctors and nurses in the State's hospital emergency departments.

### **WORKERS COMPENSATION PREMIUMS FOR TRAINEES**

**Mr STONER:** My question is directed to the Premier. Given the Premier's claim that the reason for forcing workers compensation premiums on employers of trainees was that the system was being rorted, why did the Premier not fix the loopholes in this valuable scheme, instead of replacing it with a less-effective payroll tax exemption that will not even apply to most small businesses?

**Mr CARR:** To think that the strong leadership we once had from the National Party in this Chamber has descended to this! Whatever people thought of National Party politics, the former leaders of the National Party were effective spokespeople for rural New South Wales; they would speak up for conservative opinion in the bush. But that is not what we get today. I said yesterday that the scheme had been rorted. I also said yesterday that some firms had redefined many of their staff as trainees, to get the Government to pay for them. That is why the cost of running the scheme skyrocketed from \$4 million in 1998 to a projected \$47 million in 2004.

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

**Mr CARR:** Employers of trainees will be required to pay their workers compensation premiums. What is wrong with that, given the payroll tax support they get?

### **LANE COVE TUNNEL**

**Mr SHEARAN:** My question without notice is addressed to the Minister for Roads. What is the latest information on the Lane Cove Tunnel project?

**Mr Brogden:** That's very relevant to his electorate.

**Mr SCULLY:** It is very relevant to the electorate of the honourable member for Londonderry, because the M2 happens to start in his electorate. Members may recall that when Labor came to government, Abbott Road—for the benefit of members opposite who do not know where our road network is, Abbott Road is at the end of the M2—had to have a \$20 million upgrade. Why? Because the former Coalition Government had a four-lane, divided dual carriageway spewing into a two-lane arterial local road. We had to fix it up. So it has a lot to do with the honourable member for Londonderry. We are the Government that is building the missing links in Sydney's road network.

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

**Mr SCULLY:** The M5 East and the Eastern Distributor have already been completed—in fact, they were completed ahead of schedule—and the Western Sydney Orbital and the Cross City Tunnel have already commenced. The whole length of the M4 was widened from four lanes to six lanes under this Government. The final gap in Sydney's orbital road network is the Lane Cove Tunnel. This 3.4 kilometre gap will connect the end of M2 with the Gore Hill Freeway. That will mean that, with the Western Sydney Orbital, the Cross City Tunnel and the Lane Cove Tunnel, for the first time in Australia's history a single State will have three motorways under construction all at the same time. It shows the commitment of this Government to work in consultation with the construction industry to improve the State's road network and create jobs. Just as the M5 East returns roads to the local communities in Bexley, Arncliffe and Kogarah and Beverly Hills—

**Mr Iemma:** Increased property values too.

**Mr SCULLY:** We will not talk about increased property values. That was an unexpected consequence of that road project.

[*Interruption*]

**Mr Tink:** Point of order: The Minister is using a prop, but he is using the wrong prop. Here is a great likeness, "Bob the Burglar"!

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! I call the Minister to order. I call the honourable member for Epping to order. The Minister will continue his answer.

**Mr SCULLY:** I am told that the only training in armaments that he has ever had is wet lettuce mortars that he keeps firing over to this side. As I was saying before these characters rudely interrupted me, just as the M5 East has returned local roads to the community, so will the Lane Cove tunnel return Epping Road to the local community. It is a little embarrassing for a Labor Government to have to fix up the road network and congestion in Lane Cove. The Liberal Party did nothing during the seven years it was in government.

This Government acts for all communities. It does not just represent Labor seats; it represents the whole State and is a responsible government. In order to deal with the traffic congestion problems of Lane Cove, we called for tenders last year and four separate consortia put in bids. One consortium comprised Boulderstone Hornibrook, Bilfinger Berger, the Commonwealth Bank, and Transurban Infrastructure Developments; another consortium comprised Leighton Contractors and Deutsche Bank AG; another comprised Thiess Pty Ltd, Transfield Holdings, and ABN AMRO; and a fourth consortium comprised Ferrovial Infrastructure, Macquarie Bank, and Abigroup. All four proposals have been analysed and compared.

I am pleased to inform the House that the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] has recommended to me, and I have accepted its recommendation, that the four proposals will be reduced to a short list of two. Those consortia are: Lane Cove Motorway, comprising Leighton Contractors and Deutsche Bank AG; and Lane Cove Tunnel Consortium, comprising Thiess Pty Ltd, Transfield Holdings, and ABN AMRO. I congratulate those two successful consortia in being selected to go forward. We will give very detailed consideration to the final bids that will be put in by those two corporate structures. This Government is completely committed to finishing off the missing links that it inherited in 1995 from the incompetent characters opposite.

#### CRONULLA SEWAGE TREATMENT PLANT

**Mr HAZZARD:** My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Energy and Utilities.

**Mr Carr:** Why don't you ask me any questions?

**Mr HAZZARD:** Because you never answer any, that's why! What's the point? Why has the Minister covered up the mismanagement of the Cronulla sewage treatment plant's \$90 million upgrade—

**Mr Carr:** We built it!

**Mr HAZZARD:** Listen to the question. On 27 and 28 April, and again on 14 May, the Cronulla sewage treatment plant saw a total failure of the entire ultraviolet disinfecting system, non-compliance with Environment Protection Authority [EPA] standards, and an urgent shutdown of the system to protect the plant and the employees. Why has the Minister covered up the mismanagement of the plant's upgrade?

**Mr SARTOR:** If the Opposition cares to read the budget papers it will realise that in the coming year Sydney Water will spend \$515 million on infrastructure. It will spend \$67 million on upgrades to sewage treatment plants throughout Sydney, the Illawarra, and the Blue Mountains, \$65 million to upgrade sewage treatment plants in the Illawarra, including Bombo and Shellharbour treatment plants, \$41.9 million to maintain Sydney's drinking water network, and \$29 million to upgrade and amplify sewage treatment plants in the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment to protect those relevant to the question.

**Mr Brogden:** Answer the question.

**Mr SARTOR:** I will come to the question. Sydney Water will spend \$27 million to prevent sewage overflows into residential, commercial and industrial property, \$25 million to construct a new sewage treatment system for the northern suburbs of the Illawarra, including Coalcliff, Stanwell Tops, Stanwell Park and Otford.

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

**Mr SARTOR:** An amount of \$22 million will be used for the construction of a new sewer main and carrier in Hoxton Park for future development; \$21 million upgrading of sewage treatment plants at Georges River catchment, and so on. We also intend to provide funding for work to upgrade Bondi. Last time the honourable member made a specific allegation in the House, it was about the testing of water. Those claims were completely and utterly wrong. He completely misled the House. He got up here and made an allegation. I have visited the Malabar and Bondi sewage treatment plants, but I have not yet visited the Cronulla plant.

**Mr Hazzard:** Point of order: On the grounds of relevance. The Minister indicated he was going to get to the answer to the question. He has not yet got to it. If he needs to see the email that says they stuffed up the system, then he can have it.

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

**Mr SARTOR:** This is the man who together with his mate over there—who has gone very quiet lately—wanted to put four sewage treatment plants throughout the North Shore. This is the man who is an expert on sewage!

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

**Mr SARTOR:** The heartless fruit loop from Wakehurst talks crap. That should be the next *North Shore Times* headline. If there is a specific problem with Cronulla, I will look into it. They have all got amnesia. They have forgotten everything about this.

### DROUGHT AND GLOBAL WARMING LINK

**Mr PEARCE:** My question is addressed to the Premier. What is the Premier's response to research by Professor David Karoly of the University of Oklahoma on droughts, global warming and the Kyoto protocol?

**Mr CARR:** The honourable member ought to be congratulated on the lead role that Waverley Council has taken on environmental issues. I congratulate the council on winning a national award this month for a greenhouse gas reduction plan for its vehicle fleet. The council has shown fine leadership, as indeed the New South Wales Government is showing leadership on greenhouse issues. This week I was briefed by Professor Karoly—an Australian employed at the University of Oklahoma—on the link between drought and global warming.

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

**Mr CARR:** This is something that should interest any serious member of this House who is concerned about drought and about environmental sustainability. We all know this is a one in 100 years drought, the worst since the Federation drought of 1902-03. But it can get worse. This drought has been worsened by the impact of rising temperatures. Scientists are not arguing that the greenhouse phenomenon—global warming—generates drought. Drought is generated by an independent phenomenon, that is the El Niño effect, the irregular warming of the equatorial Pacific that occurs about once every three to seven years.

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

**Mr CARR:** It is still regarded as the prime candidate for blame when it comes to drought. The frequency and the severity of droughts in Australia are growing worse. Professor Karoly is a member of the intergovernmental panel on climate change—the leading world body on greenhouse effects—and in a briefing I had with him on Monday he pointed out that in every one of the recent droughts the average temperature has been higher. This has had huge effect on the rate at which moisture is dried out of the soils and on the rate of evaporation. It has meant that water has evaporated from dams faster than would be the case without global warming.



The daily temperature during the 1957 drought was 0.5 degrees higher than average; during the 1994 drought the temperature was 0.65 degrees higher than average; in the current drought the temperature is 1.65 degrees above average. That means faster evaporation, the speeding up of the loss of soil moisture and water from dams. Dr Karoly has shown that the drought in the Murray-Darling is even worse because of global warming. It should be remembered that the Murray-Darling produces 40 per cent of Australia's agricultural output. Between March and November 2002 rainfall in the Murray-Darling Basin was at its lowest recorded level, only 45 per cent of normal rainfall and—this is the point—average daily temperatures during the current drought in that region have been 2.14 degrees higher than on average.

This cannot be explained by El Niño and it cannot be explained by normal climate variability.

Global warming means: first, more severe droughts due in part to greater evaporation; second, more frequent and intensive bushfires; and, third—a matter of great concern to the insurance industry in Australia—more extreme weather events such as the April 1999 hailstorms. They were the most costly natural disaster ever in Australia. The likelihood is that future hailstorms will be vastly more severe than that one in April 1999. That is a direct effect of the climate variability—the weather variability—that comes with global warming. It means more thunderstorms and flash floods.

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

**Mr CARR:** It means, of course, reduced snow cover and shorter ski seasons. Against this background, this Government has taken the lead in Australia on greenhouse issues, taking the position that the Federal Government should, in our economic and environmental interest, ratify the Kyoto protocol. Its decision not to ratify becomes less defensible by the day, and less defensible in terms of the economic interests of rural New South Wales, given the linkage between drought severity and global warming. This ought to be a matter of great concern to farmers and farm organisations, because if the trends of the last 50 years are anything to go by, the next drought, expected within a decade, will be even worse than this one. The moisture will evaporate even faster because during that drought, produced by El Niño consequences, the average temperature will be even higher. Therefore, the drought will be more severe.

I mentioned that we have taken the lead on greenhouse issues in this State. We should not forget that in January this Government took the tough decision to impose greenhouse benchmarks for the State's electricity retailers. That means imposing legally binding targets for greenhouse retailers. The Commonwealth argues that Australia should be there with the United States refusing to sign up on Kyoto and refusing to take measures like this. Let the Commonwealth think about the consequences of the next drought in Australia if global warming continues! I am not saying that global warming causes drought; I am saying it worsens or aggravates the effect of drought brought on by what is happening over the Pacific. The Opposition scorns this because it is not interested in global warming or greenhouse. It has no policies and will not join the Government in urging the Commonwealth to sign Kyoto.

**Mr O'Farrell:** Point of order: Mr Speaker—

**Mr CARR:** They are not interested in what this means for rural New South Wales. I thank the House for its attention.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! Does the Deputy Leader of the Opposition still wish to take a point of order?

**Mr O'Farrell:** We are not interested in the Premier's job application for the Federal leadership of the ALP.

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

#### ARMIDALE POLICE STATION

**Mr TORBAY:** My question without notice is to the Minister for Police. Now that funding has been included in the budget for the new police station at Armidale, can the Minister advise when an announcement regarding public requests for proposals for this project will be made?

**Mr WATKINS:** A total of \$4.762 million has been provided in the New South Wales police capital budget for this important work to be done in Armidale.

**Mr Fraser:** Point of order: Mr Speaker, I draw your attention to Standing Order 141, which deals with the procedure for lodging questions on notice.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! I call the honourable member for Coffs Harbour to order. There is no point of order. The honourable member for Coffs Harbour will resume his seat.

**Mr Fraser:** Nowhere does it say that a member should lodge a question on notice with a Minister. In fact, he should lodge it with the Clerk. If he has not lodged it with the Clerk, it should be a dorothy dixer and given to the Government.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! I call the honourable member for Coffs Harbour to order for the second time. The Minister has the call.

**Mr WATKINS:** A total of \$4.762 has been set aside for the police station in Armidale and \$2 million of that is allocated in this year's budget. I am advised that expressions of interest were called inviting local property owners and developers to submit proposals to provide this new police station in Armidale. Project time frames are subject to the outcome of that process. When that process is completed we will be able to give more specific information to the honourable member.

Whilst the fit-out details are yet to be finalised, the new station will provide modern accommodation for the police. This will include: disabled access to a public area and waiting rooms; office accommodation and facilities for police and support staff; interview rooms; communications rooms; intelligence gathering facilities; training facilities; charging facilities and cells; and van dock and prisoner management facilities. This is just one part of our plan to improve police accommodation throughout New South Wales. I pay special tribute to the hardworking member, who is a tireless member of this House. He is constantly banging on my door and the doors of other Ministers saying, "When are you going to assist this important part of New South Wales?"

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

**Mr WATKINS:** I thank him also for providing me with the opportunity to report to the House that for the first time the police budget in New South Wales will be more than \$2 billion, an enormous sum of money provided to the hardworking men and women that serve all electorates, including the electorate of the fine member for Northern Tablelands.

### VETAFARM WAGGA WAGGA

**Mr MORRIS:** My question without notice is to the Minister for Regional Development. What is the latest information on Vetafarm in the Riverina?

**Mr CAMPBELL:** I thank the honourable member for his interest in small business, particularly in regional New South Wales. Vetafarm is a successful veterinary diagnostic and pharmaceutical company based in Wagga Wagga. It targets the high-value end of the market and specialises in animal products. I congratulate its owners, Colin Davis and Tony Gestier, on their innovation, determination and creative approach to developing a global business. Vetafarm's success has grown steadily since the business was created in the backroom of a veterinary surgery more than a decade ago. It now employs 20 workers and plans to expand to a second site in the Bowen industrial area of Wagga Wagga.

This will create up to six new jobs over the next two years. Vetafarm will spend \$450,000 on this expansion, which will enable it to grow by up to 40 per cent—all good news for the Wagga Wagga community. The company is now the leading Australian avian health care company. Its products are used nationwide for everything from canaries to ostriches to keeping our racing pigeons in peak condition. As well as looking after birds, its range of 300 innovative products also caters for dogs, horses, zoo animals and fish. This small business is an example of innovation and creativity which the New South Wales Government is keen to support in regional communities.

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

**Mr CAMPBELL:** Vetafarm identified niche markets and has gone for broke. For example, Vetafarm is the only company in Australia making floating flamingo food for Filipino fanciers. Today Wagga Wagga's flamingo food is being sold to markets in the Philippines. Most members would acknowledge that it is pretty hard to make the average pet reptile swallow a pill. Vetafarm has a great solution to this tricky problem.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! I call the honourable member for Upper Hunter to order.

**Mr CAMPBELL:** Simply put it on your average pet snake. The company now markets a range of vitamin and mineral supplements, including a vitamin D supplement for stress relief of captive snakes—not snake oil salesmen but salesmen of snake oil! Vetafarm has developed a seal pill, a vitamin E and thiamine supplement. Seals at Taronga Zoo and Sea World happily swallow their Vetafarm pills hidden inside their daily frozen fish. Specialist products are being sold in Europe, Pakistan, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the Middle East, South Korea, Indonesia, Thailand and the Bahamas.

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

**Mr CAMPBELL:** It is fairly obvious from the reaction of members opposite that they have no interest in the innovation of small business in New South Wales. I am sure the honourable member for Wagga Wagga is disgusted with the approach of members opposite who clearly do not want to understand that this business is a serious business in regional New South Wales.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! There is too much audible conversation on both sides of the Chamber. The Minister has the call.

**Mr CAMPBELL:** Vetafarm has established a joint venture in Xian, China, which is home of the famous terracotta warriors. This business is opening new opportunities in the massive Chinese market. Vetafarm is now turning its attention to two other major overseas markets. The New South Wales Government is working with Vetafarm to help the company export to Japan and America. We have helped the company target the enormous American market, where there are more than 50 million pet birds. Recently the New South Wales Government helped the company investigate opportunities for its products in Japan. Honourable members will be pleased to know that this venture has already had some success. Vetafarm has now received Japanese orders for its bird products, based on the recent New South Wales Government assisted visit. I congratulate Vetafarm on its success to date, and I look forward to providing further information about Vetafarm's success—success that benefits the Wagga Wagga community.

#### TAFE FEES

**Mrs SKINNER:** My question is addressed to the Minister for Education and Training. How does the Minister justify dramatic increases in TAFE fees when clause 5.2 (a), in chapter 7 of "New South Wales Labor Policy", which I printed off the Internet just 10 minutes ago, states a commitment to "abolishing all fees in TAFE for mainstream vocational courses"?

**Dr REFSHAUGE:** I thank the honourable member for her question. After 179 questions this session, this is the first time the shadow Minister for Education and Training has asked me a question. But let us not take her for granted. There is some fairly powerful stuff in the *North Shore Times* about the honourable member for North Shore. As she relinquished the shadow health portfolio and handed it over to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition—

**Mr Brogden:** Point of order: My point of order relates to relevance. The Minister wants to talk about health. He was sacked from the health portfolio. Talk about education!

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

**Dr REFSHAUGE:** The *North Shore Times* stated:

Mrs Skinner said Mr O'Farrell was a very good choice and she had recommended him as her replacement. She said, "He has got a bit of mongrel".

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

**Dr REFSHAUGE:** The honourable member for North Shore said that both she and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition had a bit of mongrel, which was necessary to do that job. We have not noticed that mongrel in the honourable member for North Shore. TAFE fees in New South Wales are the cheapest of all TAFE fees throughout Australia.

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

**Dr REFSHAUGE:** New South Wales is the only State to provide exemptions for people on benefits. No other State provides a total fee exemption to people on benefits. That means that 120,000 TAFE students in New South Wales pay not one cent for their TAFE courses.

**Mrs Skinner:** Point of order: My point relates to relevance. I asked about Labor Party policy on fees for TAFE students, not exemptions.

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

**Dr REFSHAUGE:** Interestingly, the fee changes will not affect 60 per cent of TAFE students.

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

**Dr REFSHAUGE:** It is interesting to note an article in today's *Sydney Morning Herald* about Lisa Kelly, who is doing a fashion course at East Sydney TAFE. She was asked about the TAFE fee increases.

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

**Dr REFSHAUGE:** She said, "If fashion is what you really want to do, an extra \$300 is not a lot more." This student said that the fee increase is of little consequence to her. If Opposition members are concerned about the small increase in fees that Lisa Kelly will pay, what would they say to Brendan Nelson, who is making a medical degree cost \$100,000?

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The Leader of the Opposition will cease interjecting.

**Dr REFSHAUGE:** Where will the people from Western Sydney, from the poor areas of Sydney and the regions go to get their medical degrees if Brendan Nelson is making a medical degree cost \$100,000?

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

**Dr REFSHAUGE:** TAFE fees are nowhere near that amount. Members opposite have got their priorities wrong. They should be taking the fight up to Brendan Nelson to make university education affordable for those who want it, those who need it and those who can perform in highly competitive courses. No doubt they support a system whereby students get into courses not on merit but on whether they can pay.

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

**Dr REFSHAUGE:** We do not support that, and we have exemptions so that 120,000 people do not have to pay one cent for their TAFE courses, while members opposite support a system in which becoming a doctor costs \$100,000.

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

## CONSUMER PROTECTION

**Ms ANDREWS:** My question without notice is addressed to the Minister for Fair Trading. What is the latest information on the efforts of Fair Trading to protect consumers and crack down on unscrupulous traders?

**Ms MEAGHER:** Fair Trading has an impact on everybody's lives. It is interesting to note that recent estimates suggest that in the past year the Office of Fair Trading performed four million direct services to customers. This means the Office of Fair Trading is providing a direct service to a significant proportion of the State's estimated population of 6.7 million people. This includes approximately 1.4 million inquiries by phone or through its network of 22 Fair Trading centres throughout New South Wales as well as the Registry of Co-operatives and Association at Bathurst; more than 750,000 visitor sessions on the web site; over one million checks on the Register of Encumbered Vehicles; approximately 500,000 licence and business name related transactions; over half a million rental bond lodgments or refunds; and more than 24,000 fair trading complaints.

The most common areas of these complaints are second-hand motor vehicles, residential building, including contractual disputes and workmanship, major household items including electrical items and whitegoods, home furnishings and furniture, and personal apparel including clothing, footwear and accessories. Other common complaints are about computers, advertising and publishing, travel, scam letters, and mobile phones. Following on from these areas of complaint, a significant feature of Fair Trading's work is its investigative and compliance operations. Fair Trading has more than 140 investigators. In 2001-02, for example, the Office of Fair Trading undertook some 2,500 inspections and close to 2,000 investigations. We prosecuted

162 defendants for a total of 735 offences resulting in penalties totalling more than \$640,000. So far this financial year we have been successful against 85 defendants on close to 500 charges and fines, and penalties totalling more than \$650,000 have been imposed.

One of the jobs of the compliance division is to pursue shonky traders and operations that attempt to fleece or mislead New South Wales consumers. One such case was Joseph Yang, who was permanently disqualified from acting as a real estate agent after an investigation of his trust account revealed a deficiency of \$400,000. He continued to defy Supreme Court orders and in August 2002 was found guilty of contempt and sentenced to nine months imprisonment. The Government is also ensuring our legislative framework assists in protecting consumers while encouraging a fair and robust economy. Reforms include protecting job seekers in the employment agency sector, overhauling real estate industry laws—including fairer auctions—improving consumer protection when dealing with the finance broking industry, and protecting long-term users of holiday parks. Whether it is pursuing a non-compliant trader or protecting residents of retirement villages, Fair Trading is working hard to meet its obligations to the New South Wales consumer.

**Questions without notice concluded.**

## **CONSIDERATION OF URGENT MOTIONS**

### **Telstra Privatisation**

**Mr BLACK** (Murray-Darling) [3.22 p.m.]: My motion is urgent because once again in the back blocks of New South Wales the National Party is happily rattling away on the interests of regional and rural dwellers. It is urgent, because John Cobb, Federal member for Parkes, has informed the people of western New South Wales that he now supports the sale of Telstra. The National Party in this House held back implementing anything for nine months. It is urgent because we need to find out precisely what deals the National Party did with the Federal Leader of the National Party, John Anderson, the Federal Minister for Agriculture, Warren Truss, and the member for Parkes, John Cobb.

The matter is urgent because \$181 million has allegedly been placed on the table to fix Telstra. We know that is far from enough. According to independent reports, the money required is \$15 billion. The matter is urgent because services in the bush have not been upgraded to acceptable standards. This matter is urgent because of what we heard yesterday. We heard that Telstra is going to be flogged off while 98 per cent of the Australian population have reserved their verdict. It is urgent because National Party people—lapdogs of the Liberal party—are saying that the other 2 per cent do not deserve to get a service. National Party people in the bush are saying it is good enough to stay with a pigeon service because some people in the Federal Government today say a pigeon service is better than the quality of service that Telstra is delivering. Today we are told that the \$181 million will fix what is required to provide adequate, financially viable telecommunications services to the bush. This is a dead cop. Areas in the Blue Mountains and on the North Coast are still not in receipt of any form of mobile service, apart from, if you can afford it, one off the satellite

Whenever the Federal Government or any State government has gone down the road of privatisation of any essential service it has led to disaster. I mention specific cases. I mention gas in Victoria, electricity in Auckland and water under a Liberal government in South Australia. What happened to our water in South Australia? The argument we hear from the National Party is a copout. National Party members are betraying their own people, the people they profess to represent. Only two members of the National Party are present in the Chamber; the other 10 walked out. Had this deal they have done been exposed before 22nd March, the National Party would not have had 12 members elected to this Parliament.

There has been an absolute outrage about and opposition to the intended sale—opposition to the National Party copout. The presenters of this morning's *Today* program brought out the emails—and not everybody in New South Wales gets that program, because of the lousy quality of telecommunications services these people provide—and not one email professed to say that services out in the bush were adequate. Everybody in the bush is saying that these services must be improved, and \$181 million is not going to fix it. Independent reports say it requires \$15 billion. This is the most urgent issue before the House today. [Time expired.]

### **Ethanol Blended Petrol**

**Mr ARMSTRONG** (Lachlan) [3.27 p.m.]: Question time today reinforced further why my motion is the urgent motion of the day. From Tuesday 1 July a maximum of 10 per cent of ethanol will be allowed in motor spirit in New South Wales. Effectively, that means there will be zero ethanol in motor spirit, and the greenhouse emissions from car exhausts in New South Wales will be reduced. Using only 10 per cent of ethanol means a 30 per cent reduction in exhaust emissions. This afternoon the Premier said, and I thank him for saying it, "This Government is taking the lead on greenhouse issues." Here is a chance for the Government to support a

classic greenhouse issue and reduce the smog that was over Mascot last Monday. This is an opportunity for Country Labor to support the sale of a million tonnes of grain each year to just one manufacturer of ethanol in New South Wales. This is an opportunity for Country Labor to support the establishment of another ethanol plant at Gunnedah, another on the North Coast, and another in mid-western New South Wales that is currently being discussed with local government.

The matter is urgent because if we do not take the initiative now and support the Federal Government—persuade, bully, badger them—to make it mandatory that our petrol contains 10 per cent ethanol, we will lose the opportunity for more competition within the grains and sugar industries. We will lose potentially 250 to 280 families from Nowra, if the Manildra mill rolls over. We will lose 500 existing jobs in the New South Wales ethanol industry. The motion is urgent because of the smog factor in this city. In the area of lung diseases and research into cancer, there is probably no more eminent a professor than Professor Ray Kearney from the University of Sydney. Earlier this year Professor Kearney said that the smog problems of Sydney are one of the major factors in the cause of lung cancer and other respiratory diseases, particularly asthma in children. He reinforced that view last Sunday morning on the *Australia All Over* program. In recent weeks we have heard that the Government is trying to address the incidence of asthma. In an article in one of the local papers, a reporter, referring to an accompanying illustration, stated:

It contains images of two real lungs, a city lung and a country lung, using photographs provided by Professor Kearney, an associate professor of Sydney University's department of infectious diseases and immunology. The photos were supplied to him as "typical" by the university's pathology department.

Quoting Professor Kearney, the article continued:

"One is typical of the lungs of rural people and one is the type of lung which surgeons see in Sydney, day in and day out," he says. "If you take anyone who has lived in Sydney for an extended period, that photograph would be representative of the average lung."

I apologise if I do not say often enough that this matter is urgent. But there is nothing more urgent than lung disease.

**Mr Martin:** Point of order: Members on this side of the House do support the ethanol industry because it will create thousands of jobs from Nowra to the top of the State. We are behind the honourable member for Lachlan all the way.

**Mr ARMSTRONG:** I thank the honourable member for Bathurst for his commitment on behalf of the Government of New South Wales to my urgent motion. I look forward to an extended debate on this urgent motion this afternoon. That is a great accolade. We can work together to reduce smog and pollution in Sydney, to improve children's health, to reduce the incidence of lung cancer, to reduce the cost of public health, and to give people a better quality of life. It must be recognised that we have a one-off opportunity to stop the major oil companies from blocking ethanol in our pumps as from 1 July. It must become mandatory, as it is in most States of America, that our motor spirits contain at least 10 per cent ethanol. If we are to address health issues, maintain jobs and provide alternative competition in the sugar and grains industries of New South Wales, my urgent motion must be supported. It is urgent that we help the people of Sydney and New South Wales and address their health issues. I ask the House to support my motion. [*Time expired.*]

**Question—That the motion for urgent consideration of the honourable member for Murray-Darling be proceeded with—put.**

**The House divided.**

**Ayes, 53**

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

**Noes, 31**

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

**Pairs**

Ms Allan	Mr Brogden
Mr McBride	Mr Souris

**Question resolved in the affirmative.**

**Motion agreed to.**

**TELSTRA PRIVATISATION****Urgent Motion**

**Mr BLACK** (Murray-Darling) [3.42 p.m.]: I move:

That this House opposes the sale of Telstra.

As I stated in my introduction establishing urgency, we need to know what the National Party has been up to and what secret deal honourable members have done with their Federal mates on the timing of the Telstra announcement. Allegations have been made that the honourable member for Upper Hunter arranged with John Anderson, Mark Vaile and John Cobb to delay announcing the sale of Telstra until after the March election. It is remarkable to see the one true country leader of the National Party—the Hon. Ian Armstrong—time and again leading these debates rather than the accountant and businessman who tries to represent the bush. The measures announced by Richard Alston yesterday will not scratch the surface of Telstra's problems.

I draw the attention of the House to a letter in the *Land*—hardly a great socialist bible, but it is the historical bible of the National Party. This interesting letter states:

So the National Party intends to change its image.

Why would they bother changing again, when once they gave the image of trusted friends who would stick up for you, but now have succeeded in perfecting the image of a gang of Liberal lap dogs.

This image can best be described as perfect, considering the way they skilfully sold out the shooters, turning many into criminals for refusing to surrender their firearms.

The list goes on and on detailing the way these National Party lapdogs have ratted on their constituencies. Now they are all crawling to their Liberal Party masters. I will go through the sorry saga of Telstra and what has occurred since 2 March 1996, when the Howard Government was elected after promising to privatise the carrier. On 11 December 1996 the bill enabling the sale of one-third of Telstra was passed by the Senate with the support of Independents Mal Coulston—what a specimen he was—and Brian Harradine, the escapee from Tasmania. They cleared the way for a \$14.3 billion public float. On 17 November 1997 Telstra debuted on the Australian Stock Exchange with 1.8 million investors making an immediate 30 per cent profit as the value of the \$1.95 first instalment shares jumped to \$2.60. On 21 June 1999 the bill enabling the sale of another 16.6 per cent of Telstra was passed by the Senate, again with the support of those two notable senators, Coulston and Harradine.

The T2 instalment receipts hit the Australian Stock Exchange on 18 October 1999, raising \$16 billion to repay government debt. On 19 March 2000 the Government announced an inquiry into regional

telecommunications headed by Tim Besley. On 20 September 2000 the Besley report was released and revealed problems with mobile coverage, repair and installation of basic phone services—how marvellous to establish an inquiry to make that discovery—and slow Internet access, which the Government promised to fix. On 2 November 2000 T2 investors faced an average paper loss of almost \$800 each and paid the second part of a \$7.40 purchase price for shares whose value had fallen to \$6.27. On 26 October 2001 Treasurer Peter Costello revealed the Government's plans to sell the rest of Telstra in three equal tranches at \$5.49 a share.

The Howard Government was unfortunately re-elected on 10 November 2001 based on a racist lie about children being thrown overboard and it promised not to sell the remaining 50.1 per cent of Telstra until services in the bush were up to scratch. On 16 August 2002 National Party member and cotton farmer Dick Estens was appointed to conduct a second inquiry into regional telecommunications. He declined to visit the regions to consult with telecommunications service users; he did not want to know about the public. He is one of Anderson's mates in Gwydir and he was wandering around taking orders through Anderson from the Liberal Party.

John Cobb said yesterday that privatisation would push forward the expansion of services in the bush by up to 10 years and insisted that safeguards had been established. He also stated that as the National Party went through the package with the Government, it came to a point at which it dug in its heels and a task force was established to report to the Prime Minister every three months to ensure that regional services kept pace with those in the rest of Australia. What nonsense! We know that vast areas of the bush have no mobile services other than those utilising satellites. Yesterday's *Rural News* carries an article that states:

Mr Windsor—

Referring to Federal Independent member of Parliament Tony Windsor—

says country people will suffer if Telstra is fully privatised, and this latest package won't guarantee that service standards are maintained. "What is happening here is a short-term cash grab with no long term commitment at all. And to say that 100 CDMA towers across Australia is going to solve the problem, there is absolutely no way that a fully privatised Telstra will make sure that those that have distance to contend with, will have equity of access in terms of pricing.

We have these magnificent Independents from the bush—the real Opposition. What a hopeless lot the rest of them are. National Party members have caved in to the Liberal Party. The real Opposition members have joined Tony Windsor to push the cause forward to get good services for the bush. What do we get? Today we get a statement from Telstra that "Telstra aims to allay full privatisation fears." I do not know how much the Federal Government is going to spend to do that, but it will cost a lot more than \$181 million. Telecommunications analyst Paul Budde doubts whether the Government will secure the numbers to get it through. This renowned telecommunications analyst, whom everyone wants to use, says:

If you want to upgrade the network in Australia, it costs approximately \$15 billion.

Now, \$10 billion won't be a problem in cities and major regional towns et cetera, but you are left with \$5 billion in uneconomic, unviable areas.

Who's going to address \$5 billion in these areas if you don't get a return on your investment?

Does that ring a bell? The TAB was privatised, and now all sorts of other organisations are ruining country races. Which services are the first to go? The ones in the bush. That is what is going to happen with the privatisation of Telstra.

**Mr Stoner:** What do your Federal mates say?

**Mr BLACK:** Opposition communications spokesman Lindsay Tanner accused National Party leader John Anderson of selling out his constituency by supporting the Telstra sale. Lindsay Tanner said:

Instead of the tough as old boots characters that used to run the National Party, we've now got a leader in Gucci gumboots, a leader that sounds and acts like a Liberal.

He said that a fully privatised Telstra would abandon the bush once it was sold. Lindsay Tanner went on to say:

A fully privatised Telstra will be a huge private monopoly too powerful for any government to effectively regulate. It will leave the town quicker than the banks.

We know how quickly the banks left regional and rural New South Wales in the 1990s. The Leader of the National Party wanted to know what our Federal colleagues said, but what about members of the Opposition?



This lot opposite want to flog off Telstra. I have a document with an interesting headline: "Alby Schultz". It says, "Schultz still rejects the full sale of Telstra." The document was posted on Thursday 26 June at 10.43 Australian Eastern Standard time.

**Ms SEATON** (Southern Highlands) [3.52 p.m.]: Today we have seen a great contrast between the record of the Federal Coalition Government and the shameful record of the Carr Labor Government on community consultation about important community issues. It is important that we place on record the story of a Federal Coalition Government that consults on major policy issues, for example, the GST. The Prime Minister, John Howard, should be congratulated and acknowledged for having the courage to take to the community a fully costed, comprehensive and revealing set of recommendations on proposals about a new tax system. The Federal Government has also taken responsibility for consulting the community on issues such as arrangements for custodial parents sharing responsibility for children after the separation of marriages. It has been open in its community consultation on issues such as maternity leave and workplace arrangements for women. Similarly, it has consulted the community about proposals for—

**Mr Stewart:** Point of order: The honourable member for Southern Highlands is not addressing the motion but speaking about issues that do not relate to the substance of the motion. We do not even get mobile phone coverage in Bankstown—let alone in the bush! The honourable member for Southern Highlands should tell the House why her Federal colleagues cannot deliver mobile services to the bush, and why she is here as the Liberal protecting the National Party.

**Mr DEPUTY-SPEAKER:** Order! I uphold the point of order. I ask the honourable member for Southern Highlands to address the substance of the motion.

**Ms SEATON:** I will, of course, address the motion. Before I was interrupted I was about to say that the Federal Government has also been open in its community consultation on proposals relating to the future arrangements for telecommunications in this country. The Federal Government has also consulted with the community about issues such as the way we run our schools, and meeting the needs of students and families. It has consulted the community on all these issues, because it respects the views of Australian people. It is important that we contrast this with a very different picture in New South Wales. What a contrast indeed! The Carr Government keeps its plans secret. Before the election the Premier forgot to tell the people of New South Wales about the introduction of new fees for TAFE students. We also did not hear a word about the Government's proposal to impose on employers the responsibility for WorkCover premiums.

**Mr Whan:** Point of order: My point of order relates to relevance. You have already directed the honourable member for Southern Highlands to keep her remarks relevant. Clearly she has strayed from the motion, which relates to the sale of Telstra. So far she has spoken for 30 seconds on that subject and for several minutes on everything other than that subject. If Opposition members do not want to talk about Telstra, they should not seek the call.

**Mr DEPUTY-SPEAKER:** Order! I uphold the point of order. I am sure the honourable member for Southern Highlands will return to the substance of the motion.

**Ms SEATON:** We did not hear a word from the Premier before the election about his plans to force amalgamations on councils. It is important that we advise the House of the processes of consultation undertaken by the Federal Government on the future of telecommunications services in Australia. The Besley inquiry, conducted in 2000, investigated extending mobile telephone coverage in Australia. Major improvements resulted from that inquiry, and the Federal Government invested \$163 million in those improvements. The honourable member for Murray-Darling referred to mobile phone coverage. I happen to have in my possession a leaked document, which I am sure the honourable member for Murray-Darling has probably seen. The document speaks about a constituent of the honourable member for Murray-Darling who contacted him about mobile phone coverage on his farm near Cobar. A note came back to the honourable member for Murray-Darling saying that the constituent:

... phoned to say thanks for organising the new mobile phone tower close to his property—his phone works well. A good outcome! Another vote! I took the praise on your behalf!!!

The document is signed "K", and it is dated 27 February this year.

**Mr Orkopoulos:** Point of order: The question that needs to be answered is: Does the honourable member for Southern Highlands support the sale of Telstra?

**Mr DEPUTY-SPEAKER:** Order! There is no point of order. The honourable member for Southern Highlands has the call.

**Ms SEATON:** This is the result of the \$163 million provided by the Federal Government to implement the recommendations in the Besley inquiry, delivering benefits in the Murray-Darling electorate. The Federal Government then undertook the Dick Estens inquiry, which was concluded last November. That inquiry resulted in 39 recommendations, all of which the Federal Government has adopted. The Federal Government has also allocated \$181 million in funding over the next four years to implement the Estens inquiry findings, together with a \$143 million national broadband package to update regional communications. Since 1996 the Federal Government has contributed an additional \$1 billion to targeted projects for telecommunications improvements. I do not know how many members have taken the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the 39 recommendations of the Estens inquiry, so I take the opportunity to do that now, because they are very important.

The Federal Government has accepted all of the 39 recommendations of the inquiry and will invest \$181 million in a comprehensive response that will ensure all Australians have access to adequate telecommunications services, enhance a range of existing services, and ensure that regional Australia continues to share equitably in the benefits of future technologies. This response from the Federal Government will be delivered in full, regardless of any change in the future ownership of Telstra. The response also properly satisfies the Coalition's election commitment that it would not progress any further sale of Telstra until arrangements are in place to ensure that Australians have access to adequate telecommunications services.

On the subject of competition and consumer safeguards, one of the key overall findings of the inquiry was that a competitive market is central to delivering high-quality, advanced telecommunications, including in regional Australia. As a result of the Coalition's competition reforms, local, STD, international and mobile call prices have fallen, and a raft of new mobile, Internet and data services are available from multiple providers. In 1997 there were three licensed phone companies. There are now 89 separate licensed phone companies, 40 per cent of which operate in regional areas. The inquiry response will further stimulate competition in regional telecommunications.

Other recommendations of the inquiry cover the issue of adequacy of services. In order to ensure adequacy of services the inquiry recommended, in recommendation 4, that Telstra be required to provide a formal undertaking to the Government to raise the reliability of its worst-performing exchange service areas, with time frames and funding commitments, and that the Government impose a licence condition on Telstra to provide a minimum dial-up Internet speed of 19.2 kbps or equivalent throughput over its fixed line network. The Government fully accepted those recommendations, and they are now being implemented as a matter of urgency. [*Time expired.*]

**Mr MARTIN** (Bathurst) [4.02 p.m.]: I join my colleague the honourable member for Murray-Darling in supporting this very simple but very important motion opposing the sale of Telstra. We know that the Howard Government waited until after 22 March, with the complicity of the other side of the House. The honourable member for Upper Hunter is too embarrassed to be here at the moment. Members of the Opposition knew about this before 22 March, but swept it under the carpet because the National Party knew it was going to do a backflip. They resorted to secret backroom deals to stop the sale from taking place before the March election.

What we have heard already in this debate has bordered on the bizarre. The Liberal member for the affluent Southern Highlands—who, incidentally, in 1995 was in a vicious campaign against the National Party candidate, Katrina Hodgkinson, who turned up through another back door—has led for the Opposition in this important debate. We want a simple answer from the Leader of the National Party. Do members of the National Party support the sale of Telstra or not? Will they have the guts to go down to Canberra and do what their mates in Queensland did? The National Party in Queensland was prepared to buck John Anderson and John Howard and say, "We are not going to sell out country and rural people; we are going to oppose the sale of Telstra." Have they got the guts to do that? No, they have not. But this side of the House will. This is a fundamental question that is important to the bush and we are not going to waiver from that course. We will oppose the sale of Telstra.

**Mr DEPUTY-SPEAKER:** Order! Members from the opposition benches should restrain themselves. They may seek the call at the appropriate time.

**Mr MARTIN:** I have not warmed up yet. This is a passionate debate, and I apologise to anyone who thinks I am getting a bit passionate about this, but I know exactly how the people out in the bush feel about it.

The honourable member for Southern Highlands says there has been consultation. Let John Howard and John Anderson go into an election on the full sale of Telstra. Let us have real consultation—a consultation in the ballot box is what counts. The National Party has been hypocritical on this issue—it is almost the National hypocritical party.

This is the Leader of the National Party's big chance. He has remained silent on this issue. He knew about it before 22 March and was not game to raise his voice. He has been in the position for three months and he is going backwards already. He is so good he is starting to make the honourable member for Upper Hunter look like a leader. That is a pretty fair achievement. I believe the honourable member for Upper Hunter would have been prepared to get up here and say, "I oppose the sale of Telstra"—but we will never know because he has been banished to the back blocks. But the National Party sent in the honourable member for Southern Highlands to lead in this debate. I am surprised GI Joe was not behind her.

We heard an apology but at no time did we hear the honourable member for Southern Highlands utter the words, "We oppose the sale of Telstra." That is what the Government wants to hear. Where do the National Party and the Liberal Party stand on this issue? They should talk to the people of New South Wales, as Country Labor does. I am sure the Independents—who seem to have struck terror on this side of the House—have been out in the country and know what people feel about this. If there is a full sale of Telstra any thoughts of getting a decent rollout and upgraded facilities in the bush will be gone. This is the last chance for us to stand up and look after people in regional areas.

There is no need to go way out west into the Murray-Darling electorate—one has only to go into my electorate, which, by comparison, is almost coastal electorate—to find the dead spots in telecommunications. I am sure other members of this House who are much closer to the coast than the member for Murray-Darling would have the same story. If the Leader of the National Party wants a test of leadership he has it right here this afternoon. He needs to get up and say, "I support this motion. I am against the sale of Telstra and I am prepared to go down there and say to John Anderson and John Howard, 'Don't do it'." He is selling out the interests of the Australian people, and particularly his core constituency that he is supposed to represent. If he will not do that, he is a dud, with a capital D. Let us hear the Leader of the National Party get up and answer the question: Does he or does he not support the sale of Telstra?

**Mr STONER** (Oxley—Leader of the National Party) [4.07 p.m.]: I am pleased that the Labor Party has raised the issue of Telstra even though it is a Federal matter, because it gives me the opportunity to explain the enormous benefits that the National Party has delivered to the bush in terms of telecommunications improvements. Since 1996 the National Party has secured more than \$1 billion of targeted funding for improvements in communications and information technology, especially in regional and rural Australia. That includes Telstra Countrywide, which has been extremely successful in meeting the needs of customers in rural and regional Australia, and Networking the Nation in 1997, which delivered \$250 million towards improving telecommunications.

It includes the recommendations of the Besley report, with \$163 million to improve mobile coverage throughout regional and rural areas; and the Estens report, with a further \$181 million, including \$15.9 million for expansion of mobile coverage, \$4 million for the satellite telephone subsidy scheme, \$10.1 million for information technology training and support, and \$140 million for Internet broadband facilities. There has been enormous improvement in telecommunications in rural and regional Australia, and there is more to come, thanks purely to the National Party—not the Labor Party, and not the Independents. The National Party has once again secured and delivered for the bush.

There are three reasons why it is the height of hypocrisy for the Labor Party to move this motion. First, this is a Federal Government issue, which the weak and dysfunctional Federal Labor Opposition should debate in Canberra. Second, the Labor Party seems to be advocating a rollback of the significant improvements to telecommunications in the bush. Third, it was the Labor Party that flogged off Qantas and the Commonwealth Bank. Labor would have privatised Telstra years ago if it had had the chance, but it would have done so without any benefits to the bush. The honourable member for Southern Highlands pointed to more hypocrisy on the part of the honourable member for Murray-Darling. The document that was leaked from his office refers to a constituent near Cobar. His staffer wrote "PLB", which I think means "Peter Laurence Black", and continued:

... phoned to say thanks for organising the new mobile phone tower close to his property—his phone works well. A good outcome! Another vote! I took the praise on your behalf!!!

The honourable member for Murray-Darling is a sly dog: he took the credit for the achievements of the National Party. The National Party has always opposed privatisation of Telstra until country services are improved. Considerable investment and improvement has taken place throughout non-metropolitan areas as a direct result of the strong stand taken by the National Party. Much work remains to be done. The recommendations in the Estens report will go a long way towards bringing city-standard telecommunications to the bush. The honourable member for Murray-Darling and the Labor Party are so backward that they have taken their eye off the ball. The main game for the National Party has always been, and will remain, the ongoing upgrade of telecommunication services in the bush, whether or not Telstra is sold. All the Labor Party can offer is carping, negative short-sightedness.

**Mr WHAN** (Monaro) [4.12 p.m.]: The Leader of the National Party had five minutes in which to tell country New South Wales whether his party supported the sale of Telstra, but he hedged. All he did was back up the line followed by the National Party in Canberra, the line that results in National Party members always agreeing with the Liberal Party. The Leader of the National Party is a little upset by this debate, as he is demonstrating now by threatening the Independents. A couple of weeks ago I chaired a forum on Telstra in Cooma with the Federal shadow Minister, Lindsay Tanner. It was a freezing night but many Cooma locals turned up to let us know that they do not want Telstra to be sold. They also want to know why the New South Wales National Party is not standing up for country people. Once again, the Telstra debate shows that only Country Labor is willing to stand up for rural New South Wales.

I want to comment on what the Commonwealth calls future proofing, which is referred to in the report on the inquiry into regional telecommunications. Future proofing is about ensuring that rural residents do not miss out on future developments. For a long time some supporters of the sale of Telstra have pretended that today's technology will be sufficient. In 2003 it is great to have broadband access, but what will be needed in 2023? Back in 1983 we did not imagine that broadband access would be necessary in 2003. In 1983 we did not imagine, as we sat playing our Commodore 64s, that our computers would need broadband or ADSL. The telecommunications inquiry considered those matters and recommended that the Government make provision for them. Recommendation 9.5 states:

The Government should provide funding for future service improvements in regional, rural and remote Australia, rather than imposing financial obligations on industry.

That is my concern. Once Telstra is sold, taxpayers and the community will have to pay to keep rural New South Wales up to scratch. The Federal Government accepted all the recommendations, with the exception of recommendation 9.5, about which it stated "except in principle". In other words, it would not give a guarantee of future funding to keep telecommunications in regional New South Wales up to scratch. The National Party is avoiding the issue, and that is a farce. Country Labor is standing up for Telstra and for regional New South Wales because the National Party refuses to do so.

**Mr BLACK** (Murray-Darling) [4.15 p.m.], in reply: I have just two comments to make. Thank God for Country Labor out in the bush! We are fixing the problems that the National Party cannot fix. The Leader of the National Party gave a miserable performance. He could not lead in the debate. Indeed, he could not even speak for five minutes.

**Motion agreed to.**

### **SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT**

**Motion by Mr Scully agreed to:**

That this House at its rising this day do adjourn until Friday 27 June 2003 at 10.00 a.m.

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

### **PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS**

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#### **HOXTON PARK AIRPORT**

**Mr LYNCH** (Liverpool) [4.18 p.m.]: Once again I report to the House issues concerning Hoxton Park Airport, which is located within my electorate. I have raised this subject on a number of previous occasions to reflect the seriousness of the issue and the degree of concern felt by my constituents and me. The airport should

close. It causes significant danger and damage to both the safety and amenity of the residents that I represent. It provides a commercial and recreational benefit to people who largely treat my constituents with contempt. Hoxton Park Airport is the busiest uncontrolled airport in Australia. "Uncontrolled" means that it does not have a control tower and it does not have radar, although it did have a temporary control tower during the Olympics, which they could not be bothered leaving there afterwards.

The aviation industry has opposed the erection of a control tower at Hoxton Park. Ninety per cent of the use of Hoxton Park Airport is for training. Inexperienced pilots who are learning how to fly come to Liverpool to make all their mistakes above the suburbs that I represent. L-plate pilots get all the errors out of their system just above the houses of my constituents. The impact on amenity is severe. The airport is busiest at weekends, when L-plate pilots are learning to fly, outside of their Monday to Friday jobs. Their regular circuits, often early on Saturday mornings, take them just above the same houses over and over again. Just what people need when they are trying to relax on a weekend! There are also plenty of complaints about aircraft being too low. Even more serious are the safety concerns. There has been a plethora of incidents. On a Saturday in June 1998, two aircraft collided mid-air, causing one to crash into a house in Arnold Avenue, Green Valley. Two people were killed. In March 1999 a plane designed for aerobatic exercises collided on the runway with another flown by a 70-year-old student. One person was killed.

In March 2000 a plane crash-landed near Washington Way, Cecil Hills, missing a nearby house. In August 2000 a 1947 aircraft crashed outside the Horsley Park Olympic Equestrian Centre, 300 metres from houses. In April 2002 an amateur-built plane flown by a 73-year-old came down at Hoxton Park. In February 2003 another plane crash-landed at Kemps Creek. Frankly, planes simply fall out of the sky near Hoxton Park Airport. Amongst this litany of crashes, near-misses, forced landings and disruption to the amenity of the area, the one ray of hope was an announcement by the Federal Government in April that the airport will probably close in five years time. It will be developed by a private owner following its privatisation.

I welcome the fact that the airport will close, although I regret that it will take five years and that it is being privatised. In the light of the points I have made, it is no surprise that it will close. The closure of the airport was, in fact, flagged by then Minister, Ralph Hunt, as long ago as May 1980. The environmental impact statement for Badgerys Creek airport—in any of options A, B or C—involved the closure of Hoxton Park.

The current motley group who use Hoxton Park airport do so for commercial advantage, by making profit, or for their own recreational purposes. They put their profits and pleasure ahead of the safety and amenity of the residents of Liverpool. They have consistently ignored the interests of Liverpool; they have completely disregarded them, and they continue to do so. They have now taken to performing media stunts using the name Hoxton Park Action Group, which consists largely of the usual suspects. The first characteristic of their media utterances is the enormous contempt and condescension they display for people who live in Liverpool.

One person pontificating on behalf of this group is a solicitor who is a tenant at the airport—not someone, strangely enough, who seems to live in Liverpool. On *Stateline* on 6 June this person contemptuously described the suburbs I represent as a "terracotta rash". That is similar to another pro Hoxton Park aviation industry figure who described these suburbs as "just dog boxes". This Hoxton Park group also has a pretty good line in dishonest misrepresentations. They indulged in that on the *Stateline* program I referred to a moment ago, a program so utterly unbalanced that in my view it verges on being professionally corrupt. A similar comment applies to an *Australian* article on 13 June this year. The *Stateline* program recorded Martin Waterhouse saying, "Heck, this would be about as safe as you could get an airport." In light of the litany of incidents and death, and the absence of a control tower, that is a bizarre and untrue claim to make.

They also retail the highly curious claim that this is a significant historical and heritage site. That is untrue. As someone who cares passionately about history and heritage, I find it utterly offensive that profit-seeking businesses and others can make false and cynical claims about the heritage value of this airport. They have tried to list 87 hectares on the register of the National Estate, when all that is left on the site is a tiny strip of runway 250 metres by 50 metres and some taxiway bridges. The potentially significant heritage items are the war time revetments, in which planes were kept and hidden, which are not on the airport site but on adjacent State-owned land. That is, the significant heritage items are not included in the application to list on the register of the National Estate and are not on the current airport site. Mr Waterhouse also made the fairly interesting claim that the airport is a nice island of green that should add value to the homes. That is nonsense, because one issue the Coroner had to investigate was whether trees obscured the vision of aircraft pilots.

**Ms MEGARRITY** (Menai—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.23 p.m.]: I thank the honourable member for Liverpool for raising this matter, as he has done on other occasions. I am familiar with the sad and troubled

history of Hoxton Park airport, which has proved to be an anachronism in today's society. The suburbs around the airport have grown. The honourable member referred to a plane that crashed into a house that was only one house way from where a children's birthday party was being held. That could have been an absolute tragedy. Potential plane crashes are a threat to the honourable member's community. Sadly, the airport will not close for five years, but the announcement that it will do so is a step in the right direction.

### ROYAL VOLUNTEER COASTAL PATROL, HAWKESBURY DIVISION

**Mrs HOPWOOD** (Hornsby) [4.24 p.m.]: The Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol is an essential service that is responsible for the Hawkesbury River and environs and, therefore, the Hornsby electorate waterways. Recently I received an email from a constituent of the lower Hawkesbury River which stated:

As you are doubtless aware, the river-side, water only access properties in the above area rely on the Coast Guard rescue vessel for medical emergencies.

This morning a friend of mine had such an emergency at 7am. By eight, when nothing had happened, the lady's daughter phoned the ambulance station at Mooney Mooney only to be told that the rescue vessel was "out of commission" due to lack of funds. It took another half an hour for a police boat from Broken Bay to arrive and take the lady to the ambulance at Brooklyn for onward transport to Hornsby Hospital.

One can only wonder what would have happened at Wobby Beach in the fire there last Thursday if the householder hadn't been killed, but only badly burnt.

The Hawkesbury division of the Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol is a volunteer marine rescue organisation located in the grounds of Mooney Mooney workers club that has operated since 1986. The coastal patrol at Hawkesbury has 47 members: 24 are fully active and rostered on for duty one weekend in four, eight are ambulance officers attached to the F3 expressway; two are involved in fundraising only, 12 are on call for emergencies and special events, and there is one other. Sharon Bradford is the divisional commander of the Hawkesbury division. Her husband, Preben, is also actively involved. The previous divisional commander was Gavin Fear, and Barry McGrath is the regional captain.

All members pay their fees and pay for the uniforms, training and meals while on duty. The unit as a whole is required to do some fundraising to cover the purchase and maintenance of vessels, motors, fuel, radios, electronic navigation aids, the operating base and all the things that go into the organisation and running of a self-contained rescue unit. The Hawkesbury division has two vessels. The Mooney rescue vessel is a 6.4 metre ex MSB vessel more than 25 years old. This vessel is accredited by the State Rescue Board as a category 1 rescue vessel in enclosed waters, and as such receives no government support other than the insurance of qualified crew.

The water ambulance *Mooney* is a 7.1 metre vessel purpose-built to serve as a water ambulance on the Hawkesbury River. It is three years old. The vessel is not accredited by the State Rescue Board, but is permitted to act as a substitute for the Mooney rescue vessel when necessary. The water ambulance receives no government support other than the insurance of qualified crew. This vessel has been specially fitted for use as a water ambulance, including the fitting of all-weather covers, a flat bed and lockers for medical supplies. The problem with these two vessels is that they are both having problems with their motors.

Recently a grant of \$10,000 was bestowed on the Hawkesbury division for one motor but it needs two. Therefore, it needs \$10,000. The water ambulance is in a more dire state. It has a \$1,000 CDSE grant but two motors are necessary. Therefore, it needs \$19,000. So the total amount needed for these vessels is \$29,000. The funds supplied by the Government through the Waterways Authority are tied grants, which are restricted to category 2 and 3, open water, vessels only. So vessels carrying out the function of rescue, medical evacuation and the transport person engaged in emergency and disaster management are excluded from funding if those activities are on enclosed waters.

As well as its normal activities, the Hawkesbury division also provides corporate and private vessels to take care of the safety aspects of a number of sporting and charity events, staffs the police public information centre hotline in time of disaster, assists the State Emergency Service and the Rural Fire Service by taking over lesser tasks such as road barriers and catering duties, and is an active member of local emergency and disaster management committees. The present problem for the division command is that both vessels are out of service owing to engine failure. Two of the four motors involved are beyond economical repair, and the command is endeavouring to put the two non-matching outboards on Mooney rescue to give the division at least one rescue vessel.

I refer to the letter I quoted and to the desperate need for \$29,000 to get these two vessels functioning again. The division command has not heard from the Government in relation to requests for funding, which is desperately needed. Basically, they need \$29,000 to put an essential service back on the water. The Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol has a regular newsletter called *Up the Creek*. I venture to suggest that if it does not get funding soon, we will all be up the creek in the Hawkesbury area.

### TOTAL HOMESTEAD

**Mr PRICE** (Maitland) [4.29 p.m.]: Tonight I draw the attention of honourable members to Tocal homestead, which is adjacent to the C. B. Alexander Agricultural College, better known as Tocal Agricultural College. The homestead, which is under the charge of the C. B. Alexander Foundation, on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, has completed an extensive refurbishment program to a number of buildings on the original homestead site and the homestead itself. With the visitors interpretation centre now on site, a series of guides has been set up for guided tours of the homestead. Those people are volunteers, many of whom are drawn from an organisation known as the Friends of Tocal, which has for many years financially supported the old Tocal homestead and its surrounding buildings.

These buildings include the original homestead, built by Mr Webber for his family, which received a \$10,000 heritage grant from the New South Wales Heritage Council last year, and a number of the original barracks that were built for prisoners who were used on the site for construction of a number of the buildings. That grant also funded a significant refurbishment of one of the on-site barns that houses a number of agricultural implements. The barn is a real walk back in history for those who are anxious to learn about our built heritage, particularly the heritage of agriculture as it was introduced to the Hunter Valley. C. B. Alexander was a land-holder of some significance and owned the Tocal property for many years. He eventually left it in the care and control of his nieces, who remained on the site until their deaths several years ago. After many years in the Equity Court dealing with the estate of C. B. Alexander, the Presbyterian Church took control and constructed the agricultural college.

In later times, for financial reasons, the State Government became involved and the property was taken over by the Department of Agriculture. Tocal Agricultural College is a successful facility in its own right and the historic Tocal homestead is an adjunct to the college. The college provides funding for heritage restoration from its own money, which is derived from various sources. Funding to assist in the restoration is also provided by various State and Federal heritage authorities. To support the college, the C. B. Alexander Foundation operates a chicken farm known as Numerella in conjunction with the department. That profitable activity allows progress to be made on the site and assists materially in the education of college students.

The college is a heritage building in its own right, in spite of its relatively modern styling. It provides a centre of activity for many functions in the district. One of them is an annual antique auction, one of the biggest in the valley, at which good pieces of period furniture are always available. Some extraordinary prices were achieved at the last auction. This is all part of the charm of the Tocal college and the homestead complex. This year's three-day field day concluded in early May. It is one of the biggest events of its kind in the State and draws a mass of people from the Hunter Valley, as well as visitors from all over Australia. Rain, hail or shine, everyone enjoys the event and, fortunately, many local charities make a reasonable amount of money from servicing the field day. Tocal homestead is worth a visit. I suggest that anyone visiting the Hunter Valley should go to the boundary of Maitland and Dungog and spend an enjoyable day catching up with history in some of the most pleasant surroundings in the lower Hunter.

### CAMPBOR LAUREL REPLACEMENT INDUSTRY

**Mr PAGE** (Ballina—Deputy Leader of the National Party) [4.34 p.m.]: I raise the prospect of developing an industry around replacing the exotic camphor laurel tree, which is so prevalent on the North Coast of New South Wales, with native species. Camphor laurel trees are a dominant exotic species whose spread across large areas of the North Coast is a major concern. Camphor laurels invade and smother productive pastures causing ongoing costs to graziers. In addition, the trees germinate along fences and power lines and can push over fences and interfere with power services. Camphor laurels also replace native trees, impacting on local animal species such as koalas, which require specific dietary flora species such as eucalypts. They also invade and dominate remnant rainforests. In urban areas, camphor laurels with massive root systems may block drains and crack concrete structures. They are too large for small urban blocks.

Given this pest-like growing pattern of camphor laurels on the North Coast of New South Wales, the development of an industry to replace exotic camphor laurels with native species was proposed by me prior to

the last election. My proposal should have the support of the Minister for the Environment and I would like the Minister to consider it carefully. The proposal is to make larger camphor laurels available for saw logs, using the residue of the camphor laurels for power generation in sugar mills during the off-season, and they would be replaced with native species. It is a positive proposal with benefits for the sugar industry, graziers, landowners—who will be able to get rid of their unwanted camphor laurels—residents in urban areas, energy users and the environment.

Existing conventional mills such as the mill of the Notoras Brothers in Grafton are currently taking larger, straighter camphor laurel logs. A variety of products can be made from camphor laurel timber. There is an export market, particularly to Asia, where camphor laurel timber is considered very desirable. In Japan and China camphor oil is used for soap scent and embalming, and its repellent qualities make it appropriate for use in storage chests. Mobile mills can be used for smaller logs and the residue can be chipped on-site and taken away in cane trucks, which would otherwise remain idle in the off-season. The residue can be used for power generation at a sugar mill such as Condong Sugar Mill in the Tweed Valley. That mill has the capacity to take up to 100,000 tonnes of residue per year for electricity generation.

Up to this point in the proposal everything has been self-funding in that the timber mill is prepared to pay the farmer for the larger logs and the sugar mill is prepared to pay for the residue to use as fuel for electricity generation. In turn, both the timber mill and the sugar mill will have a saleable product. However, the proposal will require some government support during the regeneration phase, when land-holders would require funding to assist in the rehabilitation of the land with native species, if that is their preferred strategy. Some land-holders may prefer to allow their land to return to a pastured state. I ask the Government to consider allocating funds to provide an incentive for the growth of native species. This proposal would not only reverse the rapid spread of camphor laurels on the North Coast but would provide much-needed employment, local incomes and the opportunity to expand the growth of native species.

In addition, the use of biomass as an alternative to fossil fuels in electricity generation will help to reduce greenhouse gases. Today Professor Karoly briefed the Standing Committee on Natural Resource Management, of which I am a member, on the effects of greenhouse gases and global warming on future water and drought management. Global warming will intensify droughts. If the amount of energy generated by biomass, as opposed to energy generated by fossil fuels, can be increased, over time greenhouse gas emissions will be reduced. That is important, because about 40 per cent of greenhouse gases come from electricity generated from fossil fuels. This positive proposal has benefits all round. It will rid us of the exotic camphor laurel and replace it with native species. In the process it will generate income and jobs. It will also give us the opportunity to reduce greenhouse gases by generating more electricity through biomass.

### **TORONTO WEST CONSTRUCTED WETLAND**

**Mr HUNTER** (Lake Macquarie) [4.39 p.m.]: On Thursday 5 June, World Environment Day, I was pleased to attend the Catchment Connections Carnival, which was held at Keith Barry Oval at Toronto. On that day I was also pleased to join with the mayor of Lake Macquarie, John Kilpatrick, to officially open the newly constructed wetland. The wetland cost \$360,000 and is part of the ongoing program to help clean up Lake Macquarie. On a number of occasions I have mentioned that the State Government is contributing some \$10 million towards the Lake Macquarie Clean-up Program. That program is jointly funded by the State Government and the ratepayers of Lake Macquarie. Valuable work has been undertaken at Toronto West and the Catchment Connections Carnival held there gave local schoolchildren and the community an opportunity to learn a little more about their environment. On the day the council distributed a document which states:

The Toronto West Wetlands were constructed in 2002 to treat stormwater runoff from areas within the Toronto West catchment and to improve water quality in Stony Creek and Lake Macquarie.

These wetlands receive water from a catchment area of around 18 hectares that covers the southern part of Toronto West. Rain falling anywhere in this area flows into a network of drainage lines, through the wetlands, then into Stony Creek and Fennel Bay.

The catchment has changed greatly since the arrival of Europeans. Much of the natural vegetation has been replaced with houses, roads and other hard surfaces. Whilst the catchment was once 100% bushland; 67% of this has been replaced by residential areas, 21% by parks and reserves, and 7% by industrial land.

Sections of natural creek systems have been piped or straightened and lined with concrete. Stormwater that was once filtered by vegetation and absorbed into the soil now flows faster, carrying sediment, litter, pet droppings, oil and other pollutants.

When these pollutants enter our creeks and lake they can smother seagrass beds, cause algal blooms, kill fish and make the water unpleasant to swim in.



After decades of replacing natural vegetation with concrete and polluting our waterways, we are now realising that natural systems are a better way to manage stormwater than highly engineered ones.

The Toronto West Wetlands attempt to copy or mimic natural systems that once existed around the lake. They are an example of how we can treat stormwater by working with nature rather than against it.

Before these wetlands were constructed, stormwater and pollutants from the catchment flowed straight into Stony Creek and Lake Macquarie.

Now, instead of having a quick getaway, stormwater is being directed along a winding course and slowed down as much as possible. In this way, larger pollutants can be screened out and smaller pollutants can be filtered and settled out of the stormwater before it enters the creek.

That is a graphic description of the change over the years in the local environment of Lake Macquarie and the great work that is being done by way of a collaborative approach between Lake Macquarie City Council and the State Government. The Toronto West Wetlands project cost \$360,000. Approximately \$160,000 of that amount came from the Lake Macquarie Clean-up Program and Lake Macquarie City Council also made a financial contribution. In fact, the council constructed the wetlands. Environment Australia and Landcare also contributed to the project. We are making considerable progress on improving water quality in Lake Macquarie and this project is one of a number of wetlands that has been constructed in the catchment of the lake.

Other projects that are currently programmed include a vegetated swale drain at Macquarie Road, Fennell Bay, a stormwater treatment device at Thorne Street, Toronto, and also one near Toronto Sailing Club, and foreshore stabilisation and revegetation works on the Toronto foreshore. Three pollutant traps are being installed at Letchworth Parade, Balmoral, to protect Secret Bay. The work being done there includes an open grass channel for carrying stormwater run-off. I congratulate everyone associated with the Lake Macquarie Clean-up Program, Lake Macquarie City Council, members of the community and all those who have contributed to the construction of the Toronto West Wetlands. It is a job well done.

#### **HORNSBY SHIRE COUNCIL STATE ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING POLICY NO. 5 EXEMPTIONS**

**Mr PRINGLE** (Hawkesbury) [4.44 p.m.]: The Hawkesbury electorate contains three local government areas. Two of those local government areas are experiencing extreme difficulties with the controversial and, many would say, notorious State environmental planning policy [SEPP] No. 5 legislation as it applies to housing for older people and people with a disability. I know that the honourable member for Strathfield would be experiencing similar difficulties in her electorate. The Minister for Infrastructure and Planning acknowledged in this place that "SEPP 5 can be a blunt instrument and can be subject to abuse". He said, "I am sure some members could tell stories about some of the B-grade end of the development industry exploiting SEPP 5." The Minister said that in these cases communities ended up with SEPP 5 medium-density developments in the wrong locations and with the wrong occupants. I agree with him, and I am sure that most members of this Chamber would as well.

After much lobbying, Hornsby Shire Council and other councils convinced Planning New South Wales to allow councils to prepare strategies for exemption from the SEPP 5. Hornsby Shire Council was quick to establish a committee comprising councillors, industry representatives and community members to guide the preparation of this strategy. The committee, after a thorough and detailed investigation, found that in many instances the SEPP 5 was being used to establish medium-density residential development in undesirable and inappropriate locations that detract from the character of existing areas. Exemption from the SEPP 5 will enable the preparation of appropriate controls and guides on the location of housing for older people and people with a disability and, importantly, will maintain the character of existing residential areas.

The committee found that the rail and road networks in the area were operating at or near capacity and improvements were needed to meet the demands of an increasing population. Further, it was decided that residential development strategies should conform to the principles of ecologically sustainable development. Again, I am sure that every member of this Chamber would agree with that principle. In particular, there were major concerns in rural areas about the potential for the development of housing for older people and people with disabilities. The increased residential development would be inconsistent with the State Government's compact city strategy and the concentrated housing model embodied in the Hornsby Shire Council's housing strategy. The location of housing for older people and people with a disability in the rural areas of the shire, which have poor proximity to transport and community facilities and services, has the potential to conflict with the principles of ecologically sustainable development and total catchment management.

The committee also found that the area was poorly serviced by public transport and infrastructure and, therefore, the increased density of development would place an additional burden on already overstretched services. Further, the committee found that the increased developments would put many future residents at risk of bushfire danger and the increased density of the development would place additional demands on existing water supply services, which are currently operating at or near capacity. Importantly, the analysis identified that older people and people with a disability have a preference for small, single-storey dwellings with small gardens and no stairs. The council's strategy facilitates this option through the provision of 521 independent living dwellings in the form of single-storey townhouse-style developments by 2016.

The strategy will also allow access and mobility improvements through its development control plans in accordance with current Australian standards and increase the requirement for the provision of adaptable dwellings in multi-unit housing developments to 30 per cent. In terms of independent living dwellings, the council will prepare a local environment plan to permit the development of single-storey independent living dwellings at a density of 0.6 to 1 within planned precincts. The criteria within that area will be that the housing contains no stairs and is of low maintenance, that it is safe and secure and contains small backyards, and that 100 per cent of the dwelling houses are adaptable. Hornsby Shire Council forwarded its strategy to the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning on 14 March 2003. It has fulfilled all the requirements the department and departmental officers indicated in stage one. The council's strategy was more than satisfactory. The delay by the department in agreeing to the strategy is causing frustration and concern. I urge the Minister to sign off on the document without delay. [*Time expired.*]

### **BURWOOD ADULT MIGRANT ENGLISH SERVICE**

**Ms JUDGE** (Strathfield) [4.49 p.m.]: On Friday 30 May I had the great pleasure of attending an information day at the Burwood Adult Migrant English Service [AMES] with the Minister for Fair Trading. Everyone at the function was delighted and thrilled that the Minister would take time out from her very busy schedule to visit Burwood. She took a personal interest in all the activities that were being run that day. Her hands-on approach is to be very much commended. The service held an information day for all new students to provide recent newcomers from a non English-speaking background with information on local services. The New South Wales AMES is a teaching institution, part of the Department of Education and Training, that teaches English to new migrants. The client students are new migrants who are classified as adults at 18 years and over.

The students have a 510-hour entitlement to learn English from the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs [DIMIA]. Potential clients must register for classes within three months of arrival and must start classes within 12 months. Their entitlement expires after 36 months, but that rule can be extended to a maximum of five years. The aim of the information day is to increase awareness of the services provided and to make them more accessible. Local service providers gave 30-minute presentations with the assistance of translators. The service providers represented included NSW Police, NSW Fire Brigades, Centrelink, the Chinese Australian Services Society—which does a fantastic job in Ashfield—Anglicare, the Department of Community Services and, of course, Burwood Council. The Office of Fair Trading also made information available to attendees in a range of languages and most of its brochures are presented in different languages and are well produced.

The information day is one of the many wonderful activities undertaken by Burwood AMES to support recent migrants to the area. About 47 per cent of my constituents were born overseas and about 41 per cent come from a non-English-speaking background. The programs it offers are varied and flexible. The bulk of teaching is done face to face, but a home-tutor service is also available. Volunteer tutors are matched with students who cannot attend formal classes. Burwood AMES also runs Skillmax classes for more advanced students to improve their English skills to help them gain employment. It also publishes books that are used by many other students in Australia and overseas. About 600 AMES and 90 Skillmax students live in the Burwood area.

AMES has successfully tendered to teach the Adult Migrant English Program. The current contract expires on 30 June 2003, but the service has just signed a new contract for five years, which is fantastic. I thank John Hardy, the Operations Manager of AMES; Kate Hutchison, the Coordinator Course Information and Admissions; Ane Havea, Course Information Teacher, who is Polynesian; and all the other staff of Burwood AMES, who were very helpful. I also thank Helen DeSilva Joyce, the Director of AMES. The information day was a wonderful initiative. The Skillmax programs help more advanced students to write more effective reports, to communicate confidently in meetings and negotiations, to provide better services to customers and to

improve their day-to-day written and spoken communication skills. Of course, the course also helps them to find appropriate employment and enhance their skills to work more effectively in the Australian work force.

Representatives of the Office of Fair Trading were at the information day in full force. They provided practical advice and help about tenancy inquiries, rental bonds, buying a mobile phone, business licences and business names strata schemes. That is useful information for newcomers about hurdles they might face when settling into a new country. The information day was a wonderful experience. I commend all involved for their hard work. As the local member it was a great pleasure to be invited and to see the great work being done.

### **CASINO AND DISTRICT MEMORIAL HOSPITAL AUXILIARY**

**Mr GEORGE** (Lismore) [4.54 p.m.]: I wish to highlight another wonderful weekend in Casino. We celebrated 100 years of service by the Casino and District Memorial Hospital Auxiliary. I acknowledge every hospital auxiliary in my electorate, and I am sure that every honourable member will acknowledge the support these groups give to hospitals in this State. The Casino auxiliary is special because it is only the second auxiliary to celebrate 100 years of service. I had the pleasure of flying home from here last Friday to attend a celebration dinner that night. About 100 people were at the function, some of whom were dressed in period costume. It was a wonderful evening.

The local auxiliary members were pleased that United Hospital Auxiliary State President Mrs Andrea Mulligan, the area representative and the past State President, Jan Maskell, were able to attend this special event. The night was made even more enjoyable because the auxiliary recognised the contributions of Dr Aldo Castagna, who has worked in the area for 27 years, even though he is only in his early fifties, Dr Fred Banks, who has worked in the area for 26 years, and Dr Jurriaan Beek, who has worked in the area for 23 years. I felt honoured that the hospital took this opportunity to congratulate these doctors, all the other doctors and staff at the hospital and the other medical professionals in Casino for their contributions. Country areas have trouble retaining doctors, but these three doctors have spent a major part of their working lives caring for the residents of Casino.

I had the honour of conducting an auction, which raised about \$1,800 thanks to the generosity of those in attendance. On Sunday we had a fete and a golf event. The old-fashioned fete held in the hospital grounds was opened by the former Casino and District Memorial Hospital Chief Executive Officer, Mr Bill Bartier. His contribution to the hospital and the health services of this State is well documented. He was also responsible for compiling the history of health services in the area, and I pay tribute to him for that.

Sylvia Scarborough and her team of workers can be justifiably proud of the support they received and what they achieved during the anniversary celebrations. They raised \$6,000 over the weekend and they have raised more than \$300,000 over the past 23 years for the hospital. I pay tribute to members of the auxiliary committee: Evei Lamb, Christine Nicholls, Carrie Kennedy, Fay Donnelly, Beryl Kusters, Lesley Walsh, Pamela Duncan, Ethel Haig, Iris Cruickshank Sylvia Scarborough, Thelma Claydon and Margaret Newstead. They are a hard-working committee. The Parliamentary Secretary at the table recognises the contributions auxiliaries make to hospitals in this State—not in dollar terms but, more importantly, in terms of the hours they spend making each patient's stay in hospital a little more comfortable. Hospital staff could not provide those services and they could not cope without the thousands of hours of work done by hospital auxiliaries. They make hospitals a better place. I pay tribute to them, and I especially congratulate Casino and District Memorial Hospital Auxiliary on 100 years of service to this State.

### **PARRAMATTA HIGH SCHOOL NINETIETH ANNIVERSARY**

**Ms GADIEL** (Parramatta) [4.59 p.m.]: Today I pay tribute to the School on the Hill and some of its former students. Last Friday, at the invitation of Principal Peter McFarlane, I had the pleasure of attending Parramatta High School's ninetieth anniversary morning tea. As honourable members may recall, in my inaugural speech I spoke about Parramatta High School being the first co-educational school in New South Wales. The school has always been at the cutting edge and a leader in the wonderful area that I have the privilege of representing.

Parramatta High School now has 65 nationalities and all major religions represented. This is a tangible reflection of the success of multiculturalism. The school's youth and teachers work together to achieve great results from which we as a community benefit. Its students, past and present, are proud of their school and its history. I had the pleasure of being shown around the school's history room, which has been put together with

the dedication of Mr Peter Dunn and Ken Blundell. The collection of memorabilia was remarkable. Of particular note was the very special academic hat of 1913 which, I am told, was inspired by the founding principal's desire to replicate traditional English universities like Oxford and Cambridge. The school's colours of light and dark blue were adopted from the blues of Oxford and Cambridge universities. In fact, Parramatta High was designed to become "The Oxford of Australia".

Over the years a number of Parramatta High School students have gone on to great achievements in their lives and excelled in many aspects of society, and I wish to acknowledge some of them: in sport, the Benaud family, Louis, John and Richie, and Harry Hopman and Ken Kearney; in the Armed Forces, Group Captain William N. Gibson, and Vice Admiral Sir Henry Burrell; in teaching, Mark Bishop and Lilian Whiteoak; in writing and the arts, Evan Green, Wilbur Kentwell, Heather and Joy McKean, Chips Rafferty and Rod Taylor; in academia, Emeritus Professor William Henry Edward Hanley Stanner and Professor John Croucher; in medicine, Professor Bede Morris and Dr Ronald Winton; in the law, Gordon Champion and High Court Justice Sir Cyril Ambrose Walsh.

Additionally, there have been community welfare activists such as Ted Noffs; an astronaut, Antarctic explorer and rocket scientist, in Dr Phil Chapman; and also a Cardinal, in Edward Idris Cassidy. Parramatta High School has also produced its share of politicians, in Leo Port, who was Sydney's first popularly elected mayor; also Justice George Weir, Jack Hough and Richard Healey, who all came here to Macquarie Street. Justice George Weir was the Minister for Conservation from 1946 to 1953, and Richard Healey was the Minister for Youth and Community Services in 1973 and he went on to become the Minister for Health in 1975.

Parramatta High School has continued to honour its students, and last Friday two very special former students were honoured. Jack and Dora Freeman, who recently celebrated their sixtieth anniversary, each received a Lifetime Achievement Award for services to the school. On acceptance, Dora told the very funny story of how the principal of the time, Miss Mackeness, had seen her and Jack walking together from the train station to school. Dora was called to the principal's office and informed that if the principal ever saw her "with that boy again, she would no longer be a prefect". Obviously, love conquered all in the case of Jack and Dora Freeman. Parramatta High School is a remarkable school—it was in 1913, and it still is in 2003. I congratulate its students, both past and present, and would like to place on record the thanks of the people of Parramatta to Paul Taylor and Fiona Campbell, who have worked hard to make the history of the school come alive so that it may be celebrated.

### **TORCH BEARERS FOR LEGACY**

**Mr ROBERTS** (Lane Cove) [5.03 p.m.]: On 3 June this year I had the honour and privilege of hosting and speaking at the fiftieth annual friendship luncheon and State conference of Torch Bearers for Legacy. On that occasion I was greeted by the President of Torch Bearers for Legacy, Mrs Gwen MacLennan and Mrs Doreen Williams, a member of Kyle Bay-Cronulla Torch Bearers for Legacy. Legacy is a unique organisation formed in the 1920s by returned servicemen in pledging to care for the dependence of deceased comrades, no matter how or when they died. Legacy support extends from World War I to current peacekeeping forces. However, most dependants today are World War II widows, and Legacy is determined to help them face old age with dignity and independence.

Legacy is Australia's biggest family, with more than 127,000 widows and 1,870 children and disabled dependants enrolled nationwide. With an average of 15 new enrolments every working day in Sydney alone, Legacy's task is as vital as ever. Legacy now covers widows and dependants of service personnel who died in hazardous service or operational training accidents such as the Blackhawk helicopter disaster in Queensland. Since its inception Legacy has guided more than one million young Australians to take their places in society. Today there are still 1,400 children enrolled in Legacy Australia-wide. Legacy is there to ensure that they are prepared for successful adult lives. The organisation obtains financial scholarships and tutoring for junior legatees, and uses its own funds to augment the government education allowance. Legacy-run camps and youth programs provide junior legatees with real life experiences.

Torch Bearers for Legacy is a voluntary group of men and women who raise funds for Legacy, an organisation committed to assisting the dependants of deceased service personnel who served Australia in any operational area, those who were killed in action and those who have since died. Torch Bearers for Legacy was formed in 1946. This came as a result of rapidly increasing enrolments of widows and children after World War II. Legacy called a meeting in Sydney which was attended by women who had held various positions during the war and worked in voluntary capacities. These workers were integrated into one group and their various skills

were put to use to raise funds for Legacy. As the torch is the symbol of Legacy, they became known as Torch Bearers for Legacy.

It is interesting to note that many of these original torch bearers are now widows and are being assisted by Legacy. Many members have benefited in the past from Legacy's help, and are now contributing by raising funds for the organisation. Twenty groups, working under a centralised body, raise funds for Sydney Legacy, and about 45 groups are affiliated with other Legacy clubs and contact groups in the remainder of the State. Groups normally operate independently in their own areas, but a meeting of delegates from all Sydney groups is held every month for co-ordination purposes. A regular State conference brings together members from throughout New South Wales for the exchanging of views.

Fundraising activities are diverse, and include raffles, street stalls, garden parties, luncheons, fashion parades and badge sales. One group manages an opportunity shop. The shop is staffed by members and other volunteers, and it generates thousands of dollars annually for Legacy through the sale of donated goods. Another group raises money by selling donated stamps and ice cream containers. Legacy Day, which is the main fundraising event on the Legacy calendar, is held each year on the first Friday of September. On Legacy Day, as we all know, schoolchildren and other volunteers sell Legacy badges in public areas in an effort to raise much-needed funds.

Torch Bearers for Legacy assists junior legatees by providing the Beryl McFadyen Scholarships for post-graduate study. The scholarship was implemented in 1974 in recognition of the outstanding services of Mrs Beryl McFadyen, a past president of Torch Bearers for Legacy for 29 years. The central office of Torch Bearers for Legacy operates a very successful gift shop on the second level of 47 York Street, Sydney, and I urge my colleagues to call in there. High quality, inexpensive gifts are available, such as toiletries, silverware, kitchenware, stationery, Australiana gifts and toys. An extensive selection of knitted babywear is also available. Each year recently Torch Bearers for Legacy, through its fundraising activities, has been able to present Sydney Legacy with approximately \$1 million for the continuation of its vital work. I pay tribute to the men and women of Torch Bearers for Legacy for the fine work they do for the people of New South Wales, and returned service personnel and their families.

#### **OURIMBAH-LISAROW RSL CLUB**

**Ms ANDREWS** (Peats) [5.08 p.m.]: It gives me great pleasure to inform the House about a very successful registered club operating in the north of the Peats electorate. I refer to the Ourimbah-Lisarow RSL Club, which was formed in 1957 with 121 financial members. Today the club, of which I am also a member, has a membership of approximately 9,300. The club offers good club facilities and—Madam Acting-Speaker, you will be pleased to hear this—three good bowling greens. On 14 June I was invited to attend the gala evening held to celebrate a number of recent significant improvements made to the club. During the course of the evening more than 170 people were taken on conducted tours to inspect the various improvements. I was fortunate to be seated at a table hosted by the vice-president of the club, Mr Jack Madeley, and his good wife, Maureen. Jack chaired the building committee that had been formed in 1999 to oversee the project. It was obvious that he was very proud of the club's improved facilities, and he had every right to be proud.

Jack provided his guests with a well-presented account of the various renovations, which included a very tastefully designed casino bar, TAB and poker machine areas, a conference room large enough to accommodate 100 people, a meeting room to accommodate approximately 70 people, an RSL sub-branch meeting room, a board room, spacious administration offices, excellent staff facilities located on both the ground floor and upstairs, a snooker room, a store room, an office for the second-in-charge, a keg room capable of storing 100 kegs at a temperature of nine degrees, a packaged beer cool room where approximately 14 pallets can be stored at two degrees Celsius, a bottle shop, a walkway, toilets which include facilities for persons with disabilities, a kitchen cool room and freezer, a store room, and a switch room.

As the club's extensions involved building outwards and upwards, a lift was installed. The lift is licensed to carry a person in a wheelchair and an attendant, or three persons. Should the lift stall between floors, all one needs to do is go to the panel inside the lift and turn it off, which enables the lift to gently glide down to the ground floor. The extensions cost in the vicinity of \$2 million. The club's directors, led by the president, George Keft, who is a life member, together with his colleagues on the board—Vice-President Jack Madeley, Treasurer Ken Hetherington, Russ Whitcher, Sue Ingram, Brett Sanderco, Allan Sharpe, Colin Walker, Gordon Woodhouse, and Secretary-Manager Richard McEvoy—are to be congratulated on a job well done. They have wisely tackled the improvements to the club with a gently-gently approach, and have been careful not to overcommit the club with loans.

The board intends to carry out further improvements to the club's facilities at a future date, provided that it is in a financial position to do so. The gala evening brought together people who have been associated with the club and the Ourimbah-Lisarow area over a long period. Life members Frank Donaldson and Lance Collins attended the function, accompanied by their good wives. Unfortunately, two other life members of the club, Harry Smith and Kevin Wallis, were not able to attend. However, I am sure they were there in spirit. Riley Sohier, his wife, and many members of the Sohier family—a highly regarded pioneering family of the Central Coast—were well represented. The nexus between the RSL sub-branch and the club is still very strong. The original RSL sub-branch was formed in 1920, although it was not until 1947 that it purchased property and a building.

Honourable members will be interested to learn that the building was the registered office of Tooby's sawmill and had been used as a drill hall by the Light Horse Regiment. The Women's Auxiliary was formed in the early part of 1947. It still exists today, and is very active. In 1965 the premises were extended to include a large assembly room, a stage, and a store room with a cool room underneath. In 1975 the board of directors undertook major extensions at a cost of \$450,000, which blew out to \$600,000. Airconditioning was installed at that time at a further cost of \$130,000. A new board of directors set out to clear that debt, and I am happy to say that has been achieved, and these new renovations have now been completed. I take this opportunity to again congratulate all those involved with the renovations to the club, and I wish the club all the best for the future.

### **SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS CYCLE RACING EVENTS**

**Ms SEATON** (Southern Highlands) [5.13 p.m.]: Tonight I make a plea for a return to commonsense in the making of arrangements and obtaining of approvals for cycle racing on public roads in country areas. In my area there are a number of cycling clubs, including the Macarthur Collegians and the Highlands Cycling Club, headed by Mr Peter Tomlinson. In the past club members have enjoyed participating in cycling races on a range of roads around our area in safety, with good management and with great success. In country areas like mine young people often say, "There is nothing to do. Let's find new things to do." Cycling clubs attract young people, and cycling can be a very productive and positive interest for them, which they can enjoy all their lives.

In the past cycling events have been arranged and conducted with reference to local police, who look at the proposed routes, the safety arrangements, and so on. Because of their knowledge of local roads, traffic density and traffic flow, local police have been able to give a very informed and precise opinion as to whether to grant approval for an event. This arrangement has worked very well. A number of weeks ago I was contacted by Mr Tomlinson and by the Macarthur Collegians and told that these arrangements have now changed. Whereas previously the approvals for cycling events were handled by the local area command, based in Camden, they are now handled by the head office of NSW Police—people with no local knowledge of the road conditions.

That is completely nonsensical. Approvals can only be given for cycling events that are to be held in what are called "sterile conditions", that is, roads that are free of other traffic. That is practically impossible in my area. Country roads are desirable places for cycling events, but the chances of finding a completely traffic-free country road are just impossible. There will always be a bit of traffic on them, unless the event is held on an industrial estate or something similar. However, those routes are never long enough or interesting enough. These new arrangements will mean the death of cycling in my area. The clubs make the point that the previous situation, with local police making the decisions, worked very well, and that everything was handled responsibly.

I wrote to Commissioner Ken Moroney on behalf of both the Highlands Cycling Club and Macarthur Collegians, and to date I have not received a reply, although one may have arrived in my office in the past two days. Last night I spoke to Sue Johnson of the Bargo Chamber of Commerce. Sue is doing a fantastic job for members of the Bargo community in promoting Bargo as a wonderful place in which to live and conduct business, as well as a place with great potential for tourism. Bargo has now identified itself as Australia's cycling town and everybody there is getting together and making sure that all aspects of Bargo—business, tourism and lifestyle—are bicycle-friendly, with the intention of attracting more and more bicycle-related events. They have successfully done this.

In August this year a major weekend cycling event is to be held in Bargo. Last night I received a call from Sue Johnson, who was alarmed to discover, as Peter Tomlinson and the Macarthur Collegians discovered, that approval for the event now has to go through the head office of NSW Police and, even worse, approvals are only being given for cycling on sterile road areas. As I have just explained, that is impossible. It will always be necessary to include in cycle routes roads that have some element of traffic on them. I have again written to the

commissioner and asked whether we can return to the old system, with local police at the local area command level, who are familiar with our local roads, granting approvals for proposed cycling routes. They are the best people to make good decisions. They can work with local communities to find the safest and most interesting routes, and they can manage those routes. If we return to the old system the clubs will not have to seek approval from someone in College Street who knows nothing about our area, and who will approve cycling only on sterile roads, which is impossible. I ask that commonsense prevail and that Bargo be given a go.

### HEXHAM WETLANDS REHABILITATION PROJECT

**Mr MILLS** (Wallsend) [5.18 p.m.]: Last Saturday was planting day for the Maryland Revegetation Project. This revegetation project is a demonstration that the Hexham Wetlands Rehabilitation Project, of which this project is a part, is approaching completion. The planting day followed an on-site community consultation day on 24 May. On that day we walked two to three kilometres around the edge of the wetlands to the various planting sites, and some changes were made to help preserve the views of local residents who walked around with us.

On that occasion I also had the pleasure of walking 400 metres into the wetlands to an area where cattle grazing had ceased last February. Within three months this bare area had started to regrow salt marsh. The fact that salt marsh has begun to spread over grass-free areas provides hope for the future success of the Hexham Wetlands Rehabilitation Project. The project will encourage the revegetation and rehabilitation of upland areas surrounding Hexham wetlands as identified in the plan of management of the Hexham Wetlands Rehabilitation Project. On 14 April a community workshop was held in Maryland.

Although I understand that it is no longer politically correct to use the term "swamp", I will continue to use the word interchangeably because it is used officially in the names of nature reserves. The aim of the revegetation project is to reinstate vegetation that once existed on the fringes of the swamp. The vegetation includes a mixture of subtropical rainforest, dry sclerophyll forest and wetland vegetation communities that would have been present prior to European colonisation of the area. The purpose of the planting is to establish vegetation on the edge of the swamp to promote biodiversity in the area. Vegetation will give native animals a place to live and will promote natural regeneration of native plants.

Vegetation on the edges of the swamp will also enhance the buffer zone on the fringes of the wetlands by making it more aesthetically pleasing. The residents were able to give their views on turning the area into a picturesque setting from the southern end of the swamp, looking out over an extensive area. Native vegetation was planted to stabilise the soil and prevent erosion. The mulching condition of the soil is good, and the vegetation areas will provide places for recreation and education. The species are a mixture of wetland fringe plants, rainforest plants and upland plants. They are planted in clumps so that the line of sight into the swamp is not lost. The plants have been positioned so that, as much as possible, they reflect their position in a native bushland or rainforest setting.

The community identified a range of concerns about the whole project. These included mosquitoes, flooding, flora and fauna, recreation facilities, potential smell from new marshy areas that were formerly used for cattle grazing, and questions about when the floodgates will be opened. The opening of the floodgates is relevant because it is part of the Hexham rehabilitation project, which was launched in 1998 after community concerns relating to the condition of Hexham swamp. The Hunter Catchment Management Trust applied for funding to rehabilitate the swamp and \$5.4 million was allocated—half from the Federal Government from National Heritage Trust money and the Telstra sell-off, and the remaining half from the State Government in 1999. Contributions are also being made by other agencies in the local community. The Hunter Catchment Management Trust will provide around \$600,000.

Agreement has been reached with the owners of approximately 850 hectares of private and public land within Hexham swamp to purchase their wetland areas. The priority recommendation of the Ironbark Creek total catchment management strategy was to increase tidal flows into Hexham swamp by opening the Ironbark Creek floodgates and, in order to achieve this, the land that would be inundated is to be purchased. The principal object of the rehabilitation is to recover the fish and marine life nursery; in other words, to restore Hexham swamp to a marine environment by reopening the floodgates and, hence, re-establishing what was the largest nursery for fish and prawns on the east coast of New South Wales.

The area was converted to dairying land back in 1971. In the long term that has proved to be inappropriate, so it will be restored to a marine environment. I thank all community representatives on the

Hunter Catchment Management Trust, particularly its committees, local residents and the progress association for their help, advice and keenness for the project. I also thank the staff of the Hunter Catchment Management Trust, especially Nick Staheyeff and Sharon Vernon.

### ORTHOPAEDIC SURGERY WAITING LISTS

**Mr CANSDELL** (Clarence) [5.23 p.m.]: Since being elected to Parliament my Grafton office has had a continual flow of people in urgent need of either knee or hip replacements. All have two things in common: they are in extreme pain and they will have to wait 12 to 18 months or more for their operations. To compound this problem even further, because of their frustrations over the lack of adequate funding by the Northern Rivers Area Health Service, the four orthopaedic surgeons in Lismore have threatened to resign on 2 July unless a satisfactory resolution arises in the interim. I shall read some extracts from a letter from Dr Simon Kenny to the Chief Executive Office of the Northern Rivers Area Health Service concerning a patient. The letter states:

On the 24 February this year I felt that her knee had got to the point where a knee replacement was unavoidable, and placed her name on my waiting list for same. There are about 72 patients ahead of her on my waiting list, and at one and a half joints per week it will mean about 48 weeks before I can get her done. Add to that your requirement that we from here on pool patients who have waited over twelve months for their surgery, and the following calculations also come into play; Dr Mark Pearce has approximately 180 patients on his waiting list, and spread across all four surgeons at approximately 6 per week it will take approximately 17 weeks before his waiting time is down to the point where I can start doing my own patients again. Add both these together we get 65 weeks, and given Christmas close down, etc, it will be eighteen months before I can get Mrs V's knee replacement done for her...

The letter continues:

... Unless I increase her urgency category, in which case I will be making every other patient on my waiting list wait an extra week, there is absolutely no way with your current fairly mediocre offer to the local orthopaedic surgeons that I can relieve this lady of her misery... I thought I would illustrate for you with a particular patient the dilemma I find myself in when it comes to considering the offer you have made to the four orthopaedic surgeons from NRAHS. It clearly indicates to me that there has been no change in attitude by the Executive of the Area Health Service in regards to the funding of joint replacements for orthopaedic patients. The offer you have made is very disappointing, but unfortunately exactly the kind of thing I expected. It fails to address the problems of long waiting lists for joint replacement surgery, and in fact it specifically vetoes any possibility of attacking the length of these waiting lists on the excuse that the funds required would be "open-ended", and you make it very plain that the Area Health Service will not grant such open-ended funding to a booked service under any circumstances. I also believe that the offer you have given us has far too many strings attached. As already illustrated, the four orthopaedic surgeons in Lismore would spend the next six months doing nothing but Mark Pearce's patients, and I regard that as grossly unfair to the patients on my waiting list, and as far as I am concerned absolutely unacceptable to them, and thus to me.

The letter concludes:

To wait four years before we even begin to address the current workload in terms of joint replacements means that absolutely no commitment has been given at all to addressing the need to reverse the climb in the waiting lists as they currently exist. The bottom line therefore, is that if you think I am going to wait until "the beginning of 2006/07" before I can undertake two joint replacements on my major operating list per week on a regular basis, then I am not going to be around. I also note that your current offer makes no provision to prevent us having our major cases cancelled week by week due to a lack of beds. It is all very well to guarantee us lists, but if there are not enough beds to allow the patients in, then these lists will fall over.

My wife has had two hip replacements so I know the pain these people go through. It is totally unacceptable for anyone to have to wait 12 to 18 months for an operation. I believe the board has not yet realised the implications of the potential resignation of all four orthopaedic surgeons from Lismore Base Hospital. Losing just one surgeon will extend waiting lists another 12 months. If it is a lack of funding that is causing this backlog of joint replacements, funding must be forthcoming.

### EDEN TIMBER WORKERS MEMORIAL

**Mr WHAN** (Monaro) [5.28 p.m.]: I raise today an important community proposal by the Eden community to build a memorial to timber workers who have been killed at work in the Eden area. A committee, chaired by Mrs Gillian Munday, put forward this terrific proposal, which recognises and permanently commemorates the people who have lost their lives in this dangerous industry. Mrs Munday and her committee have been working on this since March 2002, and have gathered together many names of people who they believe should be commemorated at this site. Recently, there was a story in some of the local newspapers, including the *Land*. Since then Mrs Munday has been contacted by many people in New South Wales wanting to add the names of their loved ones to the list of people who may be commemorated by this proposal. The Secretary of the Timber Workers Memorial Project Committee, Mr Laurie Owen, wrote me a letter stating:



The response has been rather overwhelming with many people supporting the concept, and many still unable to cope with the past loss of a timber worker.

The initial concept of the Committee was directed at local Eden area workers who died, but it is evident from the large expression of interest from people beyond this region, that the Memorial should now become a significant industry memorial certainly with a State focus and probably a national focus, which is likely to honour more than 200 workers.

The concept includes a large sculptured monolithic type Monument, surrounded by memorial walls and plaques, with a Memorial Walkway, perhaps a water feature, and logging heritage treatments, to be created upon Wellings Park, Eden ...

The site for this proposed memorial is on the Princes Highway, which would be an ideal location for people to stop. It would certainly attract people to stop and look at the memorial, and allow them to think about how many people have lost their lives in this industry over many years. We are fortunate that the timber industry is much safer than it once was. New machinery provides much better protection for workers than the old style of logging, including felling trees with chainsaws and individuals, as occurred up until only a few years ago. Indeed, it still occurs in some areas.

This machinery is very expensive. All members would welcome the fact that forest industry structural assistance package funding in the south east has allowed many local timber contractors to get new equipment. An item of machinery can cost more than \$500,000. Obviously this helps them to get wood more cost effectively. But more importantly from my perspective—and, I think, from the community's perspective—also means that hopefully the list of names to be dedicated on this memorial will not grow over the next few years. I am confident that this memorial will be an important tribute to the people who have lost their lives in the local industry.

The memorial proposal is gaining a lot of support. I urge honourable members with timber industries in their electorates to get involved in this project. I encourage them to have a look at the proposal from the Timber Workers Memorial Project Committee and get behind it if they can. They should talk to local timber workers or families and see if there are names they want to add to the list. Perhaps they could suggest to their communities that they help raise funds for the project. The project is important for our area and for the timber industry, and I commend it to the House.

### ST IVES OVERDEVELOPMENT

**Mr HUMPHERSON** (Davidson) [5.33 p.m.]: The residents of St Ives and the wider Ku-ring-gai area are concerned about overdevelopment in the St Ives area. On Saturday I attended a meeting organised by the St Ives Residents Action Group. The meeting was well attended, with some 200 people present. Not surprisingly, there was substantial discussion and strong resolve about overdevelopment and inappropriate development in St Ives and more broadly throughout Ku-ring-gai. The meeting passed a resolution which I undertook to bring to the attention of the House. It states:

That this meeting of residents of St Ives and other areas of Ku-ring-gai condemns the Carr Government for continuing to inflict its SEPP5 and SEPP53 policies upon our community. We object most vehemently that the Government has deliberately allowed developers to irreparably destroy our streetscapes and natural environment, thereby depriving us of appropriate amenity and adequate infrastructure. We demand that the Premier and the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure immediately revoke the Government's SEPP5 and SEPP53 policies. Furthermore, we demand that planning powers be returned to our democratically elected Council.

The motion was moved by Lloyd Capps and seconded by David Williams, and it was passed without dissent. It reflected the views of not only the people at the meeting on Saturday but also the wider Ku-ring-gai community. Ongoing concern about the nature of development remains. The Minister for Infrastructure and Planning, who was also the Minister responsible from 1995 to 1999, needs to be much more sympathetic. Ku-ring-gai Council is prepared to adopt a residential strategy that incorporates more and greater diversity of medium-density development in Ku-ring-gai in appropriate locations.

There is strong opposition to the continued ad hoc nature of development that is facilitated through State environmental planning policy [SEPP] 5 and SEPP 53 [SEPP 53]. The removal of Burwood and Wyong councils during the recent election campaign means that Ku-ring-gai is now the only council in this State to which SEPP 53 applies, and there are numerous SEPP 53 applications for the Ku-ring-gai area. The time to repeal SEPP 53 as a State planning policy has well and truly passed. I endorse what I have said previously in the House: SEPP 53 is a ham-fisted approach to facilitating the provision of medium-density housing in this day and age.

SEPP 5 developments continue not only to be a blight on Ku-ring-gai but some of these developments are so out of keeping with the desires and needs of people that many of them in the St Ives are difficult to sell.

That is, the new developments are not being purchased. One development involves a number of dwellings and there is only one occupant after the units have now been on the market for a number of months. I ask the Minister whether he is prepared to meet with representatives of resident groups in Ku-ring-gai to discuss the need for better outcomes in amenity and character in St Ives and areas beyond.

I take this opportunity to register a concern I have as a State member of Parliament in the area. The local government elections in the next six to nine months will determine the complexion and attitude that the new Ku-ring-gai Council will take over the ensuing four years. Given the council's history, and given my familiarity with local government as a former councillor, I strongly believe that it is important to have genuinely independently minded people elected to council. I am concerned that what I term a community-based but factionalist approach to local government over the past four years may become entrenched. With the interest that the political party known as Save Our Suburbs has shown in Ku-ring-gai in recent months, I am concerned that Save Our Suburbs may evolve and that some councillors may seek re-election to council under the Save Our Suburbs banner. I am greatly concerned about the Save Our Suburbs motives, agenda and outcomes, and its interest in Ku-ring-gai local government. [*Time expired.*]

### GUNNEDAH ETHANOL PLANT PROPOSAL

**Mr DRAPER** (Tamworth) [5.38 p.m.]: Earlier today the honourable member for Lachlan referred to ethanol. As honourable members are aware, there are many plans to develop ethanol plants across the State. One plan that is being thoroughly investigated is proposed for Gunnedah, which is in the electorate of Tamworth. I note the presence in the Chamber of the Minister for Fair Trading. Obviously she has a keen interest in the ethanol debate. The initial impetus for the proposal started more than a year ago when plans were first unveiled for a \$55 million ethanol plant in the north-west, but at that stage no site had been selected. As time went on it was decided that Gunnedah would become the preferred site. Since then, there have been proactive talks and high hopes throughout the electorate.

Gunnedah has had its fair share of misfortune in recent years, from the closure of the abattoir and coalmines, the closure of the pet food factory and its subsequent relocation to Dubbo through to the worst drought on record. For a town that is hurting a lot, the plans for the ethanol plant are the light at the end of the tunnel. It is a project that cannot be allowed to fail. Over the past year developers have been working hard to have this facility built, but last month's Federal budget, in which it was announced that the valuable 38¢ per litre fuel subsidy would be extended, gave the biggest boost to the campaign so far. That was one of a number of major concessions the developers were seeking so that the project could get off the ground. The Government has also indicated its support for a 10 per cent cap on ethanol in fuel.

In recent months, the wheels have been turning faster than ever. Last month the *Northern Daily Leader*, the major newspaper in the north-west, ran an article announcing that developers were now looking at a bigger plant than they had originally planned. They are now looking at a \$70 million facility, which is almost triple the size of the plant first proposed. If it goes ahead, it will produce 120 million litres of ethanol each year and create some 50 permanent jobs in Gunnedah and around the district. There is already talk from the proponents that it may even increase its capacity to 180 million litres, with a subsequent increase in jobs and local investment. On top of that, we are looking at 350 indirect jobs and 500 during construction. For a town such as Gunnedah, that is verging on the miraculous. We are talking about an extra \$30 million in household income each year.

Ethanol workers are not the only ones who will benefit. Based on 120 million litres, around 300,000 tonnes of sorghum would be needed by the plant each year to produce the bio-fuel. Some 450,000 tonnes of sorghum would be needed if capacity increased to 180 million litres. The region's farmers would have a new market to sell their product. Another benefit is that sorghum as a crop uses much less water to grow than cotton, which has been grown predominantly in the area. At a time when the Government is working to reduce water usage in the Namoi Valley, the requirement for additional sorghum crops will help many farmers adjust.

Overall, this plant will be extremely good news if it comes off. The President of the New South Wales Graingrowers Association's Grains Council said late last year that these ethanol plants could help to improve the financial situation of farmers. That is exactly what the area of Gunnedah desperately needs. This plant relies heavily on the Central Ranges natural gas project and vice versa. I am pleased to inform the House that that too is moving ahead. The gas pipeline will stretch from Dubbo to Tamworth, servicing many of the towns and areas in between such as Gunnedah and Werris Creek. Tenders for that project will be called within the next few weeks.

I will take a moment to thank those who have helped to progress the plans to this stage. First and foremost is Mr Matthew Kelley of Primary Energy, who has been the driving force behind these plans, as well

as the hard-working team of advisers and partners who hope that this project becomes a reality. Gunnedah Shire Council and the community of Gunnedah rightly deserve special mention. They have had a long-term vision to restore the area to prosperity, and they have been proactive in supporting the proponents of the ethanol plant. The Federal Government has given the ethanol industry a lifeline, and I acknowledge the invaluable contribution made by Gunnedah's local Federal member and Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson, as well as the continuing energetic support from the Federal member for New England, Tony Windsor. It has taken a lot of hard work but with ongoing co-operation between our representatives the efforts will pay off. Ethanol has the potential to greatly improve the future of Gunnedah. Gunnedah has suffered many setbacks in the past few years and this could be the start of a bright new future. The benefits to the environment of this renewable fuel will, hopefully, show up for many generations to come.

### **THE SPIT BRIDGE WIDENING**

**Mr BARR** (Manly) [5.43 p.m.]: Tonight I want to rebut some of the arrant nonsense that has been peddled by some people, including members of this House, about the widening of The Spit Bridge. A consultant's report has gone to the two councils that straddle the area on each side of The Spit Bridge, Manly and Mosman councils. The body of the report says that contra-peak hour flow benefits will accrue from the widening of The Spit Bridge, that outside peak hour all traffic will flow more smoothly and that there will be an improvement in safety because there will be no lane changing on the approaches to the bridge. The proposal will assist bus operators to reduce travel times. The traffic engineer says there is no traffic engineering reason for refusal of the application, that the proposal is justified and there is no heritage or environmental reason for refusal. The body of the report is all favourable, but the consultant's recommendation is that the Minister withdraw the proposal.

One of the reasons he gives is lack of public support. I question that. Last year I sent out direct mail to all my constituents that included a blue slip that I asked to be returned to me. It asked two questions and also asked for general comments. The questions were, "Do you support the widening of the bridge?" and "Do you support fewer openings?" Both of those questions were overwhelmingly supported. I received more than 2,200 responses, with 290 objections to the notion of the widening of The Spit Bridge. That indicates significant public support for the proposal. Nevertheless, that is one of the reasons the consultant, Mr James Nangle, has given for the withdrawal of the proposal. It is nonsense.

Local Liberal Party politicians have been galvanised into action to oppose the widening of the bridge as they had another proposal: a 6.5 kilometre tunnel that they costed at \$950 million. That is nonsense, given that 10 years ago the 2.3 kilometre Sydney Harbour Tunnel cost \$738 million. The 2.1 kilometre cross-city tunnel will cost \$680 million and the 3.4 kilometre Lane Cove tunnel will cost \$815 million. The notion that a 6.5 kilometre long tunnel can be built for \$950 million is nonsense. An even bigger nonsense was put forward by the Federal member for Warringah, the Hon. Tony Abbott, in his maiden speech to Parliament in 1994. He said:

It seems that a road tunnel under Military Road with a better crossing at The Spit can be build with just \$30 million of taxpayers money.

That was in 1994, not 1894, although some people would consider Tony Abbot to be more of a 1694 man. The proposed widening would be the first major project on the surrounds of The Spit Bridge for nearly 50 years. It will bring significant improvements, yet there is active opposition to it even though the bridge works do not preclude other transport initiatives. That objection is absurd, and I regard the way local Liberal Party politicians, for selfish political reasons, have tried to undermine all the good work that has done in getting this project ready as offensive. They do not wish to have benefits flow through to Manly while that electorate is not represented by another Liberal. I find that outrageous.

I call on the Minister to expedite this matter. I will also call for a recommissioning of the section 22 committee so that we can examine wider transport issues on the northern beaches, with particular reference to public transport and better connections between Warringah Road, Roseville Bridge, the Gore Hill expressway and the M2 motorway. There is no reason why we should try to funnel all the traffic from the northern beaches through Manly, which is what the proposed tunnel would do. That in turn would have the dramatic consequence of much more overdevelopment in the area. Those who advocate that will well and truly lose the support of the public.

**Private members' statements noted.**

**The House adjourned at 5.48 p.m. until Friday 27 June 2003 at 10.00 a.m.**

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