

# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Thursday 4 September 2003

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

**Mr Speaker** offered the Prayer.

## AUDIT OFFICE

### Report

**Mr Speaker** tabled, pursuant to the Public Finance and Audit Act 1983, the Auditor-General's performance audit report entitled "Dealing with Unlicensed and Unregistered Driving: NSW Police and NSW Roads and Traffic Authority", dated September 2003.

**Ordered to be printed.**

## QUARANTINE STATION PRESERVATION TRUST BILL

**Bill introduced and read a first time.**

### Second Reading

**Mr RICHARDSON** (The Hills) [10.02 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Opposition introduces the Quarantine Station Preservation Trust Bill in response to the Government's plans to lease the Manly quarantine station, one of the most historic and best preserved sites on Sydney Harbour, to a single entity, Mawland Developments Pty Ltd, for 21 years. The Opposition has consistently opposed leases of longer than 10 years on significant public lands. We believe that the original proposal for a 45-year lease on this property to Mawland was tantamount to selling public property.

This is a very, very special place. North Head should be etched in the consciousness of every Australian. It is where Governor Phillip first had contact with the Aborigines. It is where Bennelong, Colebee and Arabanoon were captured. So it is an extraordinarily significant place in the context of Australian and Aboriginal history. North Head is the place where the Aborigines carried out their ceremonies; it was also a burial site for the Aboriginal people. It was sacred to them long before white man came to this country.

There are some 66 buildings on this site dating back to the 1830s. There are more than 1,500 rock engravings, some of which are Aboriginal, and there are Aboriginal cave paintings as well. The passengers who were quarantined there did most of these carvings, over more than 150 years. I do not need to emphasise to the House how unique the site is; there is nothing else quite like it in Australia. Between 1828 and 1984 at least 580 vessels carrying more than 13,000 passengers were quarantined at North Head, most prior to World War II. An estimated 572 of them died and were buried there.

The history of the quarantine station itself goes back to 1833, when Governor Phillip first declared the area to be a quarantine station. After Federation, in 1911 the Commonwealth assumed responsibility for the site, but it was always New South Wales and not Commonwealth land, and the transfer occurred on the basis that the site would be returned to the State if the Commonwealth had no further use for it. That happened in 1984, when the quarantine station was added to Sydney Harbour National Park, although by that time parts of the original site had been excised for a range of other purposes, notably North Head Barracks and Manly Hospital. There are still 57 hectares of undisturbed bushland surrounding the quarantine station. It is one of the most pristine areas around Sydney Harbour, having the most extraordinary range of views, and, as I have said, it is one of the most significant heritage sites in Australia.

One would think that this was a site that the Government would have wanted to preserve, that it would have been pouring significant resources into it. However, the buildings are falling into disrepair. Over the past

two years alone, two buildings have burnt down under National Parks and Wildlife Service management. One was the old hospital, which was built in 1883 and is absolutely irreplaceable. If that is an example of how the Government manages significant historical sites, heaven help the future interpretation of history in this State.

The Quarantine Station Conservation Management Plan 2000 concluded that the condition of the buildings and sites comprising the quarantine station range from good to poor. The plan says that the station fabric was run down prior to hand-over in 1984, and that there have been subsequent attempts to systematically address maintenance requirements but these have lacked sufficient resources to maintain the entire site. There is a maintenance backlog on some buildings, which has led to the deteriorating condition, and many sites, especially the inscriptions on them, are in varying degrees of deterioration due to weathering. However, the plan goes on to say that the condition of the station does not severely diminish its significance. That is very true, but it will significantly diminish its significance if there is not a real attempt to undo the neglect of the past, to repair the buildings and maintain them to the standard that the people of New South Wales expect.

The problem relates to resources, and there is no question that the Government has been neglecting the quarantine station. Figures published on the National Parks and Wildlife Service web site show that in 1996-97 the Government spent \$523,569 on maintaining the quarantine station, in 1997-98 that spending increased to \$621,217, but in 2000-01 it slumped to \$178,275. Over four years, Government funding for the quarantine station has dropped from \$621,000 to \$178,000, which is clearly inadequate. The National Parks and Wildlife Service operates tours of the site, and some of the buildings are used as conference venues or for overnight accommodation. However, we are talking about a contribution to the costs of managing this site of only about \$280,000, which is manifestly inadequate.

One problem is that the National Parks and Wildlife Service [NPWS] is very good at managing the natural environment, and it is very good at dealing with flora and fauna issues, and threatened species issues. However, it is not good at managing the built environment; it is not entrepreneurial in the way it goes about managing sites such as the quarantine station. Access to the site is restricted. People who want to go there must do so as part of a conference or book to go on a tour. There are very successful ghost tours about four times a week. Indeed, 27,000 people have visited the site as tourists in the past year, but that is a drop in the ocean. I am sure that many hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people in Sydney are not aware of the quarantine station's existence, let alone its significance. That is an indictment of the Government and the way it has been managing the site. The NPWS web site states:

Access to the site is limited by security requirements and the poor condition of much of the site. There is little free access and the public can only visit the site as a tour participant or by attendance at a function or conference.

Shame! Shame! Shame! The NPWS could have done much more, and the Government should have done much more, not only to maintain the site but to encourage a level of visitation that would not only have generated a significant revenue stream to assist with maintenance but would also have meant that many, many more people in New South Wales would have benefited from the interpretation that obviously goes with tours to the site. They would have understood our history to a much greater extent.

I said that the NPWS is not the best organisation to look after a site of this nature, and that is true so far as the built environment is concerned. However, honourable members should remember that we are also talking about pristine bushland. We are talking about an area that is relatively undisturbed because, by definition, the only people who went to the quarantine station were those who were in quarantine. The biological diversity of this area is outstanding. There are some five species of terrestrial mammal on the site, including the locally endangered long nosed bandicoot, seven terrestrial reptile species and 90 native bird species, including the little penguin. The Manly quarantine station site is home to the only breeding colony of little penguins in New South Wales. There are some 460 species of flora, including five that have been identified as rare.

The conundrum is that the NPWS is very good at looking after the natural environment but it is very poor at looking after the built environment. The Government wants to bring in a private sector hotel operator to do both jobs. The Opposition believes that even if the operator does one of those jobs well, he will do the other job very poorly. That is certainly what the Friends of Quarantine Station believe; they are concerned about not only the modifications that Mawland is proposing to the historic fabric of the site but also the lack of attention to these conservation issues vis-a-vis the natural environment.

Clearly, a new model is needed for this historic site, and that is what this bill will provide. It borrows from two key sources: the Hon. Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans' bill currently in the upper House and the Government's Callan Park (Special Provisions) Act 2002. Honourable members might recall that the then Callan

Park (Special Provisions) Bill was rushed into this place late last year because there was real concern about the Minister for Tourism and Sport and Recreation holding her seat of Port Jackson. The Government borrowed largely and liberally from a bill put forward by the honourable member for Davidson at that time. It thought there were conditions that should be applied to the Callan Park site as a significant public site. Why those conditions will not be applied to the Manly quarantine station, we can only guess. I reiterate: We do not believe that there should be 21-year leases on the site or that it should be leased to a single entity.

The Hon. Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans' bill has some good points, with which we would agree, and I have had extensive consultations with Dr Chesterfield-Evans and with Friends of Quarantine Station on this matter. I place on record that I am indebted to Judy Lambert and Doug Sewell in particular for their input. Both of them helped to hone and refine this bill. The major concerns we had with the Hon. Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans' bill were, first, that he proposed that there should be a five-person trust—we felt that the composition of the trust was too narrow—and, second, the trust was also to be a management entity. Another bureaucracy would be set up to run the quarantine station site. As I outlined, the National Parks and Wildlife Service should be involved to a significant extent, particularly in relation to threatened and rare species. There is a requirement for the National Parks and Wildlife Service to be involved to a significant extent. What it needs is an injection, an infusion, of knowledge and experience in managing historic buildings, and that is what our bill will provide.

Under our legislation, there will be a quarantine station preservation trust consisting of the following seven members appointed by the Minister: one member chosen by the Minister as having expertise in the restoration and conservation of historic buildings, one member nominated by the National Trust of Australia (New South Wales), one member nominated by the Director-General of National Parks and Wildlife Service; one member nominated jointly by the local Aboriginal community in the Manly, Warringah and Pittwater local government areas and the local Aboriginal land council, one member nominated by the National Parks Association of New South Wales Incorporated, one member nominated by Manly Council; and one member nominated by the Commonwealth Minister for Environment and Heritage.

Honourable members will see that the trust will cover all bases and will provide the level of expertise required for the management of this site. The trust will have both an advisory role and a consent role. It will be a consent authority for leases and other activities on the site. It could approve the use of a building as a restaurant or an art gallery but it will not run those commercial enterprises. We have no problem with private sector involvement. We believe that buildings are best preserved if they are used, but they should be used in an appropriate fashion. Under part 4 of the bill, public notice must be given in at least one metropolitan newspaper and one local paper of a proposed grant of lease or license.

The public will have 30 days to comment on the terms of that lease. So the local community will have a stake in what is happening at the quarantine station. It will have a significant input. This will provide safeguards over the possibility of inappropriate activities being carried out on the site. Clause 12 of the bill covers restrictions on leases or licences, including the impact of the proposal for a lease on the amount of open space at the quarantine station, restrictions on floor area and the significant heritage fabric of the site. Clause 12 (2) states:

The Minister must not exercise any power to which this Part applies if the Minister forms the opinion that the grant of the relevant lease or license will result in:

- (a) less open space at the Quarantine Station site than existed immediately before the commencement of this Act, or
- (b) an increase in the total floor area of all buildings that existed at the Quarantine Station immediately before the commencement of this Act, or
- (c) an adverse impact on the significant heritage fabric of the Quarantine Station site.

Clauses 13 and 14 are critical to the intent of the legislation. Under clause 13 the Minister is forbidden from leasing or licensing all of the quarantine station site to one person or one entity, and under clause 14 the Minister cannot grant leases or licences with a term of 10 years or more. I understand that Mawland claimed that it would be unable to obtain finance for its proposals with a lease, originally, of less than 45 years. Now it seems to be content with 21 years, but we believe that 10 years is an appropriate time. If the company does a good job, one would assume the trust would be happy to renegotiate with it and to reassign the lease to it. This is all about outcomes, and those who are doing well should be rewarded for doing well.

Those clauses, 13 and 14, are borrowed from the Government's own Callan Park legislation. If it was good enough for Callan Park, why is it not good enough for the quarantine station? After all, the quarantine station is an even more significant historical site than Callan Park. The Government cannot have it both ways. It cannot say that Callan Park should be protected and there should not be leases of more than 10 years there and no changes to the significant historical fabric of the site, and then say that anything goes at the quarantine station.

We think that having a trust to advise and to act as a consent authority for leases on the site is the optimum model, it is the best of both worlds. It is using National Parks and Wildlife Service expertise. It is injecting the expertise in maintaining and conserving historic buildings that is lacking currently. The Mawland proposals would include rebuilding the hospital, but it would not be rebuilt as it was. The plans are there, the photographs are there. I suppose one could create a replica. It would be a 2004-05 replica and look pretty much like the original hospital. However, Mawland wants to put in ensuite toilets—I do not think hospitals had ensuite toilets in 1883—and the first-class and second-class accommodation are also to be modified to include ensuite toilets on the basis that that is what people want today. Once again, this is an alteration to the significant heritage fabric of the area. We object to this proposal.

We are also very concerned about the proposal by Mawland to change the use of the boiler room at Spring Cove to a restaurant. The boiler room would be significantly altered from its original form—in fact, it would probably be unrecognisable as a boiler room. We believe these modifications would irreversibly change the character of the site, something the New South Wales Heritage Office, only a couple of years ago, warned against as having a permanent and adverse impact on the site.

In conclusion, the Manly quarantine station is one of the most important heritage sites in Australia. The bill will provide the best way of conserving those heritage values and of managing the quarantine station in an integrated and sensitive way. It does not preclude Mawland from being involved with the site but it would be on a lesser scale than is currently envisaged, and there would be significant opportunities for people to see the site, to walk around the site and to learn from our history. In 1997 the Premier issued a vision statement for the future of Sydney Harbour foreshore. He said:

The Harbour is too precious to be sold off for the exclusive use of Sydney silvertails.

We agree. I commend the bill to the House.

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

#### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT AMENDMENT (NO FORCED AMALGAMATIONS) BILL**

**Bill introduced and read a first time.**

#### **Second Reading**

**Mr FRASER** (Coffs Harbour) [10.28 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Coalition has a policy of no forced amalgamations. We went to the election with that policy. We stand by that policy. Does that policy sound familiar to the people of New South Wales? Yes, it does, because the then Minister for Local Government, Harry Woods, had the identical policy. When pressed on many occasions during the election campaign he reiterated and reinforced the Government's attitude of no forced amalgamations. Harry Woods retired at the last election. The Hon. Tony Kelly was introduced to the portfolio by the Premier and given a manila folder. In that manila folder, I suggest, was a list of councils in New South Wales to be dissolved or to be amalgamated. Proof of this came when the Minister wrote to the Mayor of Yarrowlumla shire and informed him that as of the next local government elections, due in September, his shire would be dissolved and merged with Yass and Queanbeyan councils.

**Pursuant to sessional orders business interrupted.**

#### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT AMENDMENT (GRAFFITI) BILL**

#### **Second Reading**

**Debate resumed from 8 May.**

**Mrs HOPWOOD** (Hornsby) [10.30 a.m.], in reply: Firstly, let me thank all honourable members for their contribution to the Local Government Amendment (Graffiti) Bill. The debate on this side of the House has been thorough and well thought out, and speakers have raised many important points. Graffiti is a scourge in many of our suburbs. I know that in the electorate of Hornsby our local councils, which are active in their efforts

to reduce the level and frequency of graffiti, fight a never-ending battle. We need all the forces we can muster to fight the problem. If we can tighten up the legislation that covers graffiti, we should do so. This bill makes a simple amendment that would provide a widespread solution to the problem of removing graffiti in difficult positions, and in an acceptable time frame. It is a simple change, but an extremely effective one.

To revisit the intent of the bill, the aim is to amend the Local Government Act 1993 in relation to the powers of local councils to remove graffiti on property owned or occupied by public authorities. It will amend the Act to enable a local council to recover from a public authority expenses incurred by the council for the removal of graffiti from property owned or occupied by a public authority; and to order the removal of graffiti from property owned or occupied by a public authority. The provisions of the bill will apply where graffiti is visible from a public place, the public authority does not agree to have the graffiti removed, and the graffiti removal work cannot be carried out from a public place. In addition, failure to comply with an order will be an offence.

I am aware and acknowledge that the amendments in this bill are in addition to amendments made to the Local Government Act in recent times. Those amendments were contained in two bills: the Local Government Amendment (Graffiti Removal) Bill 2001, under which councils may, by agreement with the owner or occupier of any private land, carry out graffiti removal on the land and facilitate the granting of financial assistance by local councils as part of programs of graffiti removal; and the Local Government Amendment (Graffiti) Bill 2002, which enables a local council to carry out certain graffiti removal work on land without the agreement of the owner or occupier of that land if the graffiti concerned is visible and accessible from a public place.

Councils express great frustration about the time taken to remove graffiti from structures over which they have no power. Many substations, particularly the large green substations, and other public authority property, are covered with graffiti and this eyesore is present on the facilities for an extended time. Councils that have strict graffiti policies, as many do, want to have the offending graffiti removed. Such removal is not the core business of the authority. The authority may eventually remove it, but it is usually not a priority. A constituent of mine, Les Howard, recently went via train to the Homebush area. In a letter he wrote to me he said:

It pays to take a book or buy a paper, something to pass the time whilst travelling. The alternative of watching out of the window is not pretty. Graffiti, graffiti and more graffiti! As I see it we have two choices. Open up classes at TAFE for graffiti—certified courses (that way we might make it an art worth looking at)—or the alternative: remove it. (That worked during the Olympics).

My bill will assist Les and many others to enjoy rail travel or any other journeys around the suburbs. The honourable member for Tweed said:

Graffiti affects people's perceptions of an area, property values, community wellbeing and civic pride.

He continued:

... many councils have experienced difficulties in addressing graffiti on public property due to a number of factors. They include safety issues on high risk sites such as railway corridors and electricity infrastructure and personal and property liability implications on high risk sites. Difficulty also arises due to the complexity of apportioning removal costs where property is not owned and maintained by a single entity.

He said further:

I am also concerned that the bill undermines the strong partnerships between local councils, public authorities and the State Government that are already in place as a result of the Government's integrated approach to graffiti management and prevention.

To the contrary, this bill actually strengthens those partnerships. The honourable member for The Hills is also concerned about graffiti and fully supports this bill in its entirety. The honourable member for Strathfield said:

Graffiti has a marked effect on the way that people perceive an area, and this has a flow-on effect on community wellbeing, civic pride and property values.

She further said:

It has been demonstrated that one of the most effective means of deterring graffiti is to remove it as soon as possible, preferably within 48 hours of it appearing.

The honourable member said that is the aim of most councils. I had occasion recently to drive through the Strathfield area. Despite the honourable member's statement that there is little or no graffiti in her area, I saw a number of substations with graffiti. So her electorate would benefit from the adoption of this bill. The honourable member for Willoughby said:

Any measures that assist to prevent or reduce the impact of graffiti throughout the community should be encouraged and supported.

She said:

I regret that the Government will not support the bill. ... The Government's arguments so far in opposing the bill are unconvincing. Graffiti is a significant community issue that has detrimental environmental, social and economic impacts.

The honourable member for Bligh provided a great deal of information about the issues associated with graffiti and had an obvious interest and vast knowledge of the matter. She said:

I support the bill because it follows on logically from last year's Government legislation

It duly does. She continued:

That legislation enables councils to act more quickly.

She went on to say:

Unsightly illegal graffiti adds to an atmosphere of neglect and urban decay, and often reinforces that cycle. Graffiti and tagging are symptomatic of much more serious problems such as theft, assaults, littering, willful damage or vagrancy in targeted areas.

**Mr Armstrong:** It also puts tourists off.

**Mrs HOPWOOD:** I quite agree: it does put tourists off. The contribution of the honourable member for Clarence gave a rural perspective. He said he has a graffiti problem in his electorate that needs to be addressed. I would like to express my profound disappointment if the Government does not see its way clear to vote for this amendment. It has purported to support measures to decrease graffiti. The changes brought about by this bill will assist communities to reduce the incidence of visible graffiti and work to discourage the perpetrators of graffiti. I believe that it is necessary that we take a bipartisan approach to this issue. Sadly, that will probably not be the case. If the Government does not support this bill, I hope to see my ideas in another bill, sooner rather than later, when the Government realises the error of its ways and decides this initiative has great merit. I thank honourable members for their considerable indulgence and participation. I urge support for this amendment to the Local Government Act, and I commend the bill to the House.

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

**The House divided.**

**Ayes, 36**

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

**Noes, 49**

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

**Pair**

Mr Fraser

Ms Saliba

**Question resolved in the negative.****Motion negatived.****YOUNG OFFENDERS AMENDMENT (REFORM OF CAUTIONING AND WARNING) BILL****Second Reading****Debate resumed from 3 July.**

**Mr NEWELL** (Tweed—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.46 a.m.]: The Young Offenders Act 1997 establishes a scheme that provides an alternative process to court proceedings for dealing with juveniles who commit certain offences through the use of warnings, cautions and youth justice conferences. The Act recognises that underlying social factors contribute to juvenile offending, that children require different treatment by the justice system from adults, that children should generally be imprisoned only as a measure of last resort, and that children who commit offences should bear responsibility for their actions but require guidance and assistance because of their state of dependency and immaturity.

Under the Act, a child is entitled to be dealt with by way of a warning, caution, or youth justice conference if he or she meets the relevant criteria in the Act. For example, the offence must be covered by the Act and, in the case of cautions and conferences, the young offender must admit the offence and consent to being cautioned or attending a conference. Very serious matters such as murder, manslaughter and sexual assault offences cannot be dealt with under the Act. The Government's position is that if a juvenile commits a very serious offence or repeatedly offends, he or she should be treated with the appropriate degree of severity under the law.

The bill introduced by the Leader of the National Party is a crude attempt to chip away at an Act that has proved very successful. Much of the bill runs contrary to the principles of the Act and would have the effect of severely restricting a young offender's entitlement to be dealt with under the Act. I am particularly concerned about the bill's provisions that would preclude a child from being given a warning or caution if he or she had been previously convicted or found guilty of an offence by a court or had been dealt with under the Act. Such provisions would have the effect of exacerbating the overrepresentation of indigenous youth before the courts. The provisions would also have the effect of limiting police discretion and the options available to police in dealing with juveniles. For example, a police officer may consider that a caution is the most appropriate response in a particular case but, under this bill, if the juvenile had previously received a caution the matter would have to go to a conference or the court.

Dr Patrick Power, chair of the Youth Justice Advisory Committee, has written to me expressing the committee's strong opposition to the bill. The Youth Justice Advisory Committee was established under the Young Offenders Act to provide advice on the Act. The committee has an independent chair and comprises representatives of the Attorney General's Department, the Department of Juvenile Justice, NSW Police and the Cabinet Office; representatives nominated by the Juvenile Justice Advisory Council and the Juvenile Crime Prevention Advisory Committee; and representatives of the interests of victims and of children and young people.

The department recently conducted a comprehensive statutory review of the Act that carefully considered many of the issues raised in the bill. The department consulted widely as part of the review and received many submissions from individuals and organisations. The Attorney General's Department has taken account of the views expressed in those submissions in preparing a report that will soon be tabled in Parliament. I anticipate that the review will result in amendments to the Act that will enhance its effectiveness.

I am aware that there is a perception among some police and members of the public that young offenders are treated too leniently under the Act. While the Government disagrees with that perception, it believes that repeat offenders and offenders who commit serious crimes must be dealt with using the appropriate severity. For this reason the Government amended the Act last year to limit to three the number of cautions that a young offender may receive. The amendments also increase the investigating officer's involvement in decisions to conference young offenders under the Act, they make provisions in relation to the rights of victims under the Act to veto outcome plans developed at conferences, they increase the involvement of schools in conferencing when appropriate, and they ensure that young offenders are referred to appropriate programs to help them overcome their offending behaviour.

Honourable members will be aware that the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research recently released a report entitled "Reducing Juvenile Crime: Conferencing Versus Court". The report revealed that conferencing can be considerably more effective than the court process in reducing re-offending and in increasing the crime-free period of juveniles who re-offend. The report found that the risk per year of re-offending was almost 28 per cent lower for young people who were conferenced than for those who went to court.

In 2000 the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research released a report evaluating youth justice conferencing. This report also strongly endorses using conferencing as an alternative to court proceedings when dealing with young offenders. The report confirms that both young offenders and victims experience high levels of satisfaction with the conferencing process. It also confirms that offenders who attend conferences accept responsibility for their offences, feel that the offence they committed was wrong, understand how those affected by their actions feel, and understand the harm they caused to the victim.

While such findings stand as a vindication of the success of the Act, certain things can be done to improve its effectiveness. Such changes have already been made in the Young Offenders Amendment Act 2002 and, as I said earlier, I expect further amendments to arise from the current review of the Act recently conducted by the department. The bill introduced by the Leader of the National Party is a simplistic, ill-conceived and crude attempt to amend the Act. The bill proposes some unnecessary amendments and amendments that run contrary to the fundamental principles of the Act. The Government does not support it.

**Mr ARMSTRONG** (Lachlan) [10.54 a.m.]: I take great pleasure in speaking in support of the Young Offenders Amendment (Reform of Cautioning and Warning) Bill, which was introduced by the Leader of the National Party. I note that the Government intends to oppose the bill. I listened carefully to the speech by the honourable member for Tweed, whose presentation was somewhat uncertain. I suspect he did not have much confidence in his presentation and was simply asked to do a job.

Anyone with an ounce of commonsense would recognise the dramatic problems in the community caused by young people re-offending. There is no denying that fact. When I visit electorates apart from my own from time to time I often talk to school principals and teachers. Three principals have told me this calendar year that they spend probably half their time dealing with young people with repetitive behavioural problems. I attend police accountability community team meetings organised by the Minister for Police, and after we have discussed the traffic figures, the number of arrests and so on the conversation usually turns to juvenile behaviour and the problem of repeat offending.

I represent a true country electorate, which extends from Young in the east to Lake Cargelligo in the west. I have a great mix of constituents, who live in more than 40 communities with an average population of



about 1,500. I assure honourable members that many of those communities are in absolute despair as to how to handle repeat offenders. For instance, in January 12 months ago the same juveniles broke into the Condobolin Bowling Club on six consecutive occasions. They had been cautioned and issued with the various relevant notices, but it was like water off a duck's back because they took no notice. Their parents were spoken to but that did not work either. Cases such as that cause immense frustration in the community.

Let us consider the other side of the equation, because I do not think the Government understands this point. If we were to follow the process set out in this bill we could caution young people who had committed a first or second offence and make them think about their behaviour and its consequences. We could make parents understand that their children have problems and respect the fact that unless their children change that behaviour they may end up with criminal records, living very different lives from those that their parents would want for them.

As I travel around the State I meet employers who take on apprentices. However, many of them are becoming increasingly reluctant to do so because their apprentices are subjected to pressure from their peers, who come along and say, "What are you doing in there? Why don't you come out here with us? We're having fun. We're causing all sorts of problems up and down the street." Gangs of young people might throw a few garbage bins through shop windows on a Friday night or, as occurred in Cowra, burn a car or burn a tractor on the golf course—all of those incidents occurred this year. That sort of peer pressure is having an adverse effect on kids who are trying to do the right thing.

If we can minimise, first, a young person's opportunity to commit an offence, and, secondly, a young person's misdirected ideas about his or her youthful behaviour, we will not only help the community but also stop that young person from following an undesirable path in life. Unfortunately, that is happening to thousands of young people under the current legislation. Government members cannot defend that legislation in any way. It is obvious that it is not working; the records show that.

The juvenile crime rate is not being reined in. We know that not from reading voluminous records in the library but from asking virtually anyone on the street what he or she thinks about juvenile behaviour. Ask people whether they feel safe in their homes and in shopping centres. Ask whether they believe it is safe to leave their cars in the street overnight or to leave their kid's bicycle on the front lawn. People will tell you that they have serious concerns about crime.

I refer to people who are buying houses in the current property boom. They are not so concerned about the price—as the newspapers would have us believe—but with buying or establishing a home in an area that is deemed to be free of juvenile misconduct. That is the first criteria. The old adage in real estate is that there are only three things to remember: location, location, location. The criteria for location, location, location these days is where we feel safe; where our wives and our mothers feel safe going to the supermarket; where we can put our 9, 10, 11 and 12-year-old kids on bikes to ride down to play footy or netball on Saturday mornings; where the kids can go for a run with the dog in the mornings.

If we continue to keep our heads in the sand in regard to juvenile crime in many suburbs and towns across the State, as the Government does, we will continue to erode confidence in those communities. We have evidence that the Government's current legislation does not work. It is not achieving its set objective. The honourable member for Tweed went to great pains to try to support the Government's legislation, but he just cannot do it. The Government's argument is flawed. This week Government members have shown that they have some courage—or at least 34 of them have some courage.

**Mr Debnam:** It's temporary.

**Mr ARMSTRONG:** I hope that my colleague is wrong and that it is not temporary. Very seldom do I argue with my colleagues, but I think Government members might have crossed the Rubicon on this one. I note that the Parliamentary Secretary is on the right side—well done indeed!

**Mr Gaudry:** On the correct side. I've not yet cut the painter.

**Mr ARMSTRONG:** He says "not yet". That is right, but here is his chance. If he can bring even half of his caucus colleagues over to this side of the House to stick up for the kids, the parents and the communities it will make a difference. The Parliamentary Secretary took a brave step on Tuesday. I hope that the courage, commonsense and sense of responsibility that was no doubt well within his chest when he opposed the masses

against him in the caucus will persuade him to come across with us today and support a bill that will improve the lives of young people in the future and the lives of people in the community. His support can make a difference. If he is in the black books now he might as well continue on the side of right. He cannot go back on what he has done—his name is recorded. It is vitally important that we recognise the objects of this bill. They are:

- (a) to provide that young offenders who have previously been convicted or found guilty of an offence by a court or who have previously been dealt with under the Act are not entitled to be warned or cautioned under the Act, and
- (b) to require that a parent of a young offender be given notice when the offender is warned under Part 3, or cautioned under Part 4, of the Act.

I read those objects for a reason. I note that, for instance, where a student has engaged in behaviour that is unsatisfactory to the school, that student is sent to see the principal. These days even little fellows in years 1 and 2 have to go to see the principal. What does the principal do? He speaks to the student and then he writes to the parents straightaway. If it is good enough for parents of children in kindergarten and years 1 and 2 to be advised of unsatisfactory behaviour, it is good enough for parents of children wreaking mayhem on the community to be advised of that behaviour. There is a total lack of consistency in the Government's management of young people's behaviour. It is condoned, encouraged and, indeed, it is mandatory for a school principal to advise the parents if there are behavioural problems with a child of seven, eight or nine years of age.

The parents are told, "The conduct of your child is unsatisfactory to the school. I have today had to interview your child"—young William, Timothy, Jonathan, Xavier, whatever his name might be—"who, as a result of an incident in the playground ..." It is a serious matter. Mum and dad then take a couple of hours off work the next day, go down to the school, sit straight-backed and are expected to straighten out young William, Timothy, Jonathan, Xavier, whatever his name might be. But what happens out in the street when that young person turns 12 or 13 years of age? He just gets a warning and he does not tell mum and dad. He is not going to tell them—no way! Therefore, he is on the road saying, "Ha, I've had a win!"

I hope that commonsense rather than politics prevails on this occasion. We have to try to assist young people to have a better life, to give them fundamental responsibilities as citizens of the future, and to give them the opportunity to understand that their actions may put them in a difficult situation in the future in relation to obtaining employment. Quite often an employer does not want to employ someone who has a criminal record, despite the fact that the equal opportunity in employment office says that employers cannot discriminate. A young person who has had problems with the police will not go to the top of the queue when looking for a job after he has left school. Let us think about that person, let us think about the broader community and let us think about the parents. Let us also think about how we can honour our obligations as members of this Parliament to make a better and happier society and to create a better environment than exists in some streets, some suburbs, and some towns and villages across New South Wales. I genuinely exhort members of the Government to have the courage that those 34 members showed against the Premier on Tuesday, and to cross the floor and vote with us this afternoon to make a difference for young people.

**Mr DEBNAM** (Vaucluse) [11.06 a.m.]: I am pleased to support the Young Offenders Amendment (Reform of Cautioning and Warning) Bill, which was introduced by the Leader of the National Party. Not only is this bill very important to the honourable member who introduced it, his electorate, the National Party and the Coalition, but it is extremely important to just about every member of this House, if they were honest with themselves and the community. The Government noted in its response to the bill that last year it reduced the number of cautions to three. It is very obvious to us and to every member of the community who is dealing with young offenders that three warnings is two too many. It should be reduced to one. The Leader of the National Party has done a good job putting this bill together and bringing it to the Parliament on behalf of New South Wales. He is doing the job the Government should have been doing.

It is important that we put in place a structure that provides for one warning and one caution but that also contains discretion for police officers in the field and in the front line, as opposed to this mindless media strategy that is being churned out by the Carr Government. Police officers are under so much pressure from the Carr Government today, not just from lack of resources but also from lack of proper policing strategies. Front-line police need the help of this bill. They need to be able to say to young offenders in the street, "One warning, one caution, and that is it." It is clear to me that the number one issue across the State—it has been a huge issue for about half the term of the Carr Government, apart from illegal handgun crime, which is obviously hitting the front pages these days—is youth crime and antisocial behaviour.

Youth crime and antisocial behaviour have become the number one issue in many communities—not just in Coalition electorates, but also in Labor electorates and in Independent electorates across the State—because the communities and front-line police feel betrayed by the Carr Government in relation to this issue. Time and time again police send me the message that they feel that their hands are tied when they are dealing with young offenders. Quite often when I am talking about young offenders in the street—regardless of what they are doing—I describe people I have seen and I have no idea whether they are 16, 17 or 18. However, the police consistently say to me, "Let me tell you, they will be 16 or 17 because they know what happens when they are 18." It is clear that police feel very strongly about this, and it is a shame that the Carr Cabinet does not. That is perhaps explained by the fact that members of the Carr Cabinet, after eight years of being picked up from home in limousines and driven to the Parliament, are totally out of touch with what is happening in the community.

Over the last few weeks I have spent day after day in the Premier's electorate of Maroubra trying to help his constituents, who are simply in despair about youth crime and antisocial behaviour running totally out of control. Just this morning there was a bashing in the streets of Bondi. Youth crime and antisocial behaviour is a major issue in many other areas. Over the last few weeks I have visited Bourke, Brewarrina, Cobar, Dubbo, Albury, Maitland and Berkeley, and the communities of those towns are simply screaming out for help. This bill provides the help they are looking for. Time and again, the initiatives on issues that really matter to the community, especially policing issues, have come from the Coalition. I simply do not know what is happening in the Carr Cabinet; I do not know what is happening in the caucus room. I do not understand why there is this total disconnection between the Carr Labor Government and the community.

*[Interruption]*

One of the members opposite suggests that because he spends all his time in Parliament he is not in touch with his community. I do not think that is true. The Parliament sits for very few weeks each year. Government members should be spending time in their electorates getting in touch with the community. I suggest that they go into their communities, engage in the consultation that they pretend to engage in on other issues, and hold public meetings in their electorates about young offenders and see what response they get. The Parliament will now have a one-week recess. This will provide a good opportunity for Government members to arrange public meetings in their electorates, and to call for public comment on young offenders and see what the people in their electorates have to say about the issue.

Over the last few weeks when I have discussed the issue with community members—whether it is in Maitland, Maroubra, Berkeley or Wollongong—I have asked them how many difficult, hard-core juveniles there are in their community, expecting them to say maybe 50 or 100. But that is not the case. Consistently I am told that the number of hard-core offenders is up to six, although I think the number for one area was 10 or 12. The reason there is such a problem with juvenile crime is that those six hard-core offenders are leading probably 20 or 30 other juveniles in their crime spree and antisocial behaviour, knowing they can get away with it and that the hands of the police are tied. It is those six people in each location we clearly have to target. The bill introduced by the Leader of the National Party does that. It clearly says to them that they will get only one caution. At the same time, it allows police to retain discretion, which is important.

This issue reminds me of 1996, when the Opposition sought to introduce another initiative for police but the Carr Government persistently resisted. I refer to legislation to impound the cars of car hooners. I introduced the bill in this House in about October 1996, the police Minister dismissed it out of hand, the left wing of the Labor Party applauded his action, and the community went berserk. It was one of the key issues in electorates across the State, and the community wanted that bill introduced. It took about four to six weeks for the Government to change the title of that bill and reintroduce it to the Parliament. The Government's bill was passed, and legislation to confiscate the cars of car hooners became law on 20 December 1996. The Government was forced to introduce the legislation because of community backlash to its arrogance and the fact that it was totally out of contact with community sentiment and concerns. I suspect that a similar thing will happen with this bill.

The Government still has an opportunity to reconsider its position and vote for the bill introduced by the Leader of the National Party. That may happen some time this morning, and we all hope that it does. However, if the Government votes against the bill, obviously within the next 72 hours every community across New South Wales will know that it has voted against this young offenders legislation. I predict that the Government will confront backlash over the next few weeks. However, as I said, the Parliament will now have a one-week recess, which will give Government members an opportunity to call public meetings in their

electorates to discuss the issue of young offenders. It will also give them an opportunity to speak about this bill introduced by the Leader of the National Party, say that they think it is a good idea, and call for submissions from their electorates to get support for it.

On the Tuesday morning of the next sitting week Government members will be able to attend caucus and say to Bob Carr, "Andrew Stoner was right." As usual, Bob Carr will sit there reading his book. He may ignore his members, but if they continue they may get Bob Carr to put down his book and listen to what they have to say. Tomorrow Government members could send out notices for public meetings to be held next Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday. They could then compile the information and submissions, and present them to the Parliament on the following Tuesday. They could say to Bob Carr, "Put down your book for a minute. Let me talk about a real issue in your electorate." The number one issue for Bob Carr's constituents, and the community in general, is youth crime and antisocial behaviour, and the Leader of the National Party's bill delivers the solution to dealing with it.

As the honourable member for Lachlan said, 34 Labor members of Parliament felt that they had some courage in the coward's castle of caucus last Tuesday morning. If those members discussed the issue with their constituents, they would realise the need to support this bill. They now have another chance not to betray the community but to support the residents of their electorates. I doubt whether we would get all 34 Labor members to vote on behalf of the community this time. Let us see some of the members in the coward's castle of caucus who voted for a review of the tax regime vote for this bill, which addresses the number one issue in many of their electorates: youth crime and antisocial behaviour. Let us see about half of those 34 members vote for this bill.

**Mr CANSDELL** (Clarence) [11.17 a.m.]: Juvenile crime is a major issue in every country town in New South Wales. It is rampant in Grafton, Yamba, Maclean and Evans Head. Everyone focuses on Walgett and Dubbo, which have major issues, but every country town has problems with juvenile crime. We are not talking about major crimes such as murder, rape or vicious assaults; indeed, most juvenile crime involves antisocial behaviour and misdemeanours. There is continued graffiti, abuse, window smashing—windows in the main street of shopping centres being smashed seven times in one week in some areas—and little old ladies are being threatened and made to feel prisoners in their own homes because kids are roaming the streets and sometimes entering their yards. The offenders simply get a slap on the wrist and continual warnings. When they are finally convicted, they simply get more warnings. Dealing with youth crime in this way does not draw a line in the sand; it does not set boundaries for young offenders.

Recently I visited Acmena Juvenile Justice Centre. The youth workers at the centre told me that the kids there need boundaries, that they need to know how far they can go. They will push as far they can go, until they reach their boundaries. If there are no boundaries, they will keep pushing. Boundaries were set, along with a bit of care that goes with it—not just the big stick but the carrot as well—and the centre is getting results. If the kids step over the line, they lose their privileges and they get some sort of detention. Outside Acmena there are no boundaries, and the kids know that. More often than not their parents do not even know that they have received a warning or caution. Parents need to be informed immediately, and any conference needs to take place fairly quickly. If the child does not agree to a conference, a responsible community representative needs to step in.

When we had street patrols in Grafton four years ago we saw kids aged 9, 10, 11 and 12 running around the streets at midnight. They are only a group of kids until they start committing crimes, and then they are a gang. Some of the older kids aged 14 and 15 who were on the streets four years ago are still on the streets now, hanging around early openers because no boundaries have been set and they have received no direction in all that time. The Young Offenders Act should be amended to include some boundaries. We need to draw some lines in the sand in the legislation. If there are no boundaries or lines in the sand, children are encouraged to take a career path that is only detrimental to themselves and their communities.

I was involved in a trial program in Grafton that provided schooling for kids who had been or were on the verge of being expelled from school. All these kids had behavioural problems. They virtually had criminal records in terms of warnings and cautions. Under the program, kids were involved in activities away from school, rather than putting them on the street. They had direction and lines drawn in the sand. Many of the kids moved on with a bit of help and direction. Recently I visited Grafton gaol, where one warden told me that 60 per cent of the senior prisoners are institutionalised. These people had gone through the system from juvenile justice to mainstream prisons. All of them had committed an offence and got away with it, and then continued to commit offences. When we were patrolling the streets we did not grab people who committed an offence—we did not grab them; we never laid a hand on them—but we called the police.

**Mr Gaudry:** Vigilante-type patrols.

**Mr CANSDELL:** The police loved us, as did the community. I have heard that a group of people patrol the beach at Newcastle. During a patrol if we saw young people smash a window or pull out a street sign we would call the police. They got caught because someone informed the police and was prepared to be a witness. They got into trouble, and were fined and put on a bond. They thanked us for giving them some direction, because no-one had been there for them in the past. All young people need is for their parents to know what they are doing. I believe these amendments will achieve that. Parents will be informed when their children receive warnings, cautions, et cetera. Some parents do not give a damn, but there is a chance that many of them do. Labor members should support this bill for the sake of their communities and the future of these kids.

**Mr STONER** (Oxley—Leader of the National Party) [11.24 a.m.], in reply: I note that only one Government member spoke in response to this bill, the honourable member for Tweed. I am concerned that there is no recognition of the seriousness of this issue throughout New South Wales. The honourable member for Tweed provided some reasons that the Government would not be supporting this bill. Firstly, he said that if the bill were passed into law it would see an overrepresentation of indigenous youth before the courts. That ground for opposing the bill is spurious. This bill makes no distinction between indigenous and non-indigenous youth; it is simply aimed at repeat young offenders. It has no discrimination whatever.

The bill simply says that young people who commit offences time and time again will be dealt with in a more timely and serious way. I do not accept the honourable member's assertion that the bill will lead to an overrepresentation of indigenous youth before the courts. If young indigenous people are overrepresented in the number of repeat young offenders, this bill will result in those indigenous youth being referred earlier and more frequently to youth justice conferences and the courts. In Kempsey, where my electorate office is based, youth justice conferences have proved to be highly effective in dealing with young indigenous offenders who, due to the shame factor of having to face the victims of their crimes, embark on changing their behaviour, with the involvement of Aboriginal elders in the process.

This has proved to be effective in changing the behaviour of repeat young offenders, unlike the current scenario, the revolving door scenario, in which young people are warned or cautioned time and time again. This bill will provide a much better outcome for indigenous and other youth than the current scenario in which they offend, get a slap on the wrist and then reoffend. That is a revolving door which does not break the cycle of crime but enables young repeat offenders to get into the habit of crime and eventually end up in an adult gaol. The honourable member for Tweed said that the bill would remove police discretion to give more than one caution. That will not be the case. The honourable member should have read the bill more thoroughly before he spoke on behalf of the Government. I refer the honourable member to new section 20 (2A), which states:

Despite any other provision of this section, a child may be dealt with by caution if:

- (a) the child has previously been dealt with under this Act only once and was given a warning, and
- (b) the investigating official is of the opinion that it is appropriate to deal with the matter by caution.

That is the relevant provision. Clearly, that will provide police officers with a discretion to give a second or subsequent caution in certain cases. However, it also establishes the important principle of one warning, one caution, then you will be dealt with in a more serious way, whether by a youth justice conference or the courts. The honourable member for Tweed also said that the bill is overly simplistic. That is the point. It must be simple—one warning, one caution, then you should be dealt with more seriously by way of a youth justice conference or the courts. Parents should be notified if their child has been warned or cautioned by police. The warning or caution should be given as soon as possible after the offence. It is not rocket science. It sends a simple message to young people. That is necessary because the message they currently receive under Labor's Young Offenders Act is that they can get away with offending time and time again.

I have received petitions containing massive numbers of signatures throughout the State. Recently, representatives of the business community in Dubbo came to Parliament to present petitions containing more than 11,000 signatures. The year before last I received in my electorate office petitions from Kempsey and district with more than 7,000 signatures. I have received petitions from Macksville, Coonabarabran and Narrandera. The honourable member for Lachlan and the honourable member for Clarence have had many representations from constituents in their electorates. Recently I received a letter from a councillor on the Broken Hill shire council regarding juvenile crime. The letter, to which was appended a petition containing 2,321 signatures, stated—

**Mr Black:** Point of order: The Leader of the National Party has diminished Broken Hill from the status of a city to a shire. On behalf of Broken Hill I take exception to that. It is still a municipality and we are still a city.

**Mr STONER:** A councillor from Broken Hill City Council wrote, saying:

There is a very real concern—

**Mr Black:** It was a gratuitous insult.

**Mr STONER:** What is the local member doing about this issue? That is the question I have to ask.

**Pursuant to sessional orders business interrupted.**

## **BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

### **Postponement of Business**

**General Business Notice of Motion (General Notice) No. 1 called on and postponed on motion by Mr Humpherson.**

## **HEALTH FUNDING**

**Mr TORBAY** (Northern Tablelands) [11.31 a.m.]: I move:

That this House calls on the Government to immediately commence constructive negotiations with the Commonwealth on increased health funding, and review cuts to elective surgery waiting lists that threaten specialist surgery at country hospitals.

I gave notice of this motion on 29 April, some considerable time ago, because it was becoming clearer by the day that Commonwealth-State negotiations on health funding were beginning to break down. It was clear, in the public comments we were hearing at that time, that the Commonwealth was putting forward a fairly final proposition before negotiations had taken place, and the States were gearing up to go to war in respect of the Commonwealth-State health agreement. It all looked a little disturbing from the perspective of those who regard our health system as being under more and more pressure.

I do not believe that any member in this House would not have received representations about the pressure on the health system; the difficulty in attracting doctors, nurses, allied health care workers, dentists and other associated skilled workers to regional and remote parts of New South Wales; and resourcing issues associated with the funding of health care, basic services and facilities. I highlight particularly regional and rural New South Wales. In the past the honourable member for Lismore has highlighted the problems associated with mental health services, and I agree fully with what he has said. Professor Tony Vinson, who recently conducted the report on education, highlighted the fact that mental health services, a major issue, are receiving a small level of funding when compared with funding for the other major issues he highlighted, which many of us are aware of.

No member of the House would not have received representations—whether members will admit it or not—from people who are sick of the bickering between State and Commonwealth governments over health funding. People are interested in outcomes in health funding and the bickering has been disappointing. Six months ago the Commonwealth Government set out its position on health funding, and that caused me to give notice of this motion. Almost six months ago I could see what was going to happen, and that has in fact happened. The Commonwealth has put forward a proposition that clearly and objectively does not keep pace with the rising cost of health services. Despite the bantering, that is the reality. The New South Wales Government and the other State governments have put all of the blame for that, in the context of the many pressures on the health system, on the Commonwealth Government.

While I am talking about health, I want to refer to aged care. It seems to me that the planning process for aged care is poor indeed. Pressure is building on the aged care sector, and the service provision for the senior citizens of our community appears to me to be ad hoc at best. I can cite many examples from my electorate. I am sure other members can do the same. Yesterday in this place the Minister for Health reminded us that many of the beds in the hospital system are taken up by our senior citizens. I can, however, cite a good outcome in the community of Emmaville, where the local community through the council, the State Government and the

Commonwealth provided a multipurpose service [MPS] for that community. The three levels of government worked together on health services for that community. It was a good outcome that also dealt with aged care planning. I have been asked why the people of Emmaville should not be able to get old in their own community.

I contrast that with a disappointing outcome for the Tingha community. Tingha hospital also put its hand up for an MPS, and I was delighted when the former Minister for Health, Craig Knowles, who has visited Tingha hospital, made a commitment to put an MPS at Tingha, subject to the Commonwealth providing the aged care beds—one cannot have an MPS without aged care beds—to give the community of Tingha a primary health care focus. All the dollars that come from the State system there are basically utilised for aged care. It is a classic example of the States subsidising what is a Federal responsibility. An MPS model was the right solution for that community. Only a few days ago we were told that the Commonwealth is not prepared to put the beds into Tingha. The Commonwealth is not prepared to work with the New South Wales Government to provide a multipurpose service for the people of Tingha, where the aged care beds have been directly funded by the States through the hospital for decades because the Commonwealth has been unable to provide those beds.

With the pressure on those who provide aged care, the small community of Tingha, which has looked after its senior citizens through the hospital for many years, may now lose the MPS. The Commonwealth says it believes there are enough beds for aged care services within that district. One of the towns the Commonwealth cited as being close enough is almost one hour away by car. Talk about not understanding the basic issues of friends and family associated with aged care! The clinical letter from the Commonwealth, which says there is not the necessary demand and the Commonwealth will not allocate more aged care beds for that part of the world, flies in the face of the pressure on the aged care industry and the waiting lists that all aged care service providers clearly have. I have focused a great deal on aged care because it is a major issue.

At the time I gave notice of this motion I was informed that constructive discussions would take place between the Commonwealth and the State on health services. Sadly, that has not been the case. Whilst it takes some time for motions to be debated after they are put on notice, this motion was clearly relevant at the time it was first put forward. There has not been any constructive dialogue on health services, despite the massive issues involved. Those issues require a bipartisan approach to be taken to the provision on future health services. I am pleased to say that a bipartisan approach is being taken in some areas. The State and Commonwealth Ministers seem to be working together constructively in relation to the management of natural resources. Why can the Ministers not do the same in relation to health services? There is no more important area than health services, on which the State and Commonwealth should hold constructive negotiations.

The pressure on the health system will continue. We as a Parliament should support many of the points made in this debate. The State and Commonwealth Governments must stop the bickering and become involved in constructive dialogue and negotiations for planning for the future. These issues will not go away. They will get worse, particularly when one takes account of our ageing population. I urge the New South Wales and Commonwealth governments not to continue down the road of discussion via television and other media. The Prime Minister announces, "That is the package, it is not negotiable." The package provides a 3 per cent increase per annum, yet costs are rising by 8 per cent per annum.

I have had that figure confirmed independently, and I believe the Commonwealth has acknowledged that to be the case by allowing private health insurers to increase their fees over and above 3 per cent. They claim that is to keep pace with health care costs. That clearly is not the case. I want to place on record my thanks to the Minister for Health for his recent visit to the Northern Tablelands. He took away with him a range of issues from the Northern Tablelands. I look forward to constructively working through those issues with him, particularly continuing capital investment and the important issue of attracting specialists, doctors, nurses and allied health care workers to our area.

**Mr GREENE** (Georges River) [11.41 a.m.]: I oppose the motion. On 23 April the Prime Minister announced an offer to the States and Territories of up to \$42 billion over the next five years for public hospitals, or a maximum of \$14.1 billion to New South Wales. He threatened to reduce funding to State hospitals if all his conditions were not met. As well, he had the hide to suggest that the Commonwealth Government should have deducted \$2.5 billion from their payments during 2002-2003, because he thinks that private hospitals have taken the pressure off public hospitals. That would have meant ripping out about \$850 million from the public hospital system in New South Wales over the past three years, or an annual amount of more than \$400 million at current funding levels.

The Prime Minister's argument about the decline in the use of public hospitals has been blown out of the water by a report recently released by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. The institute report

demonstrated that during 2001-02 the total patient bed days in public hospitals went up, not down. In a letter to Premier Carr, the Prime Minister asserted that the States and Territories went backwards in their contributions to the funding of public hospitals during the past five years. He stated in the same letter that the Commonwealth Government now puts more into public hospitals than the States and Territories. The New South Wales Government currently provides slightly less than two-thirds of public health care spending in New South Wales, and the Commonwealth contributes only the balance. The ratio is nearly 2:1 in favour of the New South Wales Government.

In addition, the 2003-04 New South Wales budget contained record health spending, with an 11 per cent increase being delivered by the Carr Government. In rural and regional areas, the increase amounts to \$244 million. The Government's contribution to health funding in New South Wales now stands at a mammoth \$9.3 billion. How the Prime Minister has arrived at his view on our contributions to public hospital funding remains a mystery. His Minister for Health and Ageing, Senator Patterson, has not been able to explain the facts behind his assertion. Mr Howard flatly refused to offer more funds for a new five-year agreement at the Council of Australian Governments [COAG] meeting last week.

Additional Commonwealth funds would, for example, assist in achieving a greater level of elective surgery in country areas of New South Wales. In hindsight, perhaps the honourable member for Northern Tablelands would have been better advised to submit his request for constructive negotiations to the Commonwealth Government rather than the State Government. The Minister for Health and the Premier did their best. Unfortunately for the New South Wales community, they could not secure more funds. What is really happening in Australia is the incremental, complete privatisation of health care funding and service delivery by the Howard Government. Medicare is being stripped back; it is being destroyed. Bulk-billing has collapsed over the twelve months to June this year. General practitioners are leaving practices in rural and outer-urban areas. And all Mr Howard can do is propose that private insurance can cover the gap between higher doctors' fees and what the now-too-low Medicare rebates provide. The moral bankruptcy of the Howard Government is no better illustrated than through its undermining of Medicare.

In relation to the second part of the honourable member for Northern Tableland's motion, it can be categorically stated that there has been no reduction in funding for elective surgery following the March elections. In fact, the Government's record has been impressive for country hospitals, and the funding commitments will continue. The latest available data, published in March this year, indicates a reduction in average waiting times for surgery. In the New England area the waiting time for surgery was 2.39 months in March 2001. It went down to 2 months in March 2003. In the Northern Rivers area the figure was 3.49 months in 2001, down to 2.07 months in 2003. The mid North Coast figure was 4.26 months, now down to 3.19 months. For long waits, those over 12 months, the results have been even more dramatic: In New England it was 69 in March 2001, down to 11 in March 2003. In Northern Rivers it was 197 in 2001, down to 156 in 2003. For the mid North Coast it was 1,535, now down to 353.

Late last year significant new funds were allocated for orthopaedic surgery with a five-year commitment to continue with the same higher funding. In 2002-03 the figure was \$7.5 million, which included funds for equipment. For each subsequent year it will be \$5 million. In New England the additional funds are \$935,000 in 2002-03, and \$635,000 per year thereafter. For the Northern Rivers the figures are \$1,537,000 and \$1,025,000. An increased contribution from the Commonwealth would help bring the figures down even further. Temporary adjustments to surgery programming at Lismore and Armidale have been unfairly characterised as cutbacks. There have been no cutbacks in New South Wales Government funding. I will repeat that for the Deputy Leader of the Opposition: There have been no cutbacks in New South Wales Government funding. Given these facts on funding and the outcomes that have been achieved, the Government opposes the motion.

**Mr O'FARRELL** (Ku-ring-gai—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [11.48 a.m.]: I congratulate the honourable member for Northern Tablelands on turning this debate into an extension of yesterday's debate on the urgent motion moved by the Minister for Health. I also congratulate the honourable member for Georges River on his excellent delivery of the latest offering from Walt Secord Productions. I remind the House that Walt Secord Productions is the biggest publisher of fiction in this State. I remind the honourable member for Northern Tablelands of the history that led him to move his motion, because he seems to have forgotten.

Within days of the State election campaign being determined, in the New England Area Health Service there were immediate cutbacks to surgery in hospitals. The Australian Medical Association blew the whistle on 9 April, and the cutbacks were the subject of considerable media exposure in the New England area. On the first sitting day after the election the honourable member for Northern Tablelands gave notice of a motion that



referred to cutbacks in elective surgery lists. We support his condemnation of the State Government's cynical abuse of taxpayers' resources. On 11 December 2002 it held out an offer of increased funding for surgery in the New England, but within days of winning the election it announced a 50 per cent reduction in surgery in that area.

The honourable member for Northern Tablelands gave notice of his motion because he had a problem. He was associated with and applauded the announcement by the former Minister for Health last December. He gave notice of the motion because, during the election campaign, he issued a press release in response to the expression of concern by the National Party candidate about health funding for the New England Area Health Service and cutbacks to services. On 17 March—as an Irish member of this House I note that it was St Patrick's Day—the honourable member for Northern Tablelands issued a press release in which he stated:

No services will be cut. They are in fact expanding.

The reality is that within two days of the election surgery waiting lists in the member's electorate were cut in half by the Government. There could be no more brutal act. The problem confronting the member for Northern Tablelands is that he cannot bring himself to hold the State Government accountable for that. Nothing in what he said in his speech in support of his motion indicated that he is seeking to hold the present Minister for Health or the former Minister to account. I am happy not to play blame games; I would be delighted if we could save time in this place and not blame either side. However, the member for Northern Tablelands must understand what I know as a parent: If we do not hold our children accountable, they learn no lessons. The problem for Independent members is that they like to buddy up with governments when it suits them, but their electorates miss out when governments fail to deliver, as this Government continues to fail to deliver in his electorate and the electorates of other Independent members. They are scared to hold the Government to account. That is why I am concerned about what the honourable member is doing this evening—I am sorry, this morning.

**Mr Oakeshott:** What day is it?

**Mr O'FARRELL:** It is Thursday and I have been here all week, unlike some of the colleagues of the honourable member for Northern Tablelands, who is now trying to turn this motion into an attack on the Federal Government. The Federal Government is providing New South Wales with \$3.4 billion more in health funding over the next five years than would have been provided if the existing agreement had been continued. The honourable member made a big leap at the beginning of his speech. He said that that was not enough to reflect increasing health costs. Not even the Canberra Health Care Summit, which was endorsed by this Government, agreed that that was correct.

The people who organised the summit, including Professor John Dwyer, said that they could not make that assertion because there was no accountability or transparency in the process that would enable them to sign up to the State Premier's claims that the additional \$3.4 billion on offer for New South Wales was insufficient. It is time the member for Northern Tablelands held this Government to account. It has collected more than \$5 billion in unexpected windfall revenue over the past five years and refuses to commit it to health services. It does so during an election campaign, but savagely rips it back as soon as the campaign is over.

**Ms D'AMORE** (Drummoyne) [11.53 a.m.]: In response to what the member for Northern Tablelands has said, I would like to clarify one point. New South Wales Health previously made a commitment to develop the service at Tingha as a multipurpose provider accommodating acute care services and nursing home beds. However, the Commonwealth Government has advised that it will not fund the nursing home beds. That will leave about 10 people without accommodation; they will have to relocate to nearby towns. The State Government condemns the Commonwealth Government for that decision and restates its commitment to continuing to provide primary care services at Tingha.

**Mr OAKESHOTT** (Port Macquarie) [11.54 a.m.]: I am astounded that the Government does not support this motion. It is an indication that it believes the relationship between the Commonwealth Government and the State Government is working. Likewise, I was surprised by the shadow Minister's comments in support of this motion. I gather that is the Coalition's position. Apparently, the shadow Minister believes that the motion moved by the honourable member for Northern Tablelands is not designed to hold the Government accountable. The fact that this debate is taking place is a credit to the honourable member. It represents a condemnation of the shadow Minister for Health for not fulfilling his role in Opposition by ensuring government accountability and honesty.

I congratulate the Independent member for Northern Tablelands and I am concerned about the parting shots of the shadow Minister for Health at the Independents about their role in ensuring accountability in this place. The shadow Minister also mentioned that some Independents were missing from the Chamber this week. As the Speaker said yesterday, I was absent to attend a funeral. I appreciate the support of most members of this House at a difficult time. I was disappointed when the shadow Minister for Health appeared to suggest that the Independent members were missing in action.

I strongly support this motion, particularly in light of the farce of the Commonwealth-State health funding negotiations over the past fortnight. Anyone watching, regardless of one's position in politics or in life, would have to say that the exercise was a comedy. Commonwealth and State Government representatives hurled crazy comments across the bow of both the Liberal Party and the Labor Party. It was very disappointing. I am sure the arguments put at Commonwealth and State levels by the Liberal Party and the Labor Party are accurate from a budgetary point of view. However, from a community point of view and from the point of view of people waiting for dental care, suffering from a mental illness or in need of aged care accommodation, the arguments and the summit were an exercise in apportioning guilt and blame, which should be sheeted home to both the State Government and the Commonwealth Government. A pox on both governments for allowing this issue, which should be the top priority for everyone, to be treated as an exercise in headline grabbing, staged walkouts and stunts. The truth was mixed with a great deal of fiction.

I strongly support the motion. Given the Premier's comment that he signed the agreement with a bayonet in his side, the Labor Government should have kept the door open for constructive negotiations with the Commonwealth at any time in the future. I thought the Premier wanted to keep the door open for constructive negotiations. Unfortunately, given the tone of this debate and the contribution of the honourable member for Georges River, it appears that the Government intends to oppose this motion. That suggests the bayonet is definitely in the side of this Parliament. The State Government has now shut the door on future negotiations with the Commonwealth Government. That is disappointing in light of what I heard and saw at the Commonwealth-State meeting.

I encourage the Government, in the short time available to it, to reconsider its position on this motion, to reconsider the comments of the honourable member for Georges River and to make health the top priority, as it says it does. Honourable members opposite talk about Medicare, bulk-billing and general practitioner shortages. I would like them to put that rhetoric into action and support the motion moved by the Independent member for Northern Tablelands, which seeks constructive negotiation on these important issues.

**Mr TORBAY** (Northern Tablelands) [11.59 p.m.], in reply: I thank all honourable members who have contributed to the debate, despite some of their comments. I am a little surprised that the Government intends to oppose a motion that simply calls for constructive dialogue. I gave notice of this motion six months ago and, as many honourable members have pointed out, the health debate has moved on since then. I intended originally to express through this motion the hope that the Commonwealth-State negotiations on health funding would not break down—which is exactly what occurred.

**Mr Gaudry:** They have been overtaken by events.

**Mr TORBAY:** Yes, that is true in some respects. I thank the honourable member for Georges River for his contribution but I point out that the Government is opposing a motion that simply calls for it to "commence constructive negotiations" with the Commonwealth. There is no doubt that some issues have progressed since I gave notice of my motion. However, I would have preferred the Government to amend my motion by promising to keep the door open to constructive negotiations or to move a similar amendment that reassured the community that the New South Wales Government is willing to engage in constructive dialogue with the Commonwealth—and vice versa—about health issues.

I thank the honourable member for Drummoyne for explaining about Commonwealth funding for Tingha Hospital. She was absolutely correct: the Commonwealth has refused funding for beds at Tingha Hospital. I am sure that the local community will not allow that matter to rest. The honourable member for Port Macquarie also made some valid comments. We must ensure that there is constructive dialogue between the two levels of government. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition congratulated me on moving the motion and, in supporting it—

**Mr O'Farrell:** I haven't indicated that I support the motion.

**Mr TORBAY:** In that case the Deputy Leader of the Opposition should vote against it, as I intend to call for a division on the motion. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition referred to elective surgery lists. That issue raised its head six months ago in Parliament and I have had numerous meetings with doctors and the New England Area Health Service about the matter. I am pleased to report that I have received a commitment that a review will be conducted and that the stop-and-start approach to elective surgery will not be adopted again in the New England area.

The Deputy Leader of the Opposition was wrong when he said that I have not acted on the matter since issuing a press release. I invite him to speak to me so that I can outline the negotiations that I have had with departmental officials, the Minister, the New England Area Health Service and doctors, who are working constructively with me through this process. I assure the Deputy Leader of the Opposition that I am working with those people on many other issues that I did not raise today, and I will continue to do so.

It is obvious from the debate this morning why we are not progressing very far in the health services area. My motion calls for constructive dialogue, yet this morning we heard comments such as "We're opposing this" and "They said that." The reasons that prompted me to move my motion were clearly evident in the debate: the Government would rather have a Punch and Judy show about health services than sit down together to discuss a long-term, planned approach involving the three tiers of government that will address community concerns and begin to resource the many pressure points throughout our health system. The State Government clearly has a case to answer. I assure the Deputy Leader of the Opposition that I am not defending the Government—it opposes my motion—but neither am I defending the Commonwealth. Any objective person would come to a similar conclusion.

**Motion, by leave, by Mr Gaudry agreed to:**

That the remainder of the member's reply be postponed and stand as an order of the day for tomorrow.

**EMERGENCY SERVICES NETWORK**

**Mr DEBNAM** (Vaucluse) [12.07 p.m.]: I move:

That this House calls on the Premier to urgently review the interface between Telstra call centres and New South Wales emergency services to ensure efficient and effective handling of all 000 calls before another person dies.

I am grateful for yet another opportunity to slam the Carr Government for everything it has done for eight years. I gave notice of this motion on 29 April, but that was not the first time I had raised the issue in the House. I have referred to this matter several times because the emergency system does not work well and, as usual, the Premier has responded by saying that it is a Federal problem. But it is not: Emergency calls are dealt with through a combined arrangement between the State governments and Telstra.

I well remember an incident in February 2001 when I witnessed a bag snatch in my electorate. We checked that the woman was okay and then called 000 and followed the offender, who had run around the corner and jumped into a car containing two other people. That incident and the difficulties we experienced contacting emergency services prompted me to raise the 000 issue in the House several times. The 000 telephone line dropped out several times—although I suspect that that had more to do with mobile telephone coverage in the area than anything else—and it took an extraordinarily long time to get through, initially to the Telstra operator and then to the police operator.

As a result of that I made a number of complaints to Telstra and to police and I subsequently visited the Telstra call centre in Sydney to try to understand exactly what was happening. I also raised that matter and similar incidents in the House on 7 June. I recommend to honourable members who have not taken the opportunity to do so, to visit the Telstra call centre that deals with emergency calls. At the time of my visit I was told that in excess of 12 million calls each year—an extraordinary number, and it is probably a bit higher now—go through the two call centres in Australia: one in Sydney and one in Melbourne. The Telstra employees are doing a pretty good job and they are constantly updating the technology to deal with calls.

We are hopefully moving towards a system that will pinpoint the location of the caller, which will overcome the terrible situation at the moment where the caller is asked, "Where are you?" The caller says a suburb, or they say Sydney or whatever, and the call centre operator asks, "which State?" It is very confronting to anyone reporting an emergency; it throws them completely off the line of what they are reporting. Obviously that technology will be available soon and should considerably help in pinpointing the call origin.

The call centre asks, "police, fire or ambulance", callers identify what they want, and they are put through to the relevant emergency service. The caller then has to wait for another operator to pick up the call. The Telstra operators listen while the connection is being made, and if the call is not answered they will transfer it to a second priority number for police, fire or ambulance. Eventually somebody will answer. In many cases the police line is being overloaded. A large number of people make calls—some of them hoax calls, some of them accidental calls—and if it is not clear what the call is about, they are routed to the police default number. That has always been a major problem for police, because it results in their resources being overloaded.

I raised this matter a number of times, and the former Minister for Police, Mr Whelan, was finally moved to do something about it. Some months after I raised it in the House he ordered a review. I am not sure what has come of that. Eventually the Government might respond to that. I make the point that time and time again in this House we raise issues of concern to the community—we did it again this morning when we introduced and spoke about legislation to assist young offenders—and the Carr Government just flicks it off.

This is another specific example of the Carr Government flicking off to the Federal Government concern about 000 calls. That is inappropriate because apart from the fact that Telstra provides the channel through which people make the calls, they go straight through to emergency services, and it is apparent that the Carr Government needs to put more effort not only into improving the answering of calls, whether they are for fire, police, or ambulance, but also into co-ordinating the Ministers. As we all know, the emergency services are spread across a number of ministers. That government structure was basically decided in the first half of last century and it is perhaps not appropriate any more for the Government to simply rely on those old lines of division between departments.

That is why, in frustration, I have raised the issue with the Premier a number of times and said, "Premier, come into the House, talk about this issue, actually pull together the various responsible Ministers and take control of it. If you do not want to talk about it in the House, get your director-general to take control of it. But you can no longer simply hive it off and say it is a Federal issue. You can no longer hive it off and say the Ministers responsible for fire, police and ambulances will deal with it. There were problems with the Waterfall train accident in January—obviously that was before I gave notice of this motion—and I have no doubt there will be problems again and again. They will be highlighted by the media because they are obviously life and death situations, and the Premier should personally have a look at this matter. The Parliamentary Secretary, the honourable member for Bankstown, may tell me that the Premier has visited the call centre in recent months. That is great. I believe that would be a major step forward. But I doubt that he has done that, and I doubt that he has got together all the relevant Ministers and said, "Lets fix this before another person dies."

That is the message I am giving to the Government today. It has been staring the Government in the face for many years. It has been a problem that has been increasing because of the growth in the number of calls, and it really has now finally reached the point where the Premier must personally take control of the situation, sit down with the Ministers, go to the call centre, see for himself what happens, and put in place better arrangements to ensure not only that all emergency calls are effectively handled but that they are efficiently handled. He must also put in place an education program that is very rigorous in getting the message across to the community, and especially to many young people who may accidentally ring that number, that hoax calls and accidental calls cause great distress. The main point I wanted to make to the Government in April, which I do today now that the motion has been called on, is that these emergency call problems have now reached a crisis point, and Premier Carr must personally intervene and try to fix them.

**Mr STEWART** (Bankstown—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.16 p.m.]: I am surprised and disappointed by the motion of the honourable member for Vacluse. I can only describe it as a cheap shot at the hard-working rescue and emergency services people who take the 000 emergency service calls. The 000 emergency service is operated by Telstra as a community service obligation under Commonwealth legislation. The Telstra operators who answer calls identify which emergency service is required and then immediately relay the call to the New South Wales police service, the ambulance brigade, or the fire brigade.

The honourable member for Vacluse well knows that concerns about Telstra's operations come under Commonwealth legislation and he should be raising these concerns equally, if not more so, with his Federal Liberal colleague, the Minister for Communications, the Hon. Richard Alston. I bet he has not done that. Today he wants to take a cheap political shot—

**Mr Debnam:** Point of order: To correct the record, the constituents of the Parliamentary Secretary are affected by this.

**Mr DEPUTY-SPEAKER:** Order! That is not a point of order.

**Mr STEWART:** I would bet a good lunch that the honourable member has not spoken to his Federal ministerial colleague about these concerns. Instead, in the New South Wales Parliament—the people's Parliament of this great State—he takes a cheap political shot, without substance, without the facts to support him, and without any real understanding of the issue. That is disturbing and disappointing. It is not in the character of the honourable member for Vacluse we are used to, but he has chosen to do that today.

NSW Police and the ambulance and fire brigades receive thousands of 000 calls each year from people in urgent need of help. In 2001-02 the police received more than 1.2 million calls for assistance, of which 110,000 required an urgent response. I am advised that the police improved their response times to 000 calls by more than 38 per cent between 1997 and 2001. Upon his appointment, the Minister for Police made it a very early priority to visit the communications room at the Sydney Police Centre. I am advised that he was impressed by the absolute dedication of the people and the operation there. Having seen the dispatch process in action, I find it very difficult to understand how these people can be subjected to this nasty and unwarranted criticism. It is unfair and it is unnecessary. Again, it is criticism without substance by the Opposition. These dedicated officers are working hard and doing a terrific job. That is precisely what the Minister saw when he visited the centre, and it is what the community expects.

The Police Assistance Line has also helped police to respond more rapidly to urgent calls by taking non-urgent calls, such as the reporting of minor car accidents and thefts. The Ambulance Service received almost 590,000 calls for help in 2001-02, an increase of 43,500 calls, or 8 per cent, on the previous year. Despite this increase, the service recorded an 11.4 per cent improvement in response times. Finally, New South Wales Fire Brigades received at least 169,000 emergency calls through the 000 service, resulting in fire crews immediately being dispatched to 147,000 incidents.

I am advised by the Minister for Emergency Services that the New South Wales Fire Brigades golden rule of "When in doubt, send them out" has resulted in very few complaints about non-response to emergencies. The Telstra and emergency services staff who field emergency calls work daily in highly stressful situations. They talk to people who are frequently panicked and are having difficulty relaying details of the incident they are reporting. However, it is unfortunate that they also receive mistaken and malicious hoax calls, which have been reported in the media recently.

There are already ongoing reviews at both State and national level to review operating procedures. This is co-ordinated at a national level under the auspices of the Australian Communications Authority through its longstanding National Emergency Call Taking Working Group. The working group comprises key representatives of each State, the emergency services, and the country's telecommunications carriers, including Telstra. The group meets at least three times a year, with its next meeting to be held in Perth in two weeks time.

At a State level, key police, ambulance, and fire brigade communications centre representatives meet monthly in Sydney to discuss common concerns and solutions, to ensure clear communication channels, and promote cross-training and partnership interaction between the agencies. Representatives of Telstra are invited to join these meetings when appropriate. The motion moved by the honourable member for Vacluse should be opposed, because it lacks substance and credibility. Any review would be duplication, costly, and unnecessary. The Government is addressing the concerns raised in a positive and proactive manner, and it has in place the infrastructure to deal with the concerns raised by the honourable member for Vacluse.

**Mr DEBNAM** (Vacluse) [12.23 p.m.], in reply: I express my extreme disappointment that a member who represents an electorate whose constituents make regular calls to the 000 emergency telephone service—many of them related to police issues, such as the out-of-control gun culture in south-western Sydney—would use the spin that we have seen perfected between the Blair Government and the Carr Government. He simply reinforces that this is a Federal issue. The honourable member for Bankstown should be ashamed. I believe he should apologise to his electorate.

**Mr Stewart:** Point of order: The honourable member for Vacluse is not speaking to the substance of the motion, as the standing orders require. He is also stereotyping my great electorate of Bankstown in a negative fashion. The honourable member might come from Vacluse, but I can tell him that the people of Bankstown are very proud of where they live.

**Mr DEPUTY-SPEAKER:** Order! There is no point of order. The honourable member for Vacluse is responding to comments made by the honourable member for Bankstown.

**Mr DEBNAM:** As you correctly point out, Mr Deputy-Speaker, I am responding to comments made during the speech of the honourable member for Bankstown. He is a member of the Labor Party who purports to represent an electorate in south-western Sydney that is under attack from gang warfare, the illegal handgun culture in New South Wales, and the lack of response from the Carr Government to that illegal handgun culture. His constituents frequently make calls to the 000 emergency telephone service for assistance, as do constituents in many other electorates, yet the honourable member for Bankstown, on behalf of his constituents, simply churns out spin that is worthy of Bob Carr and Tony Blair.

The honourable member for Bankstown should be ashamed of himself. I will continually point out to him that he has betrayed his electorate and the Carr Government in relation to this issue, not only in relation to calls to the 000 emergency telephone service but also in relation to every policing issue, particularly the illegal handgun culture. The honourable member for Bankstown and the Carr Government are betraying the people of western Sydney, and particularly the people of south-western Sydney, who have suffered a concentration of shooting attacks and gun incidents for many years now.

The honourable member for Bankstown may think it is funny for him to simply read to this House a set of words that are prepared by a department that is doing the bidding of the Premier's press secretaries. But what is really important to his electorate is to sort out life-threatening issues, such as responses to 000 calls, and the illegal handgun culture that is rife in New South Wales, especially in south-western Sydney. I have raised this issue with the Government on many occasions. Don Weatherburn has also raised with the Government the illegal handgun culture in south-western Sydney. The Auditor-General has also told the Government that New South Wales is falling below the national policing benchmarks.

The real problem is that Labor members of this Parliament will not stand up for their constituents. For the sake of some silver as Parliamentary Secretaries, they simply spout spin from the Premier's press secretaries. I note that the honourable member for Bankstown is not supported by many of his colleagues from western or south-western Sydney, the area that is currently under attack from the illegal handgun culture. I suppose that means that his colleagues are embarrassed to support him on this issue. As I said at the outset, Premier Carr must take a personal interest in resolving how the State is to deal efficiently and effectively with emergency calls, before another person dies.

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

**The House divided.**

**Ayes, 36**

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

**Noes, 46**

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

**Pair**

Mrs Skinner

Ms Saliba

**Question resolved in the negative.****Motion negatived.****INDEPENDENT COMMISSION AGAINST CORRUPTION****Report**

**Mr Speaker** tabled, pursuant to the Independent Commission Against Corruption Act 1988, the report entitled "Report on Investigation into Conduct of the Rail Infrastructure Corporation and Others in Relation to Menangle Bridge", dated September 2003.

**Ordered to be printed.****ARMIDALE RAIL SERVICE**

**Mr TORBAY** (Northern Tablelands) [12.37 p.m.]: I move:

That this House calls on the Minister for Transport Services to immediately improve the reliability of the CountryLink rail service to and from Armidale.

When I gave notice of this motion on 29 April I was engaged with my community on the issues of rail maintenance, services and reliability, as were many other members. A range of issues had arisen throughout the State, and there were many tragic circumstances. The issue of rail services in the New England area is not new to the Parliament. Indeed, I made a private member's statement on some of the issues, and I had the opportunity to meet the Minister and departmental officers several times in relation to the issue. A number of concerns about the CountryLink rail service in the Northern Tablelands electorate have been raised with me, and I have forwarded those concerns to the Minister and the department.

The concerns relate to maintenance issues on the northern line, reliability of the service and the equipment that is used—for example, whether the equipment can cope with the climatic circumstances in the New England area, which contribute to the unreliability of the service. It was reported to me that on certain sections of the rail route trains had to reduce their speed to something like 5 kilometres to 15 kilometres an hour because of maintenance issues. We have had rail bridge issues. While not directly in my electorate, the bridges feed the northern rail line. The honourable member for Tamworth has commented in that regard.

The northern rail line has an interesting history. We were disappointed when the Greiner Government closed that line some years ago. It was even closed to Armidale. I was pleased when the Armidale section was reinstated by the then Minister, Bruce Baird. The line north from Armidale no longer operates—a decision of the then Coalition Government. However, maintenance and infrastructure issues have continued to plague the reliability of this service. I hope that the commitment to keep this service going is a solid and long-term one. I hope that the focus on rail issues includes a detailed focus on rural issues. I know there are recommendations that require a significant amount of expenditure on rail maintenance and services generally, and many of those recommendations have come about through tragic circumstances.

I want to ensure that country areas are not forgotten in the process. In many country areas air services have come to a complete standstill. Many communities in the Northern Tablelands do not have air services. We are doing what we can about that. Often rail services are the only way that people in regional and rural New South Wales can access major cities. I hope that country New South Wales gets its fair of the funding that is being considered. Rail services, which are enjoying a significant increase in patronage—I think due to the lack of other options for people in rural areas—would be improved both in relation to maintenance and reliability. As a result, people will become more confident that the service will be efficient and effective, and the staff and flow-on services will be professional. Country people will be able to say that they are very proud of the service.

I appreciate that country communities do not and cannot use rail to the extent that it is used in metropolitan areas. I have heard a senior member of the bureaucracy say that the number of people who travel by train in Sydney on one day would compare to the number of people who travel on the rail system throughout

the rest of the State in one year. We are aware of those sorts of statistics, but country people are entitled to rail services and to a transport system that allows them to get to the major cities or towns on that line. In many cases, those communities have no options. My motion challenges the Government to look at how the northern line can be improved in relation to reliability, services, maintenance and confidence. The community wants to use the service and be proud of it.

I again refer to the northern part of the line. New England Rail Incorporated and the New England area of councils—the New England Local Government Group—have been supportive of attempts to reopen the northern rail line. They are aware that a range of issues is associated with that. As other transport options are not always available in regional areas, I hope we can reconsider some of those matters. Organisations such as the group of councils are prepared to sit down and talk about the feasibility of returning these services. They should be reconsidered given the changed circumstances, the reduced transport availability, in regional areas.

The New England Local Government Group, together with community organisations, is prepared to do it step by step. It is prepared to work with all levels of government. It is prepared to say, "You give us some access to some of these areas and we will consider working with you on what is necessary." It has been put back a little in recent times given the insurance issues plaguing the State and the nation, but it is working through those problems and I am assisting in every way I can. The Government must consider the reliability of the rail service to and from Armidale. I have received an enormous number of representations in this regard. These people are not playing politics; they simply want a good maintenance program. They want benchmarks that can be constantly reviewed so that the Minister and the Government know how the service is going, how it is perceived and its reliability indicators. We want to support and maintain this valuable service to Armidale and the New England area.

**Mr STEWART** (Bankstown—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.45 p.m.]: I thank the honourable member for Northern Tablelands for his comments, but I oppose his motion because there are concerns about the feasibility of what has been put. There is a way to deal with this through the office of the Minister for Transport Services. I am sure the honourable member will understand the situation after I have explained it. I have pleasure in conveying the sentiments of the Minister for Transport Services to the honourable member. The honourable member for Northern Tablelands is a tenacious and hard-working local member. I am pleased to inform the honourable member that the Minister has advised me that he is available to meet with him at a mutually convenient time to discuss issues of concern relating to safety, reliability and cleanliness of transport services in the Armidale region. I am sure the honourable member will be encouraged by this invitation and will take up the Minister's offer.

Notwithstanding this, I have received the following advice from the Minister for Transport Services on this issue. CountryLink currently operates a daily Xplorer train service from Sydney to Armidale and from Armidale to Sydney. I am advised that the Xplorer train service is scheduled to depart Sydney each day at 10.05 a.m. and to arrive in Armidale at 6.19 p.m. Travelling in the other direction, the Xplorer train departs Armidale at 9.00 a.m. and arrives in Central at 5.00 p.m. In addition, the Xplorer connects with a CountryLink coach service at Armidale each day, serving the communities between Armidale, Glen Innes and Tenterfield. The Xplorer also connects with a CountryLink coach service at Tamworth that serves the communities between Tamworth and Inverell on a daily basis.

Specifically with regard to the current reliability of services to and from Armidale, in August this year the north-west Xplorer achieved 92 per cent on-time running to within 10 minutes of the scheduled timetable. That is not a bad achievement. Over the entire year to the end of August, the Xplorer achieved 88 per cent on-time running to within 10 minutes of the scheduled timetable. I am sure the honourable member will be pleased to hear that a new maintenance regime has resulted in significant improvements to on-time running for the Xplorer service since February this year. This is good news for the people of Armidale. The Minister further advises that the CountryLink travel centre is conveniently located at Armidale station and at four private travel agencies in Armidale, enabling local people to purchase tickets for CountryLink services at their convenience.

The CountryLink Travel Centre is a one-stop travel shop that sells CountryLink tickets and a wide range of travel products, including accommodation and holiday packages, which are eagerly sought after. In addition to ticket agencies that are based in travel centres and other local businesses, the centres are located in nearly all towns that are serviced by CountryLink transport in the Armidale region. More than 17,000 passenger journeys are made on the north-west Xplorer each month. On average, only 58 per cent of those journeys have total capacity. It is undoubtedly a key service for older people in the community. More than one-third of the passengers using the rail services purchase pensioner tickets. I am sure this is good news for the honourable



member for Northern Tablelands, particularly in relation to the new rail maintenance regime, which has shown a significant improvement in the reliability of the service in and out of the Armidale region in recent months.

The Minister for Transport Services advised that coach services are integral to providing reliable CountryLink services to communities across the State. The Minister set up an inquiry, headed by Mr Tom Parry, into current funding, community transport, fares and investment options for transport services. Dr Parry's interim report is due to be released shortly and will provide options for improving transport services in country areas. I am interested in this report, as is the Minister. Country people pay taxes, and they deserve decent and reliable transport services. They deserve equity. I know that this Government is about achieving and delivering that equity to country people. I am sure that the honourable member for Northern Tablelands will accept the Minister's kind offer to meet at a mutually convenient time to discuss the issues affecting his constituents and to ensure that his electorate continues to have a clean, reliable and safe rail service.

**Mr McGRANE** (Dubbo) [12.50 p.m.]: I support the motion moved by the honourable member for Northern Tablelands about transport services to the Armidale area. Unfortunately, many country areas throughout New South Wales face similar problems to those referred to by the honourable member for Northern Tablelands. CountryLink staff do an excellent job promoting and selling rail services and products. However, at times in this competitive world it is difficult for them to sell their products. Dubbo is the hub of transport services to western New South Wales. Towns such as Bourke, Brewarrina and Cobar are serviced by coach from Dubbo. CountryLink has done an excellent job interweaving its bus and rail services to provide transport to those areas. In some areas CountryLink has used private contractors. It is a well-organised operation and a great innovation.

Unfortunately, the trip between Dubbo and Sydney via the XPT takes up to an hour more than it should because of the state of the track. This important rail line needs major upgrading. On some parts of the line the train travels at a speed of only 10 kilometres per hour, on other parts it travels at only 40 kilometres per hour. The XPT has the capacity to travel at a speed of 160 kilometres per hour. If we had a rail system that could utilise the full capacity of the XPT, travelling times between Dubbo and Sydney could be reduced by half an hour to one hour, making that service a much more attractive means of transport. Tourism is a major industry in regional New South Wales. Rail has played a part in the growth of that industry. If the rail system were more efficient and upgraded between Dubbo and Sydney it could play a major role in attracting tourists to Dubbo zoo and other major attractions in the western parts of New South Wales.

There are bridge maintenance problems in three areas along the Great Western Line. The Government has investigated these problems and reports have been produced. The lack of general maintenance by not only this Government but also by governments over the past 20 years has resulted in the tracks falling into a state of disrepair. Maintenance seems to be the lowest rung on the rail infrastructure ladder. However, the pigeons are now coming home to roost, as the rail system is in a state of disrepair. It is up to this Government to spend the money where it is needed. As I said last night in my contribution to the budget debate, if we want rural development in New South Wales we have to spend money on infrastructure, and on rail infrastructure in particular.

The honourable member for Bankstown said that country people pay taxes and are worthy of a decent and reliable service. At times country people feel that they are the poor cousins to their city relatives. The honourable member for Northern Tablelands said that the number of people who travel on the CityRail network in one day would compare to the number of people who travel on the rail system throughout the rest of the State in one year. That is a fact of life. But when one looks at the financial side, a lot more money is lost on the CityRail network than on the country rail network. Country people, citizens of New South Wales, expect and deserve the best services. Many people do not have car transportation and they rely on the public transport system. That system has been neglected in country areas. We need to spend more money on vital infrastructure to make the rail system more efficient.

**Mr DEBNAM** (Vaucluse) [12.55 p.m.]: I am pleased to have the opportunity to talk briefly about rail services in this State, particularly given the scandalous situation we have witnessed over the past couple of years. The honourable member for Northern Tablelands has raised specifically the need to immediately improve the reliability of CountryLink rail services to and from Armidale. Of course, this has implications for rail services not only to and from Armidale but also across the State. Having spoken at some length on rail services in this State over the past 18 months, and having watched the switch of Ministers at election time, we would all still maintain a very high level of concern for what is happening in rail.

I note that this motion has come before the House on the same day that the Independent Commission Against Corruption has tabled its report into the Menangle bridge, which is being considered by everyone in New South Wales. It was an extraordinary scandal and a betrayal of the people of New South Wales that this Government kept open a dangerous bridge until after the State election. That was not an isolated incident. As we have heard from technical experts after the Menangle bridge scandal was exposed, there is no shortage of bridges, as well as infrastructure, across the State that are considered dangerous. During its term the Carr Government has effectively covered up all those dangerous problems.

The motion uses the word "service". For eight years under the Carr Government we have had very little service because of the rundown of rail in this State. Now we have a new Minister. I was intrigued to see that the first thing he did was pull out every policy statement and every press release that the Coalition issued in the past year to see whether he could implement them, even down to roving teams of cleaners to try to improve the cleanliness of trains on the rail system. He adopted that initiative very quickly. As recently as this week the new Minister for Transport Services was crowing about the success of the roving teams of cleaners. I might add that the former Minister for Transport denigrated that concept day after day when we raised it before the State election and released it as our policy. CountryLink services are not the only services suffering; rail services in major urban centres are also not operating effectively or efficiently.

We have witnessed the extraordinary scandal of the former Minister for Transport's Millennium trains. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent on an extremely complex train that is not serving the people of New South Wales. As usual, the debacle was covered up until after the State election. What did the Carr Government do after the election? It attacked the workers in the Hunter Valley and insisted that they were producing substandard trains. As we noted during the debate on another motion this morning, the Government does not take responsibility for any problem in New South Wales; it always blames someone else. It blamed Telstra and the Federal Government for the problems with the 000 emergency telephone service. The Carr Government is responsible for the interface between the emergency service and Telstra.

The former Minister for Transport should have been sacked as a result of the Millennium train scandal. The Government designed an overly complex train. It is extraordinarily embarrassing for the Government and a personal scandal for the former Minister. It is amazing that he is still on the front bench. It appears that Ministers can get away with anything as long as they cover up before an election. After an election the Government simply swaps Ministers and the new Minister adopts as many of the Coalition's policies as possible and blames the previous Minister for any problems. We all hope that the reliability of CountryLink rail services can be improved. That will require a real commitment to investment and service and proper management. It will also require a real political commitment to public transport by the Government, which is something we have not seen from the Premier in eight years.

**Motion, by leave, by Mr Torbay agreed to:**

That the reply be postponed and stand as an order of the day for tomorrow.

*[Mr Deputy-Speaker left the chair at 1.02 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]*

**MINISTRY**

**Mr CARR:** In the absence of the Attorney General, and Minister for the Environment, who is attending the World Parks Congress, the Deputy Premier, Minister for Education and Training, and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs will answer questions on his behalf.

**DISTINGUISHED VISITORS**

**Mr SPEAKER:** I acknowledge the presence in the public gallery of Judge Antoine Chidiac from North Lebanon's Court of Appeal, who is a guest of the honourable member for Parramatta.

**PETITIONS**

**Autism Spectrum Disorder**

Petition requesting additional support for children affected by Autism Spectrum Disorder in all educational settings in New South Wales government schools, received from **Mr Maguire**.

**Gaming Machine Tax**

Petitions opposing the decision to increase poker machine tax, received from **Mr Ashton, Ms Berejiklian, Mr Collier, Mr Oakeshott and Mr Tink.**

**Blacktown Alcohol and Other Drugs Family Service**

Petition requesting funding for the Blacktown Alcohol and Other Drugs Family Service, received from **Mr Gibson.**

**White City Site Rezoning Proposal**

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

**Lane Cove Rotary Athletics Field**

Petition opposing the use of the Rotary Athletics Field, Lane Cove, as a car park, received from **Ms Berejiklian.**

**The 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**

**Redfern and Surry Hills Bus Services**

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

**Bus Service 311**

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

**Woodstock Police Station**

Petition requesting that Woodstock Police Station be given a permanent operating classification, received from **Mr R. W. Turner.**

**Luddenham Sewer Connection**

Petition requesting the connection of sewer to Luddenham, received from **Mr Corrigan.**

**Circus Animals**

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

**Sow Stall Ban**

Petition requesting the total ban of sow stalls, received from **Ms Moore.**

**QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE**

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**COMMANDER CLIVE SMALL MISCONDUCT ALLEGATIONS**

**Mr BROGDEN:** My question is directed to the Premier. Does the Premier still have confidence in his special adviser on crime, Clive Small, given allegations that while the Commissioner for Police was overseas in July senior police attempted to shut down the Bodor inquiry into Mr Small?

**Mr CARR:** Yes, and I stand by my comments of yesterday.

### **INDEPENDENT PRICING AND REGULATORY TRIBUNAL HEALTH SERVICES REPORT**

**Miss BURTON:** My question without notice is addressed to the Minister for Health. What is the latest information on the report of the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal into New South Wales health services?

**Mr IEMMA:** I thank the honourable member for Kogarah for her question and her ongoing interest in health reform, which is contained in the latest report of the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal [IPART]. Increasing the focus of our health dollar on direct patient care by streamlining and reducing administration is a consistent and appropriate Government goal. Health makes up 25 per cent of our total State budget, and it is incumbent upon us to regularly review health care administration to identify improvements and implement positive changes. In this respect the IPART report outlines significant proposals to do just that. The IPART conducted a review into health administration in 1998, and it was asked to carry out a further review in December 2002. This is part of a constant process of reform.

The IPART has found that New South Wales Health successfully implemented a range of important reforms, as was recommended in the 1998 review. These included the introduction of three-year budgets, securing clinician involvement in improving public hospital services, and facilitating community input to identify improvements in health care. It is important to note the introductory comments in the recently completed IPART report, and one of those comments reads:

By any measure and on any basis of comparison, New South Wales Health does a good job—a remarkably good job.

It will be of no surprise to anyone who is interested in health reform that one of the key findings of the IPART report is that the split of health funding and service provision between State and Commonwealth jurisdictions is dysfunctional. The IPART report confirms that reform of the health system—

**Mr O'Farrell:** Point of order: The standing orders clearly provide that question time is an opportunity for Ministers to answer questions, and not to make ministerial statements. I am entitled to respond to a ministerial statement being given by the Minister about the appalling record of Dr Refshauge and Mr Knowles in blowing out administration costs in health over eight years. The Minister is making a ministerial statement, and the standing orders state that is not appropriate.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! There is no point of order. I call the Deputy Leader of the Opposition to order. The Minister has the call.

**Mr IEMMA:** The report confirms that reform of our health system is essential—an opportunity sadly missed by the Commonwealth by forcing us to sign the latest health care agreement. The IPART has outlined a blueprint for reform, and the report recommends a number of reforms to the New South Wales health care system. I seek leave to table the report entitled "NSW Health: Focusing on Patient Care", dated August 2003.

**Leave granted.**

Consultation with all the stakeholders has been extensive. The major reform recommended by the IPART can be summarised as follows: streamlining of administration and reducing duplication between New South Wales Health, the corporate head office at North Sydney, and the area health services and hospitals, to give maximum focus to the delivery of front-line services, and I accept that recommendation.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! I call the Leader of the Opposition to order. I call the honourable member for Fairfield to order.

**Mr IEMMA:** The IPART report also refers to the area health service model of delivery of health services, and concludes that the model has worked well but requires strengthening. It recommends continuing the recent focus of clinical community involvement in health service planning. The report also outlines increased focus on clinical governance and patient safety, and improving funding accountability to ensure that health priorities are addressed with on-the-ground services. The IPART report suggests a new model for the procurement of services to achieve statewide savings in all areas of procurement.

The report recommends developing stronger performance indicators to improve the management of the health system and health care delivery in each area. I welcome the recommendations of the IPART. I have asked the director-general to work on a plan to implement these changes and to focus on the reforms outlined in the IPART report. I wish to conclude with a further major recommendation of the IPART, and that is a fundamental focus on improving patient safety and care. That is to be achieved by revamping the role of the Institute of Clinical Excellence, one of the very good initiatives of my predecessor. The IPART has endorsed that reform and outlines further measures to improve patient safety and care, which I endorse.

### **GAMING MACHINE TAX**

**Mr STONER:** My question is directed to the Minister for Regional Development, and Minister for the Illawarra. As the Minister responsible for regional development, why did he vote to support the tax hike on clubs that will pull \$252 million a year out of regional communities like Broken Hill, Bathurst and Tweed Heads with a consequent loss of many hundreds of jobs?

**Mr CAMPBELL:** I suggest that questions relating to taxation matters be referred to the Minister who represents the Treasurer in this place.

**Mr Stoner:** Point of order: The question clearly relates to regional development, regional economies and regional jobs, and the Minister is responsible for those issues. I ask you to direct him to answer the question, and that you do not allow him to wimp-out.

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

### **MENANGLE BRIDGE CLOSURE INDEPENDENT COMMISSION AGAINST CORRUPTION REPORT**

**Mr CORRIGAN:** My question without notice is directed to the Premier. What is the Premier's response to the release this morning of the Independent Commission Against Corruption report on the Menangle bridge?

**Mr CARR:** The report makes mighty interesting reading. The Leader of the Opposition has spent the last six months making a sustained and dirty attack in relation to Menangle bridge, and especially on the integrity of the former Minister for Transport. It was said that the Government was corrupt. It was said that there had been a cover-up. It was said that the Minister should go to gaol for three years. It was said that the Minister and the Government, and the Government's public servants, had placed lives at risk. The matter was referred to the police, and the police referred it to the Independent Commission Against Corruption. Let me quote what the Leader of the Opposition had to say on 1 May in this Chamber, "The former Minister for Transport deserves three years in gaol." That is one less than Abu Bakar Bashir!

**Mr O'Farrell:** Point of order: There can be no more important issue than a report from the ICAC—

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! What is your point of order?

**Mr O'Farrell:** My point of order is that this should not be an answer to a question; it is a ministerial statement. We should know about his statement on 1 May and his evidence to the ICAC on 22 May. We should know how he changed what he said in this place on 1 May and what he told the ICAC on 22 May.

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

**Mr CARR:** The Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party made a wonderful comment on radio during the parliamentary recess. When asked a question on Richard Glover's program he said, "I can't speak, Richard, I've only ever had a couple of professions, none of which I've been particularly successful at." What were those professions? He was the State Director of the New South Wales Liberal Party from 1992 to 1995—and I give him special thanks for the way he performed his duties in those years. Then he was the Chief of Staff to the Minister for Transport, Bruce Baird, from 1988 to 1992. What did the Leader of the Opposition say about Menangle bridge? We can weigh what he said against what the ICAC said about it today.

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

**Mr CARR:** On 1 May in this Chamber the Leader of the Opposition said that Professor West "recommended clearly and directly to the Rail Infrastructure Corporation that Menangle bridge should be closed. But the Rail Infrastructure Corporation and the Government took no action. They monstered Professor West to make him change his report." That is a fairly grave allegation. The Leader of The Opposition went on to say, "This Government put the lives of people at risk for nothing more than cheap political gain." He further said that lives were put at risk.

**Mr Brogden:** Point of order: I draw the Premier's attention to page 37 of the report, which quotes Professor West as saying:

It seemed as though the walls pushed in against me ...

The Premier monstered Professor West.

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

**Mr CARR:** The Leader of the Opposition went on to say, "Lives were put at risk as a result of the Minister's negligence, his arrogance and his willingness to cover-up to try to save his own skin." That is what was said. The great thing about an ICAC report, based on a thorough and rigorous examination of all the facts, is this.

**Mr Tink:** Point of order—

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! Members of the Opposition have sought to take points of order that do not comply with the standing orders and simply seek to interrupt the flow of Ministers' answers. If members of the Opposition take points of order with no substance they will be called to order or removed from the Chamber.

**Mr Tink:** My point of order relates to relevance. If the Premier is considering the ICAC report he must consider the previous statements of the Minister for Transport, which were inconsistent.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The honourable member for Epping knows only too well that that is not a point of order. I call him to order.

**Mr CARR:** On at least eight occasions outside the Parliament the Leader of the Opposition cried "Cover-up!" "Cover-up!" On 28 April at the Central railway station press conference he said, "Cover-up". On 8 May on radio 2GB he used the term "cover-up" on two occasions. On 30 June in the Domain press conference he said that the Premier is "the man who was part of the elaborate cover-up with relation to Menangle". On 24 July in a Parliament House press conference he alleged "cover-up" on four more occasions. Today the ICAC has completely exonerated the Minister, the Government and the Rail Infrastructure Corporation.

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

**Mr CARR:** According to the ICAC, there was no cover-up. According to the ICAC, there was no corrupt conduct. According to the ICAC, there was no political interference. And there was no pot of political gold for the Opposition. I observe that members opposite are doing a little pantomime, talking together so that they are not embarrassed. In fact, the ICAC went further, the ICAC found that it was "reasonable" for the bridge to remain open. Let me quote what the ICAC said. More members should join the little pantomime of the members opposite: we are not concerned, we do not care, and we can talk our little heads off. Members opposite have been found out. They are holding one of their brilliant tactics meetings. On page 7 of the report the ICAC stated:

... there was no evidence that any political considerations affected the way in which either the RIC or the responsible Minister acted in response to Professor West's concerns.

There was no political interference whatsoever. On page 34 the ICAC stated:

When Mr Scully was eventually made aware of Professor West's recommendations he acted appropriately in bringing them to the attention of Mr Deegan and requesting him to have the bridge inspected and assessed. There is no suggestion on the evidence that he allowed any political considerations to adversely affect his actions.

This comes after all those months of "Menangle bridge", "Menangle bridge", "Menangle bridge". The Leader of the Opposition told the ICAC that there was a cover-up and corrupt action, and that the Minister should go to gaol for three years. However, the report released today sheds an objective light on the whole matter.

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

**Mr CARR:** The honourable member for Epping will never be transport Minister or Minister for anything else. I did not know that he was the shadow Attorney General; nor does the public of New South Wales. We heard that the Minister acted appropriately. On page 29 the ICAC stated:

... the RIC acted promptly in putting the risk assessment process in place on the same day that its officers first became aware of Professor West's report. This was indicative of the seriousness with which the organisation viewed his concerns.

This comes after months of "Menangle bridge", "Menangle bridge", "Menangle bridge". The ICAC further stated:

The evidence does not demonstrate any overriding of a proper analysis of the relevant safety concerns.

Safety concerns were not overridden in any of the actions taken on this matter. Indeed, the ICAC stated that the reverse was the case. The ICAC stated:

Indeed the evidence illustrates the seriousness with which the RIC viewed Professor West's concerns and that those concerns were assessed on their merits.

In all the circumstances, the decisions made by the RIC on 6 and 11 March to keep the bridge open, subject to speed restrictions and inspection, were not unreasonable.

The executive summary states:

There is no evidence that the decisions made by the RIC were based on other than an honest belief by those responsible that the closure of the bridge was unnecessary. This belief was based on a professional assessment of the safety risks represented by the breach and an understanding of the relevant technical issues affecting the bridge.

Of course, the ICAC concludes that:

There is no evidence to warrant any recommendation that consideration be given to the taking of any criminal or disciplinary action against any person

I advise those who are interested in the safety of the bridge that the latest engineers report is on the Rail Infrastructure Corporation web site. It provides:

The overall finding is that the bridge is safe to operate.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! I remind the honourable member for Epping that he is on two calls to order.

**Mr CARR:** The allegations made were extraordinary. The evidence is in. The ICAC has reported that the Opposition and its leader have no credibility.

*[Questions without notice interrupted.]*

#### **DISTINGUISHED VISITORS**

**Mr SPEAKER:** I acknowledge the presence in the gallery of His Excellency, Declan Kelly, Irish Ambassador to Australia, and Mrs Kelly, as well as Her Excellency Anne Webster, the Irish Consul-General.

#### **QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE**

*[Questions without notice resumed.]*

#### **COMMANDER CLIVE SMALL MISCONDUCT ALLEGATIONS**

**Mr DEBNAM:** My question is directed to the Premier. Given that Mr Bodor is giving evidence not only about Mr Small's handling of the Cabramatta James issue but also about royal commission testimony and Mr Small's influence over Matthew Appleton and Bruce Newling, will the Premier instruct his adviser Clive Small to reverse his decision to refuse to give evidence and now co-operate with the Bodor investigation?

**Mr CARR:** I stand by my earlier answer.

### **PACIFIC HIGHWAY NOISE TASK FORCE REPORT**

**Mr NEWELL:** My question without notice is addressed to the Minister for Roads. What is the Government's response to the Pacific Highway noise task force report?

**Mr SCULLY:** Honourable members will be aware of the significant increase in traffic on the Pacific Highway, particularly since the Premier and the Deputy Prime Minister opened the Yelgun to Chinderah motorway.

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

**Mr SCULLY:** This has had an obvious impact on noise levels on communities, and I thank particularly the honourable member for Tweed, his community and a number of stakeholders and councils along the length and breadth of the northern part of the Pacific Highway who brought to my attention concerns about the impact of the extra level of heavy vehicles and noise on the northern part of the Pacific Highway. The State Government has been contributing on average \$160 million each and every year since we have been in government—hundreds of millions of dollars of State and Federal money has been expended on the Pacific Highway.

Members from either side of the House who have travelled between Newcastle and the Tweed would have seen the enormous improvements to road safety and travel times as a result of that investment. Twenty-one major projects have been completed. Two of the most dangerous sections, the Burringbar Range and Sullivans Gap, have now been bypassed. Later this year we propose to hold a country road safety summit. I have asked the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] to ensure that road safety on the Pacific Highway is specifically addressed.

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

**Mr SCULLY:** Honourable members will be aware of a number of fatalities that have occurred on the Pacific Highway, particularly in relation to heavy vehicles. I have asked the RTA to ensure that, as an important component of that country road safety summit, a report of a road safety audit of the Pacific Highway be considered. I am interested in hearing from stakeholders—and the shadow Minister will be invited to that. I welcome his role and thank him for his contribution in my working group during the Alcohol Summit. He made a positive contribution and I am looking forward to a bipartisan approach to country road safety in the summit I will be holding in country New South Wales early next year.

The task force set up in relation to the concerns of North Coast communities included representatives from the Tweed, Byron, Ballina, Pristine Waters and Coffs Harbour, the Environment Protection Authority, the truck industry, the RTA and a wide range of community groups. After detailed consideration of the noise issues affecting many North Coast communities the task force recently reported back to me with a number of recommendations. These include reviewing the existing environmental criteria for road traffic noise; further noise monitoring and investigation of noise treatments for some communities; road surfacing in certain locations to reduce noise; reviewing speed limits; improving signage in some areas; and educating heavy vehicle drivers on the appropriate use of engine brakes. I take the opportunity to thank the noise task force members for their hard work and commitment in exploring solutions for noise-affected communities along the Pacific Highway. I thank all those who provided submissions and comments to the task force for their participation in the process. I have now had the opportunity to consider the report's recommendations. I inform the House today that, in response to the concerns about traffic noise raised by the communities along the Pacific Highway, the Government will implement an \$18 million package to address these concerns.

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

**Mr SCULLY:** This \$18 million package is targeted at specific sections of the highway identified in the task force report as areas of most concern to local communities. Many of the noise treatment works were suggested by local communities via the task force and will be implemented over the next two years. These projects include more than \$9 million for the construction of noise walls and architectural treatment of homes at Tweed Heads; \$4 million for the construction and extension of noise walls and architectural treatment of homes at Ewingsdale and trialling of an 80-kilometre-an-hour speed limit on St Helena Hill; and \$2.5 million for road surfacing at Sapphire, Korora and Kororo. The honourable member for Coffs Harbour should be pleased.

**Mr Fraser:** This should have been done in the first place.



**Mr SCULLY:** As the honourable member knows, Coffs Harbour has done very well under my administration. Further projects include \$1.25 million for architectural treatment of homes and investigations into noise treatments for the heavy vehicle rest area between Yelgun and Chinderah; \$650,000 for investigations and implementation of appropriate noise treatments for the Sunnycrest Lane rest areas near Bangalow, Newrybar, Knockrow, Tintenbar, Ewingsdale to Tyagarah; and \$600,000 for architectural treatment of homes at Tandys Lane.

In addition to these major works, I have asked the RTA to undertake joint speed and vehicle standard enforcement campaigns and a joint education campaign for heavy vehicle drivers, and to work with the trucking industry to improve compliance with speed-limiting devices and the development of noise-reducing technology; to review speed limits and placement of speed limit signage; to implement noise advisory signs and to work with councils to consider minor traffic management changes to reduce noise and improve safety. I am confident these measures will significantly reduce traffic noise and increase the quality of life for many communities along the Pacific Highway. In the longer term, I assure those communities along the portions of the highway that are yet to be upgraded that noise will be a significant factor in the planning and design of these projects.

### PORT MACQUARIE REGIONAL STADIUM GRANDSTAND

**Mr OAKESHOTT:** I address my question without notice to the Premier. What is the Premier's response to a fundraising campaign that was being led by the late mayor, Wayne Richards, to build a covered grandstand at the Port Macquarie regional stadium?

**Mr CARR:** I am sure many members of the House will join me in again expressing my appreciation of the work of the late councillor Wayne Richards and in extending to his family our condolences as they recover from the sadness of his death. He was an active local leader and campaigner for an undercover grandstand as a priority in his work for the people of Port Macquarie. I understand that Hastings Council has developed plans for the undercover grandstand. It has been fortunate enough to secure pledges of \$10,000 each from five local businesses. I advise the honourable member that representatives from the Premier's Department will visit Port Macquarie on 1 October to further discuss the proposal.

We have a very good record when it comes to stadium facilities in the State—WIN Stadium at Wollongong, the Express Advocate Stadium at Gosford and Energy Australia Stadium at Newcastle, which I will be inspecting tomorrow and which we intend to redevelop. Wouldn't it be good if the Federal Government matched the \$24 million we put into this one in Newcastle? Many people are signing petitions to get Federal Government support. There is only one question the Opposition is going to answer: will it tell Canberra to match our \$24 million?

### SCHOOL STUDENTS COMPUTER SKILLS

**Mrs PERRY:** My question without notice is addressed to the Minister for Education and Training. What is the latest information on computer skills in New South Wales schools?

**Dr REFSHAUGE:** I thank the honourable member for her interest in educational matters. Since Labor came to office in 1995 it has been working hard to give our children the skills they need at school to compete in a diverse and ever-changing world. They need broad skills, not just English, maths, science and history, but geography, civics and citizenship. These are skills to teach them how to get by, how to read and write, express themselves, relate to others and to know what their responsibilities are as citizens.

Using a computer and knowing how to use the Internet and email are becoming fundamental to our way of life in the twenty-first century. The New South Wales public education system is a world leader in information technology. In 1996 we connected all schools in New South Wales to the Internet. We were the first State in Australia to do so and we were way ahead of countries such as the United States of America and the United Kingdom. This service provides each school with a telephone line, modem and dedicated computer with appropriate software to connect to the Internet, and it is supported by training an Internet contact person in each school.

In 1996 we introduced the Computers in School Program, and almost 100,000 computers have been distributed to New South Wales Government schools under the program. We are spending more than \$47 million a year on these computers. We have connected 165 remote and rural schools by satellite link to the Department of Education and Training network. We have also implemented e-summer schools to enable students from disadvantaged areas to gain advanced information technology skills during school holidays.

The Government is progressively implementing its \$963 million plan over four years for technology in New South Wales schools and TAFE colleges. A total of \$247 million over four years is being allocated to implement a new broadband system to increase the speed of access to the Internet by up to 30 times for schools, colleges, and the department's administrative offices. Network capacity—bandwidth—for the department's network infrastructure will be gradually increased through the introduction of new telecommunications services and technologies to enhance Internet access and support e-learning initiatives.

To support the use of computers in schools and TAFE colleges the recent State budget has provided recurrent funding of \$172.3 million over four years for broadband telecommunications services. By December 2004 most New South Wales government schools, TAFE colleges, and other departmental facilities will have services with speeds of two megabits per second or better. We will also spend \$33 million to set up more than 1.3 million e-learning accounts as part of the department's Internet Services and Products project.

Under the new Web Services for Schools and TAFE e-learning initiative an e-learning service will be provided to every student and teacher in government schools and TAFE colleges. The personalised email accounts will create new ways for students to communicate with each other and their teachers. This project is now being trialled in 50 schools and one TAFE institute before commencing full implementation. When it is fully implemented it will be a unique system—the largest educational use of an email system in the world. The new e-learning service will provide email accounts for all staff and students; filtered access to the Internet; web-hosting facilities for individuals, schools and colleges; student discussion groups; remote access from any location with Internet access; and a 24-hour support service for remote users. The Web Services for Schools and TAFE e-learning initiative will incorporate world-class solutions that further strengthen the filtering of inappropriate content. This will include filtering of email messages, Internet browsing and chat room conversations. The recent State budget provided funding of \$84.1 million over four years to implement the e-learning service in schools and TAFE colleges.

There are to be further changes to the School Certificate that reflect the importance of computer competency. Since we came to office in 1995 it has been a priority of the Government to reinvigorate the School Certificate. We have made examinations in English literacy, mathematics, science, Australian history, geography, and civics and citizenship mandatory for students completing their School Certificate. We are now intending to make testing for computing skills a mandatory requirement of the School Certificate. This fulfils a Government commitment that all students at the end of their compulsory years of schooling should be capable and competent users of information and communication technologies.

Making computing skills a mandatory requirement of the School Certificate is another milestone in the complete overhaul of the K-12 syllabus that has occurred in the eight years of the Carr Government. With computing skills becoming a mandatory test for the awarding of the School Certificate, the Government is confident that students are being tested in a range of subjects that will prepare them for life, learning and employment in the twenty-first century. We make no apology for asking our students to undertake this important test. Computing skills assessments for Year 10 are currently being trialled in our schools. This year over 580 schools participated in the trial. More than 10,000 students will take the test on-line this year. Mandatory computer skills testing will be implemented as part of the School Certificate in 2006.

As honourable members will remember, I have informed the House about the introduction of the new Years 7 to 10 syllabuses, which will commence in 2005. From 2005 all students will study computing skills in all subjects as part of the new syllabus. Testing students in 2006 for computer skills will give all students and teachers time to prepare for the introduction of the new syllabus. As I have said, New South Wales is a world leader in information technology in the classroom. I was amazed after seeing a new technology class in action a few weeks ago at Maitland Public School. A group of 28 students had highly sophisticated computer skills. They gave a PowerPoint presentation that was fit for any boardroom. The students did most of their work on computers and were comfortable using sophisticated programs such as Word, Front Page, Excel and Publisher. These were children in years 5 and 6. Their teamwork in the room was terrific and the excellent working relationship they had with their teacher was obvious.

This innovative technological program has created a unique educational environment. I learnt that all the students have their own web site and they have their homework emailed to them. When they have finished their homework they can email it back to their teacher for marking. What is also important is that while these students become highly computer literate—a much-needed factor to stay ahead in this fast-paced world—their literacy and numeracy skills improved at the same time. That was made possible at Maitland and at other similar schools because of the State Government's annual Computer Co-ordinators' Grant—which provided \$20 million

for computer-related funding across the State last financial year. Just this week the Welsh Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning visited Sydney. She visited the Noumea Primary School, which is in the Mount Druitt area. The Deputy Principal said that the Welsh Minister:

... was particularly interested in how the school was using technology like the Internet to enhance students' research skills ... She was very impressed, to the point that we're looking at setting up an Internet link with a sister school in Wales where we can communicate and learn more about each other's schools and cultures.

Internationally we are seen as a leader in information technology in schools through our many initiatives, from making computer skills a mandatory requirement of the School Certificate to providing e-learning accounts. The Government intends to keep it that way.

#### **FORMER MINISTER FOR GAMING AND RACING DEPARTMENTAL ACCESS**

**Mr SOURIS:** My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Gaming and Racing. In view of his answer yesterday, will the Minister now confirm that Mr Face and staff of his consultancy business have not had any dealings with the Minister's staff—with the Minister or staff within his portfolio?

**Mr McBRIDE:** Yesterday the honourable member for Upper Hunter asked a question in relation to the former member for Charlestown. As recorded in *Hansard*, I responded:

To the best of my knowledge the department has had no dealings with the former Minister.

After question time yesterday I sought further advice from my director-general, who has advised me in writing:

Neither the former Minister nor any of his staff have had any special access to public servants of the Department of Gaming and Racing.

The director-general has also advised me that he has routinely instructed all his staff of their responsibility to act at all times in a manner consistent with the highest public sector standards when dealing with members of the public.

#### **REGIONAL BUSINESS DROUGHT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

**Mr BLACK:** I direct my question without notice to the Minister for Regional Development, and Minister for Small Business. How is the Government assisting business in drought-affected areas of New South Wales?

**Mr CAMPBELL:** I thank the honourable member for Murray-Darling for his question. It goes without saying that he places great importance on the welfare of communities in regional New South Wales. As a Country Labor member in this place he understands the importance of these issues. He and the other Country Labor members consistently raise with Ministers and within the Government their concern about the impact that the drought is having on communities in regional New South Wales. The current dry conditions continue to seriously affect regional New South Wales and country communities. That is why the New South Wales Government is working with businesses severely impacted by drought.

The Government wants to ensure that regional enterprises, such as fuel suppliers, agricultural services and machinery repairers and suppliers are ready to take advantage of a return to better seasons. During these tough times the Government wants to help regional centres and businesses hold on to skilled workers. That is an important aspect of the Government's relief program and the reason that it supports regional businesses. In August last year the Government initiated a \$2.5 million business drought assistance payroll tax rebate program. That program is being extended for another financial year and an extra \$5 million will be provided. That is double the amount provided in the 2002-03 financial year.

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

[Interruption]

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

**Mr CAMPBELL:** This program is available to small and medium size businesses with fewer than 200 employees. It aims to make a real difference to companies experiencing hardship due to the ongoing drought. It will help companies with their cash flow, which is a vital element in retaining skilled workers. Regional

companies are successfully utilising this program. For example, last year a farm machinery company in the Riverina that was experiencing a significant decrease in sales was eligible for \$64,000 in assistance. This relief program has helped to protect 27 jobs, which means greater security for families in the Riverina. I am sure that the member for Tamworth and the member for Northern Tablelands will be interested to hear that an aerial spraying and aircraft engineering business in the New England area has also been helped through this program.

The company was eligible for \$110,000 in assistance and providing that strategic help has made a significant difference to the local community. Members of the company's 40-strong work force have specialist mechanical and engineering skills and their loss would have been a significant blow to the region. An agricultural machinery company with a 30-strong work force in the State's Central West qualified for \$54,000 in assistance. That funding has helped to protect the jobs of at least five apprentices. The program has provided support not only for jobs generally but also for apprentices and young people in regional New South Wales.

A fibre-processing company in the south east of the State was eligible to receive \$100,000 in relief under this program. That assistance is helping the company to hold on to its 30-strong specialised work force and to sustain operations beyond the drought. The New South Wales Government's drought-related support for regional companies extends beyond payroll tax relief. It also includes assistance with credit management, restructuring and the development of business strategies. For example, a New England-based company received a \$3,000 grant to review its business structure with a view to improving its cash flow, profitability and future growth. By reviewing its trading position, the company has protected its six workers. A company specialising in revegetation in the Riverina has also been given government assistance to help it to survive during this critical time. The New South Wales Government will continue to work with regional businesses during these challenging times.

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

**Mr CAMPBELL:** To date, the Carr Government has provided more than \$90 million for drought assistance in rural New South Wales. It is obvious that the silvertails from the northern beaches have no interest in what happens in regional New South Wales.

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

**Mr CAMPBELL:** That is why Country Labor members ask these questions, bring these issues to the attention of Parliament and continue to lobby for these programs—

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

**Mr CAMPBELL:** —not clowns like the member for Wakehurst, who has no particular interest in this issue. The New South Wales Government will continue to work with regional businesses during this challenging time. It has already provided more than \$90 million for drought assistance to rural New South Wales, and it will continue to work with regional communities to ensure that they thrive in the future.

**Questions without notice concluded.**

## **EMPLOYMENT SKILLING PROGRAM**

### **Ministerial Statement**

**Ms BEAMER** (Mulgoa—Minister for Juvenile Justice, Minister for Western Sydney, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning (Planning Administration)) [3.16.m.]: The most important steps a young offender can take on the road to becoming a responsible member of his or her community are to find a pathway to employment, to be able to work and to hold down a job. That is the best way for young people to break the cycle of crime. However, young offenders and young people at risk of offending present the toughest challenges for employment. They often suffer from low motivation, poor education and low skill levels, and they often come from families with a history of unemployment.

The Juvenile Justice Department has funded a number of programs designed to provide young offenders with significant training and skills to enter the work force. I have visited centres and community

training establishments in Dubbo and Wagga Wagga at which young offenders and young people at risk are given practical training. In Wagga Wagga the department is funding scientific management associates in the Murrumbidgee Gardening Partnership, which is training young people to enter the Riverina horticultural industry. Young offenders at the Western College at Dubbo are doing a practical marketing course and producing and selling artworks at Dubbo markets. The department is expanding its pre-employment training for young offenders. I announce the Employment Skilling Program, a \$730,000-a-year scheme to put about 200 young offenders a year on the road to a job. It will provide at least six months of intensive training and support for young offenders from 14 years and 9 months to 18 years of age. They are clients of the Juvenile Justice Department who have had difficulty getting into mainstream employment programs.

Operating in 11 locations around the State, the Employment Skilling Program will fund training programs and practical courses to prepare young people for work and then find them jobs. The program will provide training and job placement services at Wagga Wagga, Dubbo, Kempsey, Newcastle, Taree, Bourke and Nowra. In the Sydney metropolitan area it will operate at Campbelltown, Blacktown and Fairfield and in the inner city. Getting young offenders into jobs is a huge challenge. This Government does not believe in knee-jerk reactions to juvenile crime, for example, unworkable curfews, short-term solutions and dislocation of families. They are not the answer; programs such as this are. The Government's commitment of \$730,000 a year to get 200 offenders into the work force and out of the crime cycle is money well spent.

**Mrs SKINNER** (North Shore) [3.18 p.m.]: I speak on this matter on behalf of my colleague the shadow Minister for Juvenile Justice in another place. I had the very great pleasure of accompanying her on a recent visit to a number of local facilities including the Acmena Juvenile Justice Centre at Grafton. It is a fantastic place that is providing a number of excellent educational programs, including those provided by O10, the TAFE system's distance education network. On Monday this week I visited O10 with the Leader of the Opposition and we were most disturbed to learn that the Government's restructure plans for the Department of Education and Training will decimate that program. I urge the Minister for Juvenile Justice to raise with the Minister for Education and Training the impact that will have on juvenile justice centres and the education programs they run. The Government's plans to scatter teachers throughout different institutes and to separate them from the support staff who tailor innovative programs through O10 for young people, such as those in juvenile justice centres, will have a most detrimental effect.

The Minister will be aware that in the estimates committee last night the shadow Minister expressed concern that the new bail facility planned for Tingha offers no support to young people, who must be detained before they receive education and training assistance. I did a fair amount of work in this area before I entered Parliament and the Coalition takes a very strong view about the need to provide education, training, and support for young people in detention and for those who are disadvantaged in other ways so that they may increase their skills and participate in further education or gain employment. The previous Coalition Government had a strong track record of providing those services through the Office of Youth Affairs, of which I was the director. A number of our programs are still in place, although they have been renamed and repackaged by the Labor Government mostly through second-chance types of initiatives.

The Coalition strongly supports any initiatives that offer increased skills training and assistance to young people in detention and that help them to gain employment. However, I ask the Minister to draw to the attention of the Minister for Education and Training our concerns about his restructure of the Education portfolio, and particularly his plans to downgrade TAFE. Many people—including representatives of the TAFE teachers union, who visited Parliament yesterday—have told my colleagues and me that the capacity of TAFE to respond to the needs of people like the Minister's clients will be greatly diminished as a consequence of the restructure plans. We support any efforts that will assist young people but we call upon the Minister to ensure that the Government's approach is consistent across the board.

### **KENMORE HOSPITAL SITE SALE**

#### **Privilege**

**Ms HODGKINSON** (Burrinjuck) [3.22 p.m.]: I raise a matter of privilege. On 24 June this year—a couple of days before the parliamentary winter recess—I asked the Premier a question without notice about the sale of the Kenmore Hospital site. I waited a couple of days for an answer but none was forthcoming. Parliament then recessed for the winter and did not sit for quite an extended period. This week I have been waiting with bated breath for an answer to my question. On 24 June I asked:

Why were Australian Labor Party members of Goulburn City Council, surplus to the mayor, aware of the confidential details of the sale of the Kenmore Hospital site before they were made public by the Premier in March this year?

The Premier replied:

I will seek information and report back to the House.

That was almost 10 weeks ago. Today I received a telephone call from a constituent requesting the answer to that question. My constituent said, "We know you've asked it and that the Premier is getting back to Parliament with an answer. So where is it?" That is why this is an urgent point of privilege. The Premier said he would seek information and report back to the House but he has failed to do so.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! To establish a prima facie case of breach of privilege the honourable member for Burrinjuck must show how her character, reputation or name has been impugned or how her privileges as a member of Parliament have been infringed. Whether a Minister chose to respond to a question without notice does not give rise to a claim of breach of privilege.

**Ms HODGKINSON:** I checked this matter carefully with the Clerks and confirmed and reconfirmed that this is a relevant point of privilege. This is an urgent matter. The Premier said he would seek information and report back to the House but he has failed to do that. In so doing he is treating not only me but also the entire House with contempt. The Kenmore Hospital site contains some 40 buildings of both Victorian and Edwardian—

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! When seeking to establish a breach of privilege the honourable member cannot relate the details of the matter or debate the substance of it. As I said earlier, she must show how her character has been impugned or how her rights as a member of Parliament have been infringed. It is a matter for the relevant Minister to decide whether to respond to a question asked in this place. The fact that a Minister may have given an undertaking to provide a response and failed to do so does not infringe in any way on the privileges or rights of the member who asked the question. The member may draw attention to that fact, but I cannot see how it constitutes a breach of the member's privilege.

**Ms HODGKINSON:** I refer you to standing order 101, which states:

A member may rise to declare that a contempt or breach of privilege has been committed. In order to move a substantive motion immediately or to request the Speaker to have a notice placed on the Business Paper with precedence ...

The Premier gave a commitment to provide an answer to this place but, eight weeks later, has failed to do so. That is a total breach of privilege in this place. The Premier is showing contempt for the House. Members of Parliament have a right to question the Government about important matters during question time.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! I will hear no further argument relating to the point of privilege. I refer to a ruling by former Speaker Rozzoli, who said:

The content or relevance of a Minister's answer to a Question on Notice is not a matter of privilege.

That ruling would apply also to an undertaking such as that referred to by the honourable member for Burrinjuck. I also draw the attention of the honourable member to a ruling by former Speaker Ellis which states:

For the Chair to be satisfied that a prima facie case of breach of privilege has been established, one of the following elements should be involved in such a breach: disobedience to general orders or rules of either House, disobedience to particular orders; indignities offered to the character or proceedings of Parliament; assaults or insults upon members or reflections upon their character or conduct in Parliament; or interference with officers of the House in the discharge of their duties. The Chair must determine also whether the matter complained of could be said fairly and reasonably to be capable of interfering with members in the performance of their duties.

None of those matters applies to the issue raised by the honourable member for Burrinjuck. If she cannot show how the matter she has raised falls into one of the categories to which I have referred, I cannot allow her to continue to speak.

**Ms HODGKINSON:** Further to your ruling, Mr Speaker, I am extremely offended by the lazy and arrogant attitude of the Premier in failing to address—

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! I will hear no further discussion about the matter. I cannot see how the honourable member for Burrinjuck is establishing that her privileges have been breached. I ask her to resume her seat.

## CONSIDERATION OF URGENT MOTIONS

### *Waltzing Matilda and Rugby World Cup*

**Mr BLACK** (Murray-Darling) [3.28 p.m.]: This motion must be debated urgently because the International Rugby Board is to make a decision tomorrow about the singing of *Waltzing Matilda* at Rugby World Cup matches. I have been thinking about the honourable member for Burrinjuck and her question. This motion concerns a swagman who knocks off a sheep. The honourable member for Burrinjuck is clearly too nice to be a member of the National Party. I have two pieces of advice for her: Labor supporters will continue to shear her colleagues' sheep but, unlike her colleagues, they will not name their sons "Angus" and "Murray" after their favourite cows. This matter must be debated urgently because the Premier has written to the International Rugby Board in the following terms:

I write to express the unequivocal support of the Government and people of New South Wales, principal host State for the Rugby World Cup 2003, for *Waltzing Matilda* to be sung prior to Wallaby matches.

I can assure the Board that *Waltzing Matilda* is our nation's pre-eminent national song - one deeply embedded in our culture. Every Australian learns it as a child. Every Australian is profoundly stirred by it.

I note that the real leader of the National Party is not in the Chamber. During question time I thought we were about to establish a unity ticket with the real leader of the National Party and people on this side. At least when he was Leader of the National Party it had 20 seats in this place. He had 20 seats in 1988.

**Mr George:** Point of order: Mr Speaker, would you ask the honourable member for Murray-Darling to tell us why his motion is urgent. He is debating the substance of the motion.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! I shudder to think that the honourable member for Murray-Darling may break into song at any minute. However, I ask him to confine his remarks to the reasons his motion should receive priority.

**Mr BLACK:** Mr Speaker, with your tolerance, could we go outside the standing orders? If those opposite can get the real leader of the National Party into the Chamber, I will challenge him to sing *Waltzing Matilda* with me.

**Mr SPEAKER:** The Chair is not that tolerant.

**Mr BLACK:** The matter is urgent. In simple terms, we are the Parliament of New South Wales, we are the principal hosts of the Rugby World Cup and we are appealing to the International Rugby Board. In this great country of ours, an icon such as *Waltzing Matilda* should be able to be sung whenever we damn well please. We should not be told by the cultural savages of England that we cannot sing what really is the national anthem.

### **WorkCover Regulations**

**Ms HODGKINSON** (Burrinjuck) [3.31 p.m.]: My motion is urgent because on 1 September WorkCover regulations came into force that will massively increase the amount of bureaucratic red tape facing small business in this State. The Government has never argued that these regulations are not going to be enforced in a heavy-handed manner by WorkCover inspectors. We are expecting the worst. There are already a lot of examples of what can only be described as over-the-top rulings that defy common sense. According to comments that I have received from many small businesses, the two-year transitional period was completely wasted by the Government. My office has received many calls from small business owners who have sought, and have been unable to find, information about how the new changes will affect them.

My motion is urgent because Robert Butcher, the owner of Mitre 10 and IGA in Gundagai, rang me yesterday to say that he sent his staff to a WorkCover information session and they came back more confused than when they went. They were told that they needed a green card to deliver goods to sites, but it now transpires that this may refer only to deliveries to building sites. He still is not sure. So what is going on? My motion is urgent because John Tod, a sowing and spraying contractor from Goulburn, rang me last week wanting information about what he had to do to comply with the regulations. When he rang the local WorkCover office for help he was told that he would have to get hold of a copy of the legislation and find out for himself. Local area WorkCover staff then told him to ring me. I sent him the information that afternoon, but the relevant web site was down and it was difficult to get the information that he needed in order to make sure

that he was complying with the law. The Minister's office is well aware of WorkCover's information flow problem because I sent his office a communication in that regard. This information flow problem needs to be fixed urgently.

This motion is urgent because Kim Gann from Carpet Court in Goulburn also rang my office yesterday. She has been unable to obtain suitable advice from WorkCover officers despite extensive attempts to address the occupational health and safety requirements for her business, particularly as the new regulations will relate to contractors. Kim sent me a lengthy fax, which is quite extraordinary to read. She has all sorts of problems at the local WorkCover office and the Government needs to fix those problems urgently. The Opposition supports sensible occupational health and safety regulations that are intended to ensure that workplaces are safe, but the regulations that came into force this week are focused on forcing massive cost imposts onto small businesses. This motion is urgent because farmers could have to install "slippery when wet" signs on two steps leading up a verandah. Farmers will have to undergo additional training, even though they may have the necessary tickets and have a lot of experience.

Farms that employ seasonal workers will be required to document occupational health and safety meetings in the off-season when there are no casual employees. Contractors are required to pay for each piece of electrical equipment to be tested and tagged, even if the equipment is brand new. Staff in small retail stores will have to wear hard hats, even if they are taking a pair of shoes off the top shelf in the storeroom. This motion is urgent because last week the Chief Executive Officer of the Institute of Automotive Mechanical Engineers, Mr Frank Burgess, told me that these new regulations are a key issue of concern for the automotive repair industry. He said that not every small business has received checklists and that the WorkCover Authority gives little assistance. It is up to individual businesses to interpret the generalised checklists without assistance from WorkCover. But heaven help the poor businessman or businesswoman if their interpretation does not match that of the WorkCover inspector.

This motion is urgent because the more than 370,000 small businesses in New South Wales that will be affected by these changes have not been given sufficient information to alert them to the new requirements. Australian Business Limited [ABL], who I met again this week, says in its New South Wales Business Priorities 2003 outline that inconsistency by WorkCover inspectors creates uncertainty for business. This motion is urgent because 41 per cent of the 400 key decision-makers from New South Wales based enterprises, surveyed by ABL, rated compliance issues as extremely important and 30 per cent rated it as very important, indicating that occupational health and safety compliance was negatively impacting on business operation. ABL also says that plant regulation, comprehensive risk assessment, special arrangements for construction work, and occupational health and safety training all place increased compliance time and cost on already stretched businesses. It is impossible to comply with the legislation.

This motion is urgent because along with all the empty rhetoric about assisting small business to understand their new responsibilities, on-the-spot fines for breaches under the new regulations have increased by almost 100 per cent. The Government is penalising the most important sector of the New South Wales economy—the sector that makes up more than 90 per cent of businesses in the State—by introducing an unwarranted, heavy-handed, bureaucratic approach to occupational health and safety reform. [*Time expired.*]

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

### **WALTZING MATILDA AND RUGBY WORLD CUP**

#### **Urgent Motion**

**Mr BLACK** (Murray-Darling) [3.34 p.m.]: I move:

That this House supports moves by the Australian Rugby Union to allow New South Wales fans to sing *Waltzing Matilda* at Wallaby matches in the Rugby World Cup 2003.

The House has just heard a speech from the honourable member for Burrinjuck. I must say that I am rather surprised that the National Party opposed the House discussing this issue today. While I note that the National Party did not call for a division, during her contribution the honourable member indicated that the National Party would prefer to debate something other than this matter. This is a matter of great importance to the Australian psyche, it is of great importance to our history and, I believe, it is of great importance to the conduct of the Rugby World Cup. I thought I had a unity ticket in relation to this matter with the real leader of the



National Party, the honourable member for Lachlan. During question time he indicated that he fully supported this matter. I am surprised at the turn of events: I still maintain that the honourable member for Lachlan was very badly dealt with by the National Party. Let us face it: in 1988 the National Party had 20 seats in this place, then the honourable member for Barwon stuck the knife into the honourable member for Lachlan, off came his head, and in went Gorgeous George.

**Mr George:** Point of order: I ask you to bring the honourable member for Murray-Darling back to the substance of the debate. This debate is about *Waltzing Matilda*; it is not about the leadership of any party, let alone the National Party.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! I am sure the honourable member for Murray-Darling is only embarking on a preamble.

**Mr BLACK:** I would rather go *Waltzing Matilda* with the honourable member for Lachlan than with Gorgeous George or with Stoner the Goner. To test the water, let us see what the numbers are in late 2006 because if there is a whiff of victory for the other side Stoner the Goner will be gone and the real leader of the National Party will be back in. And, by the way, we intend to abolish the seat of Lachlan! I went to a rugby union school—Sydney Technical High—

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The honourable member for Lismore will cease interjecting.

**Mr BLACK:** He is encouraging me. As I was saying, I went to a rugby union school—Sydney Technical High.

**Mr Ashton:** He was a hooker.

**Mr BLACK:** Actually, I wasn't in those days. Members on the other side of the House—the lot that go to Kings and that sort of thing—get out there and hold their tactics meeting on a rifle range that we paid for. It is disgraceful. In my day, the combined high schools [CHS] used to play the greater public schools on that paddock called the Sydney Showground, which was a great institution in those days. In the five years that I went to Sydney tech high, the Kings brigade never won one match. And we sang *Waltzing Matilda*!

**Mr Roberts:** Point of order: It is obvious to anyone who knows about rugby that Sydney high has not won a rugby match for at least the past 50 years.

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

**Mr BLACK:** He happens to be a North Shore mayor. How many on this side are south shore mayors—17 or something? The honourable member for Lane Cove is right: Sydney high never won a CHS game against Sydney tech high, and that was because they did not have the quality. While we are talking about schools, let us look at that other place at Earlwood. What is the name of that school again?

**Mr Ashton:** Canterbury Boys.

**Mr BLACK:** Canterbury; that is the one. They did not win a game either. And that school's most popular product, the Prime Minister, never even played football. But after all those games we sang *Waltzing Matilda*. Unfortunately, that great game of rugby collapsed in 1954 in Broken Hill.

**Mr Stoner:** Is that the city of Broken Hill?

**Mr BLACK:** The city of Broken Bill—not the shire, as Stoner the Goner tried to reduce it to. But that is all right; we still have city status. Although rugby union has not been played in Broken Hill since 1954, and it has crossed to amateur rugby league, we still sing *Waltzing Matilda*—and a lot of other songs that cannot be sung in this Chamber, particularly after a game. And what does one do then? One becomes the president of what became Broken Hill and district rugby league. Over 2½ years we formed four clubs, and all of them sang *Waltzing Matilda*. And they were all workers clubs. But I can assure you that nobody from the Kings school ever got to play football in Broken Hill. As has been reported, I turned 60 on 14 June. And guess what the National Party did for me? They sent me for my birthday present a statement published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* that read:

If the Nationals want to see a threatened species all they have to do is step inside a room full of mirrors.

That is this lot opposite. This is where the singing comes in. I have the attention of the honourable member for Murrumbidgee now. Two days later, on 16 June, the *Sydney Morning Herald* published the following report:

We keep singing about native vegetation and water and bushfires," Mr Stoner said. "We can't just sing that song and hope to get in. You have got to sing outside the traditional hymn book."

Someone said that the Leader of the National Party was born again. I am not sure about that. He is talking about hymn books now. Ian Armstrong had 20 seats. At the 1999 election, in comes Gentleman George with 17 seats, which runs out to 13. What happens this year? Gentleman George goes in with 13 and comes out with 12. By the way, it has made that lot much happier, having 12 rather than 13—it saves them taking off one shoe to count how many they have got! Endeavouring to reinvent itself and to get away from the traditional National Party roots, the Leader of the National Party took that literally. And he came up with hairdressers as the preferred National Party constituency base. I cannot believe this. Is this your current leader?

**Mr George:** Sorry, I didn't hear it. Repeat it.

**Mr BLACK:** He said, "hairdressers". On 17 June, three days after the Leader of the National Party's first statement and one day after his statement about singing, the *Coffs Harbour Advocate* reported him as saying, "We need to broaden our appeal to the mechanics, hairdressers, the small business people ..." This is what the Leader of the National Party—the current one; not the real one—does not know: the State's 5,000 hairdressing salons and 15,000 employees are ready for the Nationals. Enough to tilt the balance of power for the Coalition? You must be joking! The National Competition Policy report on the review of regulation of hairdressers states that the hairdressing work force is typified as being large and transient, with workers moving from salon to salon and across State and Territory boundaries. The other piece of information that comes from the review—and pours cold water on the Leader of the National Party's vision—is that approximately 76 per cent of hairdressers are female and most are under 40 years of age. On both criteria, they are not fit to be members of the National Party!

**Mr George:** They're overqualified.

**Mr BLACK:** They are overqualified, indeed. Mr Speaker has ruled that I cannot sing *Waltzing Matilda*, which is a terrible blow, so I will refer to how the song came about. It goes back to the workers strike of 1891. That other marvellous song, *The Ballad of 1891*, was also written at that time. It was about the price of wool falling. Perhaps I will deal with this matter further in my reply. *Waltzing Matilda* was born out of the events of 1891. Banjo Paterson made it a national song, and we continue to sing it today. It is a celebration of what occurred in 1891: the shearers on the track, the swagmen, the bird that the aviary knew—

**Mr Ashton:** The Labor Party in the same year.

**Mr BLACK:** No, not the Labor Party. You stick to being a history teacher. [*Time expired.*]

**Mr GEORGE** (Lismore) [3.44 p.m.]: I am totally embarrassed to be a member of Parliament engaging in debate in this House on such an important urgent motion and having to listen to the codswallop we have just heard from the honourable member for Murray-Darling over the last 10 minutes. Just one minute of his contribution related to the urgent motion. I take exception to his comments about hairdressers during a very important debate about *Waltzing Matilda*. I have a sister who owns a very successful hairdressing salon. Has the honourable member for Murray-Darling looked at himself in the mirror lately?

**Mr Ashton:** When did your hair start to go grey?

**Mr GEORGE:** I don't have to go and get mine dyed, like you do.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The honourable member for Lismore will refrain from responding to interjections.

**Mr GEORGE:** It is ridiculous that we are even debating the banning of the singing of *Waltzing Matilda* at the Rugby World Cup. It is a very important part of our culture, it is an integral part of the pre-game build-up, and it is important to Australia's history. The John Williamson's of this world lead crowds of 80,000 people in singing *Waltzing Matilda*. Although the honourable member for Murray-Darling spoke about the

National Party for eight minutes, because he loves us so much, this is not about whether people are Labor or National. It is about the whole crowd joining as one, regardless of their religion and politics. As the Lebanese member of the National Party in this place, supported by the Italian member of the National Party, it should be a World Cup requirement that we continue to sing *Waltzing Matilda*. This is very important. The International Rugby Board has banned it.

The Australian Rugby Union has appealed the decision. It is the same as the haka, which is the national song of New Zealand. The Tongans and the Fijians have their own songs, which are condoned by the national bodies. When the English sing, *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot* it is all part of it. What do honourable members reckon we have? *Waltzing Matilda*! The Irish have an array of songs that they continue to sing. Why must we be different? The Welsh are famous as much for their singing as they are for their rugby prowess. In Australia we need to continue the tradition of *Waltzing Matilda*. It is a must. I never thought I would support an urgent motion moved by the honourable member for Murray-Darling. The Coalition is offering bipartisan support—

**Mr Black:** Where is he?

**Mr GEORGE:** The shadow Minister for Sport and Recreation asked me to lead for the Opposition because he wanted an ethnic approach to the matter. We are offering bipartisan support for the motion, which states:

That this House supports moves by the Australian Rugby Union to allow New South Wales fans—

I do not know why the honourable member used the words "New South Wales fans". He should have used the words "Australian fans". Indeed, I might move an amendment to see how bipartisan this is—

to sing *Waltzing Matilda* at Wallaby matches in the Rugby World Cup 2003.

No-one should deny freedom of expression, but anyone who dares to deny the singing of *Waltzing Matilda* at Rugby World Cup matches is denying the expression of our culture. *Waltzing Matilda* will promote our culture throughout the world, if people listen to the words of it. I do not want to hear the honourable member for Murray-Darling perform a rendition this afternoon, because that would kill any chance of having *Waltzing Matilda* retained as our song at the World Cup! There have been wars in other countries about this sort of thing, and there may be a war with the International Rugby Board [IRB] if it dares to stop the rousing renditions of this famous song that we will sing proudly in support of our national rugby union team, the Wallabies. We will proudly sing *Waltzing Matilda* when we make it to the final and we win the World Cup.

By singing *Waltzing Matilda*, we are putting our thoughts, our words and what this country is all about behind the Wallabies. I am sure that when the Wallabies are standing in the middle of the rugby ground waiting to kick off, hearing 10,000, 20,000 or 80,000 people singing *Waltzing Matilda* will be an incentive for them to perform well. I am pleased to take part in this debate. As I said, I never thought I would support a motion moved by the honourable member for Murray-Darling. However, to show that our approach is bipartisan, members from different parts of the country and from different countries are right behind the momentum to retain *Waltzing Matilda* as the Australian song at the World Cup this year.

**Mr COLLIER** (Miranda) [3.54 p.m.]: Who do the members of the International Rugby Board [IRB] think they are? The very thought of this mob banning the singing of one of our favourite national songs before World Cup games played on our home soil is an absolute disgrace. After all, Australia is the host nation. We are putting on the Rugby World Cup, the third largest sporting event in the world, and we are defending the world title that we won in 1999. And we want to sing a song that is of enormous national and cultural significance to us. That is not too much to ask, is it? *Waltzing Matilda* was first written by another icon, Banjo Paterson—a song sung by Australians for more than 100 years; a song that every Australian man, woman and child knows; the favourite song during the great war; a song that many migrants learn when they land on our soil; a song that almost became our national anthem; a song that is uniquely Australian.

Of course we will sing our national anthem at the World Cup, as will every other nation. But the IRB thinks we should stop with that. It is all right for the All Blacks, the Springboks and three other nations to be given exemptions. The All Blacks will stand proud when their national anthem, *God Defend New Zealand*, is played; then they will do the traditional haka, which paradoxically is a war dance. That is okay, because the IRB has said that that dance is of cultural and indigenous significance to New Zealand. In Australia we will sing our national anthem, *Advance Australia Fair*. What do we do then? Do we simply stand mute while we watch the All Blacks do the haka? And the Wallabies, our national team, their supporters, and Australians as the hosts find *Waltzing Matilda* as inspirational as the All Blacks and New Zealanders find the haka. We want *Waltzing Matilda*. It is as simple as that.

It is a proud song; it is a stirring song; it reflects so much of our history, our culture and our tradition. It is not just a song about a hungry stock thief who drowned himself to avoid capture. It is about the underdog. It is a song of struggle, a song of courage in the face of overwhelming odds. The song is about the tough times and the hunger. It is alive with Australian images. It is alive with the sounds of the bush; it is alive with the attributes that make up our uniquely Australian culture. Consider the words, both Australian indigenous and non-indigenous: a matilda is a bedroll; a swagman is an unemployed drifter; billabong is an Aboriginal word for a waterhole; coolibah is an Aboriginal word for an Australian tree; a billy is a tin with a wire handle used for boiling water and heating food; jumbuck is an Aboriginal word for sheep; a tucker bag is a bag containing food; a squatter is a landowner; and a trooper is a policeman.

The IRB should take on board what I am saying. *Waltzing Matilda* is uniquely Australian, a song about our culture and our heritage. The IRB should know that Australians abhor hypocrisy and loathe discrimination, and love our culture and our heritage. Allowing the All Blacks to perform the haka and display their culture and heritage to other countries is fine. But we want to do this on our own soil. We are the hosts. Banning the singing of *Waltzing Matilda* smacks of ignorance, hypocrisy and something that true Australians abhor—discrimination. We will not hear of it. This is our home and the IRB should respect that. This is our culture and our song, and it should respect that, too. If the board refuses to let us sing *Waltzing Matilda* let us be as defiant as the swagman in the song; let us just sing it anyway.

**Mr PICCOLI** (Murrumbidgee) [3.58 p.m.]: Having been to rugby union matches on many occasions, singing *Waltzing Matilda* is indeed a proud moment to be an Australian. However, in light of the fact that we are in the New South Wales Parliament discussing such an important song to Australia as *Waltzing Matilda*, I thought it would be appropriate, particularly in light of the current gaming tax debacle, to write another version of *Waltzing Matilda* for New South Wales called "Taxing Matilda". Changing the words of the traditional song, this is what I have put together:

#### TAXING MATILDA

Once a jolly punter camped by a registered club  
Under the shade of a poker machine  
And he sang as he watched and waited till his numbers came up  
You'll come a-taxing Matilda with me

Taxing Matilda, taxing Matilda  
You'll come a-taxing Matilda with me  
And he sang as he watched and waited for his numbers to come up  
You'll come a-taxing Matilda with me.

Up came a jackpot to satisfy the punter's need  
So up jumped the punter and grabbed it with glee.  
And he sang as he shoved that jackpot in his tucker bag,  
You'll come a-taxing Matilda with me.

Taxing Matilda, taxing Matilda, you'll come a-taxing  
Matilda with me  
And he sang as he watched and waited till his numbers  
came up  
You'll come a-taxing Matilda with me.

Then up rode the Premier mounted on his thoroughbred  
Down came his Ministers, one, two, three.  
Who's that jackpot you've got in a tucker bag  
You'll come a-taxing Matilda with me in the.

Taxing Matilda, taxing Matilda, you'll come a-taxing  
Matilda with me  
And he sang as he watched and waited till his numbers  
came up  
You'll come a-taxing Matilda with me.

Up jumped the punter and sprang into the billabong  
You'll never tax me alive said he.  
And his ghost may be heard as you pass by that  
abandoned club  
You'll come a-taxing Matilda with me.

**Mr CORRIGAN** (Camden) [4.00 p.m.]: I thank the honourable member for Murrumbidgee for his contribution. Continuing the theme that has been adopted so far, I congratulate Anthony Mundine on winning

his fight last night against Antwun Echols and becoming the new world champion. That may not seem to be completely relevant at this time but I will try to make it relevant to the debate, unlike some others here. On my way home last night I called in to the Merino Tavern at Camden and saw great crowd support for Anthony. I am proud to say I met Anthony seven years ago at a fundraiser for the deaf swimming team. He is a good supporter of that team. He is a quiet, humble, family-oriented young man when one gets to know him, unlike his public persona. He is good at drumming up people to watch him. Unfortunately, in the past most people have gone to watch him get knocked out and not to support him. I was happy last night to see the crowd at Camden's Merino Tavern supporting Anthony. I congratulate him on his win.

That change of support for Anthony reminds me of the change of support we now have in Australia: the mood swing towards having *Waltzing Matilda* sung before the matches in the World Cup. Like the honourable member for Murrumbidgee, I have been to many rugby union test matches. I recall very well the first test I saw in 1972, when Russell Fairfax was playing fullback against France. We should have won the game when Fairfax stopped a French player over the line, but we were robbed when the referee awarded the try anyway. Subsequently I have seen many tests against the All Blacks, but unfortunately I have not seen many in the past few years. At times I have been at test matches and the crowd has not been singing *Waltzing Matilda*. It is a more recent phenomenon that is becoming popular. Cultural performances before test matches have a long history. The comments of the captain of the Wallabies during their first tour of Great Britain in 1908 are reproduced in the book *Wallaby Gold*:

"The gravest affliction we carried was an alleged aboriginal war-cry which the parent union had imposed on us," Moran wrote. "The memory of the war-cry provokes anger in me even after all these years. The New Zealanders always performed some antics before the beginning of a match; but after all it was in the Maori tradition to lash themselves into some sort of fury by this picturesque method of self suggestion. In Australia, on the other hand, no club ever adopted a war-cry except as comic relief. Now we were being asked to remind British people of the miserable remnants of a race which they had dispossessed and we had maltreated or neglected. We were officially expected to leap up in the air and make foolish gestures which somebody thought Australian natives might have used in similar circumstances, and we were also given meaningless words which we were to utter savagely during this pantomime. I refused to lead the wretched caricature of a native corroboree, and regularly hid myself among the team, a conscientious objector. None of the men liked it."

So there was concern about cultural performances in 1908. In the Fitz Files in last weekend's *Sydney Morning Herald*, the great rugby writer Peter FitzSimons supports the singing of *Waltzing Matilda* before test matches. He writes:

Oh, all right, just one more word on the subject. So, *Waltzing Matilda* has no cultural significance, huh? It reminded former Wallabies No. 8 Arthur Buchan of the time the Wallabies played the British Barbarians at Cardiff Arms Park on the afternoon of January 31, 1948. At the conclusion of the thrilling game—won 12-6 by the Bah Bahs—the fans stood and cheered both teams long and loud. And then they began to sing ...

"Once a jolly swagman, camped by a billabong ..."

Word perfect! The crowd of 44,000, beautifully in tune! Right to the end, as a celebration of the game and the spirit in which it had been played. Some of the Wallabies started to mist up, a feeling not even tempered later when they found that the words were printed in the program. It really was the spirit in which it was sung that counted ...

We are heading towards the same thing in Australia. We should be singing *Waltzing Matilda* before we play our games. While I have the time, I would like to dispel one myth, that is, that somehow the Irish are responsible for not allowing *Waltzing Matilda* to be sung. It has nothing to do with the Irish; the International Rugby Board [IRB] headquarters happens to be in Dublin.. As someone with Irish antecedents, I am pleased to say that the Irish are among the happiest singers of songs at any time, day or night. I thoroughly support this motion. The World Cup is great for tourism in Australia. It will lead to a groundswell of national pride second only to what we witnessed at the Olympics. I support the call by the honourable member for Murray-Darling for *Waltzing Matilda* to be sung at the World Cup. [*Time expired.*]

**Mr BLACK** (Murray-Darling) [4.05 p.m.], in reply: I thank the honourable members representing the electorates of Lismore, Miranda, Murrumbidgee and Camden for their contributions to this debate. The matter is of great importance, as I said when moving this urgent motion. It is a matter of national pride. New South Wales, as the host of the World Cup, should repel as strongly as possible the suggestion by the IRB. The honourable member for Lismore commented that the Lebanese and the Italians strongly support my proposal and support the conduct of the World Cup. I suggest he overlooked the Maltese. I suggest the Maltese are also strong supporters of the conduct of the World Cup. I suggest the Maltese—and, indeed, the number one member of the Maltese community—should be at the football stadiums singing *Waltzing Matilda*, along with the Italians and Lebanese.

I go further and salute the comments of the honourable member for Murrumbidgee and the honourable member for Lismore, who established clearly that this is a bipartisan matter. When it comes to nationhood, matters should be bipartisan. During the World Cup we will be on display across the world. I do not know what the viewing audience will be but I have seen estimates of 70 million and above. Given that kind of coverage we will be on display to that place we call overseas. That is an important consideration. I do not dispute in any way the right of Fiji, South Africa and New Zealand to perform some of their cultural activities. Having said that, and bearing in mind that we are the host country, I salute the endeavours of the Premier to introduce our cultural activity. The Premier is well known for his knowledge of history. I have heard him speak about his interest in Banjo Paterson, which goes way back. He is also interested in other poets and songsters. The Premier's leadership in this matter should be endorsed by Australian citizens, not only those in New South Wales, and the IRB, located as it is in Dublin, should regard this as a special plea from the host nation and, indeed, the host State.

I will conclude by simply saying to those who interjected when I was referring to *The Ballad of 1891*—in particular the honourable member for East Hills—that long before the Labor Party was born, in the events leading up to 1891 there were such things as political labour leagues. I am not sure whether any were extant in Bankstown at the time, but they certainly were at Broken Hill. Returning to the comments I made earlier about the National Party, I suggest members of the National Party would claim the party was formed in 1926, because they would claim that its foundation goes back to the day that the Country Party was formed. That is a sound argument which most of us would support. I simply say to the honourable member for East Hills that perhaps the origins of the Labor Party go back to the formation of the political labour leagues rather than the foundation of a political branch in Balmain. I commend the motion. I again salute the Opposition for taking a bipartisan approach to this matter. I will add weight in any way I can and wherever I can to the argument that we should be on public display across the world singing our real national anthem: *Waltzing Matilda*.

**Motion agreed to.**

## **BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

### **Bill: Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders**

**Motion by Mr Watkins agreed to:**

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow the introduction, and progress up to and including the Minister's second reading speech, of the Sporting Venues (Pitch Invasions) Bill, notice of which was given this day for tomorrow.

## **SPORTING VENUES (PITCH INVASIONS) BILL**

**Bill introduced and read a first time.**

### **Second Reading**

**Mr WATKINS** (Ryde—Minister for Police) [4.10 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Government is pleased to introduce the Sporting Venues (Pitch Invasions) Bill. I am grateful to the honourable member for Vacluse for allowing this bill to be dealt with urgently. In October and November this year Australia will play host to the Rugby World Cup 2003. New South Wales will host 17 matches at four different venues: Telstra Stadium, formerly Stadium Australia; Aussie Stadium, formerly the Sydney Football Stadium; Central Coast Express Advocate Stadium in Gosford; and WIN Stadium in Wollongong. In this regard, there is a discrepancy as to how pitch invasions can be dealt with at the four venues being used in New South Wales. While it is anticipated that the incidence of people attempting to disrupt matches by running onto the field will be non-existent or negligible, the Government believes that we should have adequate offences and remedies to deter anyone who may try to do so.

Specific and adequate penalties are available for an offence of entering or remaining on the playing field at Telstra Stadium and Aussie Stadium, with fines of up to \$5,500, but no similar specific offence covers Central Coast stadium. Although a minor offence covers Wollongong stadium, the penalty is a maximum of \$550. This bill proposes legislation that brings penalties for offences at Gosford stadium and Wollongong stadium in line with those for the other grounds being used for the Rugby World Cup. Specifically, this bill will

prohibit unauthorised entry to the playing fields of Central Coast Express Advocate Stadium and WIN Stadium. The maximum penalty that the court can impose for such an offence is proposed to be 50 penalty units or \$5,500, with penalty notices able to be issued by police. Upon removal from the venue for a contravention, a person will be banned from the venue for 12 months.

A person removed from a venue for committing a further contravention at the venue or entering the venue while banned will be banned for life from the venue. Importantly, any person who invades the pitch during a Rugby World Cup match at any of the four grounds being used in New South Wales will be banned from all other Rugby World Cup matches in the State. Authorised officers who suspect that a person has contravened the Act can take reasonable actions to remove the person from the ground, require them to provide their name and address and may photograph them. It is considered that these proposed offences and penalties will act as a significant deterrent for those who may consider disrupting games by running onto the field at these grounds. I commend the bill to the House.

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

### **PRINTING OF PAPERS**

**Motion, by leave, by Mr Watkins agreed to:**

That the following papers be printed:

Budget Estimates 2003-04, Budget Paper No. 3, Volume 3  
New South Wales Scientific Committee Freedom of Information Report for 2002-03

### **SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT**

**Motion by Mr Watkins agreed to:**

That the House at its rising this day do adjourn until Friday 5 September 2003 at 10.00 a.m.

**Pursuant to sessional orders business interrupted.**

### **PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS**

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#### **PARRAMATTA YOUTH JURY**

**Ms GADIEL** (Parramatta) [4.15 p.m.]: I draw the attention of honourable members to an event that Parramatta has had the privilege of playing host to: Australia's first ever Youth Jury. I had the pleasure of attending the official opening of the Parra Youth Matters Youth Jury at Parramatta Town Hall on Monday 14 July. The Parra Youth Matters Youth Jury brought together 15 randomly selected young people, aged 16 or 17, from the Parramatta City Council area to discuss and deliberate upon the impacts of cultural diversity. During the three days that the youth jury ran in July, the jurors had the opportunity to listen to and question informed presenters, discuss and debate their findings, and, finally, develop recommendations aimed at addressing the issues raised from the youth jury that encompass the needs of individuals, the community and government. A team of university students co-ordinated the youth jury, with support from Dr Lyn Carson, who is one of the nation's most pre-eminent experts on community consultation and deliberative democracy, as well as the University of Sydney and the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs.

The youth jury is an innovative form of community-based decision-making. Adapted from the adult-focused citizens jury, it provides youth with an unparalleled opportunity to identify issues that concern them most, and to contribute to decisions that ultimately impact upon their lives. In this way, youths are acknowledged as being an integral part of the broader community. The citizens jury is similar to a criminal or legal jury, in that a group of randomly selected citizens reflecting a cross-section of the community come to a decision. The focus is on producing a series of recommendations on an area of public policy rather than producing a guilty or not guilty verdict. In the case of this youth jury there could not have been a more appropriate place to begin such an ambitious project than in Parramatta, particularly given the cultural and socioeconomic diversity of the area. The mix of public and private schools and the cultural backgrounds that were represented by the 15 youth jurors reflects this diversity.

The jury focused its deliberations upon the statement "That the media adversely influences people's views affecting perceptions of Australia as a nation". The youth jury has developed a dozen or so constructive recommendations that will be launched, alongside the official report, at a public forum on Tuesday 23 September at the Crown Plaza, Parramatta. Apart from providing some real solutions to addressing the concerns of young people with media portrayals of cultural diversity, the Parramatta Youth Jury project has created a little piece of history in Parramatta while putting a blue and gold stamp on the benefits of getting young people involved in community decision-making. I know that it has changed the way I think about interacting with young people in my electorate and I look forward to experimenting with similar forms of consultation.

I congratulate Dr. Lyn Carson and the university students who make up the "Parra Youth Matters" project team. They have made a tremendous contribution to the cause of democracy and the community in Parramatta. I acknowledge them this afternoon. Samantha Allen, James Cullen, Azadeh Dastyari, Rebecca Hicks, Frances Phillips, Christopher Sargent, Marc Tutaan, Lorien Vecellio, and Marija Zuza all worked tirelessly to ensure that their project was delivered in partnership with community organisations through initiatives such as Youth Week, Harmony Day and presentations to local school and youth groups.

Members of important community organisations in Parramatta have also been involved in the Parra Youth Matters project through its steering committee, and I pay tribute to their efforts. They include Phillip Costicas, Sophia Spyrou, Sharon Tull, Matthew Roberts, Erik Elefante, and Matilda Maldic. I also acknowledge the support offered by the honourable member for Wentworthville, the Hon. Pam Allan. Ultimately, the active participation and commitment of young people in the jury has made the project successful. Honourable members need only listen to the names of the jurors to understand the diverse nature of the group: Casey Beazley, Ahmad Gnounbandy, Jacine Eid, Michelle El-Hage, Marsha El-Khoury, Lauren Estabillo, Emma Gordon, Julia Hu, Vishal Sood, Hannah Schokman, Armina Soemino, Veronica Wong, Michael Yuen, Casli Mehmed and Jennea McWilliams. I encourage honourable members to take the time to visit the jury's web site at [www.parayouthmatters.org.au](http://www.parayouthmatters.org.au) and to track the progress of jurors as the project reaches its conclusion.

#### GAMING MACHINE TAX

**Mrs SKINNER** (North Shore) [4.20 p.m.]: I bring to the attention of the House the impact that the Government's new tax arrangements will have on clubs in my electorate. On Monday this week the honourable member for Willoughby and I attended a meeting convened by North Sydney Leagues Club. The meeting provided an opportunity for all the clubs in my electorate of North Shore and the electorate of Willoughby to bring their concerns to our attention. The North Sydney Leagues Club is in the electorate of Willoughby, but many of my constituents are club members and I have had a close relationship with the club in the almost 10 years that I have been the member for North Shore. The honourable member for Willoughby will be raising concerns about the clubs in her electorate later this evening and I will focus on the impact on clubs my electorate.

North Sydney Leagues Club provides enormous benefits to many of my constituents. It provides subsidised meals, which I know are greatly valued by older members of the community. The club is a good social venue for those people. Older people who do not always have the opportunity to get out and mix with others find it a valuable venue at which to keep vibrant and active. They involve themselves in the many activities run by the club, including bingo and bridge. The club also provides a community bus, which makes it easy for those people to access the activities on offer. The club offers enormous support to community organisations, and I am sure the honourable member for Willoughby will go into that issue in more detail. The club also supports 21 intraclubs. Tomorrow night I will again attend the President's Shield Dinner honouring the contributions of intraclubs. Their activities include baseball seniors events, women's bowls, chess, euchre, hockey, women's softball, swimming, baseball juniors events, bridge, cricket, fishing, indoor bowls, snooker, table tennis, men's bowls, photography, darts, golf, jogging, squash and tennis.

The Kirribilli Club in my electorate has a strong support base in the area. Through the community development support expenditure program it supports the Hornsby Pipe Band, life saving clubs at Freshwater, North Shore Heart Research Foundation, Sydney Legacy, Neutral Bay Public School, St Aloysius Cadet Unit, McMahons Point Occasional Care, North Shore Police and Community Youth Club, North Sydney Demonstration School, the Rotary Club of Manly and many others.

The Neutral Bay Club is in a slightly different position. It is a smaller club, but it will also suffer as a result of the Government's withdrawal of compensation for the GST. It will find the future very difficult. The club has taken out a number of loans to complete renovations to make its premises compliant with government



regulations. The Government is insisting that the kitchen be upgraded, and rightly so. However, without the income expected prior to the change in the tax arrangements and because of the payments it must make on those loans, the club will find it difficult to make ends meet. The Neutral Bay Club is a terrific organisation. It provides tennis seven days a week, hires courts, provides tennis coaching and tennis camps for juniors, and provides bowling greens—the bowling team is in the State finals. It is a fantastic community facility that can be used by Precincts, Rotary and bridge clubs and many others.

The Mosman Rowing Club, which is also in my electorate, has been hit by a double whammy. It will be paying extra not only because of the withdrawal of the GST rebate but also because the Waterways Authority of New South Wales has increased its rent from \$7,000 a year to \$72,000 a year. I assure honourable members that this club, which provides enormous support to rowers, including those who participated in the world championships in Europe last week, will suffer tremendously. The Government is demonstrating its short-sightedness.

### **PACIFIC HIGHWAY NOISE TASK FORCE REPORT**

**Mr NEWELL** (Tweed—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.25 p.m.]: This afternoon in question time I asked a question without notice of the Minister for Roads about the Government's response to the northern Pacific Highway noise task force report. The task force was established just prior to the last State election in response to growing concerns expressed by many communities along the highway, particularly in the northern section, about increasing traffic noise. The issue was brought to a head just after the opening of the Yelgun to Chinderah section of the highway, which bypasses the notorious Burringbar Range. The increase in freight traffic caused a corresponding increase in noise.

I was pleased that the Minister responded quickly to those community concerns and set up the task force. It consisted of representatives from five local councils—Tweed, Ballina, Byron, Pristine Waters and Coffs Harbour—the Environment Protection Authority, the trucking industry, the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] and a number of local communities. The local representative for Tweed was Mr Don Buckley. The task force held a number of meetings between March and June before presenting a report to the Government and the RTA. I am delighted about the Government's response to the report of the task force. The report is professional and the task force undertook extensive consultations with the community and accepted written submissions.

The Government's response demonstrates that the Premier and the Labor Government are able to respond appropriately to the concerns of country areas of New South Wales. It was an extremely quick response, given that the task force was established at the beginning of the year. The \$18 million package is an indication of what the Government is prepared to do to look after communities that are suffering adverse impacts. More than \$9 million of the package will be spent on the construction of noise walls and architectural treatment of homes at Tweed Heads; \$1.25 million will be spent on architectural treatment of homes and investigations into noise treatments for the heavy-vehicle rest area between Yelgun and Chinderah on the new bypass; and \$4 million will be spent on the construction and extension of noise walls and architectural treatment of homes at Ewingsdale and the trialling of a speed limit of 80 kilometres an hour for heavy vehicles on St Helena Hill. That area has also been the subject of representations to the task force because of the noise problem.

Some \$2.5 million has been allocated for road resurfacing at Sapphire and Korora near Coffs Harbour. Some \$660,000 has been allocated for investigation and implementation of appropriate noise treatment for the Sunnycrest Lane rest area near Bangalow; and the Newrybar, Knockrow, Tintenbar and Ewingsdale areas up to Tyagarah will also receive attention. A further \$600,000 has been allocated for the architectural treatment of homes at Tandys Lane on the new section of road that bypasses the so-called Uncle Toms part of the intersection on the old Pacific Highway. I thank the communities of the Tweed for the work they have done. Their representations, through petitions and letters, have met with a tremendous response from the Government: \$18 million to be spent within the next two years to alleviate noise problems in their local area. I congratulate residents of the Billabong Caravan Park at West Tweed and of Palms Village at Tweed, who made many representations to me which I passed on to the Minister.

The people of Sexton Hill and Banora Point, who are affected by highway noise, and residents in Shearwater and Kiata parades also made many representations to me, and I visited those areas before the task force was announced. I am delighted that the Government has responded to those representations. We have demonstrated that we listen to the people, particularly those in rural and regional areas, and in this case we have delivered an \$18-million package that will alleviate many community noise problems.

**Miss BURTON** (Kogarah—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.30 p.m.]: This is another example of the Carr Labor Government addressing the concerns of local areas, particularly in the country. Traffic noise is placing an increasing burden on my electorate of Kogarah, which, as a major link from the shire to the city, has about 85,000 traffic movements per day. However, the opening of the M5 East has addressed many of our traffic issues. I am sure that the \$18-million package to which the honourable member for Tweed referred will help to alleviate much traffic noise in his community. I congratulate the honourable member on ensuring once again that his constituents' needs are addressed. I also congratulate the community on coming together and devising positive solutions to managing the problem of traffic noise. Unfortunately, traffic noise cannot be alleviated completely; it is a fact of life. I offer the people of Tweed the Government's thanks for their hard work and commitment to their area.

## **SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS ELECTORATE TOURISM**

### **PORT KEMBLA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY GRANT**

**Ms SEATON** (Southern Highlands) [4.32 p.m.]: Springtime is always a popular time for visitors to come to the Southern Highlands, and our local business chambers and tourism promotion committees and officers deserve our congratulations on the work they do promoting our local villages and towns. In the Wollondilly and Wingecarribee shires we are working hard to promote ecotourism, local fairs and open gardens, Tulip Time, the White Waratah Festival, the Exeter Fayre, Brigadoon, our food and wine trails, national parks, and local markets, not to mention excellent bed and breakfast accommodation and resorts. Local commerce chambers and tourism committees have all worked hard to ensure a co-ordinated approach. We especially want to encourage visitors to stay more than one day, and hopefully at least one or two nights.

I am looking forward to attending an upcoming meeting between Illawarra Business Chamber members and our local chamber representatives to explore the potential for developing greater business links and business opportunities between highlands and coastal businesses. I am particularly keen to enlist the active interest of highlands and Macarthur area chambers in the opportunities presented by the Port Kembla container terminal proposal, which I believe is the most important policy and employment issue in the Illawarra. However, I place on record my grave concerns about the way in which the Minister for Regional Development, Minister for the Illawarra, and Minister for Small Business has side-stepped any responsibility for accounting for the \$50,000 granted by his department to the Port Kembla Chamber of Commerce and Industry for the Port Kembla Main Street project.

Today I call upon the Premier to step in immediately and order an urgent independent external audit of all expenditure of Labor Government grants to the Port Kembla Chamber of Commerce and Industry, particularly regarding the employment of Australian Labor Party stalwart and Throsby aspirant, Mr Gino Mandarino, the economic development co-ordinator of the Main Street Program through the Main Street Committee. I have been contacted daily this week by people raising local community concerns about this matter.

I am calling for the full tabling and disclosure of all telephone, postage, motor vehicle travel, catering, entertaining and rental expenditures associated with the program. I am also calling for a full report on the membership of the Port Kembla chamber and the Main Street Committee and an assurance that all necessary probity checks were made by the Minister and his department to ensure that the grant was being administered by appropriately qualified executive members following his confirmation last night in the estimates committee that the chamber is autonomous in its expenditure decisions.

People are calling my office to express growing community concerns that this increasingly murky situation is being worsened by fears that political aspirations for ALP advancement are a strong motivating factor for some individuals. I am also calling for an inquiry into the process of last week's annual general meeting [AGM] of the Port Kembla chamber, including concerns expressed in some parts of the community that executive member and brothel owner Neville Hilton was elected as junior vice-president of the chamber last Tuesday by virtue of 10 proxy votes in the hands of Labor stalwart Harry Pitt.

This is despite allegations that Mr Pitt had been made aware well before the AGM that Mr Hilton was the subject of a police investigation in relation to allegations that under-age girls had been working at the Southern Belles brothel, which is part-owned by Mr Hilton. I want the Premier to tell the House whether he is satisfied that the employment of Mr Gino Mandarino—whose remuneration is in the hands of executive members including Harry Pitt and Neville Hilton, and until recently Mr Nove—otherwise known as Neville—Despotovski is an acceptable and proper use of New South Wales taxpayers' money.

I further ask the Premier whether it is acceptable to him that another person responsible for expenditure decisions regarding the \$50,000 government grant, former Main Street Committee chair Mr Neville Despotovski, recently faced court on firearms, ammunition, and stolen goods charges, which he denies but are yet to be resolved. Yesterday, I raised concerns that Mr Gino Mandarino had made public statements in support of Mr Hilton and questioned the appropriateness of Mr Mandarino's comments that Mr Hilton was effectively his "boss". The very least the Premier must do is commission an independent financial audit of these matters and then explain his position on the ethical and conflict-of-interest issues that I have raised today.

### WYONG CONSERVATION STRATEGY

**Mr ORKOPOULOS** (Swansea) [4.36 p.m.]: Local government is an important arm of government in this State. It performs vital functions in the provision of services and it exercises important planning powers. Now, more than ever, Wyong Shire Council needs to show leadership in planning. Growth in development, especially in housing development, over the past decade or so has outstripped development in other regions of this State. PlanningNSW required Wyong shire to undertake a Wyong conservation strategy, in part to offset the fact that the local environment plan had not been substantially revised since the 1970s and that this now 30-year-old LEP had sustained hundreds of amendments. The Wyong conservation strategy is supposed to clearly define land needed for a healthy environment, making planning and development more coherent and simple. At page 155, the draft Wyong conservation strategy reveals:

Expected losses to continuing urban development are estimated to be in the vicinity of 650 hectares of native vegetation and 137 hectares of regenerating vegetation.

The report of the Total Environmental Centre entitled "Concreting the Coast; Land Clearing and Development Pressures on the NSW Coastline" clearly pointed out that the lack of strategic planning meant that planning is largely based on the demands of speculative landowners and developers, resulting in ad hoc, isolated, and inappropriate forms of growth in which all proposals, even in the most fragile areas, end up being approved.

The report goes on to state that local planning instruments, policies and regulations are mostly failing to provide clear, unambiguous, and consistent rules as to what can occur and where. This is clearly the case in Wyong shire, and the draft Wyong conservation strategy was meant to overcome these problems. Confronted with those alarming predictions one would have thought that the Independent-controlled council would want the draft strategy endorsed—especially as it was deferred for further public consultation in October last year.

The mayor of Wyong shire and his Liberal mates want to support development at any cost to the environment, sane planning and, ultimately, the lifestyle of the people in the shire. The Mayor, Councillor Greg Best, said there must be more consultation with the community. However, he must answer the question: What have he and the council been doing about consultation since October 2002? The mayor and his followers stand condemned for once again postponing an important strategy document until after the local government elections in March next year. I have written to the Minister responsible for planning seeking the suspension of the council's planning powers until it adopts the draft conservation strategy.

**Miss BURTON** (Kogarah—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.39 p.m.]: Local government planning powers are quite important, because the community relies on councils to do the right thing. There is a process of community consultation in place and councils should follow that process. Then they should abide by the wishes of the community. In the meantime, while this council is dillydallying, developers will take the opportunity to sneak through developments that are inappropriate, and in areas where they should not be, such as the coastal regions. I wholeheartedly support the honourable member for Swansea and I thank him for his hard work. Hopefully we will get some resolution and this council will be forced to do the right thing by its ratepayers.

### RURAL TOWN WATER SUPPLIES

**Ms HODGKINSON** (Burrinjuck) [4.40 p.m.]: I am concerned about the continuing serious lack of access to suitable town water supplies in the northern part of my electorate. The drought that continues to trouble a large part of this State has highlighted a problem that has been largely ignored by successive State governments. I have already brought to the attention of members the extremely tight water restrictions that were placed on Yass and Goulburn last summer. Despite recent rains that to some degree have alleviated the situation in Yass, level four restrictions remain in place in Goulburn.

At full capacity, Yass has only eight months of normal water usage. The Yass water storage catchment has been severely degraded, probably beyond effective repair. Significant development, particularly of "lifestyle

blocks", and the unrestricted spread of noxious Black, Crack and Wild Pussy Willows in the upper Yass River catchment have severely restricted river flows. Before the current drought, Yass was on water restrictions in each of the past five years, and the Yass River has ceased to flow every summer for many years.

While Goulburn has a greater full capacity storage than Yass, the recent rains have not fallen in its water catchment area. In the past month Goulburn's water storage has risen by only 4 per cent and now sits at 34 per cent. Goulburn's water supply was last at full capacity in November 2000. I have seen a very disturbing graph that highlights the serious problem facing Goulburn's water supply. Rainfall over the past three years has not kept up with consumption, and the long-term trend shows Goulburn's water supply gradually falling to supply failure by the end of 2004. This prognosis is based on average rainfall in the existing catchment areas of Pejar and Sooley Dams and Goulburn being placed under even more stringent water restrictions.

Both Goulburn and Yass Councils are actively seeking a solution to address their immediate short-term needs. Goulburn has proposed a pipeline to access water from the Mulwaree River that would be piped to Sooley Dam, almost doubling the water catchment. I have already written to the Minister strongly urging him to provide the necessary \$150,000 to Goulburn City Council to carry out the investigation, design and documentation of this very necessary program.

Water quality is another significant problem facing Yass and Goulburn. Although both centres have lifestyles that are the envy of most residents of Sydney, they fall short in the quality and taste of their reticulated water supply. Most residents of Yass and Goulburn drink bottled water in preference to the reticulated supply. The Yass supply in particular is very close to the lower limits of quality recommended by the World Health Organisation.

A similar situation faces many smaller towns and villages such as Gunning, Marulan and Taralga. Solutions under discussion for Goulburn and Yass are at best short term and are intended only to address the immediate problem posed by the ongoing serious drought. Both urban areas face significant population pressures. A 400-lot residential development is underway in the Mary's Mount area of Goulburn, and there is a proposal before Yass Council for a 700-lot development.

People want to come and enjoy the great lifestyle that Goulburn and Yass offer, but future development will be hampered by the lack of a viable long-term source of quality water. I would like to again flag for the House's attention the need for a solution that will ensure an adequate supply of high quality water for the Goulburn-Yass region for at least the next 50 to 100 years. The construction of the Welcome Reef Dam on the Shoalhaven River needs to be placed firmly back on the agenda. The Government dismisses the need for Welcome Reef because it is thinking only about the needs of Sydney; it does not give much consideration to the needs of residents outside the Sydney Basin.

The construction of the Welcome Reef Dam would provide a large body of high-quality water ideally placed to augment Sydney's water supply, and provide water either directly to Goulburn or through the existing Shoalhaven Water Scheme to Wollondilly Reservoir and then to Goulburn. Feeder pipes from Goulburn would supply Yass, Gunning and Marulan. The areas between Sydney and Canberra are subject to significant growth pressures that existing water catchments will be unable to meet. This problem has been growing every year, but in the absence of immediate pressure it has been shelved as something that can be dealt with later.

The drought has brought home the stark reality of the pressing nature of this extremely severe situation. I strongly urge the Government to investigate the benefits that the Welcome Reef Dam has to offer inland cities and towns in order to effectively relieve pressure from the Sydney Basin. I just cannot stress strongly enough that residents of Goulburn and Yass and the surrounding regions have really been suffering over the past summer. During the past several summers the water quality has been poor, and residents have had to recycle their washing machine water to try to keep their gardens and lawns alive. It has really been a dire situation in country towns. We need long-term solutions. We need to be looking 50 to 100 years ahead.

#### **CANTERBURY ELECTORATE ALCOHOL SUMMIT COMMUNITY VISITS**

**Ms BURNEY** (Canterbury) [4.45 p.m.]: I acknowledge and thank organisations in and around the Canterbury electorate for making themselves available as part of the community visits that were organised for the Alcohol Summit, which was held in the Parliament last week. I particularly acknowledge the Campsie Women's Centre, led by Kath Blake. I also acknowledge the Campsie public school and Viviane Byrne, a teacher, who allowed us into her classroom. She was running a wonderful program on alcohol and substance abuse.

We also visited a number of sections of Canterbury hospital. We went to the emergency department and the maternity section and we spent a great deal of time at the Canterbury community health centre, which is co-located at the hospital. The Canterbury community health centre made all of their staff available to us. The centre provides a number of services that I believe provide a fantastic model for how we should provide services right across the State to people with alcohol problems. It provides counselling, a detox service, methadone programs, and number of other invaluable services. I make special mention of the centre's medical director, Dr Ken Curry, and the liaison officer between the hospital and the centre, a wonderful young woman named Samar Zakaria. They gave us much of their time and expertise.

I was proud to be part of the Alcohol Summit. Though it was not included in the recommendations, one of the outcomes of the Summit, and certainly one outcome of the community visits, was the nature of the education that participants, and indeed the whole community, received with regard to the alcohol issues that were raised by the summit. The big message that I as the member for Canterbury received from the community visits to my electorate is, as far as possible, to emphasise the importance of co-location and coordination between services for people who have alcohol problems themselves or who have someone in their family who have alcohol problems. They made the point that these services often run in conjunction with homelessness, mental health issues, and drug issues. It is difficult for people whose lives are in this sort of spiral to travel across the city, and it is difficult for them to keep many different appointments.

We saw fantastic examples of this co-location and coordination during the community visits in the Canterbury electorate and nearby electorates. One of the really great lessons that I personally benefited from occurred during the visit to Campsie Public School. We went into a classroom of year 5 and 6 students, mostly year 5 students, who were doing a number of practical and fun activities to gain an understanding of the effects on the body of the use of alcohol and other substances.

The two outstanding features of the program were that it catered for children of many different cultural backgrounds, and for children of families that come from cultures in which alcohol will not be a major issue, though obviously it will be an issue in the lives of these children. The teacher at Campsie Public School emphasised the importance of early intervention in alcohol education, in an effort to deal with the issue on a lifelong basis. Once again I place on record my appreciation of the Campsie Women's Centre, Campsie Public School and Canterbury Hospital, particularly the Canterbury Community health centre at that hospital.

**Miss BURTON** (Kogarah—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.50 p.m.]: I thank the honourable member for Canterbury for bringing to the attention of the House her experiences during the alcohol summit. It was an extremely successful summit, and I believe that all participants gained from it a much better understanding of alcohol abuse and the resultant cost to the community, and learned about the complex nature of the problem and the social costs involved. On behalf of the Government I extend appreciation to the people who provide services to assist those people in our community.

### **SPINA BIFIDA AWARENESS WEEK**

#### **YOUTH ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION**

**Mrs HOPWOOD** (Hornsby) [4.51 p.m.]: I wish to raise issues associated with alcohol in my electorate. Before doing so, I bring to the attention of the house that this week is Spina Bifida Awareness Week. As I speak, my sister Wendy is taking home her new baby, Amelie, who was born with spina bifida at the Royal Women's Hospital two weeks ago. Obviously, it has been an extremely traumatic time for the entire family, being very concerned about the baby's condition and about how she will be able to cope in future life.

However, I am very pleased to state that the baby was born with a huge sac filled with cerebro-spinal fluid on her back but no nervous tissue, so she has an excellent chance of suffering minimal disabilities in the future. The last two weeks have been fraught with problems associated with suspected leaking cerebro-spinal fluid, and the fact that the baby had a five-hour operation only two hours after being born. It has been an extremely traumatic time for my sister and my family generally, but I had the privilege of being one of the support people to her during the birth of her baby by caesarean section.

I wish to refer to the use of folic acid. I believe that folic acid was an issue in relation to my sister's pregnancy. It was a Wooldridge initiative that women who anticipate pregnancy take folic acid in order to prevent neural tube defects. The use of folic acid will lead to the prevention of such defects, and therefore obviously it should be encouraged for every woman who anticipates becoming pregnant. Prior to the Alcohol

Summit, on 12 August, which was International Youth Day, I invited some year 11 students to my office and had the opportunity to discuss with them first-hand issues associated with alcohol among young people. I point out that 35 per cent of teenage males had had at least one day in the past month on which they had between 11 and 30 alcoholic drinks, and that 22 per cent of teenage females had had at least one day in the past month on which they had between nine and 30 drinks.

The young people I invited to my office made a number of observations. They felt that although it was difficult to buy alcohol in stores in the Hornsby area, usually older brothers or sisters would buy it for under-age young people. They also felt that some young people drink excessive amounts of alcohol as a form of escape, that it is not just for fun, and that binge drinking was isolated as a large problem for them. The young people said that most young people who drink alcohol do so not because their parents drink alcohol but because it is considered a socially acceptable way of having a good time.

Having a legal age limit of 18 years for alcohol consumption made many of the teenagers view drinking alcohol as a sign off being older. It was even viewed by some teenage boys to be a rite of passage. Advertising targeted at youth did not highlight the physical effects of alcohol on the body but, rather, looked at drink driving and the issues that may arise from being drunk. The students felt that effective advertising should highlight the physical dangers of drinking alcohol.

The students also felt that the relationship between parents and children was extremely important. Open relationships enable children to be comfortable about talking about alcohol and asking questions. Many students felt that they would never go to a school counsellor to discuss issues regarding alcohol as they were not confidential and many were not sympathetic. The students felt that there needed to be a change in the legislation dealing with the advertising of alcohol. Too many alcohol advertisements are targeted at young people. One of the young people said that there is even alcohol advertising on school buses. Interestingly, two hours later as I was driving I noticed a beer advertisement on the back of a school bus. The students also said that the shape of bottles, the flavour, and the types of drinks available are directed at younger drinkers. I commend the students from the schools in my electorate for participating in that discussion. Due to a number of reasons, I did not have an opportunity to present this information to the Alcohol Summit.

Although Lifeline's personal counselling service refers clients seeking drug and alcohol counselling to specialist counselling services in the Hornsby area, it seems that issues regarding alcohol can also be contributing factors, with clients requesting counselling for gambling problems, relationship problems, depression, and so on, that involve alcohol as a factor. Lifeline is a wonderful organisation. It does not receive any government funding, and yet New South Wales Health lists the Lifeline phone number as an after-hours phone number on many of its brochures.

**Miss BURTON** (Kogarah—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.56 p.m.]: I thank the honourable member for Hornsby for her contribution about the Alcohol Summit. We hope that the recommendations and the Summit itself will assist in changing people's attitudes, particularly towards young people drinking alcohol and the type of advertising that encourages binge drinking among young people. The honourable member showed great initiative in holding the forum for the students of her electorate. That sort of participation in the summit really highlighted the problems associated with alcohol.

### **SNOWY RIVER WATER FLOW**

**Mr WHAN** (Monaro) [4.56 p.m.]: This Saturday I will attend an important event in Dalgety, which is on the banks of the Snowy River. Dalgety will celebrate the anniversary of the historic release of water into the Snowy River by Premier Bob Carr and Victorian Premier Steve Bracks. The Snowy River, which flows from the Snowy Mountains via Jindabyne, down past Dalgety into Victoria, was dammed as part of the Snowy River Scheme many years ago. The Snowy scheme was a great engineering feat, initiated by Ben Chifley as Prime Minister. The Snowy scheme is a large employer in the area, and it has provided a lot of irrigation water inland.

However, one of the side effects of the snow scheme was the Snowy River having only 1 per cent flow. The river was dying; it was silting up. The once wide banks had become filled with willow trees and other vegetation, and the native fish life was disappearing. For many years locals, led by the Snowy River Alliance, have been conducting a campaign to get some water back into the Snowy River. A number of people in the Dalgety area have been heavily involved in the campaign, particularly Jo Garland, the President of the Snowy River Alliance.

The big breakthrough for the alliance and the residents along the Snowy River came upon the election of Labor governments in New South Wales and Victoria. The governments got together and agreed to each contribute \$150 million towards paying for water savings which could then be directed down the Snowy River. The Commonwealth eventually chipped in with another \$75 million. The funding will be spent on water-saving initiatives on the western side of the Mountains, for the benefit of irrigators in the Riverina and surrounding areas, and the savings will then be directed down the Snowy River. Eventually, the snow will have at least 21 per cent of the original flow, with the ultimate aim of achieving 28 per cent flow.

A year ago this weekend we saw the first stage of that initiative, when Premiers Bracks and Carr went to the Mewamberra Weir, near Jindabyne, and decommissioned the weir for a time, releasing a flow of natural water down the river. It was the first time in the memory of many people when the Snowy River actually reacted to rain by rising. That is usually a fairly normal reaction in a River, but it had not happened previously in the Snowy River. The people of the small town of Dalgety received a great psychological boost as a result. Tourists came to see what the Snowy looked like, and older locals visited the river a couple of times a day to see whether its level had risen or fallen. That was the first down payment in the process, which will take a number of years. A lot of the money will be spent on alterations to the Jindabyne Dam wall. Eventually we will see 21 per cent of flow; hopefully, eventually 28 per cent of the flow will come over the dam wall and be used to generate electricity, thus enabling the river to be managed so that we are able to mimic floods.

The sediment that has built up in the river will start to be scoured out by a reasonable flow and the river will return to a more natural state with a rocky bottom. Eventually it will start to look like Thredbo River. Anyone who has visited the Snowy Mountains in summer would know that Thredbo River is a healthy and clear river that is well stocked with fish and attracts a lot of fishermen. The process has been facilitated by a joint government enterprise [JGE], which has finally been established. That is has taken so long to establish the JGE has been a source of frustration for the locals. The Federal Government held up establishment of the JGE for many months because it could not agree on how to treat the money in terms of taxation.

The Federal Government wanted to tax the money contributed by the three governments to fund this work. The JGE has finally been established, and that is the green light for work on the Snowy River to begin. Restoration work can commence, and the river will get the volume of water that is required. On top of that, the State Labor Government has allocated funding to remove willows and to improve the banks of the river to ensure that the habitat will be right for fish. To celebrate that important achievement a year ago—it is probably one of the biggest environmental achievements in Australia's history—a gathering is being held on the weekend. The people of Dalgety will be there—people such as Julie Greenwood and Nerida Bayley from the Chamber of Commerce, who have been instrumental in trying to build up tourism based on the Snowy River. They are looking forward over the next few years to seeing a lot more water coming down the river and fishermen and tourists returning to the area.

**Miss BURTON** (Kogarah—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.01 p.m.]: I thank the honourable member for Monaro for drawing the attention of honourable members to the first anniversary of getting the Snowy flowing again. This is another example of Labor governments putting their communities first. The Snowy is a great asset to the community, and we will see nature flourish. I wish the Dalgety community all the best for its celebrations this weekend.

### **GAMING MACHINE TAX**

**Ms BEREJIKLIAN** (Willoughby) [5.02 p.m.]: I wish to respond to a motion passed by the clubs in the electorates of Willoughby and North Shore at a meeting attended by the honourable member for North Shore and me on Monday 1 September. In summary, the clubs in our local communities called upon us to oppose the Carr-Egan tax increase on poker machines, and to make appropriate representations on their behalf. I place on the public record my support for the club industry in New South Wales and, more specifically, for all the clubs in the Willoughby electorate. Clubs in my community make an outstanding contribution to local charities and sporting organisations. They provide flexible employment opportunities, particularly for women or university students needing part-time and casual employment. They provide a secure income for many local businesses, especially those involved in food and catering. They provide subsidised meals and amenities that are able to be accessed by everyone. For many they provide the only opportunity for meaningful social interaction.

When the Carr-Egan tax was first announced and it was initially left to the Minister for Gaming and Racing to defend, I interjected when the Minister was trying to convince the House that the new tax regime would impact only on a small number of the larger clubs. I recall being told that I had no reason to complain,

given that the clubs in the lower North Shore area would not be impacted. I knew from that moment on that the Government had not given sufficient consideration to the devastating impact of these tax increases on local communities. The Government has also failed to acknowledge that this new tax regime comes on top of the fact that the GST rebate will not be paid back to the industry. Indeed, at Monday's meeting we were presented with a detailed report from our local clubs, highlighting the magnitude of the damage that will be sustained by them, and consequently the community, and the fact that based on current figures many of my local clubs will not live to see 2011, when the full impact of the tax will be realised.

Nineteen out of 23 clubs in the lower North Shore area responded to a survey, which has revealed some extremely concerning results. In order to conduct an accurate analysis of the effect of the Carr-Egan tax increase, it was assumed that the clubs would continue to trade exactly the same in 2004 to 2011, as they did in their last published annual accounts, that is, their income, expenses and community support would remain constant. This assumption is clearly conservative as I am advised that in recent years the revenue from poker machine operations has, on an industry average, been less than the consumer price index while at the same time overhead costs of running the clubs have been steadily increasing, with insurance, workers compensation and compliance costs increasing well in excess of the CPI.

An analysis of the 19 clubs that responded shows that only six clubs declared an annual profit after fulfilling their charter for community support. One of these clubs was a bowling club that relied on honorary labour to survive, one was an RSL club, two were golf clubs that relied principally on membership levies and two were sailing or rowing clubs. According to the industry, nearly 24 per cent of all gaming revenue derived on the lower North Shore is paid in tax. The Carr-Egan tax will cost the clubs in the lower North Shore area an additional \$1 million in the first year alone, climbing to more than \$5.5 million by 2010-11. The accumulated tax increase to 2010-11 will be nearly \$23.5 million. The losses over this same period will increase each and every year, culminating in a total loss of more than \$36 million for the 2004 to 2011 period.

If the Carr-Egan pokies tax regime is allowed to continue, no doubt, to my deepest regret, many clubs in my area will be unable to survive. It is a stark reality that many clubs in my electorate will need to scale down their sporting and community works in the short and medium term. They are also likely to scale back the amenities and subsidised services they offer in order to become more efficient so that they can pay the Carr-Egan tax burden. This would include the closing down of non-profitable areas, such as sporting facilities and function-meeting rooms, as well as scaling down on their work force. I call on the Premier and the Treasurer to do what is right by the community. They must admit that they were wrong and reconsider the onerous regime they have introduced.

### **PENRITH OLDER WOMEN'S NETWORK**

**Mrs PALUZZANO** (Penrith) [5.06 p.m.]: Today I address this place about the Penrith Older Women's Network. Now in its ninth year of operation, this group of dedicated women has worked together to develop programs and improve services for older women in the Penrith electorate. I take this opportunity to thank the hardworking members of this group: the chairperson, Rae Paine, whose support to all members of the group never goes unnoticed; the convenor of special events, Thelma Anderson, OAM—I congratulate Thelma on receiving her order this year—who is also responsible for the co-ordination of volunteers for the drop-in centre; and the secretary, Elizabeth Brooks, whose commitment to the drop-in centre cannot be faulted.

Currently, the centre operates five different classes for women to promote wellbeing. The tai chi group is instructed by Fay Cattell, the popular aqua aerobics class is run by Patricia Klump, a gentle exercise class is also run by Patricia Klump, a yoga class is instructed by Myrtle Smith and the international dance class is instructed by Jeanette Mollenhauer. These great women also challenge local schools in a sports day. This year they will take on the children from Kingswood Park school in games such as tunnel ball to prove that they are remarkably fit despite their age.

There are many other volunteers in the Penrith Older Women's Network, and I take this opportunity to thank them sincerely for their hard work. The network was founded in 1994 with the goal of promoting the rights, dignity and wellbeing of older women. But these hardworking volunteers do much more. As the name indicates, the group is a network of women providing many social opportunities such as bus trips, shopping days and a yearly harbour cruise, along with regular exercise and other classes. One key aim of the group is to stop the isolation that many older women feel and to introduce them to others who can relate to their situation.



One of the most noteworthy achievements of the Penrith Older Women's Network is the drop-in centre, which is run entirely by volunteers. The centre is open five days a week, and it is a testament to the dedication and caring shown by the volunteers. In its recent annual general meeting report a number of volunteers expressed their experiences while volunteering at the centre. It was wonderful to read how these hardworking women have gained personally from volunteering their time. I thought it would be appropriate to read some of the comments made by the volunteers regarding the drop-in centre. One volunteer said:

My time spent at the drop-in centre is a two way street. I find I get as much out of meeting people as I give.

Another said:

I genuinely feel that I have taken a step forward within myself in accepting people as they are, with a real fondness and appreciation of them, and a greater understanding of other people's challenges.

Another said:

It is rewarding watching how the people who drop in for coffee have become more at ease and treat us more as a friend, which is very good for their outlook on life. It also helps us as we feel we are helping in some small way.

As I mentioned, ensuring the wellbeing of members is of paramount concern, and this group has taken a number of steps to this end. The group also participates in a number of local community events. For example, it has craft stalls at local shopping centres, it delivers speeches about nutrition at community health forums and it is active on seniors days. It conducts a number of charitable events. This year it held an Easter raffle to raise money for cancer research. It extends help to other members of the community. Recently the Kingswood Neighbourhood Centre was opened, and the group offered its support and guidance to help with the management committee of that centre. I commend the group for that. Next year the Penrith Older Women's Network will celebrate its tenth anniversary, and plans are already in place to make it a celebration to remember. I congratulate the Penrith Older Women's Network on its service to the Penrith community and on making it a great place to live for people of all ages.

**Miss BURTON** (Kogarah—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.11 p.m.]: I congratulate the honourable member for Penrith on her hard work and her commitment to her community. My electorate also has a lot of seniors, and they have very active community groups. It cannot be impressed on this House too much how important volunteers are and how important the people who co-ordinate those services are. My electorate has a senior citizens computer group, which is run by volunteers. The group has taught about 1,000 seniors how to use computers. That is amazing. The seniors tell me stories about how they can now email their grandchildren, so it is great. These activities are important to the community, particularly in relation to people's physical and mental wellbeing. This assists the community in many ways. Once again I pass on the Government's congratulations and support for the Penrith Older Women's Network and wish its members all the best for their tenth anniversary celebrations.

#### **CASINO HIGH SCHOOL OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY**

**Mr GEORGE** (Lismore) [5.13 p.m.]: Just after my election in 1999 I was made aware of occupational health and safety needs at Casino High School. Under the leadership of Geoff Cousins and one of the key teachers, Chris Simpson, the school worked hard to overcome the problem, so much so that it became a pilot school for occupational health and safety. It put a lot of work into overcoming problems associated with occupational health and safety. Apparently a consultation paper entitled *Equipment Safety in Schools* has been circulated, and I would like to express some concerns and strong opposition to the content of the document. I have had discussions with those two gentlemen. They have the school, the students and the area at heart. They came to me out of frustration. I recently congratulated them on awards they had won.

If the policy contained in this document is implemented in its entirety, there will be a substantial deterioration in safety in public schools and within the school community. It will further disadvantage public schools in comparison with schools in the non-government sector. The elimination of machinery as the preferred strategy is not supported by other evidence and appears to be based on a lack of understanding of the syllabus requirements and the spirit of current syllabi, which encourage the use of technologies. I acknowledge the important links between schools, industry and student needs. It is important to have those links in country areas. The document is more about the economics of supply, maintenance and staff training than it is about the realistic and logical needs to address some of the perceived safety issues in schools.

I specifically draw attention to equity. As I said earlier, the policy disadvantages government schools. The consultation process has not been thorough and inclusive. Schools are already safe users of equipment. The delivery of the curriculum to students in public schools is diminishing. The controls suggested are extreme and not consistent with occupational health and safety practice. There seems to be a lack of consistency between various statements and suggested outcomes within the document. Vocational education training schools and designer technology schools have outstanding reputations for excellence throughout the North Coast—particularly the Casino school. This is not a problem only at Casino but at other schools in the region as well.

I remember reading a letter to the editor of the *Northern Star* signed by a Richard Bigner from Wollongbar, whose family attends the Alstonville school. So it is a concern to the students. Safety is a concern to all North Coast schools. One has to agree with some points in that consultation paper, but banning equipment required to deliver the syllabus is unacceptable when there is an acknowledgement that schools are safe places with regard to machine use. As I understand it, there has not been any consultation with North Coast schools and they have tried to be part of the process of equipment monitoring but were always rejected. Their experience has not been tapped into or valued.

As I said, Casino High School was a pilot project for occupational health and safety, but it has had no access to the policy makers. The staff are trained and accredited in equipment use but will not be allowed to use it. There does not seem to be any provision for teacher use—only for some machines. In my opinion the document has taken the easy way out—it will eliminate rather than credential. Occupational health and safety control measures are an appropriate way to go. However, the same result could be achieved by other means. The equipment concerned has WorkCover approval but is Department of Education and Training banned. I make a plea on behalf of all the students of Casino High School and other schools in the area to use the expertise that the school has tapped into. The teachers and the principals of the schools are from the North Coast. They are conscious of the OH&S requirements and work very hard to achieve them. I ask the Minister to take their concerns into consideration before enforcing this issue. [*Time expired.*]

**Miss BURTON** (Kogarah—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.18 p.m.]: I thank the honourable member for Lismore for drawing attention to occupational health and safety at Casino High School. This Government is dedicated to the provision of best quality education in the State in a safe environment. I am happy to take the honourable member's concerns to the Minister for Education and Training and to get a response for him.

#### **PARKES AND COVENTRY SISTER CITY RELATIONSHIP**

**Mr McGRANE** (Dubbo) [5.18 p.m.]: On 11 July 39 citizens of Parkes visited their sister city, Coventry, in the United Kingdom. I was a part of that visit. Parkes, which is in my electorate, enjoys a tangible sister city relationship with Sir Henry Parkes' birthplace, Coventry. That relationship was established in 1928. It is one of the oldest sister city relationships in the world, and the oldest of 470 sister city relationships enjoyed by Australian towns and cities. The town name changed from Bushmans to Parkes in 1873, after Sir Henry Parkes, who served five terms as Premier of New South Wales. Coventry shares 25 sister city links throughout the globe. There are major differences between Parkes and Coventry. For example, Coventry has a population of 300,000 and Parkes has a population of 10,000, with 5,000 in rural areas. There is a massive tangible link between the two regions—one in the United Kingdom and one in Australia.

The difference in the councils is remarkable because of the structure of local government in the United Kingdom. Coventry council has 16,000 employees, which is more than the population of Parkes and surrounding areas. Parkes has a population of 15,000 and has just on 200 council employees. The visit in July to Coventry by 39 people, including myself, was a major event. All the delegates paid their own expenses for the trip. The purpose of the visit was to develop the relationship between the city of Coventry and Parkes shire.

Parkes Shire Council has commissioned a site in a prominent position on the Newell Highway to build a new museum complex. The complex will have a number of exhibits, one being memorabilia of Sir Henry Parkes and another the history of the Parkes region. An exact replica of Sir Henry Parkes birthplace, Moat Cottage, is currently being erected on the site. When I was in Coventry a few months ago, a ceremony was held at Moat Cottage, which is still occupied by residents of Coventry. It was hard for me to believe that I was in the cottage of the founder of Federation in Australia and that it was still fit to be lived in.

The museum complex will be a great tourist attraction for Parkes and surrounding areas, and it will be an asset for all Australia because it will house memorabilia of the history of Federation in Australia. The museum will become a mecca for educational excursions. It will be one of the most significant boosts to tourism

in the area. During the visit the 39 delegates from Parkes participated, over a period of eight days, in many activities that brought the citizens of Parkes and Coventry together.

I referred earlier to the difference in the size of the two towns. It may seem a little lopsided, and one might wonder how one town can support the other in another country. Certainly, the Coventry people have been extremely generous towards the Parkes council area. They have offered major donations to establish an exhibit about Coventry. A vintage Jaguar will be on display; Jaguars are built in Coventry. Now Coventry has a major new factory, which is owned by Citroen, to manufacture Peugeots. Coventry is a productive part of the United Kingdom economy. The linking of Coventry with Parkes is a beneficial relationship not only for Parkes but also, because of the connection with the Federation of Australia, for New South Wales and for Australia.

Sir Henry Parkes was a colourful person. To become Premier once in this place one must have flair, but to become Premier five times one must have stamina and the will to succeed. As to his life generally, the best way to describe him is colourful. He also had great vision. Many advances in New South Wales and the Commonwealth were the result of his vision.

### COLLEGE OF NURSING

**Ms JUDGE** (Strathfield) [5.23 p.m.]: I wish to inform the House about the launch of the College of Nursing, which I had the great pleasure of attending on Friday 8 August. The College of Nursing is situated at Railway Parade, Burwood, which is in the centre of the electorate of Strathfield in Sydney's inner west. It was established to meet the need for a professional body to represent and assist nurses Australiawide. The College of Nursing was previously known as the New South Wales College of Nursing, and it has changed its name to reflect its broader national focus. Jane Gordon is the current President, and Professor Judy Lumby is the Executive Director. The importance of the college to the international nursing community was reflected in comments by the special guests at the function, some of whom gave tele-addresses. It is wonderful to have such modern technology.

The guests included Margaret Rich, nee Ritch, longstanding Fellow and twice President of the College and Director of Nursing at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital 1960-1978; Professor Donna Diers; Annie Goodrich, Professor of Nursing Emeritus, Yale University School of Nursing and Senior Clinical Co-ordinator, Finance, Yale New Haven Hospital; Professor Jean Watson, Distinguished Professor of Nursing, Endowed Chair in Caring Science, Health Sciences Centre, School of Nursing, University of Colorado; Professor Jenny Carryer, Professor of Nursing, Joint Appointment with Massey University and Mid-Central Health, Massey University, School of Health Sciences; and Dr Naeema Al-Gasseer, Senior Scientist for Nursing and Midwifery, World Health Organisation.

The College of Nursing plays an important role in supporting nurses, who are a vital part of our health system. It has members in every State and Territory and in 17 countries worldwide. The college is a central point of reference and support for nursing professionals and aims to bring professional development through a wide section of post-graduate courses in both on-campus and flexible delivery modes, customised education courses and refresher education. The courses are offered to both registered and enrolled nurses, as well as to others working in the health care system. The college has the largest nursing library in the Southern Hemisphere, which provides comprehensive on-line services for research and communication with access to all the latest journals and publications.

Another important part of the college's activities is the opportunities it provides for the establishment of networks across health industry and professional organisations, such as Commonwealth, State and local governments and agencies; advisory committees and bodies; specialty nursing associations and colleges; universities; and tertiary institutions. I commend the College of Nursing and its wonderful staff for the important role they play in supporting nurses, thereby contributing to the creation of a better health care system for all Australians, from which we all will benefit. I am absolutely thrilled that this college is in the electorate of Strathfield. It will be convenient for the electorate, particularly as there are a number of health facilities in the area, such as nearby Concord Hospital, Auburn District Hospital, Canterbury Hospital and many other providers of specialist medical services.

### VAUCLUSE ELECTORATE CRIME

**Mr DEBNAM** (Vaucluse) [5.28 p.m.]: I wish to talk this evening about violence in my electorate. As I have said a number of times in this House, I am at Bondi Beach most mornings for a swim. When I arrived there

early this morning I was greeted with the sight of a number of police vehicles in Campbell Parade and police tape sealing off areas on both sides of the street. Apparently there had been a bashing of a young man early this morning. Police forensic services were present, obviously taking samples and photographs. There was also a baseball bat that apparently had been involved in the incident. No doubt, in the next few weeks we will find out what went on. I hope that the young man who was bashed and who is in hospital today recovers from the incident any without difficulties.

That incident highlights again the problem with violence not only in my electorate and in eastern suburbs as a whole, but right across New South Wales. I have spoken on this issue many times and I have highlighted the concerns about assaults, murders and shootings. I have talked to many people in the eastern suburbs in recent days and weeks about problems in Maroubra that have been of major concern. There has been intimidation, harassment and assaults. One incident that comes to mind is a rock being thrown through the front window of the home of a young family on Friday night. Those people are being targeted because they reported a crime. They will not bow to the intimidation they are being subjected to. I believe that these incidents must be part of the crime wave that has occurred across New South Wales. The number of assaults has increased by 69 per cent between 1995 and 2002.

The incidence of abduction and kidnapping increased by 50 per cent between 1995 and 2002, robbery without a weapon increased by 37.5 per cent, and stealing from a motor vehicle increased by 28 per cent in the eight years of the Carr Government. That has obviously been a major concern not only in my area but also across New South Wales. The incidence of stealing from a person has increased by 89.8 per cent, demanding money with menaces has increased by 13.5 per cent, extortion and blackmail has increased by 166.7 per cent, arson has increased by 99.4 per cent, malicious damage to property has increased by 21.2 per cent, and attempted murder has increased by 50 per cent in the eight years that the Government has been in office. That is why my constituents are concerned about crime.

Everyone was extremely concerned to hear the Government a few weeks ago talking about the perception of crime and claiming that perhaps the incidence of crime was being exaggerated. The point I made to the Government and to the Commissioner of Police is that the concern about crime is very real. It is not imagined; it is a real problem on the streets. Only last night there were more shootings at Balranald and Greenway Park. The Government spoke today about the theft of 34 handguns—31 Glocks and three revolvers. Those Glocks are in addition to the five stolen from police stations and police cars in 1999-2000. The 34 stolen handguns are an insignificant addition to the thousands already on the streets of New South Wales, especially in western and south-western Sydney. We have our fair share of those problems in the east, in both my electorate and the Premier's electorate. Since this Government came to office, weapons offences have increased by 127.5 per cent.

#### **TRIBUTE TO MR CHARLES KEITH JONES, A FORMER MINISTER OF THE COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT**

**Mr MILLS** (Wallsend) [5.33 p.m.]: I bring to the attention of the House the death on 7 August of my constituent and a Labor man of great leadership and integrity, Charles Keith Jones. He is best known as the Minister for Transport and the Minister for Civil Aviation in the Federal Labor Government led by Gough Whitlam. We in the Hunter region knew Charlie as a regional Labor leadership figure for three decades: the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, his influence was evident until the day he died, more than 20 years after he retired from Federal Parliament. He was active to the end. Charlie was secretary of the Jesmond-North Lambton Branch of the Australian Labor Party [ALP]. He was also a delegate to the Wallsend State Electorate Council, the Waratah State Electorate Council, the Newcastle Federal Electorate Council and the Newcastle Local Government Committee. He was an office bearer with Neighbourhood Watch and many other community organisations. He was active in the Retired Metalworkers Association and a life member of our great party, as was his wife, Doreen.

Charlie Jones had a single principle in his public life. He examined every issue on its merits for the benefit of the working men and women of our region and the nation. He was an old-fashioned socialist. His socialism was based on the economics of collective action for the betterment of all workers, their wealth and job security and health and safety. He detested outside influence in the Labor Party and the trade unions. He, therefore, detested equally the groupers and the Communists, and he would tell people about that at some length. He was a political organiser and fundraiser par excellence, and he knew how to count.

As I said, Charlie died on 7 August 2003. He was born on 12 September 1917 at Newcastle and was educated at Cooks Hill High School and Newcastle Technical College. He married Doreen Wright in 1939 and

they were still happily married 64 years later, until death parted them. He served his boilermakers apprenticeship at the BHP steelworks, worked at Stewarts and Lloyds and then at the State Dockyard. He was a member of the boilermakers union and, subsequently, the various metal trade unions. Of course, he was also a delegate to the Newcastle Trades Hall Council. He was elected to the Newcastle City Council in 1946, and at the age of only 39 he became the youngest Lord Mayor of Newcastle, a position he held until he was elected to the Federal seat of Newcastle at the 1958 election, which he held until he retired in 1983. He was awarded an Officer of the Order of Australia honour for service to politics and government in the 1984 Australia Day honours list and was recently presented with a Centenary Medal for service to the Australian community. At the State funeral in Christchurch Cathedral, Dean Graeme Lawrence quoted from *Ecclesiastes*:

Whatever task falls before you, do it with all your might.

He applied that quote to Charlie's life. He said that honesty, integrity and service were Charlie's guiding principles. Karl Leman, Charlie's son-in-law, talked about the family holiday home at Tea Gardens, an interest that he shared with John Howard, who spent his holidays at nearby Hawks Nest. The property at Tea Gardens was his and his family's retreat. Charlie was a fanatical fisherman. The last time I brought him to State Parliament, which was a few years ago, he came to lobby the then Minister for Fisheries, the Hon. Eddie Obeid, for an extension of the bans on commercial fishing in Botany and Lake Macquarie. He wanted them extended to estuaries further north, especially Tea Gardens.

The congregation at the funeral service also heard from John Ford, Charlie's press secretary during his time as a Minister. John described his Minister as a man with short back and sides, sensible shoes, heavy, dark suits, big boilermaker's hands and a pugnacious man with a direct approach. Charlie was an early advocate of the offsets policy and had a great passion for detail. The final tribute was from Gough Whitlam, the former Prime Minister. He praised Charlie for having the foresight to vote for him as the Deputy Leader of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party in March 1960. Mr Whitlam stated:

In the McMahon Ministry there had been a Minister for Shipping and Transport and a Minister and an Assistant Minister for Civil Aviation. Charlie Jones assumed the responsibilities of all three. It is beyond question that Charlie proved the most innovative and successful transport minister in Australian history. It is beyond question that he inspired the next two most successful transport ministers, Peter Morris and Bob Brown from this region.

What a pity Charlie did not get New South Wales to adopt the 25,000 volt AC train system. I express my condolences to his wife, Doreen, his daughter, Fay, and her husband, Karl, his son, Ken, and his wife, Marlene, and the rest of the family. Vale Charlie Jones, a great Labor man and a great political leader.

**Mr GAUDRY** (Newcastle—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.38 p.m.]: I thank the member for Wallsend for the tribute he has paid to the former Minister for Transport and Minister for Civil Aviation, Charles Keith Jones. There could not have been a stronger demonstration of the respect afforded him than the picture on the front page of the *Newcastle Herald* on the day after his funeral of the other two big men of the Whitlam Government—Gough Whitlam and Tom Uren—paying their respects to Charlie's wife, Doreen. That demonstrated the ongoing respect he attracted and the strength of feeling about him. As my colleague quoted, he was a short back and sides man, with sensible shoes, dark, heavy suits and big boilermaker's hands.

Charlie was absolutely committed to improving the life of the working men and women of Australia. He is credited with the development of our national rail system and, as the honourable member for Wallsend said, the development of the offsets policy, which provided that any major overseas government project must include as an offset the development of Australian expertise and manufacturing. That policy should always apply. The congregation at the funeral was a tribute to Charlie Jones's connection with working people across Newcastle and the Hunter Valley area and his influence on those members of Parliament who have followed him into the Federal sphere—Peter Morris and the current Federal member, Sharon Grierson, who paid tribute to Charlie in Federal Parliament. Like the honourable member for Wallsend, I pay my respects to Doreen, who was a loving wife to Charlie over many years, and to their family.

#### MURRUMBIDGEE ELECTORATE STAFF SHORTAGES

**Mr PICCOLI** (Murrumbidgee) [5.40 p.m.]: Staffing is a most important issue in my electorate of Murrumbidgee. Last week I attended a meeting of the interagency committee in Griffith comprising representatives of the Greater Murray Area Health Service, Centrelink and other welfare and social security agencies. The serious problem of staffing was raised once again at the recent meeting—this has been a problem in my electorate for some time—the purpose of which was to discuss with the Greater Murray Area Health Service the provision of mental health services in Griffith.

The committee is often called upon to provide mental health services to clients because specific counselling and other related services are not available in Griffith. The Greater Murray Area Health Service pointed out that the Griffith community health service mental health team had seven vacant positions. We cannot blame the Greater Murray Area Health Service for the shortage because it has made those funded positions available. The health service pointed to the difficulty of attracting staff to the area. Many of the seven positions had been advertised for some time but had not been filled.

These staffing problems are not limited to community health services. Local industry also has difficulty attracting staff. Peter Bartter, the Chairman and Managing Director of Bartter Steggles, which employs 1,500 people in my electorate, said that on any given day his company has up to 40 vacant positions, ranging from unskilled chicken catchers to middle management, accounting and trade positions. That is a serious problem in a town such as Griffith, which is growing at a rapid rate. In fact, it was recently acknowledged as being the fastest-growing inland city in Australia. However, if we cannot get staff to fill the vacant positions I assure honourable members that those positions will be shifted to areas where staffing is not a problem.

It is incumbent upon the Government and Parliament to find solutions to this staffing problem. A couple of weeks ago I visited Moree where local councillors told me and several others about their staffing difficulties. Three rather large businesses were forced to leave Moree—one shifted to Brisbane and the others moved to different major centres—because of staffing problems. They could not attract staff to Moree, which I suppose is considered to be too far from Sydney and the coast.

Land in Griffith is expensive. The Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources is releasing very slowly its land bank for residential development, which is keeping land prices high. We must provide appropriate local health services and facilities and make Griffith an attractive place to live. When applicants from outside the area express an interest in the many local jobs available and ask the inevitable question about the quality of our health services we must be able to reply that they are first class. People should not have to travel elsewhere to visit most specialists—gynaecologists, obstetricians, paediatricians and particularly health professionals who look after children—and have surgical procedures. For too long the necessary health facilities have not been available.

Education facilities are equally important. Yesterday the closure of residential courses at the Yanco Agricultural Institute was announced. That is a big blow to education services in my electorate. Job applicants ask about such services. When they apply for an accountant's position at Bartter's they will say, "I'm moving from Sydney. How much will it cost to buy a house? Will my young children be okay if they get sick? Can they attend well-funded, air-conditioned schools and will there be tertiary education opportunities in Griffith?" All too often the answer to such questions is "No". I call upon the Government and Parliament to assist in developing regional New South Wales, particularly the town of Griffith.

**Mr GAUDRY** (Newcastle—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.45 p.m.]: I thank the honourable member for Murrumbidgee for his thoughtful contribution. Most members who represent electorates in regional and country New South Wales are concerned about staffing problems. I am sure the honourable member will agree that the drawing together of portfolios under the new Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources will present a great opportunity to examine the issues intensively. I am sure that the honourable member has in his electorate a regional development organisation or perhaps an organisation of regional councils that will draw the many issues together. The Government certainly has the will to address this matter. Only this week the Minister for Regional Development outlined the programs and processes available in this area.

I am aware that the honourable member for Murrumbidgee visited Newcastle during the last parliamentary session to extol the virtues of living in the Griffith area and perhaps to connect with those looking for work following the closure of the BHP steelworks. Even with the best will in the world it is difficult to persuade people to move from coastal New South Wales. I am sure that any incentives that the honourable member could suggest to the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning, and Minister for Natural Resources would be very well received.

#### **YOUTH OFF THE STREETS NEPAL FUNDRAISING TREK**

**Mr STEWART** (Bankstown—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.47 p.m.]: On 27 September I will be travelling to the Annapurna circuit in Nepal to do a 20-day trek that will take me, God willing, to an altitude of about 6,000 metres. I am going on this excursion to raise money for Father Riley's Youth Off the Streets charity. This organisation deserves adequate funding and I have used the trek as a focus for fundraising activities to

benefit the charity. Many honourable members and those in the wider community will know that Father Riley's Youth Off the Streets does a wonderful job supporting our young people. It is not a cliché to say that young people are our future. The charity helps young people who, as a result of various circumstances, have hit rock bottom and whose parents, communities and society have given up on them. Father Riley's Youth Off the Streets gives them a second chance in life. It helps them to pick themselves up, review their situation and make their lives better. Most importantly, it helps to improve their morale and encourages them to understand that, like anyone else, they can achieve and excel in our community. Its many successes inspired me to dedicate this trek to the charity.

At 46 years of age I will find the trek a challenge, but I have been in training for some time. My training manager Kevin McCormick, who is 73 years young, is the President of the Bankstown District Sports Club. Over the past few months he has encouraged me to drink middies instead of schooners and to watch my diet carefully. He has monitored my training program and given it a tick and believes that I will make it to a significant altitude—I hope to reach 6,200 metres. I must point out that Bankstown District Sports Club has donated \$30,000 to Youth Off the Streets. I make it clear that I am paying for the trek but the moneys raised from fundraising activities will go to Father Riley's Youth Off the Streets organisation and to a local school in Kathmandu, which is underprivileged and desperately in need of resources.

I am pleased to inform the House that as of today I have managed to raise \$50,625 through the focus on this trek. I understand that a further \$15,000 has now been pledged. I hope to be able to provide funding for Youth Off The Streets of about \$65,000 by the time I leave for Kathmandu on 27 September. As I said, some of the money raised will go to Kathmandu. I thank the wider community for wholeheartedly getting behind this venture. I am referring not only to clubs like Bankstown District Sports Club, but other clubs in my local area: the Revesby Workers Club, the Canterbury Bulldogs club and others. Local schools are also involved. That is important. Tomorrow I am going to St Theresa's Catholic School at Lakemba to help them out with a mufti day to raise money for the trek. Each student has been requested to bring a gold coin that will go towards Father Riley's Youth Off The Streets. It is an indication of what the community is doing.

Greenacre Public School donated \$1,000 from its parents and citizens support fund. That is an incredible donation from a parents and citizens association in a local public school. There are too many to mention, but other schools have certainly got behind the venture. People in the community have heard about it on the radio or read about it in the newspapers and have put in \$20, \$50, or \$100—\$30,000 in the case of Bankstown District Sports Club. It all adds up and I thank the community wholeheartedly for realising that this is not a trek to meet some mid-life crisis; it is proof that members of Parliament are there to serve their communities. We are doing the best we can, and this trek is a way of focusing on a deserving charity. The school in Kathmandu that I will be supporting is the Gokarna Lower Secondary School. I hope to be able to provide them with another \$5,000 towards getting their school in a better shape. There are 80 children in each classroom; they should get some help as well.

**Private members' statements noted.**

**The House adjourned at 5.52 p.m. until Friday 5 September 2003 at 10.00 a.m.**

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