

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Wednesday 17 September 2003

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

Mr Speaker offered the Prayer.

DRUG SUMMIT LEGISLATIVE RESPONSE AMENDMENT (TRIAL PERIOD EXTENSION) BILL

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 5 September.

Mr O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [10.00 a.m.]: While I lead for the Opposition, I make it clear that the Liberal Party has decided that this will be a free vote for its members. So I speak as the honourable member for Ku-ring-gai in this place, not as the Deputy Leader of the Opposition or as shadow Minister. I welcome this debate, as I welcome the opportunity to assess the aims of the heroin injecting centre against the final report of the evaluation committee. I welcome it because it allows the findings and issues that essentially have been omitted from the public debate to be raised. I shall start by looking at the stated aspirations of the medically supervised injecting centre [MSIC]. Among the most often stated reasons used by promoters to support the facility was the hope that it offered to heroin users access to rehabilitation. The Premier told the *Daily Telegraph* on 28 July 1999:

The point about this is to get heroin use off the street ... and to get people into an environment where treatment is part of it [the environment].

On 21 June 2001 he told the House:

It is a way of introducing people who are taking unsustainable risks with their lives to the possibility of rehabilitation and treatment.

A year earlier, on 2 May 2000, the Special Minister of State had told the Legislative Council:

The aims of the centre are to save lives, provide a gateway into treatment and counselling ...

He further said:

... one of the most important criteria is to ensure the medically supervised injecting room in its trial form as a gateway to treatment. The Government is working ... to ensure the centre will be supported by a mix of services, and that referrals are progressed in a systematic, timely and efficient manner.

That statement reflected two earlier statements the Minister had made in the Council. On 23 September 1999 he said:

There is consensus about the problem, about the urgency to deal with it and about the two core issues—the punishment of drug dealers and the rehabilitation of drug addicts.

On 21 October of that year he said:

Two fundamental principles stood out. The first is that people who have become drug dependent for whatever reasons or whatever circumstances deserve our compassion and assistance to end their drug use and resume a more healthy life.

I re-read the debates, media releases and media stories in endeavouring to decide what I would say in this debate. I had them in mind when I read the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre Evaluation Committee's 214-page report entitled "Final Report of the Evaluation of the Sydney Medically Supervised Injecting Room". I was looking to assess the report against the aims set out for the facility by the Premier and his Special Minister of State, especially in relation to the referral of users to rehabilitation services. I am disappointed in what I found, and I am appalled by the shifting of ground on the rehabilitation and referral issue by the Premier and the Special Minister of State. These issues are principally dealt with in chapter 5 of the final report, although, to be fair, there are references to them throughout the report. On page 8 of the report the Executive Summary states:

- Uptake of referral
 - Around half of the 1385 referrals were made in writing and, of these, 20% were confirmed to have resulted in the client making contact with the specified agency.
 - The MSIC provided referrals to treatment for drug dependence for 11% of clients. The more frequent attenders at the MSIC were more likely to be referred for treatment and take up referral.

The Minister's media release announcing this legislation stated:

1385 written and verbal referrals were provided to 577 clients. A referral card system required the drug user to retain the card and give it to the medical service. The medical service was then asked to mail it back to the evaluators. Of 534 referral cards issued, 20% came back.

The use of statistics is confusing—and, I suggest, deliberately so—because on any reading the final evaluation report does not support the hopes of either the Premier or the Minister that the facility would act as a "gateway to treatment" or provide "rehabilitation of drug addicts" or "assistance to end their drug use". A key target of this trial has failed to be met. Chapter 5 makes clear that only 15 per cent of the facility's clients were provided with written or verbal referrals to all types of referral services. Of these 1,385 referrals, only 601, or less than half, were for drug treatment, that is, for drug rehabilitation as opposed to referral for sexually transmitted diseases testing or social welfare assistance; 300 of those 601 drug rehabilitation referrals were written referrals involving the referral card system; and only 49 cards, representing just 16 per cent of all written referrals, were returned to confirm that clients had turned up for treatment.

Reading chapter 5, it is hard to determine how many clients are represented by that latter figure. Oddly, the number of clients represented by those 49 returned referral cards is not given, and I note the Minister in his release stated that 577 clients received 1,385 referrals, which suggests that a client could have received multiple referrals. However, to be generous, it can be concluded that the evaluation report finds that, out of 3,810 people registered to use the facility, fewer than 50 are confirmed as attending drug treatment referral appointments. That represents just 1.3 per cent of the facility's clients.

By no stretch of anyone's imagination can the MSIC be seen as successful in meeting the Premier's desire that it "introduce people who are taking unsustainable risks with their lives to the possibility of rehabilitation". Without labouring the point, there are two other issues I want to deal with. The chapter's authors make reference to "methodological limitations" on their study results. Given the findings of chapter 5, I am not surprised that there is within the report an attempt to divert attention from them. But I note that, in announcing the centre and its trial in 1999, the Special Minister of State declared:

The committee's greatest challenge will be the development of transparent evaluation methods for the extent to which the injecting room contributes to rehabilitation and treatment of addicts.

I do not think the authors or the committee can have it both ways. They cannot seek to discount findings that are adverse to the trial by claiming problems with measurement methodology when the Minister charged them with the responsibility for developing a workable measuring system before the trial commenced. Last week I heard the centre's director, Ingrid van Beek, interviewed by Sally Loane. In responding to statements by a group questioning the centre's efficacy, and Ms Loane's questions about how aggressively the centre advocated rehabilitation, Dr van Beek noted that when hosting "240 visits a day", "one every three minutes", "we don't necessarily approach each and every person" about rehabilitation. That underscores my concerns about this facility. It is more about managing an existing heroin problem than seeking to reduce the extent of the problem by providing a gateway to services where addicts can seek advice on ending their addictions.

On Dr van Beek's own admission, the demand upon services works against the centre's ability to offer rehabilitation to clients. There is more than a faint echo of the experience with the State's methadone program in that admission. Setting aside meeting the rehabilitation criteria set out for the centre and the trial by the Premier and the Special Minister of State, I viewed the rest of the report from the point of view of the other goals set for it by those advocates. But again the reader is confronted with the difficulty of assessing the study's findings. For instance, the issue of overdose and preventing overdose deaths was a major factor for those arguing for the facility. On page 61 these paragraphs appear:

3.4.3 Interpretation and implications

Prevention of heroin overdose deaths was a major argument put forward for the establishment of the MSIC. The expectation, however, that any single facility operating for a third of the day could prevent a large number of deaths was optimistic.

Initial analyses of ambulance attendances at opioid overdoses across the years 1995-2002 provided no evidence that MSIC had decreased opioid overdose events occurring in the community. There was, however, a large decrease in opioid overdose events attributable to a reduction in the availability of heroin which was sustained in the Kings Cross drug market throughout 2001. Secondary analyses of the number of overdose events occurring in the other major Sydney drug market, Cabramatta, and across the rest of NSW specifically showed that the heroin shortage did not reduce the number of deaths occurring. There was a further reduction in the number of overdose events around the time the MSIC opened but the fact that the same trend occurred in Kings Cross and Cabramatta, one of which did and the other which did not have a MSIC, suggests a continuing effect of the heroin shortage rather than an effect of the MSIC.

Further analyses of the pattern of ambulance attendances at opioid overdoses through the 24 hours of each day also provided no evidence that MSIC had decreased opioid overdoses. If the MSIC were exerting a specific effect on overdose events in the community one would expect to see a reduction in overdose events when the MSIC was open for business (8 to 10 hours per day) and no such reduction when the MSIC was closed. The analysis of the effect of the MSIC on the pattern of ambulance attendances during the MSIC opening hours in the Kings Cross area showed no detectable impact on opioid overdoses.

The data suggests that the opening of the MSIC occurred at the same time as a reduction in opioid poisoning presentations at St Vincent's Hospital and Sydney Hospital. It is likely that the reduction in opioid poisoning presentations at St Vincent's and Sydney hospitals were part of the general trend associated with the heroin shortage (as was observed in the ambulance attendances time series in the rest of NSW and in Cabramatta).

I challenge anyone reading this section of the report to reasonably conclude that it was the MSIC—whose operations we are asked this morning to extend for four years—rather than the heroin drought, that was responsible for the recorded reduction in opioid poisonings over the period of the trial. But still the centre's supporters, ministerial and other, make media claims about the centre's continuing success in this area. I should note, however, Minister Della Bosca's release of 1 September where truth surely sought to shine out through his statement that "Importantly, the report found the trial made nothing worse..." While a number of people would dispute that claim, it is in terms of the Carr Government ministry less than a resounding endorsement for a project that had the combined muscle of the Premier and Mr Della Bosca behind it. It is a one on a political Richter scale where Carl Scully's claim that he was a good Transport Minister makes it a ten. I want to conclude using the Special Minister of State's own words. On 21 October 1999 John Della Bosca told the Legislative Council:

... the Government remains committed to the view that self-injection of addictive substances cannot be normalised, and must be rejected as a behaviour on social, health and moral grounds.

This view I wholeheartedly support. The Minister went on:

There will be medical supervision in clean and hygienic conditions.

That certainly occurred during the trial. The Minister continued:

The model that will be trialled for 18 months aims to save lives and reduce the spread of disease...

This report does not support that claim. There is an absence of evidence to allow anyone to conclude that the centre, and not the heroin drought, is responsible for the reduction in heroin overdoses. On that occasion Mr Della Bosca went on:

... but especially focuses on providing a gateway for referral to treatment and counselling.

Neither the report nor Dr van Beek's statements support such a claim for this facility. The Special Minister of State said in 1999:

Its effectiveness will be clinically assessed on all those grounds.

The report itself raises questions about the centre's clinical assessment despite the Minister charging the evaluation committee to develop a transparent evaluation method before even starting the trial. The Minister went on to say:

This is a centre for rehabilitation, a centre for treatment, a centre for counselling and referring—it offers a gateway to treatment.

The report offers no such evidence. Fewer than 50 people referred to drug rehabilitation were confirmed as turning up. And with a client presenting every three minutes, how on earth could the facility do so? Less than 1.3 per cent of the centre's registered clients were referred to drug treatment and actually turned up for that treatment. Finally, Mr Della Bosca stated:

It offers to those who have reached the extreme end of injecting drug use a continued option for rehabilitation and treatment.

Sadly, regrettably, unfortunately, this report makes it clear that that statement is not true and, on the basis of this report, that goal has not been met. If trials and evaluations mean anything, if they are genuinely meant to determine public policy and the allocation of scarce public resources, their results should be critically examined and not simply used to support a predetermined position. I oppose this legislation because that is what any study of the evaluation report demands. I also oppose it because of my concerns that the State's harm minimisation policy pays too little attention to advocating no drug use and rescuing people from drug addiction and too much attention to managing addiction. Finally, I oppose this legislation—as I did in 1999—because I do not think there is any safe level of drug abuse and, however dressed up, a legal medically supervised injecting centre sends the opposite message.

Ms KENEALLY (Heffron) [10.18 a.m.]: The medically supervised injecting centre at 66 Darlinghurst Road, Kings Cross, was established as part of the Government's new approach to drug policy following the 1999 Drug Summit. The focus of the summit is clear: prevention, education, treatment and law enforcement. The injecting room seeks to reduce supply, reduce demand and reduce harm. The injecting room at Kings Cross is a specific response to a specific need in a specific community. It is not meant to be a solution for all drug users or a solution for all communities. The Drug Summit recognised that no one approach fits all. The outcomes of the Drug Summit saw the Government fund abstinence-based approaches, methadone and other similar treatments.

The medically supervised injecting centre at Kings Cross was established as a trial. This bill seeks to extend that trial for a further four years. The bill amends part 2A of the Drug Misuse and Trafficking Act to extend the trial so it will finish on 31 October 2007. The bill will also make sure that a review of the operations of the centre and the legislative framework is finished by May 2007. The Government's approach to drug policy is evidence-based, and the recent evaluation of the medically supervised injecting centre made the following findings: that the operation of the centre is feasible in Kings Cross; that the centre made service contact with its target population, including many who had no prior treatment for drug dependency; that a small number of opioid overdoses managed at the centre may have been fatal had they occurred elsewhere; that there was no overall loss of public amenity; that there was no increase in crime; that the centre made referrals for drug treatment, especially among frequent attendees; and that the centre afforded an opportunity to improve knowledge that can guide public health responses to drug injecting and its harms.

It is important to note the client profiles and the gateways to treatment aspects of the injecting centre. Some of the clients of the centre are being referred to rehabilitation services. In the 26 months to June 2003, 79 referrals were made from the centre to residential rehabilitation. Referrals are also being made to detoxification and drug treatment—233 referrals to detoxification, 156 to methadone treatment and 250 referrals to other forms of methadone-related treatment. This is not surprising when one considers the profile of a typical client who came to the injecting centre. The profile is of a 31-year-old male, high-risk injecting drug user, who has been injecting for many years—most of them for more than 12 years—and who has either previously failed drug treatment or who has never been in drug treatment before.

Most of these clients did not complete secondary schooling, and 43 per cent did not complete year 10. Social Security was their main form of income. About half the clients had injected daily or more in the past month and about 40 per cent had injected in a public place; 44 per cent had previously overdosed; 60 per cent, roughly, had been in drug treatment at some time and failed; more than 1,000 attendees at the centre had never been in any form of drug treatment; 26 per cent had been in prison in the previous 12 months and 25 per cent of these clients returned 11 times or more. We are talking about people who lead very chaotic lives, people at the margins of society who do not have traditional pathways or gateways into treatment.

The evaluation that was set up to track the referrals and whether or not further treatment was sought was a complicated process that relied on a card that was given to the client and which had to be taken to the treatment centre. It was quite complicated for people who have chaotic, non-traditional lives. It suggested that the number of referrals may be quite high and it may be that the evaluation process does not reflect accurately the number of people who received treatment. Privacy laws made it difficult in some cases for the evaluators to follow up on whether the clients received treatment. So, while the statistics may not indicate an overwhelming uptake of treatment services, the injecting centre is providing, for a very marginalised part of the population, opportunities to access services.

In some sense we may need to look at whether the evaluation of the effectiveness of the injecting room has been adequate. Part of extending the trial of the injecting room for a further four years will involve the appointment of a special case manager, who will build relationships with clients who come to the centre. We know from the statistics that the more often people visited the centre the more likely they were to follow up with

treatment and additional services. If we get someone in the centre whose job is to build those relationships, to take a proactive approach with the clients and with the local community, and to monitor that, we may see an uptake of services for people who do not have any other traditional way to access them.

The evaluation took place over the first 18 months of the injecting room's operation. This was a start-up period. Many other distractions were in place, not the least being the media spotlight on the injecting centre. If we are able to evaluate it over the next four-year period, when it is established, well-running and working for that marginalised part of the population, it is worthwhile to continue this trial. There is majority community acceptance of the initiative in Kings Cross. Prior to its opening 68 per cent of residents expressed agreement with the centre's operation, and 58 per cent of the business community approved of it. Those figures have now increased to 78 per cent and 63 per cent respectively. I would like to see the centre continue. The injecting centre is meeting the needs of some of the most marginalised members of the community. It is not a panacea for all drug problems. It is not a solution that will fit all communities, but it is part of a package of initiatives that this Government put in place after the Drug Summit. The evidence we have merits a further four-year trial of this medically supervised injecting centre.

Mr STONER (Oxley—Leader of the National Party) [10.27 a.m.]: I oppose this legislation. The National Party has chosen to have a free vote on this issue, but interestingly, with a free vote, every National Party member of this Assembly has come to the same conclusion—that the legislation ought to be opposed, and for some very good reasons of which I will enlighten honourable members. Through the Drug Summit Legislative Response Amendment (Trial Period Extension) Bill the Government seeks a further four-year trial. The title of this bill is a misnomer. It ought to be the Drug Summit Legislative Response Amendment (Extension of Social Experimentation) Bill, because, simply put, this is not a trial. How long is a piece of string? How long does a trial have to go on before one recognises that it is not a trial, it is something that has been put in place and is set to continue? We were told in 1999 that the trial would go on for 18 months. Last year we were told there would be an extension of the trial until after the March 2003 State election.

Now we are asked again to endorse a further extension until after the 2007 election—that is, in 3½ years time. We are looking at a total of more than seven years of this so-called trial. This could have been well and truly evaluated. We could have made a firm judgment on the success or failure of this experiment by this point and certainly well within seven years. The Government is attempting to hoodwink the public by continuing to extend this so-called trial, but it is definitely more than a trial: it is a continued experiment by this Government. It is asking the taxpayers of New South Wales to commit a further \$2.4 million per annum, which, over four years, is another \$9.6 million when the evaluation report shows clearly that the medically supervised injecting centre [MSIC] is of questionable benefit.

The evaluation report is highly contentious on a number of fronts. I have some correspondence from a group called Drug Free Australia, which has undertaken some very extensive research. I have all the references, which I will not go into, but I will summarise some of the research findings. The most conservative estimates from national statistics on heroin use and overdoses indicate that nationwide there is one overdose fatality for every 45,000 injections. Yet the injecting room supervised 35,000 heroin injections over 18 months and claims to have saved 6 lives. This claim simply cannot be sustained.

The implications are that if the injecting room continued at a rate of 35,000 heroin injections every 18 months it would, based on Australian national averages, take almost two years and cost \$4.6 million of the estimated \$2.4 million a year before it could claim that it saved just one life. The organisation states that 96 per cent of heroin overdoses nationally are not fatal, therefore the 329 overdoses recorded at the injecting room are alarmingly above national averages. Conservative national estimates indicate one overdose for every 1,700 heroin injections, but the injecting room has one overdose for every 106, which means that the injecting room has 16 times more overdoses than the rest of the community. The findings of the evaluation report and the statistics used therein are contentious when compared with research and national statistics on heroin use and overdoses. The report highlights further contentious issues, and indicates that the number of ambulance call-outs has not changed since the medically supervised injecting centre opened.

During the Drug Summit I visited the Metropolitan Ambulance Centre. Ambulance officers use motorcycles that are fully outfitted with the appropriate medical equipment to enable them to revive drug users who have overdosed. The officers carry Narcan on the back of their bikes. They whiz down the alleys and the back streets to resuscitate drug users who have overdosed. It is an effective way of reviving addicts who have overdosed, and I congratulate the ambulance officers on the work they do. But the evaluation indicates that there has been no change in the number of drug overdoses and related emergencies attended by the Ambulance

Service as a result of the injecting centre. One must question the value of the centre and whether the additional money spent over and above what is being spent by the Ambulance Service to treat those people is money well spent. The effects of the injecting centre on local business are also quite contentious. I have received this correspondence from Michael Robinson:

I was interested to watch the effect the room is having locally. While speaking to business owners who still complain of needles on their door step each morning and escalating crime, in the rear laneway adjacent to the rear/exit door of the injecting room 3 middle aged males were standing on the footpath drinking a cup of coffee having just exited the facility, and a number of younger males were hanging around the street.

While talking we observed an undercover police operation detain and arrest one alleged dealer almost directly opposite the rear doors of the facility. Within 2 minutes of this occurring half of the people on the street cleared out, business owners can point them out, but the injecting room draws them in like a honey pot. Dealers know where their 'customers' are going to be and who they are, their customers are the people using the injecting room...

The business owners I spoke to all had one thing to say, the crime is worse, it's driven business down and they want a solution, clearly the injecting room isn't helping them either.

I have also received correspondence from the President of the Kings Cross Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Incorporated which states:

This facility is ruining the Cross and similar centres have the potential to ruin other local communities.

The evaluation mentions that police anecdotally reported an increase in drug-related loitering in the train station opposite the MSIC. The effects of the injecting centre on local business are contentious. We hear that most people in the business community support it, but the evidence I have is that it is definitely impacting on the community at Kings Cross. The report also noted that the majority of injections occur elsewhere, not in the centre. People are continuing to inject at home and elsewhere. The average individual attendance at the centre was 15 visits in the 18-month trial period. However, this figure was skewed by one individual who attended on 646 occasions. Despite the presence of the MSIC the vast majority of its users inject elsewhere, and certainly not under the supervision of MSIC staff.

I am not without compassion, and neither are my colleagues. Every life saved is worth the effort. As members of Parliament, we ought to endeavour to save lives, but we must question whether this is the best use of taxpayers' money. I have already pointed out the effectiveness of ambulance officers in that environment. But would the money be more effectively spent on rehabilitation and detoxification? How many more lives could be saved by getting people off drugs? We have heard about referrals from the centre, but only 15 per cent of the so-called clients of the centre received referrals and only half of those were for drug rehabilitation. When we talk about drug rehabilitation and detoxification to help people get off drugs, we are talking about the quality of life rather than the quantity of lives saved—although the quantity of lives saved is an important consideration.

Rehabilitation and detoxification add to the quantity of lives saved, but the question is how many more lives would be saved by helping people to get off drugs rather than by providing a centre that helps them to maintain their habit. Another consideration is the quality of life. I would be happy to debate this, but I imagine that the quality of people's lives would be greater if they were off drugs. I cannot imagine that people's addiction to a substance that drives them to do whatever they have to do to feel good—for example, commit crime—would result in a very high quality of life. That was certainly my experience during the Drug Summit. When I visited some of the rehabilitation centres and spoke to some of the addicts, they expressed dissatisfaction with their lives and their desire to get off drugs.

It is not simply about the quantity of lives saved but also the quality of life. That is why we should put our resources into rehabilitation and detoxification. The \$2.4 million per annum to run the centre would fund more than 100 rehabilitation beds for a full year at, for example, the Salvation Army. Therein lies the question: Is the money spent on this centre to maintain people's habit the best way to spend the money, or should we direct those resources towards rehabilitation and detoxification? As I said, more than an additional 100 rehabilitation beds could be provided for the same money it takes to run the centre. My view is that the injecting centre is an ineffective and costly social experiment that has clearly failed. The evaluation was unable to conclude in any way that this money is well spent. We have now had three years to come to this understanding.

The Government is asking us to endorse another four years of this failed ideological experiment, which has been trialled at taxpayers' expense. The proposition is indefensible. The \$2.4 million per annum spent on this facility would be far better spent on programs aimed at helping addicts to stop taking illegal drugs, rather than assisting them to maintain their habit. The Government's notion is contrary to the opinion of the United Nations Narcotics Control Board, which at paragraph 559 of its 2001 report stated:

The Board regrets that local authorities in the Australian State of New South Wales have permitted the establishment of a drug injecting room, setting aside concerns expressed by the Board that the operation of such facilities, where addicts inject themselves with illicit substances, condones illicit drug use and drug trafficking and runs counter to the provisions of the international drug treaties. The Board notes that the national policy in Australia does not support the establishment of drug injecting rooms. The Board urges the Government to ensure that all its States comply fully with the provision of the international drug control treaties to which Australia is a party.

I hear some noise from the other side of the Chamber. The Labor Party takes notice of the United Nations when it suits them, but simply makes a lot of noise when it does not. It ought to listen to what the United Nations Narcotics Control Board has to say. I cannot support this legislation, which seeks to perpetuate this farce.

Mr Orkopoulos: You never have.

Mr STONER: I never have, and I never will.

Ms MOORE (Bligh) [10.41 a.m.]: I support the Drug Summit Legislative Response Amendment (Trial Period Extension) Bill 2003. This legislation extends the trial from the 2002 Act. The bill will take effect from 31 October 2003 and will enable the medically supervised injecting centre [MSIC] in Kings Cross to continue its operations until 31 October 2007. In effect, the bill extends the trial period to October 2007 and requires that the review into the operation of the centre apply to the whole of the trial period rather than to the first 18 months. Another evaluation will take place in 2007.

In my August newsletter, which was hand-delivered to 50,000 householders in Bligh, I informed my electorate that the independent evaluation report on the Kings Cross medically supervised injecting centre had endorsed the facility. The report showed that the centre's operations had decreased overdose deaths, provided a gateway to treatment, and reduced the problems of discarded needles and users injecting in public places. Up to April 2003 more than 4,700 registered users underwent full health assessment and there were more than 1,800 referrals to drug treatment, rehabilitation, and health and welfare services. There has been no increase in crime or loitering in the Kings Cross precinct, there has been no evidence that the centre has increased drug dealing or drug use, and there has been no honey-pot effect. Two-thirds of the clients come from Kings Cross. The report found that 78 per cent of residents and 63 per cent of businesses were supportive of the centre and estimated that the closure of the service would result in nearly 230 injecting episodes per day reverting to the streets of Kings Cross.

In my electorate newsletters I have kept my constituents informed about the establishment of this Australian-first health facility. In 1999 I reported on the heartbreaking photograph in Caroline Lane just before the State election. The Drug Summit, which was preceded by the challenge of the Wayside Chapel supervised injecting room, focused the attention of legislators on one of our most serious social problems and a major cause of crime. At the Summit members of Parliament were presented with expert evidence and local and overseas research. They heard from community leaders, people who work with users, and the users themselves and their families. They visited treatment centres and talked to health workers.

As the State representative of an inner-city electorate, which includes Kings Cross and now Eveleigh Street, I approached the Drug Summit with a determination to instigate action. I was elected to the special resolutions committee as the Independent representative of the crossbench. I pushed the policies and reforms that would address the growing drug-related problems in our area. I promoted a trial of a supervised injecting room on the basis of evidence given at the joint parliamentary select committee that it would save lives, give marginalised young addicts a gateway to treatment, and reduce public injecting and the disposal of needles on the streets of Kings Cross, Darlinghurst and Redfern. At the request of the Minister for Health I moved a motion for the trial, and I received overwhelming support from delegates. Other recommendations endorsed by the Drug Summit included education and prevention programs and increased funding for detoxification treatment and rehabilitation. I also moved a motion, which was narrowly defeated, for a heroin trial for chronic addicts in an attempt to undermine heroin trade and reduce crime. I believe that the Summit provided a way forward in dealing with drugs and hope for inner-city residents who have endured the impact of government inaction. My goal is to ensure that the Government implements the Summit's recommendations.

One year later in my winter newsletter of 2000 I reported on my active involvement with the community consultation committee, which was set up by the Uniting Church, and my work with church and community representatives, and service providers and users to ensure that these lifesaving projects succeed and get injecting off the street. Although there is broad local consensus in support of the facility, its location is a problem. People do not want it located near them. I have asked the Government to ensure the availability of essential back-up services, such as policing.

One year on, in the winter newsletter of 2001 I reported that the medically supervised injecting centre had opened in May, initially operating four hours a day to get established and to train staff. It now opens from 10.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. on weekdays and from 2.00 p.m. to 6.00 p.m. on weekends. The hours will later be extended to 10.00 p.m. The project includes a panel of local residents, business people and police who meet every six months, and there is further assessment of community response through telephone surveys. I work in conjunction with the community consultation committee.

While it is too early to assess the full impact of the project, there have been four overdoses, which could mean that four lives have been saved. Fifty referrals have been made for young users who have not previously accessed treatment. I again suggest a trial of prescription heroin for chronic users. Such a trial needs to be considered, as drug-related crime is on the rise. International evidence of reduced crime, overdoses and homelessness persuaded many New South Wales Drug Summit participants to support my motion for a heroin trial, but it was narrowly defeated.

In my summer 2001-02 newsletter I reported that 1,507 private users are now registered at the centre and that there have been 88 drug overdoses, all non-fatal. Of the registered users, 623 people, many with no prior history of access to medical services, have been referred to treatment programs. Ambulance call-outs in the Kings Cross area have decreased and residents report less shooting up and fewer needles in the streets. The majority of people who voted for me in the election this year—where I received 65 per cent of the vote—support my approach for seeking progressive solutions to complex and tough inner-city social issues, such as the establishment of a medically supervised injecting centre. The Australian Labor Party, Liberal and Green candidates in my electorate all supported the facility, as did the local council.

I now turn to a number of crucial issues, including the rigorous independent evaluation of the centre. Seventy-eight per cent of local residents and 63 per cent of businesses support the facility, and that support has increased since the centre began its operation. Out of 200 businesses polled, only 1 per cent indicated that the centre had adversely affected them. Opposition to the centre has dropped from 26 per cent to 17 per cent since it began its operations. A vocal minority has voiced concerns about the centre and has been opposed to it from the start. At a community meeting held by the Chamber of Commerce on 20 August this year—to which I and Dr Ingrid van Beek, the director of the centre, were invited—only eight community members attended.

I would like to refer to the benefits of the centre. Every day 240 users—that is 1,000 per month—inject at the centre. The centre estimates that up to 25 lives per year have been saved. Overdoses have decreased since the centre began its operations. An important aspect to note is that those who overdosed were treated in the centre without injury to brain and other vital organs. Such injuries occur when overdoses occur on the street. The centre has treated more than 550 overdoses in two years.

Another important piece of information I ask members to note is that the rate of blood-borne infection, such as hepatitis B and C, in Kings Cross has remained stable, whilst other areas, such as Cabramatta, which has twice the average rate, have experienced an increase. There have been no new drug-related HIV infections in Kings Cross during the MSIC evaluation. I note that a September *Washington Post* article reported that Canada has dramatically shifted its approach to drug users, from a punitive approach to a policy of harm reduction. Canada has adopted the stance of Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland and, I am pleased to say, Australia. A representative of Vancouver's Coastal Health Authority said that the new policy also makes good economic sense. She pointed out:

When we get someone with HIV it costs \$150,000 to treat [that person] over a lifetime. Some people say we are enabling addicts, but if we prevent 10 people from contracting HIV the injection site pays for itself.

That is a salutary observation that this House should contemplate. The MSIC is also a gateway to help. Sixty per cent of its users had never had any contact with other drug services, yet are more likely to start treatment for drug dependence and more likely to test for blood-borne diseases, which will assist to prevent disease from spreading. The centre has estimated that half of its clients were successfully referred to other services. The centre is also able to reach people that other treatments have failed; and it has reached injecting users in the early stages, with the result that there is less chance of an entrenched drug use pattern forming.

To summarise the benefits of the centre—people live longer with fewer health problems, and hopefully long enough to get help with their drug problem. The amenity of Kings Cross has improved because 550 overdosers have been taken off the streets. It is distressing for anyone to see someone injecting or, worse, dying from an overdose, but that was happening regularly in back lanes. If the facility closed tomorrow, there would be 240 injecting episodes in the area each day. Of course, there has been a reduction in syringes and other drug

paraphernalia in the street. Another issue that is important from the point of view of my constituents is crime and drug use. Kings Cross police commander Dave Darcy is on public record supporting the centre, and the crime rate has dropped. Currently the area has the lowest assault rates on record and a sustained drop in all types of crime in the Kings Cross command, at the same time as use of the centre has increased.

We have low and decreasing rates of drug-related crime, especially theft and robbery. Loitering around the centre dropped as soon as the centre opened, and there has been no adverse impact on drug-related loitering in Kings Cross. Some claimed that the centre was responsible for increased drug-related activity at the railway station, but that increase was reported before the centre opened. Heroin availability dropped before the centre opened, and is only now increasing with the end of the heroin drought.

Kings Cross police report that there is no relationship between the availability of drugs in Kings Cross and the operation of the centre. As well as other benefits, the centre acts as an early warning system. Through its direct contact with drug use, health personnel and police can be alerted to changes, for example when a higher strength in drugs becomes available. Members have also referred to the honey-pot effect, and concerns were expressed about that even before the centre opened. The independent evaluation has shown that this has simply not eventuated.

The users of the centre are already in Kings Cross because they live in the area or are there in order to buy drugs. Eighty per cent of the centre's clients spent the night before their visit to the centre in the South Eastern Sydney Health area, and two-thirds were in Kings Cross itself. The more frequent users are more likely to live locally. The evaluation report states that the centre did not result in an increase in drug-related loitering in Darlinghurst Road, and that loitering declined over the period of the evaluation. The centre is sited in the area where drug users are, rather than attracting them to the area. The cost of the centre is another issue that is bandied about. I again remind the House that the injecting centre was paid for by the confiscated proceeds of crime, including proceeds from drug dealing. The point is worth re-emphasising: the centre was paid for by the confiscated proceeds of crime, including proceeds from drug dealing. The funds have been used to help the victims of the drug trade. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

I also wish to respond to claims that the centre has not been cost effective. There were problems setting up a new and innovative service. The Catholic Church pulled the Sisters of Charity out of the agreement, and the centre was taken over by the Uniting Church. Negotiations about the venue or site were complicated and delayed its establishment. There was a court challenge by the chamber of commerce which delayed the centre's opening. The new service had a one-off set-up and fit-out, and additional funds had to be allocated for evaluation and monitoring. However, costs have decreased. The centre is now operating at twice the rate that applied during the 18-month evaluation period, and there are now nearly three times the number of injecting visits compared with visits made during the evaluation period. The centre has the normal operating costs for its type of facility but it has had to cope with extraordinary costs for insurance and rent for its premises in Darlinghurst Road.

Another issue relates to the site. The 66 Darlinghurst Road site was chosen after extensive work by both the Sisters of Charity and the Uniting Church to meet the specific criteria, which included proximity to Springfield Plaza, distance from residential areas, and the site owner's ability to pass a probity test and to agree to the site being used for the trial. The Kings Cross Chamber of Commerce, the Kings Cross Community and Information Centre, and the 2011 Residents' Association all undertook to look for alternative sites that met these criteria, but without success. A site in Earl Place and a site at the foot of the residential tower, The Elan, were rejected. I supported siting the service in the commercial area rather than in the residential area.

Darlinghurst Road and its future are currently being discussed in a number of venues such as community meetings, Police Accountability Community Meetings, and Council of the City of Sydney meetings. One per cent of businesses polled, have opposed the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre from the outset, blame the facility for the retail downturn in Darlinghurst Road. I challenge that view, as do others. The Kings Cross area is changing. Hotels are converting to apartments, which the manager of the Kings Cross Partnership claims has crippled sex and tourist trades. The Pink Pussycat nightclub closed in February, the Vegas is up for sale, while the Bourbon and Beefsteak is having a \$7 million facelift and the Kings Cross Hotel is undergoing \$4 million renovations. The Sydney city council plans a \$7 million upgrade for Darlinghurst Road, which I hope will maintain the cosmopolitan feel of the area and also be a stimulus to revive the retail trade, particularly shops that serve the increasing local population.

I will briefly refer to criticisms of the service. I place on the record that Drug Free Australia comprises a number of people who opposed the trial at the 1999 Drug Summit, as well as in their submission to the

Commonwealth's inquiry into substance abuse in 2002 before the trial or the Kings Cross evaluation report was available. That organisation has no standing as a drug expert. Its members are reported to have wasted \$1 million setting up a rehabilitation centre in Port Macquarie which subsequently closed down due to poor management. As well, the association's figures are not statistically sound but rather are based on a misunderstanding of the data and what it means. The head of the National Alcohol and Drug Research Centre, Richard Mattick, said that the calculations done by Drug Free Australia were "back of the envelope" calculations, and I think they should be dismissed by this House.

In conclusion, I point out that the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre [MSIC] has demonstrated its effectiveness. I believe the trial should be expanded to other areas. I acknowledge that this legislation does not deal with that issue but I think that matter should be taken on board by this Government. I also call upon the Government to amalgamate the K2 needle exchange with the MSIC as both are located in Darlinghurst Road. I wish to conclude with these comments that I made when moving the motion to establish the trial at the Drug Summit:

Much has been said about sending the wrong message, but I would like to say on behalf of those who support this proposal that the message we really want to send is one of tolerance, compassion, help for survival and keeping young people alive long enough for them to be able to come off drugs.

I believe that the trial has achieved its aims. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr McLEAY (Heathcote) [10.57 a.m.]: I would like to start with a general overview of the safe injecting centre's operations. During the 18-month trial, 3,810 individuals were registered, of whom 73 per cent were male. On average they were 31 years of age and had commenced injecting at approximately 19 years of age, so they had been injecting for approximately 12 years; 44 per cent had previous non-fatal heroin overdoses and two-thirds had already been receiving drug treatment; there had been 56,000 visits, with an individual average of 15 visits per client.

As has been previously alluded to, sometimes statistics can be skewed. The number of individual visits ranged from one to 646. Heroin was most frequently the drug of choice, followed by cocaine. With approximately one in every four visits, health care services in addition to the supervision of injecting were provided to the client. Most of the advice given related to injecting and vein care. One in every 44 visits resulted in a referral to obtain further assistance. A point of some criticism by others in this place, but nevertheless a key point, is that a heroin injecting centre is not a pleasant place. A person must be at least 18 years of age before being allowed to walk through the door, and proof of age must be provided. It is a non-smoking environment and it is a quite sterile atmosphere. But the point is that it is a safe place in which to inject, and some health care facilities are provided.

I was not a member of Parliament when the Drug Summit was held. However, I have read a great deal of what was said. Many people believe that heroin addicts eventually grow out of their addiction. The trick is to keep them alive until they are ready to stop using. When they are ready, the appropriate people must be there with advice and support to assist them, and that is one of the centre's primary roles. Medical services are offered by nurses on site. The majority of access to primary health assessment is through referral to St Vincent's Hospital, Sydney Hospital and other services. Non-urgent cases are referred to a local general practitioner. Occasional crisis drug and alcohol counselling is also offered on site with referral for ongoing treatment. Health education is a core on-site service, in particular, education pertaining to injecting-related health issues, drug overdoses, blood-borne viruses, sexually transmitted diseases [STDs] and other sexual health issues.

Referral to drug and alcohol detoxification and rehabilitation services is also offered to outpatients. If a client expresses the desire to undertake drug or alcohol detoxification and rehabilitation an expert is available to issue a referral to the Langton Centre, Rankin Court, Regent Street Clinic, Kobi Clinic and other detoxification and rehabilitation providers. Referral is offered for methadone and other drugs and testing for blood-borne diseases and STDs. An on-site service is available for needle and syringe exchange and referral to vending machines and pharmacies. As I said previously, clients must be 18 years of age and be carrying identification. If they are not 18 years of age they are referred to the appropriate youth services for individual assessment; for example, to Oasis. The staff are medically trained, the clinical services manager is an accredited trainer for NSW Health, and staff must undertake child protection training and ongoing professional development. It was suggested that statistics are low.

Mr Stoner: What statistics are we talking about?

Mr McLEAY: The Leader of the National Party said there is little ongoing referral and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition said that it is disgraceful that only 1.5 per cent of the clients are referred for assistance. That is not true; in fact, 7,732 clients obtained advice about injections and vein care, and well-woman advice was given to 424 clients. That advice covers contraception and reproductive health information. Drug and alcohol information was provided to 284 clients, sexual health was provided to 243 clients, drug treatment advice was provided to 149 clients and other health education was provided to 129 clients. Advice for all basic services was provided to nearly 9,000 clients. Medical advice was also provided for 624 miscellaneous medical cases, 421 wound dressings or tissue trauma cases, 200 skin disorders and 26 asthma or chest infections. In addition, 2,333 clients received general counselling, nearly 400 were provided with referrals for accommodation and legal services, and crisis counselling was provided to 247 clients. Other crisis counselling and financial advice was also provided.

The report is critical and suggests that the trial be extended over another four years. In 18 months the centre has experienced 409 overdoses among 267 clients. The report suggests that lives have been saved, and that is the primary goal. Staff say that if the injecting room did not exist the target population would be injecting on the street. The centre is reaching a high percentage of users. The registration rate and the quick uptake of clients are good measures. Even after people score they still make the effort to get to the injecting room. It is less hassle for clients than injecting on the street and they regularly bring a friend with them to share the information that is available. A great deal of advice has been given about injecting techniques, which reduce illness and the risk of death. The staff say that the objective is to stop people dying. People who overdose in the injecting room may otherwise have overdosed on the street. It is suggested that clients like the staff because they can potentially resuscitate them and they choose to use the facility because they feel safe. That safety is reinforced when someone overdoses on the street. Clients who use the injecting room know they will be looked after.

Sound advice is obviously available. As has been stated, \$2.4 million a year is spent on the service. That should be put in the context of a few other initiatives. Drug and alcohol services have been significantly expanded across New South Wales as a result of the Drug Summit. The summit allocated a total of \$113 million for expanding health care and treatment over four years. That does not include enhancements such as the Adult Drug Court, the Cabramatta Anti-Drugs Strategy and internal agency funding. The second drug budget allocated NSW Health a total of \$129.2 million over four years, including \$30 million for 2003-04. Over the next four years the Government will build on the significant achievements resulting from the Drug Summit. Drug treatment capacity will be further expanded and programs introduced to respond to emerging drug issues.

A significant amount has been spent on detoxification and rehabilitation, including \$1.6 million to introduce medicated detoxification at the Lakeview Unit at Belmont Hospital in the Hunter; \$1.6 million to introduce medicated detoxification at Orana House at Port Kembla Hospital in the Illawarra; \$1.3 million for a new youth detoxification service in Western Sydney; \$2.4 million for 40 additional residential rehabilitation beds in non-government organisations around the State, including 20 beds to move patients from methadone to abstinence; and 212 detoxification beds and 753 rehabilitation beds have been provided in New South Wales—that is more beds than ever before. In addition, \$2.7 million has been provided for cannabis intervention and treatment strategies; \$750,000 has been spent on a psychostimulants strategy with new projects targeted at ecstasy, amphetamine and cocaine use; and \$1.2 million has been provided for telephone information services and counselling support, including increased funds for family drug support services providing advice and services for families affected by drug use, and for the Alcohol and Drug Information Service.

The budget has also provided \$1.4 million for a rural integrated care trial on the North Coast, providing intensive case management of drug-dependent women, linking them to drug treatment, housing, employment, child protection, financial advice and parenting services; \$1 million has been provided for the heroin overdose prevention strategy; \$1 million has been provided for an infrastructure program for non-government organisations to help these valuable services maintain their premises for fire rating and accreditation purposes; and \$2.5 million has been provided for the Mid North Coast Drug Treatment Service for a multipurpose drug and alcohol service in Port Macquarie, Kempsey, Coffs Harbour, Taree and Forster, including home detoxification and counselling. A comprehensive range of treatment options is available. The Medically Supervised Injecting Centre is but one service and the continuation of the trial will give us a better opportunity to save lives and help users to get well. It should be commended.

Mr KERR (Cronulla) [11.09 a.m.]: Once again I place on record my opposition to shooting galleries. Before I deal with the contribution of the honourable member for Heathcote—

[*Interruption*]

I am being interrupted, when I was about to say something nice about the honourable member for Heathcote. I wish him well in his personal quest to find out whether blondes really do have more fun! Obviously, anyone reading his speech and the statistics he threw around with gay abandon would know why he is a numbers man. No doubt he thought that numeracy would compensate for the lack of literacy in his speech. I will deal with some of the matters he spoke about.

Mr Tripodi: That's very personal.

Mr KERR: I have only come within a hair's-breadth of being personal. The best part of the honourable member for Heathcote's speech was when he spoke about the facilities that are being funded in other areas. Those facilities are being used by people who are motivated to get off the drug habit. For the benefit of the honourable member for Heathcote, if the funds that have been raised for the medically supervised injecting room—where criminals are having their habit facilitated—had been used for the other facilities that he referred to, we might be making a little more progress in those areas.

In her speech the honourable member for Heffron referred to law enforcement as one of the aims of the injecting room. Even under her Government, obtaining heroin remains a crime. Every person who goes to that injecting room having obtained heroin is a criminal. The honourable member for Heffron spoke about the chaotic lives that many of those people live and their lack of income. How did they get their income? As the Premier said some time ago, "junkies", as he called them, get the money to enable them to do a deal by breaking into homes. It could well be that a number of homes in the Caringbah area have been broken into in order to support a drug habit. Money is raised through breaking into homes, the criminals do a deal, and they go to the injecting room and get injected with heroin. It could happen in any electorate. Homes are being broken into to enable people to raise the money to do a drug deal to get heroin.

It is a furphy to suggest that the injecting room may save lives. The habit is ongoing. A few days after going to the injecting room the person may take an overdose in the streets of Fairfield or Cabramatta, and two weeks later he is dead. That life has not been saved. That is the problem with the shooting gallery. The honourable member for Heathcote referred to the contributions of the Leader of the National Party and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, who spoke about referrals. His argument is not with those members but with the independent evaluation, and the small number of people who make a sustained effort. At least the honourable member for Heffron sought to provide an explanation in terms of the chaos and complexity of these people's lives. But she certainly did not dispute the independent report, which is the whole basis of this legislation. I do not believe that anyone—even the honourable member for Bligh—would argue with the proposition that taking illicit drugs is wrong, because it harms the body, dulls the mind, diminishes self-control and ultimately can, and does, kill. Drug taking is probably the most dangerous problem we face as a community.

Mr Orkopoulos: Cigarette smoking is.

Mr KERR: Tobacco is a drug.

Mr Tripodi: I reckon a Liberal government is the biggest threat to community welfare.

Mr KERR: I acknowledge the interjection. We have at the table a man who regards that threat as bigger than the drug problem facing Australia. I look forward to hearing the contribution of the honourable member for Fairfield. Next time he goes to a caucus meeting and he leads the singing of "What a Friend We Have in Bobby", I suggest that just after that little rendition he should say to the Premier, "Why don't we have a Liberal government summit, and bring everybody together to talk about the threat. It's toast." I digress a little. This is an extremely ill-considered bill. Someone whose opinion the honourable member for Heathcote would probably regard as being at an even higher level than mine would be Archbishop Pell, who had this to say on this subject—

[*Interruption*]

The honourable member for Swansea laughs. He should talk to the honourable member for Heathcote. I am modest enough to think that the honourable member for Heathcote would not regard my opinion with the same—

Mr Brown: Point of order: I refer to the standing order that provides that members shall not construct speeches on interjections, and I ask you to rule on that point of order.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Andrews): Order! There is no point of order. The honourable member for Cronulla will confine his remarks to the subject matter of the bill.

Mr KERR: With regard to the bill Archbishop Pell said:

We cannot risk sending a message to society generally, and young people in particular, that seems to give a green light to drug abuse.

Mr Tripodi: You keep back flipping. Hurry up!

Mr KERR: I would hurry up, if you stopped interrupting me.

Mr Tripodi: You have been going on for 10 minutes.

Mr KERR: I do not mind a bit of constructive criticism, but I object to the continuing delaying tactics of the honourable member for Fairfield. Archbishop Pell continued:

There is a host of practical problems surrounding the proposal. We need more than band-aid solutions. We need more places in detox programmes, more halfway houses for those leaving such programmes, more help for the families involved and better prevention strategies. Effective compassion will cost money and involve much greater efforts.

The sort of money that is being channelled into the shooting gallery could be better used in detoxification programs, more halfway houses for those leaving such programs, more help for the families involved and better prevention strategies. The millions of dollars we are pouring into the shooting gallery could be provided for those worthwhile projects. The honourable member for Heffron made no reference to what is happening in America and what happened during the Clinton administration. Did they set up any injecting rooms? No. The honourable member for Bligh spoke about establishing injecting rooms in other areas. However, she did not refer to what other areas. Will they be established in the electorate of the honourable member for Fairfield or the electorate of the honourable member for Bathurst—

Mr Tripodi: It might be Cronulla.

Mr KERR: That is right, and I would oppose it being established there. Is the honourable member for Fairfield, who is at the table, saying that the Government now has a proposal to establish an injecting room in Cronulla? Is that the agenda? As the *Australian* pointed out:

The real culprits are the drug dealers with an estimated global market of between \$700 billion and \$800 billion a year. The Kings Cross injecting room is a very small player in this vast, malevolent business, its impact local, its effectiveness questionable.

I would say its effectiveness is highly questionable, even based on the report. The article continued:

If what began as a limited experiment is to become the norm, a proliferation of injecting rooms would be the next demand—

And that is the demand of the honourable member for Bligh. People who believe that the centre is a solution for Kings Cross are morally bound to support such centres in other areas where there are drug problems, be it Cronulla or the electorate of the honourable member for Fairfield. The *Australian* editorial continued:

—of the advocates of drug tolerance. But increasing the number of injecting rooms would do nothing to stop the spread of drugs throughout the community.

Mr Martin: It might save a few lives though—but that is not important to those over there.

Mr KERR: Yes, it is. It is a pity the honourable member for Bathurst was not here earlier because I dealt with that very thing. The honourable member for Bathurst talks about saving lives. A person can go into the injecting room and be injected, but they could be in Bathurst the next day and not be able to get to the injecting room. They could end up dead in a backstreet of Bathurst.

Mr Martin: We've got you on line with technology there. At least you got the terminology right.

Mr KERR: I am being interrupted again when I am trying to enable the honourable member for Bathurst to make a contribution in this debate. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Andrews): Order! Honourable members will listen to the contribution of the honourable member for Cronulla in silence.

Mr KERR: I conclude with these words: This is not the answer. The message being sent is, "Yes, go ahead, commit a crime, obtain your heroin, and the State will provide the facility for you to use the fruits of your crime. You are not required to enter any program, and the money that we do not spend on providing a halfway house or a detox program we will not use to help people who are genuinely motivated to get off drugs. You will take it away from them. But we as a State believe that is all right. We as a State will continue to support that, and we will pour millions of dollars into providing for and facilitating your drug habit."

Mr BROWN (Kiama) [11.22 a.m.]: I support the Drug Summit Legislative Response Amendment (Trial Period Extension) Bill, especially after listening to the speech of the honourable member for Cronulla—what he lost in logic he certainly made up for in literary ability. However, this issue should be debated on logic rather than on the literary ability of the honourable member. The Carr Government does not condone drug use but it is compassionate, as opposed to a number of the zealot ideological conservatives who are members of the Liberal and National parties. The Carr Government is committed to do all it can to prevent people from using drugs. The medically supervised injecting room is only one part of the many measures to prevent people from using drugs. This bill should be seen in that light and not used as a grandstanding opportunity by Opposition members. The people who use the centre need our help. Only 28 per cent of the people registered have completed the Higher School Certificate, 26 per cent have been imprisoned in the past year, and 11 per cent are homeless. Closing our eyes to these people is not a solution.

The initial trial period is coming to an end, but there is evidence that we should keep the medically supervised injecting room open. An extension period clearly makes sense. The extension period will be used to trial and assess new approaches to encouraging drug users into treatment. For example, a special case manager will be appointed to the centre to build relationships with clients and service providers in the area, and to take a proactive approach in client referral and follow-up. The honourable member for Cronulla mentioned that the most dangerous dilemma facing the community is the drug problem. If that is the case, simply closing the trial injecting room is not addressing one aspect of that very important problem. The final report on the evaluation of the medically supervised injecting centre was recently released and it is interesting to note some of its key findings. The operation of the centre was considered feasible in Kings Cross and the centre made service contact with its target population, including many who had no prior treatment for drug dependence. That in itself is a very important conclusion and a significant argument towards keeping this trial going.

A small number of opioid overdoses managed in the centre may have been fatal had they occurred elsewhere. The centre made some referrals for drug treatment, especially among frequent attendees. There was no increase in the risk of blood-borne virus transmission, there was no overall loss of public amenity and there was no increase in crime. The centre has afforded an opportunity to improve knowledge that will guide public health responses to drug injecting and its harmful effects. According to the most plausible estimate, it is likely that about six heroin overdoses may have been fatal had they occurred outside the centre during the trial period. That is a saving of six lives. I do not know how any member of the Opposition can say that this trial injecting room is a waste of money. It is likely that the centre played a role in reducing overdose-related morbidity. Early intervention can minimise brain and vital organ damage.

One of the centre's key aspects is the ability for a person to make a connection with these drug users and refer them for better health and drug treatment. The centre made 1,385 verbal or written referrals for health, drug treatment and social services for its 577 clients. A number of honourable members have referred to crime but, according to these key findings, the centre has minimal impact on drug-related activity in the area. As the honourable member for Bligh said, there was no honeypot effect; there was no increase in crime. There was a very slight increase in drug-related loitering but, from those key findings, I am pleased to affirm that there was a downward trend in theft and robbery in the area.

As I mentioned earlier in my contribution, this trial injecting room is one part of the Government's plan of action on drugs and it should be seen in that light. The 1999 Drug Summit established a new direction for drug policy in New South Wales that recognises the complexity of drug abuse and the need for a comprehensive approach. The Government, in partnership with the community, is responding to the drug problem through prevention, education, treatment and law enforcement. In July 1999 the Carr Government allocated \$176 million in additional funding to implement the Drug Summit's recommendations over four years. Building on that work since 1999, a new four-year \$230 million plan has been announced. This is the Carr Government putting its money where its mouth is. This is not about the Carr Government grandstanding in this place about one small

section of the plan against drugs. The New South Wales drug treatment system is the most comprehensive in Australia and it provides a range of treatment options.

Since 1999 the Government has opened three new drug detoxification and treatment centres and has funded a further 62 residential rehabilitation beds to treat an extra 523 people each year. The Government has opened new youth drug rehabilitation facilities and appointed new drug and alcohol counsellors to work with young people in regional areas. The Government has also funded 2,000 additional places for home and outpatient detoxification treatment and has provided 3,000 extra places in an improved methadone program. It has introduced buprenorphine treatment as an alternative treatment. In addition, the Government has opened a new residential rehabilitation service for young people in Western Sydney and has established the trial of the medically supervised injecting room.

Over the next four years the drug treatment capacity will be further expanded and programs will be introduced to respond to emerging drug issues. These include the introduction of a medicated detoxification unit at the Lakeview unit at Belmont Hospital in the Hunter and at Orana House in Port Kembla Hospital. The Government has provided funding for 40 additional residential rehabilitation beds in non-government organisations around the State, including 20 beds to move patients from methadone to abstinence. A new youth detoxification service has been set up in Western Sydney. The Government has introduced a psycho-stimulants strategy, with new projects targeted at ecstasy, amphetamine and cocaine use. The strategy will include a community information and education campaign to warn drug users and their families of the risks associated with these types of drugs. The Carr Government has also provided funding for telephone information and counselling services. It has increased funding to Family Drug Support, which provides advice and support for families affected by drug use. It has also increased funding to the Alcohol and Drug Information Service, which provides general drug and alcohol information statewide.

The Carr Government has provided funding for the rural integrated care trial on the North Coast and for the heroin overdose prevention strategy. The Government has established an infrastructure program for non-government organisations to help those valuable service providers maintain their premises for fire-rating and accreditation purposes. Prevention and education have been debated at length in this Chamber and, in my opinion, will be the key to the future. The Carr Government has taken up the challenge by putting its efforts and funding where they are most needed. More help and information have been made available for parents, including support for parents with new babies, and advice has been provided on how to broach the subject of drugs with teenagers.

Young people now have ready access to accurate information on drugs. As well, communities receive encouragement and support to tackle drug problems locally. Since 1999 many programs have been funded. These include the Families First Program, with funding of \$117.5 million being provided over four years to support all families with children up to eight years of age. Families First helps parents build skills and confidence in parenting, improves children's health and helps parents respond to problems early. For example, nurse home visits are now provided to 30,000 babies each year.

The Government has introduced a new mandatory 25-hour course called Crossroads into all government secondary schools for year 11 and year 12 students. It also introduced into 44 schools across the State a program entitled Healing Time, which is a resource for junior secondary Aboriginal students, with a further 83 schools receiving material in the first semester of 2003. A new Healing Time resource is also in all New South Wales Government primary schools. The Carr Government, in partnership with young people, produced the Drug Smart Z-card and distributed it throughout the State during Youth Week. The Family Matters drug information kit for families has been extremely popular in the Kiama electorate. When I visit constituents in their homes I see the information kit used as a fridge magnet; it contains more important information than some of the propaganda sent out by the Liberal Party.

The drug information kit was sent to all families of government high school students and distributed to Catholic and independent schools. The Carr Government established 72 community drug action teams in metropolitan, rural and regional New South Wales. These teams include members of church organisations, businesses, welfare groups, councils and government agencies. The teams devise innovative ways of raising awareness of drug problems in local communities. In 1999 the Leader of the Opposition spoke in the debate on the Drug Summit Legislative Response Bill. He stated:

I was one of only six Liberal members of Parliament to support the motion to trial a medically supervised injecting room, but my decision to exercise my free vote in support of this proposal came the week before the Summit.

He concluded by stating:

The real test of this bill and the Government's total response will be measured in human life and a reduction in drug addiction, drug availability and drug usage ... those are the real tests for the Government, and I and others intend to maintain a critical review. We await the results.

The results have been debated in this Chamber as a result of an independent report, and I urge honourable members to consider the facts. Like the Carr Government, members should take an evidence-based approach and support the extension of the trial to 2007.

Mr CONSTANCE (Bega) [11.36 a.m.]: As a representative of a rural constituency that does not face the same challenges as those faced in the Kings Cross area, I spent considerable time researching and examining the Carr Labor Government's independent evaluation of the medically supervised injecting room. My reason for not supporting the bill is based on statements and facts in the report. I have spoken to many members of the legal profession who believe there is some merit in supporting the concept of an injecting room as a means by which drug users can be rehabilitated. However, the report is inconclusive in many respects. It states:

There was no evidence that the operation of the MSIC affected the number of heroin overdose deaths in the Kings Cross area.

It also states:

The proportion of ambulance attendances to opioid overdoses in the Kings Cross area that took place during hours of MSIC operation changed little during the Evaluation compared to the equivalent calendar period prior to the Evaluation.

The report continues:

Subsequent to the opening of the MSIC, there were further reductions in the number of opioid overdose ambulance attendances in the Kings Cross area and across NSW. These reductions were associated with the ongoing fall in heroin availability. It was not possible to distinguish the role of the MSIC in reducing demand on ambulance services from the effect of the continued reduction in heroin availability.

Even after a trial period of 18 months the independent evaluation is inconclusive. The Government should have the guts to put its real intention on the table and make the injecting room a permanent fixture. It will not do so because it knows that the majority of people throughout the State are uncomfortable with the concept of an injecting room. That is why we have legislation relating to a trial, rather than legislation that will make the medically supervised injecting centre a permanent fixture.

I listened to the honourable member for Bligh, and I understand that compassion is required when dealing with these problems. However, we must work our way through the problems so that we achieve the best and most viable outcomes for the entire New South Wales community. With the trial, we are sanctioning the use of an illegal product in a legal way. I am concerned about the Government's intentions in relation to drugs and drug law reform. The Government needs to put that on the table, because the issue was not raised during the recent State election campaign.

The report contains a number of alarming figures. There has been spin doctoring in the press because the Government wants to soften the political impact of the trial. When I read the report I was astounded to learn that there had been 56,861 visits to the medically supervised injecting centre during the 18-month trial, with an average of 15 visits per client, ranging from one visit for one person to 646 visits for another person. That person has made 646 visits to an injecting centre but we have not been able to get that person into a referral centre or into the care and support they need. The report has produced some alarming outcomes. In relation to the independent evaluation, the report states that the injecting centre provided referrals to treatment for drug dependence for 11 per cent of clients.

I suppose the best spin is that the more frequent attendees at the centre were more likely to be referred for treatment and to take up the referral. The report further states that of that 11 per cent, only 1 per cent of the 4,000-odd registered users of the centre—that is, fewer than 50 people—took up referrals to deal with their drug dependence. That is a tragedy. That means that the Government, in experimenting with this approach, has not been able to put in place necessary referral procedures to ensure that more people are getting off drugs, which was the original intention of the trial. That means that the trial is not a success—or not the success the Government hoped it would be. The report is inconclusive. The fact that the report does not spell out clearly the number of lives that were saved, the nature of the referrals, and the way people were successfully taken from the injecting centre and put into referral procedures is reason to no longer support the concept of the trial. National Party members will have a conscience vote on this bill because we want the public to have greater input into and debate on this issue.

The State Government, through the Southern Area Health Service, spends \$1.6 million to service 200,000 people. In the Bega electorate that is \$300,000 spent annually on dealing with drug rehabilitation. The report states that the annual injecting centre operating costs would be sufficient to fund approximately 100 residential rehabilitation beds in non-government organisations offering residential drug dependents treatment based on a daily cost of \$65. The initial cost per client visit to the injecting centre was \$63.01, and it is now projected to be \$37.23. The broader community does not know that it is costing New South Wales taxpayers \$63 per visit to the injecting centre, yet in regional areas, such as Bega, \$8 per capita is spent annually on drug rehabilitation.

The cost benefit of the injecting centre to the community must be questioned. It strikes me that the inequity between an injecting centre and the opportunity cost of putting 100 rehabilitation beds into non-government organisations is not being debated. The report further states—and this is one of the most concerning aspects of it—that whether the money could have been better spent in other areas is a matter for public debate. That is taken from the independent evaluation of the trial. We will debate this bill and vote on it today, and we have not had a public debate as to whether the money could be better spent in other areas of drug rehabilitation.

I am concerned that the report does not stipulate the number of lives saved. In terms of benefit, the evaluation committee recognised that there were 380 heroin overdoses and that not one life was lost. That says something. But then we must ask this question: How many lives were lost in regional and rural areas as a result of drugs, youth suicide or any one of the many other issues confronting the local community? The honourable member for Bligh said that the confiscated proceeds of crime are used to fund the injecting centre. Based on what is contained in the independent evaluation report, I believe that the confiscated proceeds of crime could be better spent in funding 100 residential rehabilitation beds in non-government organisations across the entire State. For those reasons, I will not support the bill. If the Government intended to make the injecting room a permanent fixture it should have introduced legislation to that effect. I firmly believe that in four years time, when another independent evaluation of the injecting centre at Kings Cross is undertaken, the results will be the same.

Mr MILLS (Wallsend) [11.47 a.m.]: I am pleased to support the Drug Summit Legislative Response Amendment (Trial Period Extension) Bill. The Drug Summit was a watershed in policy debate and formulation regarding how the community should deal with the problem of people addicted to illicit drugs and the use of those drugs. At the Drug Summit a significant change occurred in public attitudes to illicit drug addiction. I believe that that was largely thanks to the positive and co-operative approach taken by members of Parliament and other delegates in assessing the various policy options available so that we could move forward to achieving a national drug strategy. For the first time, during and after the Drug Summit people like Tony Trimmingham from Family Drug Support became widely heard. They explained the nature of drug addiction and the devastating consequences on families affected by the drug addiction of a family member.

Having lost his son to an overdose, Tony Trimmingham had the courage to rethink his position and to set up a group of people who could help other families to cope with the problems that drug addiction causes to their families. Prior to the Drug Summit and in the immediate period afterwards one of the many problems often referred to in my electorate office was how families and particularly parents—sometimes grandparents as well—dealt with the problems caused by a drug addict living with them and causing them great grief. So I applaud Tony Trimmingham and others like him for having the courage to come forward at the Drug Summit and help change community attitudes.

The Summit recommended, by majority, some difficult, awkward and controversial steps as well as some well-agreed steps. The key was that those steps were designed to try to save the lives of drug addicts. They placed the appropriately high value on every life and respected the life of every person, even if that person was addicted. Steps were also taken to acknowledge that addicted people have a health problem and that their addiction should be treated as such and not perceived as a criminal justice problem deserving punishment. The Labor Government responded to the Drug Summit with a legislative package that contained many steps. One of those was the establishment of a trial of a medically supervised injecting centre. Importantly, that was part of a package of an extra \$170 million of funding over four years for drug rehabilitation, treatment, education, detoxification, and so on. A necessary part of establishing the trial of the medically supervised injecting centre was a good, independent and proper evaluation of it.

Listening to the debate this morning I have been reminded of where I started in this debate, that is, when I was elected to serve on the Joint Select Committee into Safe Injecting Rooms in 1997. That committee was initially chaired by the Hon. Patricia Staunton, MLC. When she left Parliament the chair was taken over by

the Hon. Ann Symonds, MLC. A number of present members of the two Houses served on that committee 5½ or six years ago. They include the honourable member for Cronulla and the honourable member for Bligh, both of whom took part in debate this morning. I seem to be following those two members of the committee in debating these issues. It is interesting to reflect on some matters raised in the report on the establishment or trial of safe injecting rooms, as they were called. The executive summary on page XV of the report stated:

This Inquiry has its genesis in a recommendation made by Commissioner Wood in the Final Report on the Royal Commission into the New South Wales Police Service. Evidence had been presented to the Royal Commission that illegal shooting galleries, that is, places where drug users go to buy injecting equipment and rent a room for a short period of time to inject drugs, were operating in Kings Cross often with the approval of the police. Given that such a situation could give rise to corrupt practices, and that illegal drug use is an ongoing phenomenon in our society, Commissioner Wood recommended that "consideration be given to the establishment of safe, sanitary injecting rooms under the licence or supervision of the Department of Health, and to amendment of the Drug Misuse and Trafficking Act 1985 accordingly".

That is where we are coming from. That idea has flowed through the Drug Summit and the injecting room now being trialled thanks to the previous legislation. We are in the process of extending that trial. The honourable member for Cronulla seems to be an unreconstructed reactionary. He still uses the term "shooting gallery" even though the rest of us have moved on from there. He probably still refers to Qantas as TAA and to Westpac as the Bank of New South Wales. He has not moved on. At the suggestion of a Liberal member of the Legislative Council at the Drug Summit the term "safe" was abolished. That was done as an acknowledgement that people who inject poisonous substances into their veins are not doing anything that can be called safe. The Hon. John Ryan made an excellent suggestion late in the Summit that we should change the term to "medically supervised injecting room". I commend him for that. The commonsense of that approach is acknowledged in what we are now doing.

I have heard all the arguments before. In the report of the Joint Select Committee into Safe Injecting Rooms the arguments for the establishment or trial of injecting rooms from a health perspective were noted as having the potential to reduce fatal overdoses and to reduce the transmission of blood-borne viral infections. The report also noted that such facilities may provide injecting drug users with better access to primary medical care and improve the likelihood of them accessing drug treatment programs, and that injecting rooms may improve the occupational health and safety conditions of health workers and emergency service personnel. They are all matters that have been addressed in the evaluation of the trial of the medically supervised injecting centre. Arguments against the establishment or trial of an injecting room were also presented in the report. They were that injecting rooms could lead to an increase in drug use or in the number of injecting drug users, that they may delay injecting drug users from seeking rehabilitation, and that there are potential health and safety implications both for those using, and for those working in, the injecting room.

The report went on to give the arguments for the establishment or trial of injecting rooms from a social perspective. Those arguments included the possibility that they may lead to a reduction in the public nuisance aspects of injecting drug use, that they may reduce opportunities for police corruption and the incidence of some criminal activities, and that they may improve the likelihood of reintegration of injecting drug users into mainstream society. Again, arguments against the establishment or trial of injecting rooms were presented from a social perspective. Arguments for the establishment or trial of injecting rooms from an economic perspective were given in that report. They included reducing the cost to the community associated with the treatment of overdoses and the treatment of people who contract blood-borne viral infections, and so on. We have been there before.

There are no new arguments, but the key difference 5½ years on, thanks to the courage of the Drug Summit delegates, the Carr Government and the majority of members in this Parliament, is that we have our own evidence in New South Wales. I thank the Premier and the Special Minister of State for having the courage to continue to implement the recommendations of the Drug Summit. That evidence is in the evaluation report. We have not had that report before; we only had the arguments. Whether one agrees with the bill or not, the Government has done the responsible thing and gathered the evidence. Those who gathered the evidence were independent people of great integrity and competence. We can have great respect for this report because of those people.

They were Professor John Kaldor, the Deputy Director of the National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research at the University of New South Wales; Helen Lapsley, formerly a senior lecturer at the School of Public Health and Community Medicine at the same university; Professor Richard Mattick, the Director of the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre; Dr Don Weatherburn, the Director of the New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research; and Dr Andrew Wilson, formerly the Chief Health Officer in the New South Wales Department of Health. I commend them for their report and for the

thoroughness of it. Their evidence concerning the injecting centre at Kings Cross revealed some warts. The uptake of the opportunity for referral to detoxification or treatment is lower than I would have hoped, but it is there and it has been measured by the evaluating committee. I refer to this dot point in the report:

- Approximately one in 41 visits resulted in a referral for further assistance. Among the 1,385 referrals for further assistance made for 577 clients, 43% were for the treatment of drug dependence, 32% were to primary health-care facilities and 25% were to social welfare services.

One of the great benefits of the centre is that we have been able to measure the referral basis for it. There was success in referring people who may well not have been referred for treatment or to social services if the centre had not been operating. Other evidence relates to overdoses. In this regard the report stated:

It is likely that the MSIC staff had prevented some overdose fatalities among those who used the Centre ...

On the basis of clinical and epidemiological data on heroin overdose outcomes, at least four deaths per year are estimated to have been prevented by clinical intervention of the staff at the MSIC.

Lives have been saved! The objectives of the first stage of the trial are being achieved. We cannot ignore the evidence in the report to that effect. Some Opposition members said that the money spent on the centre should be spent on detoxification and rehabilitation programs. That argument is not sustainable. The Government is already spending some of the Drug Summit response package funding on such programs. I know from my activities as a local member of Parliament that money is being spent all across New South Wales, including in regional areas, to fund those programs. Before the Drug Summit, once or twice a month a desperate addict would knock on my office door seeking my help to get a place in a detoxification and rehabilitation program. But in the Hunter region, and in many parts of New South Wales, places simply were not available. People were told they had to wait three months for a place, but often by that time the addict had changed his mind.

Since the Drug Summit, the injection of money, and the additional places for detoxification and rehabilitation—which previous speakers have referred to—I have been approached by only a couple of people and in both cases I have been able to refer them for immediate placement in a Hunter-based detoxification and rehabilitation unit. While I am sure that some people are still not able to get immediate referral, the Government has provided extra money for the programs. The Opposition cannot use the argument that the money spent on the centre should be spent on detoxification and rehabilitation places, because those places are already funded.

During the recent Alcohol Summit I took a trip, together with other interested members—including the Minister for Justice, the honourable member for Vacluse, the honourable member for Davidson, and the Leader of the National Party—to Silverwater remand centre and Mulawa women's prison. We were told that 50 to 70 per cent of incoming prisoners needed immediate detoxification, almost all for alcohol dependency. That is an expensive process that occurs throughout all New South Wales gaols.

Another element of the drug treatment package that the Government has implemented following the Drug Summit is a 12-bed unit at the remand centre to which the Drug Court at Parramatta can refer offenders for drug treatment. I also had the opportunity to talk to some of the offenders. I commend the Government for the introduction of the medically supervised injecting centre at Kings Cross and I commend the extension of the trial period.

Mr MAGUIRE (Wagga Wagga) [12.02 p.m.]: I am on record as having participated in the Drug Summit and for my opposition to the injecting rooms. I have read the report and the evaluation on the injecting centre, and they contain nothing new that would change my mind. For the many reasons put forward by previous speakers today, particularly the Deputy Leader of the Opposition and the honourable member for Bega, I will not support the extension of this so-called trial. I would not support the supply of alcohol to alcoholics, nor the suggestion to allow underage drinkers to experiment with alcohol. I would view favourably the allocation of extra funding for rehabilitation and extra resources for prosecuting peddlers of illicit drugs, particularly heroin, of death and destruction. For those reasons I will vote against this bill.

Mr ORKOPOULOS (Swansea) [12.03 p.m.]: I support the legislation. Firstly, I would like to address some of the issues that have been raised by Opposition members, who, surprisingly, although they can have a conscience vote, have all indicated they will vote against the bill. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition tried to construct an argument on the basis of the evaluation that the trial was wrong and should be abandoned, and that other forms of therapy or treatment should take place. If I could be so bold, I suggest that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition is hardly a visceral model of constraint. Just to say no to drugs or to implement other more extreme versions of treatment, which he advocates, does not address the problem.

Following the Drug Summit in 1999, it was imperative that the Government chart a new course of treatment. It was important that we not only expand the range of treatment options for people addicted to heroin but also expand the methadone program, particularly in rural and regional New South Wales, where there was an absence of such programs. We had to provide treatment to people who had identified a problem with a whole range of illicit drugs. The Government has done that, and this bill will ensure that the excellent work started at Kings Cross will continue.

The Government has focused on prevention, education, treatment, and law enforcement. We have introduced a suite of treatments to deal with drugs in our community. Our focus on prevention and education includes drug education for our young people. Through the personal development, health and physical education [PDHPE] curriculum in our schools, which is considered one of the best in the world, our young people receive the best education and information on drugs. However, as was pointed out at the Drug Summit, our young people are often better educated than their parents. Some parents get drunk at home or take various types of drugs. We have to also reach the older generation and educate them about drugs. As to treatment, this bill provides for one aspect of a suite of treatments for illicit drugs.

I am not impressed with the Opposition's argument that because the results of the evaluation of the centre show that only a small number of lives have been saved the centre should be closed. Every life saved should be cherished. You cannot have the philosophy that abortion or termination is wrong because of the value of life, yet say that this trial should be abolished because only one or two lives have been saved. You either value life or you do not. As to promoting the value of healthy lifestyles to people who, unfortunately, are addicted to heroin or other illicit substances, we need to ensure that these people are referred to rehabilitation programs and continue with them. Even if the evaluation is inconclusive, we must ensure that we refer these people to programs that will lead them to a healthy lifestyle.

I believe that any opposition to this bill is opposition to life and a healthy way of dealing with this difficult problem. It continues on from the old 1999 opposition, sponsored by the former Leader of the Opposition, Mrs Chikarovski, and does not bring anything of value to this debate. The Opposition has not introduced any new element into the debate, other than the interesting point made by the honourable member for Bega. He asked why the Government is not treating this as a permanent solution or preventative strategy in its armoury to deal with this problem. Why are we continuing with a trial? Without consulting the oracles, I believe we must continue the trial and the evaluation process so we can improve access to drug rehabilitation programs to ensure that addicts live. Every life lost would be a stain on my conscience if this trial were scrapped. For that reason I cannot oppose this bill, and I commend it to the House.

Ms HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck) [12.11 p.m.]: I oppose this Government bill. Once again I voice my opposition to the medically supervised heroin injecting room, as I did four years ago when I spoke at the Drug Summit. I can never condone the use of illicit drugs. Community leaders such as members of Parliament have a responsibility to act as role models for our constituents, who look to us for advice and leadership. The drug house at Kings Cross condones heroin use and I can never agree with that. This Parliament should provide incentives for people to stop using heroin once and for all; it must never encourage its use. We should provide more beds and rehabilitation services for the many people who want to stop using heroin; that must be our priority.

When I hear that millions of dollars are being spent on this interjecting room I cannot help but think how much more effectively that money could be used in providing beds and an opportunity for people to get off heroin. Some people start taking drugs in gaol and elsewhere. It is our responsibility to discourage them from using drugs and to help them to get off them. We have a responsibility as members of Parliament to act responsibility in this regard and to provide disincentives, community education, rehabilitation, and so on. Very simply, I oppose the bill.

Ms BURNEY (Canterbury) [12.14 p.m.]: I support this bill and welcome the extension of the heroin interjecting room trial in Kings Cross until 31 October 2007. I speak from a slightly different perspective in supporting this legislation. Like many other honourable members, I was a delegate at the 1999 Drug Summit. I did not attend as a politician but as a community representative. After the Summit I was invited to be a member of the expert advisory group responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Summit's recommendations and decisions. Therefore, I do not speak from a position of ignorance. I understand the range, flexibility and diversity of the Summit outcomes and recommendations regarding the interjecting room, juvenile justice centres, school education, and the prison system. I understand the entirety of the Drug Summit's goals.

As parliamentarians and lawmakers we have an obligation to think compassionately about the extension of the trial. I have just come from the launch of the Catholic Church's annual social justice statement, which deals with compassion and the way in which we act as a society. I am not trying to be dramatic but, from my perspective, one of the shining lights in the implementation of the Drug Summit outcomes is the bravery and flexibility displayed and the desire to have as many options as possible for dealing with the issue of drug use, particularly injecting drug use, in Sydney.

I have met people who have used the facility at Kings Cross. More importantly, people in my family and young people very close to me have died as a result of heroin use. We cannot step away from that as individuals and as members of society. We cannot simply say that heroin use is wrong and that junkies are hopeless and should be able to cope as well as anyone else. Many heroin users are young people; any of them could be our daughters, sons and cousins—in fact, many are. They all have families who love them and who are as desperate as they are to do something about their addiction.

We live in a very tough world in which some people find reality impossible to bear. Many people's lives are destroyed almost from the moment of birth. We live in a world that questions many of the things we hold to be true and is changing rapidly. Of course, some people feel they cannot cope and as a result they get caught in a terrible downwards spiral to injecting drug use. Many users also suffer from diseases such as hepatitis C. The evaluation of the injecting room considered those issues. I would like all honourable members to think about the many things that lead to people putting a needle in their arm and possibly dying as a result. If there is anything that lawmakers can do to help deal with this situation—whether it be by providing more beds, more detoxification centres, or a safe place to use heroin, and therefore providing assistance and support to do something about this terrible addiction—I believe we have a responsibility to support it. At the end of the day, what is so dreadful about it? We need to remember that anyone who walks in the door of the injecting room could be near and dear to us.

Heroin does not choose a certain socioeconomic group; it does not choose between males and females; and it does not choose between people who have had a dreadful life and those who have had a good life. It is simply a dreadful reality of our society that this drug is a part of it, and part of the solution is that we have to deal with it from a very real perspective. As I said earlier, if there is a suite of ways in which we can deal with this scourge, and an injecting room is part of that, we should all embrace it, and it should be within the framework of compassion.

I emphasise once again that drug addiction can touch every one of our lives. Indeed, it has touched the lives of my family and friends. We sat with my 18-year-old niece for 25 minutes after a life-support machine was taken off her, until her heart stopped. My niece was not a bad person; she was a kid who got caught up in the dreadful web of heroin use. Notwithstanding the evaluation and the fact that the heroin injecting room has become an accepted part of the community in which it exists, I feel absolutely compelled to support any measure whatsoever that will support people who are caught up in the awful spiral of heroin use. For those reasons, I believe that supporting this trial for the next four years is the brave thing to do, it is the right thing to do, and, above all, it is the compassionate thing to do. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr APLIN (Albury) [12.23 p.m.]: The honourable member for Canterbury asked what is wrong with the injecting room. One may well ask: What is wrong with heroin? What is wrong with alcohol? What is wrong with abuse? What is wrong with violence in general? All these go to the heart of the issue: that we have laws in this land. As parliamentarians we also have a responsibility to acknowledge the weakness of the human condition, and to support those who fail in some way to support themselves. Sometimes it is easy to take a cop-out and abuse the law that we ourselves set. I ask whether this is an example of such a cop-out.

I recently spoke in support of, and voted for, the extension of police powers to examine and detect drugs in border regions. I find it incompatible that I should then turn around and support the use of drugs. I find the support of the drug trade despicable. I believe that the peddlers of death and destruction deserve the highest possible penalties for wreaking the havoc they do on our society. I also find it incompatible that we should support the weakness by feeding the habit. I believe in rehabilitation, and that we need to spend much more money on it. I believe that this area is not supported wholeheartedly by the Government.

During the recent Alcohol Summit I, along with other members, visited a rehabilitation house in the Illawarra. The staff told me about the extent of their work in the detoxification and rehabilitation of young people who are caught up in the web of drug and alcohol dependency. I know of people who have been caught up in drug addiction and had their lives ruined, and I also know of those who have had the strength and support

to come through on the other side and rebuild their lives. That is what we should be aiming at; that is the mission we should be setting ourselves.

Last week I participated in the launch of a rehabilitation fundraising drive organised by Albury-Wodonga Community Care. It is entitled "The Drug Run", because in the current climate that terminology attracts attention. The purpose of the fundraising drive is not to run drugs but to raise funds to support the rehabilitation of those who, unfortunately, have got caught up in a drug addiction. The rehabilitation unit, Granya House, whose establishment I played a role in, receives not one single dollar in New South Wales Government support. Shame, shame, shame!

Granya House serves the border region as a whole and receives people from all of southern New South Wales and even further afield. Indeed, I believe that some people who live in northern areas of the State register for attendance at Granya House. Granya House is now run by Faith City because there is no government support for it. The unit raises its funds from the community, and it involves itself in the mission of rehabilitating people who, unfortunately, have been caught up in drug addiction. That is the mission we should be setting ourselves: the rehabilitation of those individuals, and the hard work that it takes to accept that they have been caught up in the addiction and to work their way through it so they can return to their lives as worthwhile, supported citizens who can play a proper role, rather than the role they have been forced into in some cases, or have sunk into through their own weakness or whatever condition affects them. It is up to us to support those people, and to support those who are raising funds for their rehabilitation. For those reasons I cannot support the bill.

Mr ARMSTRONG (Lachlan) [12.27 p.m.]: I listened with interest to this morning's debate, which reflected that a number of Government members have been either requested or told to support the Government's position on the continuation of the trial of the medically supervised injecting room at Kings Cross. However, very few members addressed the real issue in this debate: the continuation of the injecting room as a trial. The purpose of this debate is not to canvass the plethora of ideas regarding the use of drugs in the community. The question that needs to be asked is: What has been achieved by the injecting room that has been set up in Kings Cross at a cost of \$18 million? I do not think anyone has been able to demonstrate that the injecting room has achieved any beneficial result in reducing the number of drug addicts in this city and saving any more than some, at best, 13 lives.

Last night at about sunset as I walked through Martin Place I noticed behind the fruit and flower barrow about eight men who had received an evening meal from one of the charities. I glanced quickly at the men and it was obvious that some of them were suffering, or had suffered in the past, from the effects of alcohol. The weekend before last I met with a man whom I have known for many years who is dying of lung cancer. The Government is not advocating that we should set up establishments where people can go and drink because they have a drinking problem, like some of the eight men I observed last night. The Government is not advocating that we should set up smoking rooms for people who have an addiction to smoking, despite the fact that people are dying as a result of that addiction. However, for some reason—perhaps because it has no other thought on the matter—it has decided that the answer to the drugs problem is an injecting room in Kings Cross.

Mr Cansdell: An easy way out.

Mr ARMSTRONG: It is. If it worked I would be the first to say, "Well done". But there is not one scintilla of evidence that the injecting room has done anything to reduce the amount of drugs in the community and the effect they have on young people's lives and on middle-aged people's lives. As the honourable member for Albury said, drugs are non-selective—they apply to all socioeconomic classes in the community. I suggest that rather than continue with this experiment to placate a few academics and maybe backroom people in the Government we should have a look at advertising campaigns. If an advertising campaign against alcohol is working, if an advertising campaign against smoking is working—smoking is banned in virtually every building in the State and every children's playground, which I support—why do we not have the same sort of advertising campaign in relation to drugs? Has the Government got it right? The Government cannot have it both ways. Tobacco is a drug, alcohol is a drug and heroin is a drug. They are all drugs. They have a common bond. Why are we saying that hard drugs—injectable drugs—are different from other drugs? There is a lack of common thinking on how to manage a community problem.

The injecting room has been an interesting experiment. It has cost \$18 million and the results are there for all to see: it has achieved very little. On the other hand, we believe that the heavy advertising campaigns against smoking may be preventing some people from taking up smoking—and that is a good thing. We would hope that the advertising in relation to alcohol consumption is working as well. The Alcohol Summit was held

three weeks ago and we talked about alcohol consumption for a week. If it is good enough to treat tobacco and alcohol, two of the hard drugs, in that manner why not the so-called injectable drugs as well? Let us forget this poppycock about creating a pleasant place in ideal conditions for people to continue their habit, which in many cases will lead to their downfall if not their death. I suspect that the Government is well behind the eight ball on this. It has been badly advised. It should re-examine the whole program and the advice it has been getting. The Government should reassess the position and have a look at the parallels of other drugs in the community.

Mr GEORGE (Lismore) [12.32 p.m.]: Along with the honourable member for Lachlan, the honourable member for Albury and the honourable member for Wagga Wagga, I am concerned about where we are going with this issue. As I have said in the House before and as I will say again: drugs are like cancer; no-one is immune to them—families, friends and relatives are not immune to them; young people and old people are not immune to them. It is common knowledge that when there has been a shortage of heroin on the drug market there has been a significant reduction in overdose deaths and events throughout New South Wales and Australia. As I understand it, from the figures that I have seen, clients who used the injecting room still did 98 per cent of their shooting up away from the room. We all know that the use of drugs causes a loss of production in the workforce and in households.

Money should be put into law enforcement and treatment because there is no such thing as safe drug use. I might be asked, "Well, where would you put the money?" My electorate of Lismore has a wonderful Riverlands detoxification and rehabilitation unit. However, although it helps people and puts them through the process, if family or friends do not pick them up from the unit on the day their treatment finishes they go back out on the street. This is where we can put the money. We need what I would term a halfway house—for want of a better description. Sadly, if friends or family do not pick them up they go straight back onto the streets, straight back into the cycle they have just come out of. It is a never-ending cycle.

Rural areas have drug problems and we need to provide non-government organisations with the means to support these detox and rehabilitation units. I would like to see a lot more funding put into education and the prosecution of the dealers who peddle death and destruction. I am sure I speak for the majority of people in the Lismore electorate when I say that we certainly do not want an injecting room in the area. More funding is needed for drug rehabilitation centres in rural areas in this State. I certainly will not be voting in favour of the bill. All members have been touched by the drug stories and the drug tragedies. I certainly will be voting against the bill.

Mr NEWELL (Tweed—Parliamentary Secretary), on behalf of Ms Meagher [12.38 p.m.], in reply: I thank all members for their contributions to this debate. I also restate the Government's position. The purpose of the bill is to extend for a further four years the trial period of the medically supervised injecting centre at Kings Cross so that it now concludes on 31 October 2007. The 1999 Drug Summit established a new direction for drug policy in New South Wales. It recognised the complexity of drug abuse and the need for a comprehensive approach.

The Government, in partnership with the community, is responding to the drug problem through prevention, education, treatment and law enforcement. In July 1999 the Government allocated \$176 million in additional funding to implement the Drug Summit's recommendations over four years. Building on the work since 1999, a new four-year, \$233 million plan has been announced. The Medically Supervised Injecting Centre is just one part of the Government's comprehensive approach. I point out to the honourable member for Lismore that the cost of the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre at Kings Cross is not the \$18 million that he claimed, but is more in the vicinity of \$8.3 million.

All aspects of the current licence, the terms and conditions for operating the centre and the trial remain unchanged for the additional period. The trial will continue to be carefully monitored over the next four years. The extension period will be used to trial and assess new approaches to encouraging drug users into treatment, and other research suggested by the New South Wales Expert Advisory Group on Drugs and the independent evaluators of the trial. The extension will provide an opportunity for information and data to be collected over a longer period and to take account of any changes in the drug market, such as any changes in the supply of heroin. The fact that the trial has a limited life gives the government of the day in 2007 the opportunity to consider its suitability both in terms of location and purpose. The Government has made the decision to extend the trial based on the report entitled "Final Evaluation Report of the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre—Trial" released on 9 July 2003 and on advice from the New South Wales Expert Advisory Group on Drugs.

I should like to make a few comments about some of the issues raised in this debate. In terms of the evaluation report, the independent evaluation of the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre was conducted by a group of respected academic researchers from highly regarded institutions. They relied not just on the data

collected for this evaluation but used other research and references to analyse and verify their results. The Government is confident about the reliability of the results. The independent evaluators provided a comprehensive and well-documented report to the Government in July. They found that, even by the most conservative estimate, lives were saved during the 18-month period under review. In the 12 months since, it is likely more lives would have been saved. Further, the evaluators found that 329 heroin overdose incidents were managed in the centre with no deaths. More than 500 such overdose incidents have now been managed by the centre. The evaluators have stated that had the centre staff not intervened, had they sat back, it is possible that some of these people might have died. It is also likely that some may have suffered serious brain or vital organ damage. The report tells us that 44 per cent of the people registered to use the centre had previously overdosed.

We should be quite clear that the typical client is a person dependent on heroin, engaged in a chaotic lifestyle, at high risk of overdose and injecting in public places. This is the centre's target client group. The centre, where help is at hand and where there is also the possibility of receiving other referrals for assistance, is a better place for these people than on the streets, injecting in the parks and back alleys of Kings Cross and perhaps dying there. Now more than 5,000 people are registered with the centre. The centre is building a relationship with some of these people. There are very limited comparable cost-effective options to engage with this particularly high-risk and intractable group of injecting drug users. Since the Drug Summit we have funded 100 rehabilitation beds and detoxification places and beds, drug treatment programs have been improved by the introduction of case management for clients and alternative pharmacotherapies such as buprenorphine have been introduced.

Many people have been able to deal with their drug addiction through these measures. Clients of the centre up until now have not succeeded in engaging with the health or justice systems where they might be encouraged or compelled to enter drug treatment. At least here we may still have a chance to help them. In relation to comments on referral for treatment, according to the evaluators, although the rate of confirmed referral uptake was not high, the rate of confirmed uptake was three times higher among clients who were regular attendees at the centre. Clients who visited the centre on more than 10 occasions were statistically almost 18 times more likely to have confirmed referral uptake. Almost one-third of written referrals for drug treatment were provided for clients who had not been in treatment before. The extension of the trial period will be used to assess new approaches to encouraging drug users into treatment. A special case manager will be appointed to the centre to build relationships with clients and service providers in the area, and to take a proactive approach in client referral and follow-up.

It is not possible to determine the number of people successfully completing treatment, as the evaluation did not follow individual clients across time if they did not stay in contact with the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre. Investigation of impediments to properly monitoring referrals, including impediments posed by the current New South Wales privacy legislation, will be undertaken during the trial extension. I should emphasise that the extension of the trial for four years is not a radical proposal. It will continue to be very carefully monitored. The Government will also continue to roll out its broad-based drug program. This is only one of many projects that are a part of our \$230 million package for the next four years. I commend the bill to the House.

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

The House divided.

Ayes, 56

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

Noes, 27

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

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a second time and passed through remaining stages.

BUDGET ESTIMATES AND RELATED PAPERS

Financial Year 2003-04

Debate resumed from 16 September.

Mr ARMSTRONG (Lachlan) [12.53 p.m.]: I am speaking very late in this budget debate. As a shadow Minister I would normally speak earlier in the debate but I had a problem. Budget Paper No. 3, Volume 3—which contains the estimates for Tourism and Sport and Recreation—was not available until some three weeks after the presentation of the budget. Therefore, it was impossible to make anything like an intelligent response until I saw this particular budget paper. Let me say at the outset that the budget is what we expected from this Government just after an election. The budget is without flair, imagination and, most importantly, structure and provision in terms of major construction and major positive capital expenditure. New South Wales is going through—hopefully, we are getting towards the end of it—the worst drought in history. I suspect that that may be right. Yet I cannot see anything in the budget to indicate that the Government is prepared for the next drought, which is inevitable. We live in a harsh climate, and droughts, floods and fires are part of that climate. Yet the budget is totally deficient in terms of addressing the problems that will invariably rise in the future.

Recently we received the Parry report on transport services, which contains a number of recommendations regarding the usage of rail, particularly in country areas. My electorate of Lachlan is a significant producer of grain and, because of its location in the State, is central to some major rail activity. I have both the southern line and the western line running either side of my electorate. One recommendation in the Parry report says that there should be a major transfer of freight from rail to road. However, I have failed to find anything in the Roads budget, particularly for my electorate, that indicates there will be any compensation or acknowledgement that there will be a major transfer of heavy freight onto country roads, if the Government accepts the recommendations in the Parry report. If CountryLink services are transferred from rail to bus, again we will have increased tonnage at normal speeds traversing roads that were not built for that. Our road and rail systems are more than 100 years old. Indeed, the compaction strengths in our roads were not designed to take the current freight requirements, let alone those that might impact on them if the Government accepts the Parry report.

There is no more critical issue than health funding. Fundamental to good life from the moment we are born through to death is having the best access to health facilities. Yet only this morning I read in the *Wagga Daily Advertiser* that, because of budgetary problems and remodelling at Wagga Wagga Base Hospital, there will be a long period when no elective surgery will be undertaken. So I ask: What is the responsibility of government? Anyone out on the street would say that the core responsibility of any government in power in Australia and in New South Wales in particular is to provide funding for health, education, and law and order. Those three things are fundamental. They are the most talked about subjects by political commentators, taxpayers, governments and oppositions. Yet we see in the budget papers that there is inadequate funding to support the health system.

Three area health services impact on my electorate of Lachlan. I understand that the Greater Murray Area Health Service is over budget by about \$10 million, the Southern Area Health Service is over budget by about \$8.5 million and the Mid Western Area Health Service is over budget by between \$8.5 million and \$9 million. In recent weeks we have had much drama because the midwifery service at Forbes District Hospital has been curtailed to five days a week. I do not think pregnant women can organise to have their babies only on week days. Nature did not intend it to be that way, but that is the way it is. It is a Monday to Friday delivery service in Forbes—the same as bread deliveries! Once again the Government has not recognised one of its fundamental responsibilities: adequate health funding. We are not asking for anything out of the box; we are simply asking for realistic health funding to keep reasonable services particularly in my electorate, which I speak so strongly about.

In two days I will have been a member of this place for 22 years. In that time the number of cases dealt with each week in my electorate by the Department of Community Services [DOCS] has increased from one or two cases a week to probably seven to ten. There seems to be a growing demand on the department. That is an unfortunate indictment of society, but let us not get into that today. Let us talk about the funding for DOCS and whether DOCS is being given sufficient resources to carry out its duties. I suggest that the escalation in family breakdowns, the increase in the number of dysfunctional families, and in the mobility of those dysfunctional families, with the large migration of people into smaller country towns and villages, are all factors that place all sorts of new pressures on DOCS. I simply ask the Government to reassess its assistance to DOCS so it can provide the necessary services. Demand is exceeding service in the electorate of Lachlan and, I suspect, elsewhere across the State.

Earlier I mentioned the drought. I understand that less than 8 per cent of farmers receive assistance in a drought. That speaks volumes for the preparedness of the farming community and its capacity to deal with what nature dishes out. However, I must make particular mention of some high-profile industries in my electorate that miss out on drought assistance. They are intensive industries: the poultry industry, the pig or pork industry, and the dairy industry. There are large and small operators in each of these industries in my electorate, yet they receive no assistance for the purchase of fodder. I have taken up that matter with the Government and with the Commonwealth. I believe the value of those industries is not properly realised in times of extreme distress, as we have experienced and are still experiencing across the State.

I want to make particular mention of Corrective Services. Junee is in my electorate, and there is a large gaol there. In the budget last year, some \$30 million was allocated to increase the size of Junee gaol dramatically. About two months after the budget was delivered, rumours started to permeate the region that the funding would not be forthcoming but would go to Kempsey instead. Inquiries were made and assurances were given that the rumour was not right and the money was intended for Junee. That came from the highest echelons within the gaol system. The budget brought down by the Government a few weeks ago proved that the rumours were right. The rumour mongers knew far more than the Government was admitting. All those funds, with the exception of \$5 million, will be used to pay for a new gaol at Kempsey. I have no doubt that there is a need for a gaol at Kempsey; all I am asking for is truth in presentation. I do not believe anyone in government is naïve enough to claim that they did not know months ago that the promised funding for Junee gaol was a smokescreen and it would never be realised. Once again, the community has been short-changed, and the trust that should exist between government and the community has been breached.

Tourism is one of the largest employers and generators of funding in the country. More than 75 per cent of international tourists who come to this country come to Sydney. It is the largest city in the nation and its most popular tourism city. In recent years it has been voted a number of times by international bodies as the number one tourist destination in the world. That is a commendable tribute to the wonderful aesthetics of the harbour, to the climate we enjoy for most of the year, to the entrepreneurs who have planned and put in their own money, and to the hoteliers, the restaurateurs, those who run tours and exhibitions, and the great staff that run those facilities. To a great extent country areas of New South Wales, which have a third of the State's population, depend on tourism as well. Unfortunately, less than 2 per cent of the international tourists who come to Sydney ever visit country areas of New South Wales. If the number of international tourists who visit inland New South Wales could be increased by 50 per cent, it would still be only 3 per cent of the total number of tourists. But it would make an enormous difference to our major resorts, convention centres and sporting facilities; it would allow investors to anticipate the needs of the international community for the next 30 to 40 years and to invest wisely.

Unfortunately, in the budget and in the paper entitled "Welcoming the World: Labor's plan to develop tourism", which was distributed recently by the ALP, there does not seem to be any longer term vision as to how

more of the tourist dollar will be captured for country New South Wales. There also seems the little vision as to how we will capture more international tourists in any event. Much of the paper has been predicated on the aftermath of the Olympics. Unfortunately, after the Olympics we had September 11 and the bushfires. However, I note that domestic tourism in Europe and in North America has increased. There has been a slight increase in Australia. In the past two years there have been record sales of caravans in Australia. In 1993-94 about 300 were sold; at the caravan and camping show held about six weeks ago at Rosehill racecourse more than 500 were sold in one weekend. There are many new caravans to be seen on the Newell Highway. That it is only tinkering around the edges, because the visitation rates and accommodation levels in the bulk of our resorts, hotels and motels across New South Wales have been fairly static. There has been no growth in those figures in the past 12 months.

Essentially, the budget for tourism this year has been cut back by some \$10 million or 10 per cent. There has also been a change in name of the department to the Department of Tourism and Sport and Recreation and the Minister is now the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation. The well-known and highly reputable body Tourism New South Wales has disappeared. I have been asked many times by those involved in the industry—the last being at a dinner on Sunday night of the Restaurant and Catering Association—why an agency name would be changed. Tourism New South Wales was a well-known brand name, a marketable brand, like Qantas, Coca-Cola or Shangri-La Hotels. They are brand names. Companies spend millions trying to establish brand names in the minds of ordinary people. Tourism New South Wales has been doing that for many years but it now seems to have been abandoned and absorbed into a new department. The brand now has to be resold. Someone might care to inform me what marketing advice was taken before the decision was made to abandon the well-known name Tourism New South Wales. The paper "Welcoming the World: Labor's plan to develop tourism" talks a great deal about what the Government has done since 1995. It states:

NSW's share of international visitors has grown from 58 percent in 1998 to 60 percent ... in June 2002. Our nearest competitor is Queensland with 44 percent ...

But only 2 per cent visit country areas, as I said earlier. The paper also states:

NSW also captures a large percentage of the important domestic market with 32.4 million leisure visits from the rest of Australia—that's 34.3 percent of the market. During the Olympics domestic visits to NSW peaked at 32.6 million or 35.4 percent of the market.

Of course they did. The Olympics are the number one event in the world, and there is no doubt that they were successful. The Games were successful because they were hosted by Australians. They were successful because of the wonderful volunteers, the magic weather and all the individuals who made them work. I cannot find any reference in the paper to Labor's plan to develop tourism or how the Government will attract tourism and economic activity from the World Swimming Championships, which will be held in Melbourne in two years' time. Honourable members should note that Melbourne also got that event. The World Swimming Championships will not be held in what was claimed in 2000 to be the world's best swimming pool. The swimming complex at Homebush was said to have the largest seating area, the best airconditioning system, the best pool technology and viscosity of water, the best diving pool and the best ambience. Yet Melbourne got the 2004 World Swimming Championships. There is nothing in the paper to show how the Government will try to get some of the backwash from that event and attract the tourists from Melbourne to New South Wales.

Where will the 2006 Commonwealth Games be held? They will also be held in Melbourne. Those pesky southerners are pretty good: they get out of bed early down there. They have done us over again. Again there is no reference in the paper to any program or initiative to attract some of the tourist activity that will be married to the 2006 Commonwealth Games to New South Wales. Some critics might say it is a little early to plan for that. It is not, because tourism activities are planned over a five-year span. Honourable members should think back to the Olympics.

The Government has a long way to go before tourism is acknowledged as a proper industry. It has to give more support to the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation. The Premier and the Treasurer have short-changed the Minister: she has been left to try to sell a program without any funds. I call on the Government to make a significant and intelligent contribution to the efforts of the Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation to attract tourists and events to New South Wales. This matter has also been referred to in another paper, but again there is little indication of an imaginative marketing capacity. That paper refers to the development of a cruise ship tourism strategy. It states:

Cruise ships visiting Sydney inject an estimated \$30 million a year into the State's economy—approximately \$1 million per vessel.

I have no doubt that is correct. Cruise ships do not come here by accident. As has been said on many occasions, Sydney is recognised as the world's number one tourist destination; it has the world's best harbour. The paper continues:

A Cruise Ship Tourism Strategy will ensure NSW remains the number one cruise destination in Australia.

It will focus on increasing the number of cruise ships visiting both Sydney and regional NSW ports, and developing pre and post cruise opportunities to encourage passengers to begin their cruise or extend their stay in NSW.

Build on the excellent results with our *Shortbreaks* campaigns encouraging Sydneysiders to travel to country NSW.

The paper does not say how the Government will encourage tourism. It is only words; there is no substance. The Government should spell it out; it should tell the people how it will manage tourism more positively and achieve greater productivity in this great State of ours. The budget is disappointing. It is without vision; it has no bait to attract business, industry or tourism to the State. It does not acknowledge that rural New South Wales has one-third of the State's population and that agriculture is still the single largest employer in this nation and the single largest utiliser of materials.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Yeadon.

[Mr Speaker left the chair at 1.14 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]

MINISTRY

Mr CARR: I advise honourable members that during the absence of the Minister for Health I will answer questions relating to his portfolio.

PETITIONS

Gaming Machine Tax

Petition supporting the increase in gaming machine taxes and welcoming the fact that all extra revenue will be spent on the health system, received from **Ms Keneally**.

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**.

Mount Austin High School

Petition requesting funding for the installation of airconditioning in all learning spaces at Mount Austin High School, received from **Mr Maguire**.

Gaming Machine Tax

Petitions opposing the decision to increase poker machine tax, received from **Mr Oakeshott**, **Mr O'Farrell**, **Mr Pringle** and **Mr Tink**.

Cudgen Creek Seaway

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

Dunoon Dam

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

Urban Planning

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

White City Site Rezoning Proposal

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

Lidcombe Hospital Heritage Precinct

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

Bushfires and Hazard Reduction

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

Lane Cove Rotary Athletics Field

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

Trunk Road 120 Upgrade

Petition requesting substantial upgrades to Trunk Road 120, known as the Megan Road, and installation of guardrails at Deep Creek and Bielsdown Creek, received from **Mr Fraser**.

Jingellic to Holbrook Road Upgrading

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

Hornsby Shire Rail Parking Facilities

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

Redfern and Surry Hills Bus Services

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

Newcastle Rail Services

Petition opposing the removal of Newcastle rail services, received from **Mr Orkopoulos**.

Community-based Preschools

Petition requesting adjustment of funding to ensure viability of community-based preschools, received from **Mr George**.

Wagga Wagga Electorate Fruit Fly Control

Petition requesting funding for fruit fly control/eradication in Wagga Wagga, Lockhart, Holbrook and Tumbarumba, received from **Mr Maguire**.

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**.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**Reordering of General Business**

Mr O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [2.25 p.m.]: I move:

That the General Business Notice of Motion (General Notice) given by me today [Honourable Member for Wentworthville] have precedence on Thursday 18 September 2003.

This House needs some answers. This House needs an explanation from the Hon. Pam Allan, the honourable member for Wentworthville, as to what she did with the money she received from Environmental Resources Management [ERM] Australia. This House needs answers from the former Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning, Andrew Refshauge, as to what ERMA decisions she took. This is a serious matter. This issue goes to the code of conduct that covers all members of this House. Breaches of that code of conduct can lead to the expulsion of members of this House.

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

Mr O'FARRELL: In introducing that code, this Government stated:

The rules prohibiting corruption must be as clear and simple as possible so that there is no excuse not to follow them, and no excuse as to what they mean.

The code of conduct states that members "must divest" themselves of conflicts of interest in a number of ways: the pecuniary interests register, in the House, in the committee, and in any other appropriate way. This member, the Hon. Pam Allan, failed to do so before a committee of this place. She is Chairman of the Standing Committee on Natural Resource Management and she is a director of Environmental Resources Management Australia [ERMA]. From the committee, she receives \$15,000 a year. From ERM, she gets tens of thousands of dollars. She cannot continue to hold both positions. She has a conflict of interest. She is in breach of the code. She needs to resign one position.

The very helpful Deputy Premier has confirmed that the honourable member for Wentworthville took people with commercial interests associated with ERM to his office. She did not declare, according to his office, that she was a director of ERM during those meetings. That is a clear conflict of interest. Her action is clearly in breach of the code of conduct. That requires an explanation from both the Hon. Pam Allan and the former Minister. If we want to ignore the code of conduct, which this Government does time and time again, let us adopt the Premier's test.

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

Mr O'FARRELL: The Premier's test on Mike Carlton's program this morning was that "full disclosure is the key" to this matter. The Hon. Pam Allan did not disclose to the standing committee her directorship of ERM and she did not disclose to Andrew Refshauge on the occasions of two meetings that she was a director of ERM. She has failed the Premier's test. What are you, you dolt, going to do about it? It is time that the Premier stood up for standards in public office. It is time that he sacked this woman because he cannot have it both ways.

This is a Government that is not prepared to put public standards ahead of the snouts in the trough of its members, but there are those of us who are enjoying this today. Labor's Left loves this because these leaks came from Labor's Left and they were confirmed by the leader of the Left. This is a dirty deal within the Australian Labor Party [ALP] but it goes to the heart of government in New South Wales. The Hon. Pam Allan cannot continue to have both jobs. She should resign from one of them. We need to know what she got the money for, what she has done, and what the Premier is going to do about it. [*Time expired.*]

Mr SCULLY (Smithfield—Minister for Roads, and Minister for Housing) [2.29 p.m.]: How dare the Deputy Leader of the Opposition stand in this House and reflect badly on the good name of the honourable member for Wentworthville! We have some questions: What did the Leader of the Opposition do for \$110,000? What did he do for that? How dare the Deputy Leader of the Opposition attack the Hon. Pam Allan. What did the Leader of the Opposition do for a grubby \$110,000?

Mr O'Farrell: Point of order: He did not get patronage—

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

Mr SCULLY: What a political stunt! Honourable members opposite are throwing rocks at a giant glasshouse. He who has sinned should not cast the first stone. They are all sinners; they are on the rots. The Leader of the Opposition did not ask the question. He had his hand in the till to the tune of \$110,000. How dare he put the Deputy Leader of the Opposition up to this! The Leader of the Opposition should answer the question. He chairs the tactics committee. I am disgusted with him.

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

Mr SCULLY: This is information just to hand: According to Australian Securities and Investment Commission records today the Leader of the Opposition is still a director and the secretary of Northmist Pty Ltd.

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

Mr SCULLY: Honourable members opposite do not like this; they love chucking it, but they do not like getting it. They will get it!

Mr O'Farrell: Point of order—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I remind the Deputy Leader of the Opposition that he was called to order when he last took a point of order. I hope this attempt is better than the last.

Mr O'Farrell: My point of order goes to the heart of the debate. If the Leader of the House wants to bring on the debate, we will agree.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. I call him to order for the second time.

Mr SCULLY: The Leader of the Opposition omitted the fact that he was still a director and the secretary of Northmist Pty Ltd on his pecuniary interests declaration for 1 July 2001 to 30 June 2002 under the subheading "Interests and positions in corporations".

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put

The House divided.

Ayes, 34

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 Draper	Mr O'Farrell	Mr R. W. Turner
Mr Fraser	Mr Page	
Mrs Hancock	Mr Piccoli	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Hartcher	Mr Pringle	Mr George
Ms Hodgkinson	Mr Roberts	Mr Maguire

Noes, 52

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

Pair

Mr Debnam

Mr Iemma

Question resolved in the negative.**Motion negatived.****QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE**

CAMDEN AND CAMPBELLTOWN HOSPITALS EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS

Mr BROGDEN: My question without notice is to the Premier. Given a statutory declaration by one of the whistleblower nurses from the Macarthur Health Service which states that in a meeting last year with the former Minister for Health, Craig Knowles, he repeatedly slammed his fists on the table and told her she could be sued, and that she could lose her home and her career, will the Premier now sack Mr Knowles for his attempt to intimidate an honest public servant?

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

Mr CARR: As I said yesterday, the allegations by staff at the two hospitals deserve—and deserved—to be taken seriously. When the former Minister for Health received the material, he immediately sent it to the Health Care Complaints Commission. As I spelled out yesterday, the material went off to the Health Care Complaints Commission.

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

Mr CARR: It is not disputed that the material went to the Health Care Complaints Commission. In other words, it was sent to the statutory body with considerable powers to pursue a thorough investigation. That is what the former Minister for Health actually did.

Mr Brogden: Point of order: I seek leave to table the statutory declaration.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition should be sufficiently aware of the standing orders and the procedures of the House to know that he cannot seek leave to table the document.

Mr CARR: It is sad that members opposite do not know the standing orders. I read them religiously; I take an interest in them. Mr Speaker, you rarely have to point out the standing orders to me, so intimate is my knowledge of them. Wasn't it rather touching a moment ago when the issue of the pecuniary interests—whether they were declared or not declared, and the association with the company—was raised? Interestingly, the issue was raised not by the Leader of the Opposition but by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition! However, I must say—indeed, I am obliged to say—it was a terrific performance by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. We did not agree with what he said, but it was a strong—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I remind the Deputy Leader of the Opposition that he is on two calls to order.

Mr O'Farrell: Point of order: I remind the Premier of the standing orders relating to relevance. This is not a debate about the code of conduct we would like to have; it is about the infamous behaviour of his health Minister. I ask you to direct him to answer that question.

Mr CARR: I may have been distracted. I thought it was a terrific performance by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. It was powerful, it was staunch, and it fell only a little short of being sincere. You could not call it sincere. He did not believe in his case—it was a weak case—but he did his best. It was the most leadership-like performance we have seen!

Mr Brogden: Point of order: Mr Speaker, I draw your attention to the standing orders, which require a Minister, in this case the Premier, to be relevant in his answer to the question asked. I have asked the Premier what action he intends to take against a thuggish Minister who intimidated a public servant. I ask you to direct him to answer the question.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition should know that the Chair cannot direct the Premier or any Minister how to answer a question. If Opposition members ceased interjecting, they may perhaps hear the answer to the question asked by the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr CARR: The former Minister for Health took one action on that this matter, and that was to institute an inquiry. The Opposition's case would be strong if its members could say that, faced with the material, the former Minister for Health put it in the bottom drawer. Opposition members would have a case if they could argue that the former Minister for Health sent the material to his department and did not pursue it further.

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

Mr CARR: If the Opposition had any evidence that the Minister ignored the representations of the nurses, again it would have a case. The Minister did none of those things. The weaker the case the louder the noise! The Minister did one thing, an entirely proper and appropriate thing in the circumstances: he referred the matter to the Health Care Complaints Commission, thus instigating the inquiry that has produced the draft report that is now before the complainants and the people they complained of. That is the proper process.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the Leader of the National Party to order. I call the honourable member for Epping to order for the second time.

Mr CARR: The nurses had the encouragement and the comfort of knowing that when there were doubts expressed by them about the process of the inquiry, the Minister saw to it that there was a second inquiry, not one but two inquiries, to accommodate the complaints made by the complainants about the first inquiry. This has been handled in altogether an appropriate fashion by the Government. I am happy to answer more questions on this. But I must say that the overriding impression observers of this Chamber are left with after the performance to date is the flourishing of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, who has hit his stride for the first time. We know that side of politics never goes to an election with the leader they had at the last election. It is almost as if that is against their collective religion.

TEACHERS INDUSTRIAL ACTION

Mr McLEAY: My question without notice is addressed to the Minister for Education and Training. What is the Government's response to today's industrial action by teachers?

Dr REFSHAUGE: The Government does not support the strike action. The strike action simply penalises students and families, it punishes our students, and it costs businesses and the community. Virtually every public school student in the State is affected in some way as a result of today's strike action. Almost all schools are either closed or are offering minimal supervision. The teachers pay claim is before the Industrial Relations Commission. That is the appropriate place for it. The strike action is pointless while the commission is attempting to hear this claim. The Government has made it very clear that it will abide by the umpire's decision. I call on the New South Wales Teachers Federation to do the same: to accept the umpire's decision and agree not to cause further disruption to our schools.

I thank those teachers who have, despite the strike action, attempted to operate normally in schools across the State. Those teachers may or may not support the Government's position but their efforts have helped families when they needed it most. I put on record our support for them. The Government has offered teachers a 6 per cent pay increase at a cost of \$334 million a year. That pay offer will mean that New South Wales teachers will continue to be the highest-paid teachers in this country. The teachers' claim for a 25 per cent pay increase would cost the Government and taxpayers \$1.389 billion. It is important to note that in addition to that 25 per cent pay claim, the teachers have other claims before the Industrial Relations Commission. They are effectively asking for another 5 per cent to cover salary allowances for certain teacher groups, making a total of \$1.6 billion if all of their claims are granted.

The Government's pay offer of 6 per cent is costing \$334 million and the first 3 per cent has already been factored into this year's budget. New South Wales teachers are amongst the highest paid in the country right now and with the 3 per cent next year and 3 per cent the following year—a total of 6 per cent—they will be the highest-paid teachers in the country. Starting rates at the moment are \$41,109 and after eight years that increases to \$58,992. When we came into government teachers were paid \$29,750 and we have increased that by 38 per cent to \$41,109. Comparing those salaries with other similar professions, the starting salary for a librarian is \$39,594; for a psychologist, \$41,616; for a legal officer, \$41,474; and for a science officer, \$39,594.

The New South Wales Teachers Federation has said that there is a lack of people wanting to be teachers. That is wrong. The supply of teachers exceeds demand. On average fewer than two out of 100 teachers resign each year, so the turnover is less than 2 per cent and that is the lowest it has been for many years. In fact, under the Greiner government the turnover was up to 5.4 per cent. It is now significantly less. We have teachers often doing casual work at the moment who want to get back to full-time teaching. Some 16,790 teachers want to take up full-time employment with the department. On top of that we have graduates whom we cannot employ. There are areas where we want teachers to go but they choose not to go there. But in general we have more teachers wanting to teach than we have positions.

We also have more than 30,000 approved teachers registered and ready for casual work through the Casual Direct system, which is delivering an 85 per cent rate of success in school regions where it has been trialled, and it is being rolled out to the rest of the State over the next few months. At the moment we have the lowest vacancy rates for permanent teachers than we have had in the past four years. Of course, applications for employment are regularly made to the department and the number of applications has significantly increased in the past 16 months.

Another issue that needs to be put to rest is our per capita expenditure on students in the New South Wales education system. New South Wales spends more on education than the national average. According to the Schools Annual Report 2001, New South Wales spends \$8,571 per capita compared with the national average of \$8,435. We are also finding that more school leavers are choosing teaching as their profession. In 1999 there were 4,976 teacher places in universities in New South Wales; this year there are 5,904. That is an extra 1,000 students studying teaching at universities over the past four years. As a result of the increased interest in teaching as a career, the university admission index that is required for admission into many teaching courses is also increasing. It is harder to get into a university teacher course now than it was in 1999, because of the increased demand by school leavers wanting to take up the teaching profession. It is not surprising because we are spending record amounts on education.

Since we came to government in 1995 we have increased spending on education by 50 per cent to \$8.7 billion. In our last budget we increased funding in education by \$565 million. During the election campaign we made some 300 commitments to education for the people of New South Wales. These commitments all related to improving the education system and getting better outcomes for our students. They included some \$329 million over four years to reduce class sizes in the early years of kindergarten, year 1 and year 2. Other commitments were included: \$144 million, of which \$44 million was new money, over four years directly to schools for locally determined professional development; establishing the New South Wales Institute of Teachers to develop a framework of professional standards for teachers; a new school leadership strategy to improve induction programs for principals; and a \$56 million program over four years to address destructive behaviours that unfortunately occur in some of our classrooms. Part of that strategy is to have 11 behavioural schools, 17 tutorial centres and better peer mediation and support programs as well.

The Government is also funding a \$16 million extension to the Priority Action Schools Program, designed to support and boost the performance of students in the 74 New South Wales government schools that have been identified. The Government is also looking to extend the \$5,000 retention benefit paid to teachers who stay longer than three years in difficult-to-staff schools. This will help the Government ensure that teachers will be prepared to remain in those difficult-to-staff schools. The Government is committed to ensuring that New South Wales has results that are up with the best in the world. We are getting good results but we want to improve.

The Government is prepared to look at ways to make the system work better and the biggest commitments given by the Government before the election were in education. Some of them will make the lives of teachers better and easier in the classroom, but it was done for students, not for that reason. This inappropriate industrial action is hurting students, parents, business and the general community. The strike action will prove nothing at all. The only result will be from the Industrial Relations Commission, which is meeting right now, and we will abide by the umpire's decision. I ask the Teachers Federation to also abide by the umpire's decision.

**HONOURABLE MEMBER FOR WENTWORTHVILLE AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES
MANAGEMENT AUSTRALIA (HOLDINGS)**

Mr STONER: My question is directed to the Premier. Given the revelations about the directorship of the honourable member for Wentworthville in Environmental Resources Management [ERM] Australia, will the

Premier now sack her from her \$14,000 a year job as Chair of the Parliament's Standing Committee on Natural Resource Management?

Mr CARR: The honourable member for Wentworthville advises me that she has been scrupulous in complying with the rules and regulations of the Parliament in relation to this matter. By the way, why is the Leader of the Opposition not taking this matter up? He made a big attack before question time, his question bypassed the issue and once that was out of the way, someone else then asked a question about pecuniary interests. The honourable member for Wentworthville advises that she has declared her directorship in her pecuniary interests register in two successive years and, of course, will be complying again this year. She advises that she is neither a lobbyist nor a consultant for ERM, but is a non-executive director.

I do not want to dwell on things that have been worked over in the past but they keep asking about it. According to Australian Securities and Investment Commission records today the Leader of the Opposition is still a director and secretary of Northmist Pty Ltd. In his pecuniary interests declaration of 1 July 2001 to 30 June 2002 under subheading "E. Interests and positions in corporations", he has omitted the fact. The records are there, and I suppose there will be a flurry of interest in tabling them. We now have on the other side of the Chamber the pantomime called "nonchalant conversation".

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

Mr CARR: "The Premier is talking, so we will all have a staged conversation with vigorous exchanges, little jocular episodes and nothing will be taken seriously." It is the sort of thing that takes place in the corner of a stage when the major actor is occupying centre position.

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

Mr CARR: The honourable member for Lismore has been called in and there will be others called in from time to time.

Mr Stoner: Point of order: My point of order relates to relevance. The Premier can answer by saying yes or no.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I do not understand how the Leader of the National Party could take a point of order when he has not listened to the answer.

Mr CARR: It is a serious question that deserves more than a cavalier yes or a dismissive no. The Leader of the Opposition did not declare his directorship of Northmist in 1996-97.

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

Mr CARR: The *Sydney Morning Herald* disclosed that he earned a fee of \$110,000 consultancy in PricewaterhouseCoopers Legal over a number of years. By contrast, the honourable member for Wentworthville has been paid only directors' fees, and she did declare her directorship of ERM after she was appointed. The Leader of the Opposition denied any association with questions on notice placed by him as shadow Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning on issues where PwC was involved; namely, St Hilliers Development at Zetland; Sydney Water development charges, sale of railway yards at Rozelle; Walsh Bay development; Eurobodalla Shire Council and brothel legislation; Eurobodalla Shire Council and Mogo Charcoal Plant—all matters that are a total coincidence—that mighty force of motivation in human affairs. The iron law of coincidence meant that PwC Legal had these briefs, the Leader of the Opposition was on its payroll, he asked these questions and the ICAC report is about him. The Leader of the Opposition is still a director and secretary of Northmist, even though his pecuniary interest declaration says otherwise. By contrast, the honourable member for Wentworthville declared her directorship in her pecuniary interest register for 1 July 2001 to 30 June 2002.

Ms Seaton: What about this year?

Mr CARR: I am still so impressed by the contribution of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition on this.

Mr O'Farrell: Point of order: My point of order is relevance. I will be impressed if the Premier will give a yes or no answer.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! No point of order is involved. Five points of order taken by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition have now not been upheld.

Mr CARR: It was a terrific performance. The atmosphere in the House of Commons when the talent of the young Disraeli was revealed in his maiden speech is very much the atmosphere here today. Someone is feeding his local media, the ruminations are occurring from the local media, the *North Shore Times*, that "Barry's star is looking good." I wonder who planted this article, "Ku-ring-gai MP, Barry O'Farrell, is looking more and more like foreman material every day." It did not say, "He looks more and more like a contented number two every day."

They are astute people at the *North Shore Times*. It did not say that he is content in his life as Deputy Liberal. It did not rest on that or say, "Barry O'Farrell's content with his number two role." No. It said, "More and more, with every passing day, like foreman material." I have answered the question, perhaps more comprehensively than the questioner asked. It is also nice to see the National Party, guardians of propriety down through the years in the Parliament. But the first ICAC inquiry where ICAC found its feet was an inquiry into North Coast land deals. A column in the *Daily Telegraph* notes, "They couldn't help notice Deputy Opposition Leader, Barry O'Farrell at Star City showroom Friday night for the musical *Leader of the Pack*." It is a very good musical. I saw it when it was doing its out-of-town warm-up at Gosford. The column states, "Shouldn't he have been watching the Deputy Leader of the Pack?" I thank the House for its attention.

SYDNEY HARBOUR BRIDGE SECURITY UPGRADE

Mr STEWART: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Roads. What is the latest information on further measures to upgrade security on Sydney Harbour Bridge?

Mr SCULLY: No doubt Sydney Harbour Bridge is one of our icons. In fact, it is one of the great icons of the twentieth century. During World War II anti-aircraft cannons were fitted to the pylons to protect the bridge and the surrounding community from air attack. Today we face another threat. Following September 11 and Bali, security on the harbour bridge was enhanced. A closed-circuit television [CCTV] system and motion detection systems were put in place, and we employed permanent round-the-clock security guards. The Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] has been examining what further steps can be taken on the harbour bridge and the Anzac Bridge to enhance security.

I have accepted a recommendation from the RTA that we call for tenders next month for the installation and operation of 18 thermal imaging cameras around the harbour bridge and a further eight on the Anzac bridge. This thermal imaging technology will complement the 12 CCTV cameras already in place and the security guards that are already there. Thermal imaging needs no light.

[*Interruption*]

The Government, and I trust every member of the House, regards security as very important. It is no laughing matter. Members opposite should treat this matter extremely seriously, as we do. It is important that a message go out to anyone who intends to intrude on this iconic structure in Sydney: All human beings emit a heat signature. Up until recently the thermal imaging equipment as applied by security agencies could only pick up a blob of colour, whereas the technology has been significantly enhanced in the past couple of years. What happens is that a monitor operator can watch on a screen a full outline of a person in the dark. So if an intruder without permission or authorisation enters an area of an icon such as the Sydney Harbour Bridge or the Anzac bridge in complete darkness, the thermal imaging equipment will pick up the heat signature and give a full body outline as if it were broad daylight. That is an important improvement to security on the harbour bridge.

The Anzac bridge, while not as iconic as the Sydney Harbour Bridge, is still a significant engineering structure. That is why I have decided to approve the recommendation for eight heat detection imaging cameras to be installed on the Anzac bridge. That means 26 of these high-tech cameras will be installed. We will be calling for tenders next month. After the tender, design and installation process, I expect all of those cameras to be in place and operational during the first half of next year. The cost is approximately \$3 million.

HONOURABLE MEMBER FOR WENTWORTHVILLE AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT AUSTRALIA (HOLDINGS)

Mr O'FARRELL: My question is directed to the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Natural Resource Management. In view of her chairmanship of the committee and its activities, which are of direct commercial interest to Environmental Resources Management [ERM] Australia (Holdings), will she reveal how much she is getting paid as a director of ERM and what she does for it?

Ms ALLAN: First, I echo the eloquent words of the Premier when he said that the honourable member for Wentworthville had been scrupulous in complying with the rules and regulations of the Parliament in relation to this matter. Unlike members opposite, I have declared my directorship in my pecuniary interest register in two successive years. The Premier has already mentioned that. Earlier in question time the honourable member for Southern Highlands interjected on the Premier, "What about this year?" And, of course, I will be complying again when the register is due for completion. The Opposition signalled its intention to ask this question of me today. The Standing Committee on Natural Resource Management held a series of public meetings this morning. My good friend the Deputy Leader of the National Party indicated that—

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

Ms ALLAN: The Leader of the Opposition was not there, but his stooges were there. The honourable member for Ballina signalled that the Opposition expected me to step down from my position. Of course, I will not be doing that. Indeed, the decision of the committee overwhelmingly was that I should remain as Chair, and I thank the committee members for their support. One relevant matter raised by the honourable member is the potential conflict of interest.

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

Ms ALLAN: I refer to the tabled minutes of the Select Committee on Salinity, which is the committee that was set up immediately prior to the Standing Committee on Natural Resource Management. In particular I refer to the minutes of 11 April last year, in which I specifically referred to the possible relevance of ERM and the committee. The minutes state:

Consideration of the revised draft report.

It was an excellent report and one that has already been discussed in this Chamber. The minutes further state:

The revised draft report having been previously circulated, the chairman declared her interest in ERM, a company referred to in the revised draft report in relation to the case study of the Boral site in the Holroyd local government area.

Mr O'Farrell: What committee was that?

Ms ALLAN: That is April 2002.

Mr O'Farrell: That committee no longer exists.

Ms ALLAN: The honourable member for Ballina sat on that committee, and today in the Standing Committee on Natural Resource Management he raised the identical issue.

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

Ms ALLAN: That was handled in April 2002, and I will continue to handle the matter in a completely appropriate manner.

Mr Tink: Point of order: My point of order is relevance. The web site of the Standing Committee on Natural Resource Management shows that it was only set up on 8 May 2003. What the honourable member for Wentworthville is talking about predates the setting up of a committee—

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

Mr Tink: —a committee that is almost identical in title as the company of which she is a director. That is an outrageous standing, walking conflict of interest.

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

Mr O'Farrell: How much?

Ms ALLAN: In conclusion, can I say that, unlike the Leader of the Opposition, and possibly other members opposite, my involvement with ERM is strictly on the public parliamentary record. I am neither a lobbyist nor a consultant for ERM. I am a non-executive director providing professional advice to a company.

Mr O'Farrell: Point of order: My point of order relates to relevance. I asked the honourable member how much she was being paid. She has not addressed that. Give the money back or resign the position!

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

CAMDEN AND CAMPBELLTOWN HOSPITALS EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS

Mr MARTIN: My question without notice is directed to the Premier. What advice can the Premier give the House about the Health Department's response to claims last year of serious abuses at Campbelltown Hospital and Camden District Hospital?

Mr CARR: The former Minister met the complainants in this matter on 5 November 2002. I have in my hands the memorandum that the then Minister dictated—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will control his behaviour.

Mr Brogden: Point of order—

Mr SPEAKER: On what possible basis could the Leader of the Opposition take a point of order?

Mr Brogden: The Premier is about to read a statement.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I do not know what the Premier is about to do. There is no point of order.

Mr Brogden: I seek leave to table the statutory declaration.

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

Mr Brogden: I seek leave to table the statutory declaration.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition knows that the standing orders make no provision for him to table the document.

Mr Brogden: I seek leave to table the statutory declaration. I ask you to put the question.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. On a number of occasions I have called the Leader of the Opposition to order. I have also reminded him of the standing orders. The Leader of the Opposition is obviously unaware of the provisions of the standing orders; he should make a study of them, as others have done. The Chair will not continue to tolerate the Leader of the Opposition taking frivolous points of order that he knows have no basis.

Mr CARR: The Minister dictated a memorandum to the Director-General—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I place the honourable member for Gosford on three calls to order. If his present behaviour continues he will be removed from the Chamber.

Mr CARR: I have here a memorandum to the Director-General of the Department of Health regarding "Allegations of mismanagement and misconduct at Campbelltown hospital". It reads:

Further to our telephone conversation I would like to advise you of discussions held in my electorate office today with five people whose names, addresses and phone numbers appear on the attachment. The four women involved are either former nurses of Campbelltown Hospital or are on leave from Campbelltown Hospital. The fifth person—

He mentioned the name; I will not—

is a solicitor and the brother of [name]. The five people made a range of allegations about senior members of staff at Campbelltown Hospital.

Again, I will not mention the names—

In addition, they allege [names] had ignored their concerns or had done little to have their concerns addressed.

This is the Minister's memorandum to the head of the Department of Health dated 5 November, the date the Minister interviewed the constituents. It further states:

The allegations relate to allegations of mismanagement, negligence, patient neglect and a failure by the critical care committee to properly oversee the clinical performance of the hospital over a number of some years.

There is then a paragraph that mentions a name and allegations against an officer of the hospital. It states in the next paragraph:

Mr [name] and the nurses advise they have documentation to substantiate their allegations. Mr [name] undertook to compile a composite document to assist in my inquiries.

This is the former Minister for Health's memorandum. It goes on:

I advise that the matters raised were serious and would need to be investigated. I undertook to forward their names, addresses and contact details to you as Director-General for immediate investigation. Naturally I expect that the individuals will be—

Mr Brogden: Point of order: I wish to draw the Premier's attention to his words in *Hansard* yesterday. He said yesterday in Parliament—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! That is not a point of order. The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat.

Mr CARR: It concludes:

Naturally I expect that the individuals will be interviewed as a matter of urgency to test the veracity of their claims.
Yours sincerely,
Craig Knowles,
Minister for Health.

Attached to it are the names as mentioned. Let me read a document to the Commissioner of the Health Care Complaints Commission [HCCC], Ms Amanda Adrian, sent by the Director-General of Health on 18 November.

Mr Brogden: You said the 5th yesterday.

Mr CARR: Yes. On the 6th the Minister provided the director-general with the memorandum. The Minister's memorandum was provided to Victoria Walker, Director Audit, New South Wales Health Department. On 11 November one of the complainants was interviewed and agreed to provide documents to the New South Wales Department of Health along with the consolidated report. After several requests the documents were made available to the audit branch for photocopying. The first document was made available on 18 November and the final documents on 21 November.

On 13 November complainant two was interviewed at Harrington Park. Interviews were set up with the various complainants at the first opportunity they were available. To speed up the process, a number of interviews were conducted after hours in the complainants' homes. On 5 November, complainants one and five were interviewed at Miller Street, North Sydney, and complainant three was interviewed at Campbelltown. I am advised that complainants one to four corresponded to one to four in the Minister's memorandum to the director-general but the other complainants have been numbered in the sequence in which they were contacted.

A media release was issued by the director-general concerning a preliminary investigation commenced by the audit branch of New South Wales Health into allegations relating to the management practices at Campbelltown and Camden hospitals. On 8 November complainant four was interviewed. On 18 November a memorandum outlining interim investigations was provided to the director-general. On the basis of the four interviews and because of the nature of the allegations, the director-general referred the matter immediately to the HCCC. I have the director-general's letter to Ms Amanda Adrian. After those interviews took place, after the complainants were soothed after their complaints were painstakingly collected, this letter went from the Director-General of the Department of Health to the Health Care Complaints Commissioner:

Dear Ms Adrian,

I am referring a number of wide-ranging allegations to you regarding practices at Camden and Campbelltown hospitals. The allegations have been made by a number of staff and concern both management and clinical practices at the hospitals. Staff link these practices to a number of deaths. Preliminary inquiries have been undertaken by the department's director of audit. I attach a summary of the initial allegations provided to the department and her preliminary findings. I am now referring the matter to you for investigation.

It goes on:

Given the seriousness of the allegations I anticipate your liaising with other relevant agencies, including the State Coroner's Office, the New South Wales Police as necessary and as the course of the investigation dictates.

Yours sincerely,
Robyn Kruk,
Director-General

**HONOURABLE MEMBER FOR WENTWORTHVILLE AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES
MANAGEMENT AUSTRALIA (HOLDINGS)**

Mr PAGE: My question without notice is directed to the Deputy Premier, and Minister for Education and Training. What was the purpose of your meetings of April 2000 and June 2002 with Environmental Resources Management [ERM] Australia (Holdings), and exactly why was the honourable member for Wentworthville in attendance?

Dr REFSHAUGE: In April 2000 I met with ERM at its request, and the honourable member for Wentworthville, to discuss issues in regard to sustainability. It was a company that had significant interests in Europe, and as an interested planning Minister trying to develop further interest in sustainability in this country, we were trying to find ways to enhance sustainability here. In fact, we set up a sustainability advisory council, and it has been very successful.

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

Dr REFSHAUGE: I met with company representatives and thought their ideas were quite interesting. I asked if they would be able to keep me informed of the latest trends in Europe and, particularly, when they were able to come to Australia again as I would be very keen to meet with them. I thought it would be a useful and productive thing for the New South Wales Government, through me, to be able to keep in touch with ideas being promulgated about sustainability in other countries, particularly on the other side of the world. I asked them to see me when they were in town again. The honourable member for Wentworthville informed me some two years later that they were coming to town again and asked whether I would like to meet them. I said I very much would. They have good ideas and I wanted to keep in touch. As a consequence, I had a subsequent meeting with them.

SNOWY MOUNTAINS TOURISM

Mr WHAN: My question without notice is addressed to the Premier. What is the latest information on Snowy Mountains tourism following last year's devastating bushfires?

Mr CARR: The fires of last Christmas were among the worst the nation has seen. More than 65 per cent of Kosciusko National Park was burned out as well as almost all of Brindabella National Park and 30,000 hectares of farmland. Thredbo was particularly hurt, as the honourable member is aware; the village virtually closed down for six weeks. More than 500 tourism jobs were lost. In response, on 15 February I announced a \$2.6 million fire recovery package for the Snowy Mountains and the capital region. That included \$1.5 million for stabilising soils and assisting bush regeneration, replacing burned fences alongside national parks, removing the entry fee for Kosciusko National Park until the end of April, and providing \$250,000 for a television campaign to win people back to the region—advertising various attractions such as the Jindabyne Easter Fun Festival and the Thredbo Jazz Festival.

I am pleased to say that these efforts, in partnership with the local community and the tourism industry, have been immensely successful. In fact, it is hard to pinpoint another targeted regional campaign to look after local businesses that has been more successful. The Easter season this year was just as busy as last year's. Occupancy rates, which have grown in the past three years, were even better this year. They rose 63 per cent in 2000, 68 per cent in 2001 and 71 per cent last year. This year they are even better. According to operators such as Heidi's Ski Tours, this year's bookings are between 30 per cent and 40 per cent higher than in 2002. In the wake of the devastating fires, this year's bookings have increased.

Jindabyne and the resorts have been booked out every weekend for the past couple of months. Most places were full during the school holidays. The Thredbo Chamber of Commerce estimated that turnover for the village increased by 200 per cent for the year to 7 September. Remember, the season still has four weeks to

run—as I know the snow bunnies around here are fully aware. Now that the ski season is coming to an end, we are required to prepare for the slower summer months.

That is why on 3 June I announced a \$10,000 grant to the Thredbo Chamber of Commerce. The funding, which was granted in response to representations from the new member for Monaro, allows the Chamber of Commerce to employ a business and events manager to help attract visitors over summer. The New South Wales public sector, through its outstanding State Emergency Services, was there to fight the fires. We were there to help with the recovery and we will be there to help rebuild the region's fortunes over the coming summer with the tremendous support and encouragement of the honourable member for Monaro, so proud is he to represent in the Parliament of New South Wales this great and unique ski field region.

**HONOURABLE MEMBER FOR WENTWORTHVILLE AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES
MANAGEMENT AUSTRALIA (HOLDINGS)**

Mr TINK: My question is directed to the chairman of the Standing Committee on Natural Resource Management. In view of the Minister's earlier answer that the meetings the chairman initiated with the Minister and Environmental Resources Management [ERM] Australia (Holdings) were about sustainable development, how can she claim she has no conflict of interest with her committee duties, which relate to sustainable development?

Ms ALLAN: I do not believe the honourable member for Epping understands what sustainable development is. He should go and learn all about it.

DETECTIVE SUPERINTENDENT JOHN HESLOP RETIREMENT

Ms GADIEL: My question without notice is to the Minister for Police. What is the Minister's response to the recent retirement of Detective Superintendent John Heslop?

Mr WATKINS: Child protection is one of the hardest and most mentally demanding policing tasks an officer can undertake. Today I want to pay tribute to an officer who devoted a large part of his career to this most important part of policing. Superintendent John Heslop joined the New South Wales Police Force in June 1968. He served at Redfern, Mascot, Annandale and Rockdale, and after a stint in the highway patrol he was transferred to the scientific investigation sector of the Central Investigation Bureau [CIB]. In 1978 he was designated a detective and performed crime scene examination duties at Parramatta and Macquarie Fields. For the next decade he acted as one of our very first crime scene investigators.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is too much audible conversation in the Chamber. The time for questions has not yet expired. The Minister will be heard in silence.

Mr WATKINS: In 1987 John Heslop transferred to the commissioner's policy unit at police headquarters and was put in charge of the child protection program. He was soon promoted to inspector, and a stint in an emerging detective field shaped his entire career. After tours of duty as tactician and commander at Blacktown and Seven Hills patrols he returned to child protection at the time of the Wood royal commission. Mr Heslop was seconded to the project team to reorganise NSW Police and respond to child exploitation that was uncovered by Justice Wood.

In 1997 Mr Heslop was promoted to the rank of superintendent and became the first commander of the new Child Protection Enforcement Agency [CPEA]. It was a position he would hold until November last year, prior to his imminent retirement. During that time Mr Heslop directed the unit, which supports local area commands by investigating and providing specialist advice relating to child sexual assault and child abuse. It works in close partnership with the Department of Community Services and the Department of Health. It also looks after the child protection register, which is the database of known paedophiles.

This register provides the blueprint for a national database of child sex offenders, which was agreed to at the July meeting of State and Territory police Ministers. It allows us in New South Wales to track the movements of about 900 offenders who have been released following their gaol terms. Detective Superintendent Heslop said that his unit's biggest success during his time at the CPEA was the work of Strike Force Sayda. This two-year project led to the gaoling of gang-rapist Bilal Skaf and eight others for sentences of between 11 and 55 years.

Since November 2002 John Heslop has played a pivotal role in the creation of the new State Crime Command [SCC] and the management of its nine specialist squads. As the manager of the investigations support unit within the SCC, his legacy has lived on, with the introduction of the Child Protection and Sex Crimes Squad. The State Government is backing this growing squad with the introduction of a special working party to investigate new anti-Internet paedophilia powers. Before his retirement Detective Superintendent Heslop was awarded the National Medal with Clasp and the Australian Police Medal. He recently said he hoped he would be remembered for making New South Wales a safer place for children. I hope the Parliament will join with me today in assuring Detective Superintendent Heslop that he has indeed achieved that goal. Superintendent Heslop, we will use your fine example to plot the course for future enhancements to child protection policing in New South Wales.

Questions without notice concluded.

REGIONAL RADIO RECEPTION

Ministerial Statement

Mr CAMPBELL (Keira—Minister for Regional Development, Minister for the Illawarra, and Minister for Small Business) [3.36 p.m.]: I wish to make a ministerial statement about a proposal to improve radio reception in regional areas. Communications are vital to regional communities. Radio—with daily news, community information and weather details—is an essential part of life in country New South Wales. The New South Wales Government keenly supports better radio services to regional areas. People living in the Illawarra, the south-east of the State and the Snowy region have long complained about their radio reception. Now they can do something about it. Rather than turning off their radios, they can have their say about local radio.

Honourable members will be interested to know that the Australian Broadcasting Authority [ABA] recently released proposals to improve community and national radio reception in these areas. The ABA is responsible for allocating radio frequencies. It also allocates, renews, suspends or cancels broadcasting licences. Local listeners and community groups have until Friday 26 September to have their say about these proposals. I urge everyone living in these areas to take the opportunity to improve their daily radio. People living in Bega, the Canberra region, Cooma, Goulburn, Nowra and Wollongong should get in quick with submissions to the Australian Broadcasting Authority.

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

Mr CAMPBELL: On the south coast the ABA proposals include improving reception for radio 2EC Bega, a better community radio service for 2BAR Bega, and the possibility of another community radio service in Eden. In the Snowy region the Queanbeyan community would benefit from better community radio reception. The proposals also look at options for improving ABC News radio services to Queanbeyan and Tuggeranong. For the Cooma, Jindabyne, Thredbo, Bombala, Cabramurra, Khancoban, Perisher, Monaro and Talbingo communities, these proposals give hope for better local radio.

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

Mr CAMPBELL: The ABA's proposals in this region include an extra transmitter for community radio 2MNO to serve Bombala, and changes to radio 2XL and radio 2SKL in Bombala to prevent interference from WIN 3 Narooma television services. The proposals also seek to improve reception in the Southern Highlands, including an extra community radio station for the Braidwood area. In the Nowra area, the ABA proposals will improve the radio footprint of radio 2ST. An extra FM transmitter would help to improve the station's reception in the south-eastern section of its licence area. An extra community radio station is also proposed for Sanctuary Point. The ABA's proposals for the Illawarra are about planning for the future. The authority wants to reserve capacity for an extra national radio service to serve that community. It also plans to boost the reception of SBS radio service 2EA. These proposals are a chance for regional communities to shape their future and to ensure that their radio services meet their needs. I urge regional communities in those areas to seize this opportunity to have their views heard on 26 September.

Mr STONER (Oxley—Leader of the National Party) [3.41 p.m.]: Radio reception in rural areas is important because communities should stay up to date with current events. They should also have the opportunity to advertise community activities and businesses. That is all part of regional development. The areas the Minister mentioned—Bega, Cooma, Jindabyne, Bombala, the Illawarra, Nowra, the Snowy Mountains,

Queanbeyan and so on—could benefit from enhanced radio reception. The Australian Broadcasting Authority's [ABA] proposal to allocate new frequencies in those areas is very welcome. The Opposition supports the Minister's call for community groups to contact the ABA and to take advantage of the proposal to establish these frequencies so that more community radio services offering better reception can be provided throughout rural and regional New South Wales.

CONSIDERATION OF URGENT MOTIONS

Wealth Creation Schemes

Ms MEAGHER (Cabramatta—Minister for Fair Trading, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Commerce) [3.43 p.m.]: My motion is urgent because consumers are at immediate risk. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission announced earlier this month that it would investigate the so-called wealth creation schemes that are emerging primarily from the real estate sector. Mum and dad investors throughout the country are being ripped off by so-called wealth creation gurus. As the industry continues to grow we must have a national approach to its regulation. In August the State and Territory Governments received a concession from the Federal Government when it agreed to allow the Australian Securities and Investments Commission [ASIC] to join a national working party to address the issue.

However, ASIC will not take the lead. A lead must be taken and we must have a national approach, because the industry knows no State borders. The Federal Government already regulates the financial advice sector, but Senator Campbell continually resists extending that regulation to include wealth creation schemes. The national working group will report in March 2004. That will be a valuable step and, in the best interests of consumers, the Federal Government should give the green light today to assume regulatory responsibility for the industry.

Camden and Campbelltown Hospitals Emergency Departments

Mr BROGDEN (Pittwater—Leader of the Opposition) [3.46 p.m.]: My motion is more urgent than the Government's motion because it sheds extra light on the information revealed in the House today about the thuggery of the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning, and former Minister for Health, the Hon. Craig Knowles. It also sheds light on the claims about 17 deaths due to malpractice and poor health services at Camden and Campbelltown hospitals in the four years during which he was Minister for Health. My motion is urgent because the Premier misled the House today or yesterday. I do not know which; it is for him to decide. Yesterday he said:

The seriousness of their complaints led to the matter being referred to the Health Care Complaints Commission [HCCC] on 5 November 2002.

Today he indicated that the matter was referred to the Health Care Complaints Commission on 18 November—not 5 November. Therefore the Premier has misled this House either today or yesterday. He must be clear about the truth. Today I will reveal to the House what happened at the meeting to which the Premier referred earlier and for which he had minutes. I have a statutory declaration from one of the whistleblower nurses, whom I will not name because she remains fearful of losing her job and having her reputation destroyed by this Government and the Hon. Craig Knowles. The statutory declaration states:

On November 5th 2002, I had a meeting with the Minister for Health, Craig Knowles, regarding grave fears and concerns about the way in which managers & executives of MHS were managing the Hospital. I explicitly outlined the clinical & managerial issues which resulted in needless and senseless deaths of innocent people.

Mr Knowles attempted to "water down" my concerns by justifying them as a resource issue as well as pointing the blame at the Doctors especially the consultants and Nursing staff. I again reiterated my concerns, he then became angry. He pushed his chair back and turned to me slamming his fist on the table repeatedly.

He said "You better be right... Jennifer Collins is a friend of mine and she is a nice person."

Jennifer Collins is the manager of the Camden District Hospital. The statutory declaration continues:

I replied that the allegations were not about her being a nice person or not. He also stated that this was slanderous, that I shouldn't go around talking about people like this, you could be sued, lose your home, your career. He stated (with his fist slamming on the table) that this was about conspiracy, corruption, criminal negligence.

He was clearly angry that I had raised these concerns & he tried to intimidate me.

That is the way the Labor Party treats whistleblowers in New South Wales! This experienced nurse found the courage to front up to the Minister for Health and lodge those complaints, but she was intimidated by his thuggish behaviour. He desperately wanted her to go away. He has form in this regard. The statutory declaration further states:

I have been contacted by various media organisations who have sought comment over this issue. Journalists have relayed to me that the Minister's office have labelled me as a troublemaker, mentally unstable and this was a personal vendetta against the hospital following alleged disciplinary actions by MHS. This is completely fabricated.

When the Minister does not get his way he gets his staff to tell journalists that those making the allegations are mentally ill and unstable and that they should be ignored. This Minister told Mr Yakub, whose wife died as a result of malpractice in the New South Wales health system, that he is also mentally unstable. The statutory declaration continues:

I note Hansard from 16th September 2003 where the Premier said "that the nurses who made the allegations will have their positions protected as it must be under the law." How can this be when I have been ordered by the administrators to stay away from the Hospital and I was not allowed to be seen there. Subsequently I have not been paid for several months and most of my emails have been unanswered.

On 2GB both Mr Carr & Mr Knowles stated that I was undergoing disciplinary measures and that MHS had problems with me for some time. It is the Carr Government who have repeatedly discredited me publicly by stating something that is false.

That damns the Minister for Health and the Government. The Minister should deal with this motion today.

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

The House divided.

Ayes, 50

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

Noes, 34

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 O'Farrell	Mr J. H. Turner
Mr Draper	Mr Oakeshott	Mr R. W. Turner
Mr Fraser	Mr Page	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mrs Hancock	Mr Piccoli	Mr George
Mr Hartcher	Mr Pringle	Mr Maguire
Ms Hodgkinson	Mr Roberts	

Pairs

Mr Carr
Mr Iemma

Mr Debnam
Mr Richardson

Question resolved in the affirmative.

WEALTH CREATION SCHEMES**Urgent Motion**

Ms MEAGHER (Cabramatta—Minister for Fair Trading, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Commerce) [3.58 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

1. notes the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's investigation into the practices of property investment advisers involved in so-called "wealth creation seminars";
2. supports the Reserve Bank of Australia Governor, Mr Ian Macfarlane, in his view that the Australian Securities and Investment Commission [ASIC] should regulate such practices; and
3. calls on the Federal Government to extend ASIC's powers to cover property investment advisers.

Property investment advice—or, as it is often coined, wealth creation seminars or get-rich-quick schemes—has certainly been in the news in recent months. Earlier this month the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission [ACCC] announced that it would step into the issue of wealth creation seminars, possibly using its powers under the Trade Practices Act. In its statement, dated 2 September, the ACCC said its investigation would look at four issues: two-tier marketing; advice given by financial consultants, solicitors and valuers; unconscionable conduct by financial institutions; and real estate investment seminars. As ACCC Chairman Mr Graeme Samuel said:

The ACCC is particularly concerned that in a very hot property market, mum and dad investors and superannuants are being pressured into joining property investment programs that promise massive wealth through property investment.

The ACCC investigation into this issue is timely. It brings into focus the urgency of tighter regulation in this area—and the most appropriate regulator to undertake that job is the Australian Securities and Investment Commission [ASIC]. In August State and Territory governments received a concession from the Federal Government when it agreed to allow ASIC to join a national working party to look at the issue. We now have the ludicrous situation of another Federal regulator, the ACCC, investigating and possibly taking action under its powers. Although the ACCC is dealing with the symptoms of unregulated property investment advice only ASIC is in a position to treat the causes. On the one hand, the consumer protection regulator, the ACCC, has seen the importance of undertaking an investigation into this issue and possibly using its powers to bring people to account but, on the other hand, ASIC, which already regulates financial investment advice, will not step in and take the necessary preventative action—or perhaps the answer is that the Federal Government will not let it step in.

It is time for the Federal Government to put an end to this uncertainty. It has said that it favours a national approach, yet it is still to be convinced, despite all the evidence around it, that ASIC is the appropriate vehicle to lead that national approach. I am pleased that the ACCC will investigate this practice, but investigating possible breaches of the Trade Practices Act is not a substitute for strict regulation of the industry, which is the role of ASIC. Marketeering was identified in the late 1990s as a problem of two-tiered investment property markets in Queensland. Since that time it has become clear that two-tiered markets in other forms of considerable profiteering at the expense of investors has proliferated throughout Australia and New Zealand. Basically, these people use very clever and slick marketing techniques to gain profits from unsuspecting victims. They particularly target vulnerable consumers—the young and the elderly—and they are lured into property speculation by promises of large returns with minimum financial outlay. This advice is often delivered in expensive property investment seminars that provide access to properties and financial products that can expose consumers to significant financial risk.

We have all heard of Henry Kaye. Mr Kaye has already been nabbed for misleading sales pitches, primarily for claiming that his courses were ASIC approved. On 31 July, following proceedings commenced in the Federal Court in Melbourne, ASIC obtained undertakings from Mr Henry Kaye and others. The

undertakings included corrective advertising, payment of compensation and ongoing monitoring of the parties' compliance with these undertakings. This was a welcome step, but more needs to be done. It has become clear that the key regulatory gap allowing this to happen was not so much the point of sale but the marketing and investment advisory services that have lured and psychologically prepared investors for the kill.

Queensland first raised this issue and I commend my colleague the Hon. Merri Rose for her unwavering interest in it. In August New South Wales hosted the annual Ministerial Council on Consumer Affairs [MCCA]. The States and Territories called on the Federal Government to expand its current regulatory regime of financial investment advice to fill the regulatory gap. This was not a big ask: ASIC already has the enforcement powers and regulatory regime in place to fill the gap. Even the Chairman of the Reserve Bank, Ian Macfarlane, recognised the gap and saw the sense of the Australian Securities and Investments Commission expanding its regulatory regime to cover this area of investment advice. On 6 June Mr Macfarlane told the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration:

I think there is a regulatory gap there. It is clearly a problem if there is one group of people who are holding seminars on how to invest your money who are regulated - the financial planners - and there is another group who are doing almost exactly the same thing, although doing it within one asset class, which is property, who are unregulated.

He concluded:

So I think there is a need to extend the capacity for ASIC to do that.

The States and Territories also argue that the regulation of investment property seminars and advisory activities needs to be nationally consistent. After all, the industry knows no State bounds. Therefore, there are two very sound reasons why it is desirable for the Commonwealth to assume responsibility. The Commonwealth, through ASIC, already has a regulatory regime that it put in place under the Financial Services Reform Act 2001 to cover investment advice for financial products such as superannuation and life insurance. Investment advisory services regarding capital and equity markets fall within the responsibilities of ASIC. Notwithstanding this, there is a clear functional similarity between investing in financial products and investing in real estate. As far as advisory activities are concerned, the risk to consumers of poor-quality advice or advice that is tainted by conflicts of interest is very similar in each case.

The State's ability to take action to regulate this industry is limited. State Governments regulate the sale of property and can take action for false and misleading statements that are made by an enterprise. While there have been successes in dealing with false and misleading practices, these are usually able to be dealt with only after the fact and in some cases after consumer detriment. In fact, only last month the Supreme Court granted orders by consent against one such enterprise, Radisson Maine Financial Group Australia Pty Ltd. However, obviously a national regulatory regime backed by the existing powers and jurisdiction of a Federal Government is a much more desirable outcome to protect consumers.

In the lead-up to the MCCA the Parliamentary Secretary Senator Ian Campbell wrongly claimed that the States were asking the Commonwealth to take over State property laws. This was not correct for two reasons: first, the majority of people offering their services are not real estate agents and, second, the States are not suggesting the removal of state-based regulatory control of real estate agents. But we did score one victory at MCCA on 1 August: The Federal Government agreed with the States and Territories that a working party be set up, chaired by Queensland, to provide a regulatory framework for the property investment advice industry. The working party would involve all States and Territories as well as ASIC and develop a framework for regulation of investment advisers by March next year. That was not a bad result. But the Federal Government can resolve uncertainty and tell Australian consumers today that it will expand ASIC's powers. I assure the Commonwealth that such an announcement would be most welcome by consumers.

Mr HARTCHER (Gosford) [4.07 p.m.]: The speech of the Minister for Fair Trading was the most interesting speech I have heard her make since I read *Abuse of Power*. It is always illuminating to hear from the Minister—remembering the great works that have been written about her in the past in a document that, of course, was tabled and is part of the record of the New South Wales Parliament.

Ms Meagher: So you do not have a lot to say about this issue?

Mr HARTCHER: I have a lot to say about a number of issues. Of course, whether the power is properly exercised is an appropriate issue. To listen to the Minister one would think that she did not have a department, that there was no Department of Fair Trading, that there was no Fair Trading Act, that there were no

statutory responsibilities or powers in New South Wales to deal with people who run these phoney schemes. Real estate get-rich-quick schemes have been around for years. The old Department of Consumer Affairs used to take action against the real estate get-rich-quick schemes. It is now the Department of Fair Trading and it has statutory power under the Fair Trading Act to deal with these sorts of programs, to deal with this sort of false advertising and to deal with these sorts of schemes, which are designed to entrap consumers. That is why the department exists.

What is the attitude of the Minister to these phoney schemes arising across the country? She flings her hands up in the air and says, "I haven't got an Act of Parliament. I haven't got a department. Let Canberra do it all." What is the point of having a State Government? What is the point of having a Minister when she will not carry out her statutory responsibilities and she will not use her department to enforce the law? The Fair Trading Act gives the Minister power over these schemes and she is not doing anything about it. She is putting her hands up in the air and saying, "Let Canberra solve the problem for me." Well, that is a classic abuse of power.

Mr Tripodi: What a load of crap!

Mr HARTCHER: The honourable member for Fairfield, who also figured prominently in *Abuse of Power*, interjects. The honourable member for Fairfield has a lot to say. Why does he not stand up and give us his side of that excellent document? It was a well-written document that related to the Minister, to the honourable member for Fairfield and to the Hon. Amanda Fazio. We heard all about their activities in the past and what do we get? Only spurious interjections from the honourable member for Fairfield. I move:

That the motion moved by the Minister be amended by the addition of the following paragraph:

- (4) notes the failure of the Department of Fair Trading to advise the public of the pitfalls in "wealth creation schemes" despite the fact that it has a statutory duty to do so under the Fair Trading Act.

That is what this motion is all about. The Minister has the power but she is not exercising it. She suggests that the Federal Government should solve this problem. The Federal Government is working on it—and the Minister admits that it has established a national working party to investigate this issue and that the report is due in March. When questions are asked of Ministers in this House they always answer, "The matter is subject to an inquiry and we must wait until a report is handed down." For example, that is what we were told when we asked questions about Menangle bridge. There are inquiries across the board and we are told to wait until reports are handed down because that is the reason for the inquiries.

The Minister for Infrastructure and Planning is expert at this. He regularly establishes inquiries and whenever he is asked a question on the subject he states that an inquiry is being held and that we should wait until the report is handed down. The Commonwealth Government has set up a working group and the Minister for Fair Trading is a participant. All States will have an opportunity to make submissions to the working group, which will bring down its report in March. The Minister is seeking to pre-empt that report for a cheap headline stating that New South Wales is leading the way. The Minister should lead the way by using her powers under the Fair Trading Act.

If wealth creation schemes are phoney, shams and are milking innocent consumers of their money, why will the Minister not take action? The court case against the person referred to by the Minister is taking place in Melbourne but it should be held in New South Wales. The Minister should make applications for an injunction in the New South Wales courts and the Office of Fair Trading should issue public warnings. Advertisements for wealth creation seminars regularly appear in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Daily Telegraph* but we never see notices inserted by the Office of Fair Trading. The Minister has the power and the money to warn consumers about that method, but she has done nothing except move this motion. That is the extent of the effectiveness of the Office of Fair Trading under the administration of this Minister and this Government. The Minister is providing no protection to consumers; she merely suggests that matters be referred to Canberra.

People who are ripped off by get-rich real estate schemes or get-rich wealth schemes, which we deplore, will receive no recourse, no warning, no help, no court orders or no public relations programs from the Minister. The motion suggests that we do not wait for the report in March and that we take action now. The Minister has a greater responsibility to the people of New South Wales, who expect better. They pay their taxes, they observe the law and they expect the Office of Fair Trading to look after them. Every member in this place receives floods of letters complaining about the inaction of the Office of Fair Trading with respect to Fair Trading matters and building disputes.

Ms Meagher: Why haven't I received any representations from you?

Mr HARTCHER: You do, and three months later I receive a long letter that always tells me nothing will be done. Those letters are superb. Representations to the Minister go nowhere. Anyone who is serious about helping someone will not write to the Minister but will try to solve the matter in a more effective way. I am concerned about the attitude of the Minister and, through her, the department towards consumer protection in this State. As Christmas approaches we will have the annual march of the killer toys. We can be sure that the Minister will demonstrate for the television cameras and, hopefully, the community the pitfalls of various toys. She does this to gain a measure of television exposure. However, she does not appear on television to discuss these get-rich schemes or the rights of consumers who are milked by wealth creation schemes.

Come December we will merely see the march of the killer toys—a skill that was perfected by so many of the Minister's predecessors. Departmental advisers simply dust off the file every year and bring it out once again. The people of New South Wales are entitled to more, which is why I have moved the amendment. If the Minister were serious she would support the amendment, which calls on her to use her statutory powers. If she accepts this challenge we will back her. If she uses her powers she will receive the unanimous support of the Opposition. If she abolishes these schemes and protects the consumer she will receive the gratitude of every member of this House and every member of the community. Her old friends in the left wing, including the honourable member for East Hills, will support her.

The honourable member for Fairfield remembers the McDonald's burger night, where people were given a hamburger if they voted at the Young Labor branch meeting. Indeed, we all remember that night. The honourable member for Fairfield is good—he is the best branch stacker in the Parliament. The honourable member for East Hills objects, but he would never beat the honourable member for Fairfield. He is universally recognised for that and I pay tribute to him. I would not mind if he conducted a seminar on branch stacking because it would not be like the get-rich seminars; he would give value for money. It would be money well worth spending. We would not need the Office of Fair Trading to intervene because everyone would get a fair go. The Opposition does not support this motion but it will not divide on it. However, I ask the Government to support my amendment. If it does so, the people of New South Wales will applaud the Minister for exercising her statutory power. [*Time expired.*]

Mrs PERRY (Auburn) [4.17 p.m.]: I welcome the opportunity to participate in this important debate. I represent an electorate that is culturally diverse and that represents people from many non-English-speaking backgrounds. In fact, I am pleased that next week the Minister will visit Auburn to promote new partnerships between ethnic communities and the Office of Fair Trading. Many of these people come from countries where there is much distrust of government. They also come from societies where consumers have negligible rights. Unfortunately, ethnic communities are often targeted by slick and devious traders who attempt to capitalise and milk them of their hard-earned money. We have tough consumer protection laws in this country. However, the Commonwealth has let down consumers in the area of property investment advice.

On the weekend I noticed an interesting article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* about the so-called wealth guru Roy McDonald. The article talks about Father David Smith from Holy Trinity in Dulwich Hill, who forked out \$5,500 to learn how to manage a small inheritance on behalf of the church. He paid the money to attend a lecture by Roy McDonald at a property near Cessnock. The article quotes Father David Smith as saying that what followed was five-days deprivation of food and sleep in the name of financial security. He said that conditions appeared to be manipulated to reduce the emotional defences of the group and to enhance the power of McDonald. Apparently, Father Smith wrote to McDonald after the Born Rich seminar and said:

I believed, when I signed up, that I was going away to do some training in financial management. I did not realise that I was being inducted into a cult.

I notice that the Office of Fair Trading is currently in discussions with Mr McDonald about his business and has fielded numerous complaints. This and many other examples demonstrate the need to protect consumers by Commonwealth regulation. It is simply a constitutional issue that requires the Commonwealth to enact regulations. As the property boom continues unabated, there is more urgency for regulation of this growing industry. Property investment advisers target the most vulnerable in our community: the young, the elderly and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. They are more vulnerable and can easily be attracted by the message of these spruikers. The message is that for a small outlay you can realise your fortune. For an elderly couple looking to build their retirement nest egg, the message could be irresistible. For the young, promise of a quicker and cheaper way into the property market seems too good to be true.

As I said, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are particularly susceptible to the slick and often disingenuous marketing techniques of these property investment advisers. The fact is that if an offer seems too good to be true then it probably is. Obviously, prevention is better than cure. Consumers should be aware of these offers and ensure that they always seek their own financial advice before signing on the dotted line of any deal. But governments also have a responsibility—a responsibility to ensure that these property investment gurus cannot exploit regulatory loopholes for their own selfish financial gain. I hope that the Commonwealth heeds the call of the New South Wales Government and the Minister, and takes responsibility for this important issue, as it should constitutionally.

Ms HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck) [4.21 p.m.]: In speaking to this motion, I realise that in the past couple of weeks there has been a lot of publicity in the papers about this issue. Indeed, the article referred to by the honourable member for Auburn is significant. The article entitled "The get-rich-quick trick" appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* last weekend. When I got to the page I was drawn to the article immediately and read it with great interest. It contains the story of the self-made multimillionaire Roy McDonald, who is offering to show people how to turn \$1 into \$1 million in seven years or less.

I took this article with me when I visited some friends on the weekend. They told me that a mutual friend had attended one of these seminars recently, and she now has a plan to have \$1 million worth of investments in the next four weeks or something extraordinary like that. I find it amazing that so many people are drawn to these seminars. They work for some people, but obviously not for many people. They seem to be a way for people such as Roy McDonald to talk people into getting credit cards so that he can get their \$6,000 for doing the Born Rich program. This issue is of significant concern.

I echo the remarks of the shadow Minister for Commerce that the Office of Fair Trading has not done enough to advise the public of the pitfalls in wealth creation schemes despite the fact that it has a statutory authority and duty to do so. More and more people seem to be getting tied up with these get-rich-quick schemes, many of which are obviously a sham. There is a lot of information available on the Internet, and the Government needs to target the Internet to ensure that unscrupulous operators are shut down quickly. I am sure the Federal Government would welcome any move by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission [ACCC] to step in and use its powers under the Trade Practices Act to take action against promoters of property investment schemes and any professionals or financial institutions involved in misleading or deceiving consumers in relation to these sorts of get-rich-quick property schemes.

As we know, and as we have heard from Senator Ian Campbell in recent months, the regulation of real estate agents is a longstanding and traditional responsibility of the States and Territories, as is the regulation of many other activities relating to real estate within their jurisdictions. Earlier the Minister said that the Queensland Minister for Fair Trading has introduced legislation that regulates property marketeers. Today New South Wales has started a push to have responsibility for the regulation of property investment advisers shifted to the Commonwealth. The Minister mentioned that there was a meeting on 1 August, at which the States and Territories and the Commonwealth agreed to set up a working party to establish a common regulatory framework to deal with high-pressure property investment marketeers. I commend them for that: a working group is a good idea.

The working group will be chaired by the Queensland Minister, and is due to report next March. I put on the record that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer, Senator Ian Campbell, wrote to all the States and Territories last July to express the Commonwealth's support for a thorough examination of regulatory arrangements covering the activities of property investment advisers by the Ministerial Council for Consumer Affairs. That would ensure that the nature and extent of the problem is appropriately ascertained. I have a lot of information on this topic. It is important that the States and Territories do not shirk their responsibilities and that the working group proceed in such a way as to enable the States and Territories to get their act together and formulate a uniform approach to this important matter. One Internet site I found is run by the Dynamic Success Group Sydney New South Wales Australia, and is another Born Rich scheme. The site states:

We invite you to embark on a journey that will change your life forever!

I ask the Minister for Fair Trading and the Office of Fair Trading to look at all Internet sites and to investigate the people who put forward these Born Rich seminars, including their history and whether they are accountable. I note that Graeme Samuel of the ACCC recently expressed concern that in a hot property market mum and dad investors and superannuants are being pressured into joining property investment programs and are promised massive wealth through property investment. It is time this issue was looked at seriously. [*Time expired.*]

Mr TRIPODI (Fairfield—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.26 p.m.]: The Australian Securities and Investment Commission [ASIC] administers a regulatory regime covering investments in financial products. Property investment is excluded because in theory the regulation of real estate agents is a State-based function. However, as the Minister outlined, State regulatory regimes applying to real estate agents generally are not designed for regulating investment advice. The fact is that most people who engage in this practice, whether we want to call it wealth creation or get-rich-quick schemes, are not real estate agents. The end result may be that some poor coot has bought an overpriced property, but the property is the end result.

We are concerned about the so-called investment advice. Investment advisers lure unwary customers into property speculation by offering general taxation advice on the benefits of negative gearing. This advice is often delivered in property investment seminars from which property is sold at significantly overvalued prices through two-tier marketing. This area should be regulated by the Commonwealth. The regulatory gap was first exploited primarily in Queensland by property marketers who ran property investment seminars at which property was sold to unsophisticated investors at significantly overvalued prices. It was claimed that losses by investors amounted to close to \$20 million.

These people are using the direct marketing recruitment techniques pioneered by time share fraudsters and combine them with the entrapment techniques used by cult religious groups to ensnare unwary victims. As this industry continues to grow, it is important that there is a national approach. As the Minister said, in August the States and Territories received a concession from the Federal Government when it agreed to allow the ASIC to join the national working party to look at the issue. However, this issue needs to be led by the Commonwealth because this industry knows no State borders. The Federal Government already regulates the financial advice sector. It needs to act now. The longer it leaves the regulation untouched, the longer we leave Australian consumers vulnerable to these financial pied pipers. In ASIC, the Commonwealth has the existing regulatory infrastructure to move quickly and effectively.

Ms MEAGHER (Cabramatta—Minister for Fair Trading, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Commerce) [4.29 p.m.], in reply: I thank honourable members for their contributions to this debate. The Opposition simply does not understand the Government's concern about this matter. To cover up their ignorance, members of the Opposition put forward all manner of fallacious arguments to try to suggest that the States are trying to push regulation of the property sector onto the Federal Government. That is simply not true. This is about wealth creation. The seminars are not necessarily run by real estate agents, but property is the class of asset that is utilised. The problem of having a State-based regulatory framework is that the contracts do not necessarily originate and finish in New South Wales. The seminars could be in Melbourne, the property may be in Queensland. Eight State-based regulatory regimes cannot catch these people. It is the superannuants, the mums and dads, the vulnerable and those who are marginalised who are being ripped off by these shark property investors who promise all sorts of wealth to satisfy people's natural urge to make their lives a bit better and to provide for their kids. At the end of the day they are ripped off.

On 1 August State and Territory Ministers met. We formed a working group, not because we acknowledge our responsibility for this problem but because the eight Ministers have all agreed that, at the end of the day, State-based regulations are not the way forward. A national approach is needed. The honourable member for Fairfield highlighted the fact that this industry knows no State boundaries. The Federal Government knows something is up. If that were not so Senator Campbell would never have made the concession he did, that is, that the Australian Securities and Investments Commission [ASIC] would participate on the working group. The Federal Government knows it has a responsibility and it knows that its time is running. That has also been signalled by the involvement of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission [ACCC], which has said there is a problem in this industry. As a Federal statutory authority, it will look at the problem—a Federal statutory authority that criticises the inaction of another Federal statutory authority that has ownership of this problem.

I am always highly amused by the contributions of the honourable member for Gosford. This afternoon he has demonstrated that he is a really smart fellow. He knows an awful lot about this matter. As he made clear to the House for 10 long minutes, he knows more about economics, finance and investment than the Governor of the Reserve Bank. I remind honourable members yet again that the Governor of the Reserve Bank, Mr MacFarlane, told the House of Representatives standing committee on 6 June this year that there is a regulatory gap. He concluded by saying that we need to extend the capacity of ASIC to regulate. He is wrong, according to the honourable member for Gosford, who simply knows more. He also knows more than the chairman of the ACCC. The honourable member for Gosford is a smart fellow. Graeme Samuel said the ACCC is particularly concerned. He went on to talk about the types of people who are being ripped off in a hot property market, and announced an investigation. If it has no jurisdiction, why would it get involved? It does not fit together logically.

The States have called on the Federal Government to extend its responsibility under the Financial Services Reform Act, which is already in place, and to extend its regulatory capacity to deal with a serious issue that is affecting New South Wales consumers. The honourable member for Burrinjuck said the Queensland Minister introduced these reforms in that State. That is not the case. She has been constantly calling on the Federal Government to do something about it. The other States and Territories agreed that she should chair the working group because the problem has been on foot in that State for longer than anywhere else. At the end of the day the working group will not be able to deliver any outcomes unless ASIC is involved. The Federal Government caved in on that. It should read what was said in this debate, save us all heartache by extending its regulatory capacity under the Financial Services Reform Act and take on these property services advisers.

Question—That the amendment be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 28

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

Noes, 55

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

Pairs

Mr Debnam	Miss Burton
Mr Richardson	Mr Carr
Mrs Skinner	Mr Iemma

Question resolved in the negative.

Amendment negatived.

Motion agreed to.

LIVESTOCK TRANSPORT INDUSTRY

Matter of Public Importance

Mr GEORGE (Lismore) [4.44 p.m.]: I ask the House to note as a matter of public importance the need to support our livestock transport industry. I am proud to support this industry because the livestock transporters of this State do a magnificent job transporting livestock throughout the nation. They deserve our recognition. I acknowledge the members of the Livestock Transporters Association and all transport operators in this State and throughout Australia. In paying tribute to this industry, I refer to the Coalition's policy on the road transport industry. It was our policy at the time of the last State election and it is still our policy today. With the road freight task set to double in this State within the next 20 years, the need for trucks and cars to share the road safely has never been greater. Heightening road transport efficiency will reduce export costs, allow the present road freight task to be performed with fewer vehicles and encourage a shift to latest technology vehicles with better safety and environmental performance. It is important that we work to achieve these aims in this State.

The failure of the Carr Government to even consider efficiency reforms such as mass limits, a grain harvest scheme and volumetric loading for the transport of livestock has placed New South Wales transporters, primary producers and industries at a disadvantage when compared with interstate competitors. The Coalition is committed to placing New South Wales on a level playing field with its interstate competitors to promote valuable regional employment and development opportunities in this State. The livestock transport operators have been neglected by the Carr Labor Government. Our policy is to conduct a full review of the New South Wales road network to identify the viability of introducing a 45.5 tonne mass limit on certain appropriate strategic routes.

In 1996 the National Road Transport Commission conducted a mass limits review which recommended increases in mass limits for heavy vehicles fitted with road friendly suspension. The National Road Transport Commission has estimated that higher mass limits, when fully implemented, will add \$840 million to gross domestic product [GDP] per year. The benefits to consumers will comprise about \$500 million of that figure. We need to introduce a new scheme for the transport of livestock in New South Wales that is based on the loading of livestock according to volume and preset deck lengths.

Last week in Parliament House members of the New South Wales National Party had the honour of meeting the Country Trucking Congress, which represents the Livestock Transporters Association, the Australian Road Train Association, the Australian Livestock Transporters Association and the Australian Trucking Association. Those groups have combined to address this problem, which is of major concern to them. They want the Government to remove impediments to business in New South Wales. We need to work together to get rid of these impediments. In a submission presented to members of this House, the Country Trucking Congress states:

NSW is the natural road transport hub of Australia. As a result rural trucking and our customers routinely do business in other States and know how cost advantages in other States can add up to create more jobs and greater prosperity.

In addition, many rural trucking operators in the northern and southern parts of NSW have the opportunity to relocate to other States so we also naturally ask, "What can we do to work with governments and the parliament to remove impediments to doing business in the NSW".

The main issues before the congress included:

- Mass limits review ...
- Livestock loading

There was also the old complaint:

- WorkCover including the workers compensation premiums and administration
- Chain of responsibility obligations which the NSW Government is committed to introduce through *Compliance and Enforcement* legislation
- Access for innovative trucks like AB-triples and B-triples and 4.6m high livestock crates and road trains west of the Newell Highway.

They are the main issues facing these organisations day after day, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They cannot compete with operators in other States.

Mr Torbay: Point of order: I have a bill before the House that addresses these issues. I am keen to know whether the National Party, like the industry, will support it.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Saliba): Order! There is no point of order.

Mr GEORGE: The Country Trucking Congress document states:

Why can't trucks carry more, be required to have road friendly suspensions to reduce road wear, operate on designated routes to avoid sub-standard bridges and also operate under a strict form of accreditation ...

Over the past 12 or 18 months the congress has raised with me and the National Party its concerns about WorkCover. It is galling to see other honourable members trying to take credit. The document further states:

A simple comparison between Queensland and NSW is probably enough to explain many of the difficulties that rural trucking operators see in WorkCover.

I have had a lifetime association with the Livestock Transporters Association. The document continues:

A typical road transport business pays 9.2% workers compensation premium in NSW compared to 3.58% in Queensland.

A typical business in rural Queensland sees the system, on average, intolerant of rorts and excesses and operating with administrative efficiency.

By contrast, administration of workers compensation in NSW all too often seems to reward those who deliberately set out to exploit the system and penalise businesses creating jobs.

The document goes on to state:

Chain of Responsibility & Accreditation

The rural trucking industry is cautious of chain of responsibility requirements because it's new and we are worried about proposals that truck owners and operators will not have a reasonable steps defence—unlike everyone else in the transport chain. At the same time we see as highly desirable to implement the principle of placing obligations on all those in the transport chain to be responsible for their actions...

Access

With accreditation in place, and only operators who perform consistently to utilise innovative vehicles on designated routes, we see any possible concerns in NSW about operator performance being solved.

As I said, WorkCover is a serious issue. The congress document provides a number of case studies and states:

A NSW rural trucking business located in the north of the state, with six trucks directly in the business and with up to twenty others subcontracted at other times would gain an annual advantage of \$100,000 a year by shifting its operations base to Goondiwindi—just across the NSW border.

In addition, in Queensland the rural trucking operator would have far greater confidence that WorkCover was focused on outcomes—not process.

I have quoted correspondence from the Northern Co-operative Meat Company Ltd, in which I have been involved as a director and deputy chairman, but from which I do not receive remuneration. Using a B-double to shift a container from Casino to Brisbane would save \$75. That does not sound much, but last year the company shipped 16,000 containers, which means a total saving of \$120,000. What organisation or industry could stand that? It costs the same to move livestock using B-doubles and articulated transport. However, because of the road system, operators can use two B-doubles for every articulated transporter. We could get trucks off our roads. I implore the Government to support the transport industry and to find ways to work productively with it. We must remove the impediments to doing business in New South Wales and thereby create jobs and deliver efficiencies to our customers.

Mr STEWART (Bankstown—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.54 p.m.]: I welcome the opportunity to address this important issue today and to outline the Government's ongoing efforts to provide a safe and prosperous environment for New South Wales livestock carriers. The honourable member for Northern Tablelands has introduced a bill that deals with similar issues and will be second read tomorrow. Once again, the National Party is closing the gate after the horse has bolted. That is perplexing but not surprising, because the National Party has done little other than indulge in political rhetoric on this issue. The honourable member

for Northern Tablelands is dealing with the Government on this issue in a constructive manner and obviously we still have ground to cover. The National Party appears to have raised this issue today to pre-empt that bill.

Over the past eight and half years the Government's focus has been to deliver high standards and safe routes for the road transport industry to move goods to market, including livestock. The Government has directed its resources to building better State highways and improving vital infrastructure, such as timber bridges. These are the bridges that link farms to saleyards and abattoirs. The Government has overseen a massive program of improvements on routes such as the Pacific Highway. The program has saved many lives. The upgrades are now also saving transport companies an enormous amount because of fuel efficiency and reduced maintenance costs.

The Government will continue to look for ways to save lives and to boost business for livestock transporters. However, any decision to approve higher mass limits must not cause greater damage to the State road network or endanger lives. That has been the Minister's consistent message to me as I have visited country areas in my role as Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Minister for Transport. I have travelled to Coffs Harbour and Albury to meet trucking industry association representatives and listen to their points of view. I have also met one-on-one with operators. I have had numerous meetings with residents to hear their concerns about highway safety in their environment.

The Carr Government remains focused on providing safe, smooth highways for motorists and transport operators alike. The Minister and I continue to examine new proposals put forward by trucking associations and we will endeavour to support regional jobs and regional exporters whenever possible. However, some basic problems with livestock loading need to be addressed by any responsible Government charged with managing the oldest road network in Australia. Those problems include the extra damage the scheme would cause on local and State roads, the lack of scientific agreement on the merits of road-friendly suspension schemes, the lack of statutory maximum load limits for trucks under this scheme, and the need to treat all sectors of the trucking industry consistently.

The State's growing freight task presents challenges and opportunities to the Government and the industry. The Government recognises the benefits to the economy from improved productivity for the road freight industry. Many gains have been enjoyed by the industry as a result of improvements to highways and the new motorways coming on line, such as the Yelgun to Chinderah stretch on the Pacific Highway, which has been a great success.

The State Government has also made significant concessions to lower costs for operators, such as the introduction of national registration charges. However, concessions such as those related to livestock loading can be given only when the State has sufficiently strong pavement and bridge infrastructure to support the heavier axle loads. The industry is continually being reminded of that. Unfortunately, the existing bridge infrastructure is not generally able to support increased mass limits without significant upgrading. To do so would be irresponsible and leave a poor legacy for the future.

The Government has made some tough decisions to find extra funds for country roads, such as increasing the toll on the Harbour Bridge in December 2001—a measure that was not supported by the Coalition. City motorists now recognise that the Government supports the infrastructure of country and regional roads. The Harbour Bridge toll increase has allowed some of the important improvements we have made to country road infrastructure. Funds from this initiative are now overwhelmingly spent on building better regional routes throughout the State.

Last month I travelled over a newly reconstructed section of the Mitchell Highway west of Dubbo. The pavement is now much smoother and wider for all motorists. This is more good news for New South Wales livestock loaders. Improvements to routes like the Mitchell Highway also mean less wear and tear on heavy vehicles moving livestock to market. The Carr Government has just about completed its initial program to upgrade bridges on State roads, and I am pleased to advise that \$105 million has been earmarked for local councils over the next seven years to help them fix bridges on regional roads.

It is clear that the benefits to the New South Wales economy of increased mass limits can only be achieved if major increases in funding to compensate for the associated infrastructure costs are provided. The bottom line is: Who pays? At a time when the Commonwealth has enabled higher mass limits on selected sections of the national highway network, John Anderson, the Federal Minister, appears to be withdrawing from the Commonwealth's clear, unambiguous and longstanding responsibility to fully fund the national highways.

These are treacherous times in terms of future funding for national highways. With the Roads budget for New South Wales fully committed, we continue to look to the Federal Government for support if measures that accelerate damage to our roads, such as livestock loading, are to be introduced. Whilst the Government has a strong position on this issue, it is investigating innovative schemes to help regional transport operators. In Dubbo the Government has worked to help local industries in times of drought. The Newell Highway to Gilgandra has been opened up to road trains, saving transport operators and primary producers hundreds of dollars.

The Minister approved a pilot scheme to assist local regional producers move their goods to export. The key principles behind the scheme are to promote exports by allowing higher axle loads for containerised commodities to the nearest railhead to reduce road damage, and maintain or enhance safety standards. We are also determined to do more to improve safety, particularly in regional New South Wales. That is why the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] has been directed to convene a Country Roads Summit to focus on practical measures such as getting truck drivers to wear their seatbelts.

The State Government does not support schemes that increase the mass limits above the current statutory limits. Mass limits are set at levels that minimise infrastructure damage and reduce the risk of road trauma arising from overloaded vehicles. The Government does not support the implementation of a livestock loading scheme, as evidence suggests it is generally inaccurate, resulting in higher axle loads that damage road infrastructure. Local government also opposes the introduction of livestock loading schemes and other higher mass limit concessions due to the damaging effect on their local road network. At a time when councils are seeking more funds for their roads, it is not appropriate to agree to their accelerated deterioration.

There are claims that road friendly suspension schemes reduce the damage to roads and bridges caused by overloaded trucks. This issue has not been satisfactorily resolved. There is still a lot of work to be done before the claims can be given any foundation, if they are true in essence. The RTA has been asked to monitor international research in this area, and we will continue to examine new initiatives. Livestock loading is a concession to loading by volume, not weight. That means that these schemes have no maximum load limit to check vehicles for safety and roadworthiness. These trucks would inevitably cause great damage to old bridges on local roads.

Without additional funds to improve local roads, this Government has taken the responsible decision to protect the road asset. Without further Commonwealth funding for better roads, livestock loading would be an irresponsible option. If the Coalition were serious about this matter, it would ask the Federal Minister, John Anderson, what he is doing about future funding for national highways in this great State of New South Wales.

Mr R. W. TURNER (Orange) [5.04 p.m.]: I am pleased to speak to the matter of public importance introduced by the honourable member for Lismore. It gives me an opportunity to indicate my support for the livestock transport industry and, indeed, all freight operators throughout New South Wales, who operate under considerably higher costs than their interstate colleagues. The National Party has been working closely with the transport industry to ensure that transport costs are reduced so the industry can compete with the transport industries of other States.

The honourable member for Bankstown accused the National Party of coming along after the horse has bolted. Apparently the honourable member for Northern Tablelands will tomorrow introduce a bill that he maintains is along the lines of this matter of public importance. However, Government members seem to forget that the National Party has been pushing to support the livestock transport and freight industries throughout New South Wales for many years. Indeed, one of the National Party pre-election policies during the March election campaign was that we would support volumetric loading of livestock. Under that Coalition policy, livestock could be loaded on a trailer to an agreed length of 12.5 metres. As much stock as possible could be loaded, providing that road-friendly suspensions and unladen mass limits were complied with, and the loading was carried out according to animal welfare guidelines.

Every State in Australia except New South Wales has volumetric loading. We have all heard of the extreme difficulties faced by operators in transporting cattle or sheep from Queensland. They are forced to offload stock at places such as Goondiwindi, and proceed with fewer stock than they are allowed to transport in every other State. The National Party has also supported the livestock industry with regard to Australian Design Rule [ADR] 80-compliant engines, which allow for under-body exhausts that do not interfere with livestock. At the moment the Government insists that, regardless of whether livestock are being transported to farms or abattoirs, they should be loaded on vehicles that have vertical exhausts. However, with these exhausts the fumes

go all over the livestock. Under-body exhausts provide for much more comfortable and cleaner transport of livestock. The engines are more compliant because they are cooler, they run more efficiently, and they use less fuel. However, the Government will not support the industry by allowing vehicles that are fitted with ADR 80-compliant engines to be used to transport livestock.

Every other State has lower livestock transport costs. For example, in New South Wales workers compensation premiums are 9.2 per cent, whereas in Queensland they are only 3.58 per cent. It is little wonder that many transport operators in border areas are operating out of Queensland or Victoria and not New South Wales. This State would gain hundreds of thousands of dollars a year in registration fees if their vehicles were registered in New South Wales.

Livestock transport companies such as Hayes Transport, which operates out of Orange, run very efficient operations. Wherever possible, they run B-doubles, all their drivers are accredited, and their vehicles have road-friendly suspensions. Yet they are dammed all the way by the Government, which does not acknowledge how much they put into the industry, how responsible they are, and how many millions of dollars they have invested in extremely safe and efficient rigs. They are still not allowed to bring B-doubles over the Blue Mountains. I do not know why the Government will not support the livestock industry. The Government needs to implement a lot of measures before it earns any credibility from the livestock industry, which is very reliable and moves stock all over the State extremely efficiently.

Mr GEORGE (Lismore) [5.09 p.m.], in reply: I thank the honourable member for Bankstown and the honourable member for Orange for their contributions this afternoon, despite the honourable member for Bankstown's comment about the National Party's rhetoric in this debate. The former Minister for Agriculture is in the Chamber and I acknowledge that he has spoken to the directors of the Northern Co-operatives Meat Company with me, and that the B-double issue was raised with him. So this did not just happen overnight. I would like the Parliamentary Secretary to go back to the Roads and Transport Authority offices in the area from Tamworth to the Queensland border and see how many times over the past five years I have made representations about B-double problems and problems associated with transport in the north of the State.

[Interruption]

If I were the honourable member for Wentworthville I would keep working. This is a major problem. If the honourable member for Northern Tablelands were so interested in the problem he would not have wasted my time on such an important issue by taking a point of order. If he feels so strongly about it he should have been here supporting it. I would like to read a letter from Cassino RSM Processing, which is a pig processing plant at Lismore:

With some of these arterial roads into Booyong only allowing 4.3 metre high stock crates in, it will become a major issue to Booyong as local pigs could by-pass us and go into Queensland.

It is a problem because one of the major carriers that delivers pigs to the plant at Booyong has been three times fined \$300 in the past month. If this were to continue that carrier would not transport livestock to Booyong again. However, through my representations, despite what the Parliamentary Secretary has said, the carrier has been given a two months interim permit to use roads in the shire into Ballina to avoid these fines of \$1,000. But that did not happen because of the bill that will be before the House tomorrow.

Leaving everything else aside, the point is that the trucking industry in this State needs help. If the trucking industry and the livestock industry do not get support, carriers will have to go to other States for jobs. We have heard what the honourable member for Orange has said and I have placed on record the costs involved with workers compensation alone. It is a pet subject of mine and I will keep reinforcing that we need volumetric loading and we need access.

Public responsibility is in the community's interest. The grain harvest truck loading scheme has to be implemented, and the livestock loading has to be implemented. Last year all around the State the Country Trucking Congress had meetings which were attended by various members of Parliament from both sides of the House. However, we need the mass limits reviewed for trucks because, at the end of the day, if we do not remove these impediments to businesses, the livestock carrying business, and the other transport operators in this State, they will go out of business.

I should not have to reinforce that every day. These businesses are very concerned, and all of those associations have joined together over the past 12 to 18 months and run conferences around the State to try to

get their ideas together. They have finally formed a group, they have got their ideas together, and it is now up to as the Opposition—the real Opposition in this place—to promote them to the Government and get their requirements carried through by the Carr Government. We have got to get the Carr Government to recognise this problem, because it is very important for us to maintain a certain standard in this State to keep the business here.

Overall, the trucking industry needs to find ways of working productively with the Government and the Parliament to remove impediments to doing business in this State. I congratulate the Country Trucking Congress on its time and effort coming here last week and on its work over the past 12 to 18 months in going around the State and putting this paper together. We certainly endorse what it has done. I encourage the Carr Government to pick up the policy of the Country Trucking Congress, as well as our policy, and run with them to support the trucking industry and the livestock carriers of this State.

Discussion concluded.

Pursuant to sessional orders business interrupted.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

PARADISE BEACH ROAD CENTRE TEACHERS AIDE

Mrs HANCOCK (South Coast) [5.15 p.m.]: It is fitting that I speak on this matter on the day when teachers are withdrawing their labour from public schools and TAFE colleges throughout the State. That they should reach this level of frustration is not surprising, given the arrogance of the Carr Labor Government in recent years regarding the various concerns of teachers in their classrooms across this State. The matter I wish to address this evening concerns the working conditions of our teachers in emotionally disturbed [ED] and behaviourally disturbed [BD] units throughout primary schools in New South Wales. The issue to which I refer is not about class sizes, remuneration or infrastructure, it is about the dangerous situation that teachers dealing with emotionally or behaviourally disturbed children in these units will have to face when funding for teachers' aides is cut.

I understand about staffing formulas and funding constraints in the Department of Education and Training but I cannot comprehend the Government creating a situation where perhaps a young primary school teacher may have to deal alone with a number of very disturbed children who display violence, verbal abuse, non-compliance and other extreme behaviours. At Sanctuary Point public school there is an ED-BD unit called, paradoxically, the Paradise Beach Road Centre. The funding for a teachers aide has now been cut despite representations I made to Minister Refshauge regarding the continuation of this position.

The young Koori teachers aide has shown ability in this difficult position, the school principal supported his retention, and the cost to retain him was a mere \$28,000 per year. Now the centre's teacher will, on her own, be facing often dangerous and distressing situations in classrooms. This is clearly an occupational health and safety issue as well as a teacher health issue. The minimal cost of a teacher's aide would have assisted in the successful operation of such classes and enable appropriate educational and social support. Intervention would hopefully reduce the need for ongoing support in the broader community as these students mature and leave school.

The children currently under the care of one teacher at the Paradise Beach Road Centre are not just naughty, defiant or impulsive children who have shown themselves to be difficult in the classroom and have been suspended for a time. These kids have serious emotional and behavioural disorders, and they have all displayed violence and aggression not only towards their peers but also towards their teacher. One child has been diagnosed as uncontrollable, violent, and prone to self-harm, with police having been called several times this year due to the child bringing weapons to school. This child has also damaged property, broken windows, used sexually suggestive language, and trashed the classroom, and is prone to uncontrollable outbursts.

Another child is diagnosed ADHD [attention deficit hyperactive disorder] and conduct disorder [CD] and most of these students have been similarly diagnosed. This child has displayed violent behaviour towards peers, aggression, bullying and intimidating behaviour. Another child is diagnosed elective mute with anxiety disorders. He baits other students and displays violent, bizarre and obsessive behaviour. Another has kicked

walls, thrown objects, and physically attacked the teacher. The other students all display similar behaviour patterns, including one child who is currently under the care of a paediatrician and child psychologists.

The student displays bizarre behaviours including head banging, damaging other people's property, acting like an animal—according to the teacher—and pretending to be a flower. There are serious mental health issues in this centre and the one teacher who is experienced and committed should not have to face these conditions without the assistance of a teachers aide. This appalling situation is absolutely untenable and I drew attention to it when I wrote to Minister Refshauge in July this year. The Minister responded by saying that the Department of Education and Training is committed to the well-being and safety of teachers. I was concerned about that response in the light of the appalling situation at the Paradise Beach Road Centre.

The Minister informed me that the teacher had been advised of mentoring programs beyond the school for additional training, development, and professional support. All of these so-called opportunities for the teacher would, of course, be after school. In the meantime, without any support whatsoever, this teacher works alone in the classroom and supervises the children at recess and lunch times. Without the assistance of the teachers aide, the teacher will daily face the violent and dangerous behaviours of the emotionally and behaviourally disturbed children in the classroom. The situation could be solved easily by reinstating funding for a teachers aide in the princely sum of \$28,000. But the Minister talks about funding formulas that prevent assistance for this teacher. Surely the whole system must have some flexibility to take into account the behavioural and emotional disorders of children on a year-by-year basis. I implore the Minister to revisit this case and reinstate funding for a teachers aide.

GEORGES RIVER CATCHMENT

Ms MEGARRITY (Menai—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.20 p.m.]: I draw the attention of honourable members to the Georges River, which forms most of the boundary of the Menai electorate. The Woronora River flows into the Georges River and is technically within the catchment. I recall that some years ago an educational video package was produced entitled "The River in Sydney's Backyard". Indeed, the Georges River catchment is home to more than one million residents. It is also Sydney's oldest and most used catchment. The river and its tributaries flow through bushland, residential, commercial and industrial areas to Botany Bay. I once participated in a forum organised by the Georges River Environmental Alliance [GREA]. The honourable member for Lismore might be interested to know that the forum was called "George needs a friend".

Mr George: I do, too.

Ms MEGARRITY: Since that time members of the GREA and other community organisations have consistently lobbied for funding and programs to reverse the negative impacts of the last 200 years upon the river. I believe that the formal establishment of the Georges River Environment Centre at Chipping Norton Lakes was a critical milestone in improving community awareness of the river. Students of all ages benefit from the talent and commitment of the teacher in charge, Sharyn Cullis. In late 1998 the centre was the meeting point for Ministers in the first term of the Carr Labor Government. Ministers Knowles, Amery and Yeadon attended a briefing in the centre and then boarded a boat for a first-hand look at the state of the river. Shortly after that inspection came the very welcomed announcement of the State Government's commitment to the Georges River Foreshore Improvement Program [GRFIP].

This four-year, \$6 million program was established to improve and rehabilitate the foreshore, to improve water quality and to improve access to the foreshore by local people. With support and matching funding from councils and State agencies, the GRFIP has generated up to \$12 million of work in and around the catchment. In August 2002 the Sutherland Shire Environment Centre and the Georges River Environmental Alliance obtained funding from the program to conduct a feasibility study into improved and managed pedestrian access along the Georges River and its tributaries. An advisory board was established to develop the concept comprising representatives from local environment and community groups, the local Aboriginal land council, local government and State government agencies. The capable project co-ordinators, Bob Symington and Nick Benson, were employed at the Sutherland Shire Environment Centre.

The study divided the Georges River catchment into three major subregional sections, which were then further divided into subsections. The study has produced a professional and detailed vision for the Great Kai'mia Way. It identifies more than 200 kilometres of sustainable walking tracks and cycleways, linking Botany Bay, Woronora Valley, large parts of southern and western Sydney and the Illawarra escarpment. A prioritised and costed blueprint has been developed for the entire project. Consultation with all the relevant councils has been

extensive to maximise co-operation and co-ordination with local planning initiatives. I am sure that all honourable members and those who have seen the draft—including the honourable member for Georges River, the honourable member for Heathcote and the honourable member for Miranda—would congratulate everyone involved in producing the visionary and exciting Great Kai'mia Way.

Managing sewer overflows is also a critical component in protecting the Georges River. I am pleased to advise that Sydney Water is funding a major program of improvements to the sewerage system that potentially impacts on the Georges River. This is a significant and worthwhile investment by the New South Wales Government and the results can be seen by the quality of the water in the river. For some time Sydney Water has worked on the project and the results are very encouraging. Local students participate in Streamwatch and results from their river quality testing indicate decreases in faecal and other contaminants. I am pleased to report that there is a concerted effort by government, community, environment and other groups to work towards a better future for the Georges River. I am pleased to report that George has indeed many friends and so, too, does the honourable member for Lismore.

PICTON TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT

Ms SEATON (Southern Highlands) [5.25 p.m.]: I inform the House that Picton is reaching crisis point in relation to traffic management. This is partly because we are victims of our own local success in that Picton and its surrounding areas are now seen as desirable places to live. The area has experienced an increase in employment opportunities and has numerous tourism attractions. It is pleasing that so many people wish to be in and around Picton, but the area is becoming increasingly difficult to manage. Last week I discussed this matter with Councillor Christine Towndrow, the President of Picton Chamber of Commerce Mr Mark Hardacre, Tourism Wollondilly Manager Lynn Davey and other business representatives, shop owners and community members. Traffic has increased considerably in the area because people are travelling through Picton via Menangle Road from Tahmoor, Thirlmere and even Bargo on their way to the Hume Highway.

Recently the historic Victoria Bridge, a heritage wooden bridge that is used as a bypass to remove some traffic from the centre of Picton towards the Hume Highway—not a great deal but enough to keep pressure off the centre of town—was closed for six months for restoration. That closure increased traffic through town, causing a bottleneck at the intersection of Argyle and Menangle streets. This intersection includes the historic post office, which is now the Visitor Information Centre. It is really the centre of town, with lovely cafes, a hotel, many shops, St Anthony's School and a bank. However, the area is becoming more and more gridlocked. In the past I have suggested the necessity for a bypass and I have asked the Minister for Roads to give some indication of the long-term planning intentions of the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA]. Some time ago a road route was identified through the stud that is now the sewage treatment plant, across the river, coming out somewhere near the Malden cement plant. Many people would like that reservation to be made formal, for a timetable to be given and for funding to be allocated for construction of that bypass.

However, Picton is in crisis. As well as increased development, the council has received plans to expand the local shopping centre. I met with Chamber of Commerce representatives a few months ago with respect to a problem the RTA is trying to solve through the installation of traffic lights at the Menangle Street intersection. Many community members do not find that proposal acceptable because they believe it will be out of keeping with the historic nature of the post office and would create too much congestion at this small intersection. Another suggestion is for a one-way system through Picton. Following completion of the shopping centre expansion, the proposal is that people will travel one way down Argyle Street, into Margaret Street, then Colden Street and back on to Menangle Street. Shop owners and the chamber of commerce strongly urge this proposal because it does not involve installation of traffic lights at the intersection and will help to maintain the historic precinct. Indeed, the density of that area could be kept to a minimum.

On 28 February I wrote to the Minister for Roads asking for a written briefing on the RTA's views and plans for traffic management for Picton town centre. I also inquired about the RTA's views on how to handle increasing traffic loads that affect Picton from Thirlmere and Tahmoor and access to the freeway, including the long-proposed bypass concept. Apart from an acknowledgement I received on 10 March and a brief letter from the Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Minister for Roads, which essentially stated that the local issues were a matter for the council, I am disappointed to report that the question of the bypass and the intentions of the Roads and Traffic Authority—ultimately, the RTA will be a partner in any project—have not been addressed. I simply emphasise the importance of solving the traffic problem in Picton. The Bowral Chamber of Commerce and shop owners consider that solving the traffic problem is a major priority, and I would like the Minister for Roads to do the same.

BATHURST ELECTORATE EDUCATION WEEK ACTIVITIES

Mr MARTIN (Bathurst) [5.30 p.m.]: Last week was Education Week in New South Wales. It was also the celebration of 155 years of public education in New South Wales. The Bathurst electorate has some 58 public schools of all shapes and sizes, from large high schools with more than 1,000 students to one school at Glen Alice that currently has two students. However, the Government is keeping that school open because it appears that there will be a baby boom in Glen Alice in the next couple of years. Last week was a week of celebrations, with major functions at Bathurst, Lithgow, Blayney and Oberon. I attended the official launch for the district in Bathurst on Monday, where the district superintendent, Chris Evans, was the main speaker.

Education Week was launched in Kings Parade with the magnificent carillon in Bathurst as the backdrop. School leaders from schools close to Bathurst were awarded certificates for outstanding leadership and for the remainder of the day the schools undertook a number of activities, including concerts and demonstrations, to entertain the public. Kings Parade is in the centre of the Bathurst central business district. The activities were a wonderful demonstration of the skills of Bathurst school students. As I said, the students came from schools as large as Kelso High School and Bathurst High School and as small as Burruga Public School and Trunkey Creek Public School.

On Thursday a schools spectacular was held at Lithgow High School. Once again the talents of our students and dedicated teachers were at the fore in a concert performed by students from Lithgow High School, Lithgow primary school, Cooerwull school, which has existed since 1869, Zig Zag Public School, Capertee school, Cullen Bullen school, Portland central school, Hampton Public School, which is about to celebrate 130 years of continuous education, and Wallerawang public school. There was a wide range of entertainment in the form of a concert, and all the children—from the kindergarten kids through to the high school students—put on an excellent performance. The highlight of the concert was the mass choir, under the capable musical direction of Mrs Ray Burton, who has been the musical director at Lithgow High School for many years, which finished with that wonderful Australian song *I Am Australian*. The interaction between the students showed the talents of the public school students.

The week closed with a cocktail party at Bathurst Public School, which is celebrating 150 years of education. That school has existed for all but five years of public education in this State. It started all those years ago on a site in Howick Street but is now located on a site in George Street, Bathurst. The principal of Bathurst Public School, Tina Slaterry, along with her staff members and committee, went to a lot of trouble to organise the cocktail party, which was attended by at least 200 to 300 people. The school committee invited school captains and prefects from as far back as they could.

Indeed, present was a gentleman from Perth who attended Bathurst Public School in 1916. Also in attendance was Alex Bedwell, a well-known retired businessman in Bathurst who attended the school from 1930 to 1936. He was able to bring back memories of his days at the school in so much detail that one would have thought he was there only yesterday. All in all, the celebration at Bathurst Public School was a fitting finale to a very public celebration of public education in this State. With more than 2,200 State schools and 131 technical colleges or TAFE institutes, New South Wales has the best public education system in Australia, and probably one of the best in the world. I was pleased to be part of the 155th anniversary celebrations last week.

RYDE HOSPITAL SURGICAL SERVICES

Mr TINK (Epping) [5.35 p.m.]: I raise a matter on behalf of Dr Samuel Sakker, who is the senior surgeon at Ryde Hospital. Dr Sakker has visited me and the honourable member for Ryde, and it is fair to say that there is bipartisan concern about the issues he raised. The background is a concern about surgical services at Ryde Hospital. In the past there have been 10 visiting medical officers [VMOs] with succession in seniority. In the past 10 years the non-reappointment of retired VMOs has reduced the number to five. Recently the hospital appointed a part-time staff surgeon who also works at Royal North Shore Hospital. However, I understand that that surgeon has a right to private practice. The time he spends at Ryde Hospital is of concern as he does not consult locally in a medical sense. He has stopped operating at Ryde Hospital and when he is on call he transfers surgical cases to Royal North Shore Hospital.

This situation is extremely unsatisfactory for the local surgeons and has not been resolved to date. This means that there are only five effective surgeons in the area, including Gladesville, Ryde, Eastwood, Meadowbank, Epping and Beecroft. Of the five surgeons involved, one is a senior surgeon aged over 65 years, which means that he is in the zone for retirement; and three surgeons are over 60 years, which means that they

are within a year or so of retirement. This leaves only one surgeon at Ryde Hospital in the over-50 age bracket. My point is that shortly there may effectively be only one surgeon covering Ryde Hospital. The surgeons at Ryde Hospital have raised the issue with the area administration on a number of occasions. The most recent occasion was in July this year, when a letter requested that three VMO surgeons be appointed to Ryde Hospital. However, to date no reply has been received.

Following considerable representations by the administrator at the hospital, one position has finally been advertised. I understand that there are four applicants for the position, and the surgeons at Ryde Hospital want three of the four applicants appointed to the hospital, provided they are otherwise suitable to be appointed as surgeons. They see that as the minimum requirement to continue surgical services. The surgeons believe that the arrangement with the part-time surgeon should come to an end. They believe that the part-time surgeon should practise at Royal North Shore Hospital, as effectively he does at the moment, that one person should be brought in to replace that surgeon, and that two other surgeons should be recruited to start rebuilding the basic level required for services, bearing in mind the rolling retirement of surgeons currently at the hospital which is about to take place. The problems are short-term increased work load on the remaining surgeons and reduced teaching of junior staff. The long-term critical problems are no succession and the disappearance of local surgical services as four surgeons are in the zone for retirement.

This situation is exacerbated by problems with insurance. All honourable members know about the current problems of obtaining medical insurance, particularly in high-risk areas such as surgery. This is a major impost on surgeons in the present climate of the incurred but not reported levy. There is concern that people at the top of the age range facing these additional levies might advance their retirements. We could see a rapid reduction in the number of surgeons at the hospital. The one part-time surgeon from Royal North Shore Hospital is not operating at Ryde Hospital and is not really a surgeon at the hospital. We have to get three out of the four applicants appointed, subject to their basic fitness, and to get the surgical staff at the hospital back to strength.

HUNTER MEDICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE AWARDS

Mr MILLS (Wallsend) [5.40 p.m.]: I want to praise the research work of the Hunter Medical Research Institute [HMRI] and describe its annual awards night at the Newcastle Conservatorium of Music hall on 28 August. We heard that Frances Kay-Lambkin, Dr Amanda Baker and a team of HMRI researchers have been awarded almost \$660,000 from the Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation to help people suffering from depression and co-existing drug and alcohol problems. The grant will be used in a three-year study, based at the University of Newcastle, into the effectiveness of using innovative cognitive behaviour therapy [CBT] treatment. CBT is a rapid, targeted, drug-free treatment option for sufferers of depression. The new funding will allow research to be expanded to take in all participants from the Hunter region and extend the study to include rural and remote areas of New South Wales.

At the presentation night the director of the HMRI, Dr John Rostas, described the three cornerstones of success for HMRI. First was strength in research. There has been focused research activity in recent years in six major research programs—four of them spring to mind, including brain and mental health, cancer, cardiovascular health, and mothers and babies. Each of those programs involves internationally recognised work focusing on creating a better life for humanity; collaboration between clinicians and scientists working at several campuses of HMRI; and multidisciplinary approaches that span the continuum from investigating biological mechanisms, improving the diagnosis and treatment, preventing disease and promoting health, and translating discoveries into commercial products and health policy. This focused approach has helped HMRI's researchers to be more competitive and successful. HMRI won more peer-reviewed competitive research funding than any other research institute in New South Wales—\$8.5 million; even more than the Garvan Institute. These competitive grants come from many sources, including government agencies and research foundations, both in Australia and overseas. The second cornerstone of success is strategic advantage. Dr Rostas said:

As a highly successful regional institute, HMRI has a unique opportunity to make a real difference to rural and remote Australia. We currently have a number of key initiatives which will improve the health of rural communities—such as projects in the prevention of cancer, heart disease and premature birth and the treatment of depression and acute stroke.

The third cornerstone of success is the ability to develop and foster talent. Through the generosity of local community and corporate partners, HMRI has established attractive research fellowships and scholarships to catch the attention of the world's best researchers and nurture the Hunter's own local talent. Examples are the NBN Telethon Children's Cancer Fellow, the Port Waratah Coal Services Fellow in Respiratory Medicine, the first PhD students to be funded by the Emlyn and Jennie Thomas perpetual scholarships, and the Jennie Thomas career development awards. The first grant this year was the Andrew Lojszczyk Memorial Grant, which will be

used to investigate novel genetic and environmental risk factors in thrombosis. It was awarded to Dr Chris Levi and seven others. Another grant went to Associate Professor M. Ebert and Dr P. Greer, who will test a new method to improve the accuracy of radiotherapy by using the treatment machine to precisely locate tumours. The next grant went to Professor Leonie Ashman and Dr A. McClusky, who are testing anticancer drugs with higher selectivity and lower toxicity than conventional chemotherapy.

A grant to investigate a novel molecular target for a new anti-asthma therapy was awarded to Associate Professor Alistair Sim. A grant for the identification of brain pathways that control stress was awarded to Professor Trevor Day. A grant to be used to study receptor interactions that can trigger schizophrenia went to Dr F. Ross and Dr P. Tooney. They want to establish a new molecular technique to study how the receptors activated by cannabis use might lead to the development of schizophrenia. A HMRI grant to investigate older women and alcohol use was awarded to Associate Professor Judy Byles and Dr L. Parkinson, who will develop recommendations on safe alcohol use amongst older women by examining the relationship between alcohol use and health outcomes in that group. Finally, a grant went to Associate Professor P. Schofield and Dr Ross Kerridge, who will examine the risk factors for the development of post-operative delirium among patients over 60 years undergoing elective major surgery.

Other grants were awarded, including the Pulse Education prize that went to Sabrina Pitt. The Young Medical Researcher of the Year Award, sponsored by Pulse, went to Amanda Baker for her psychological management of addictive disorders. The HMRI award for outstanding achievement in cancer research, sponsored by the Cancer Council of New South Wales, went to Christine Page and Professor Alan Spigelman. The Newcastle Permanent Building Society bowel and prostate cancer research grant went to Alan Spigelman. I have mentioned about 50 researchers' names in HMRI, and it defies belief that a senior officer of New South Wales Health could write that HMRI employed an average of only three staff. I congratulate HMRI's researchers.

MIRRIWINNI GARDENS SCHOOL

Mr STONER (Oxley—Leader of the National Party) [5.45 p.m.]: Last week I visited Mirriwinni Gardens, a school for Aboriginal children west of Kempsey in the Nulla Nulla Creek area near beautiful Bellbrook. Mirriwinni Gardens school started in 1978 when a local community group bought land and through volunteer effort established a school. It was aimed at meeting the needs of Aboriginal children, not only in the district but further afield, for whom the standard State school system was not providing the education required. In 1989 the school received some Federal funding to establish a building, although it has never received funding through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission [ATSIC] for its ongoing costs.

I met with the principal, Fay Oliver; the chairman of the board, Rex Marshall, OAM; his daughter, Lena Marshall; and another board member, Merv Cohen. They explained to me that during a period in the late 1990s, when Fay Oliver was not the principal, the school's registration and accreditation requirements slipped. This was discovered when Department of Education and Training inspectors visited the school in 2000. They told me they are still not on top of the Board of Studies curriculum requirements and training for teachers to cope with the changes in the curriculum. Mirriwinni Gardens has been successfully delivering the School Certificate for 26 years and has had some outstanding results. For example, last year nine students completed their School Certificate. The great majority of these children—for example, six out of those nine students—go on to do their Higher School Certificate in Kempsey.

However, the Department of Education and Training requirements have not been met. The Mirriwinni Gardens school requires additional time to get its accreditation and registration requirements up to the standard required by the department. It has applied to the Independent Schools Association for funding for a consultant to work on the curriculum and with teachers. Board members of the school told me that the Board of Studies no longer comes out and spends time at the school to help it with these sorts of requirements and to help it with the terrific outcomes it is achieving for Aboriginal kids in the area. They fear that the Government, through the Board of Studies, wants to close Mirriwinni Gardens, which would be an absolute—

Mr George: You are joking!

Mr STONER: That is their fear. That would be an absolute tragedy. This school is staffed by Aboriginal teachers, with an Aboriginal board, and is meeting the needs of Aboriginal students, not just from that district but from around New South Wales—places such as Moree, Bourke and Dubbo. Kids with particular needs are attending this terrific school in the bush west of Kempsey. It would be an absolute disaster if

Mirriwinni Gardens school were to close down, if that is the department's intention. The school operates very successfully, but it needs sufficient time to meet the curriculum and the teacher training requirements of the Department of Education and Training. I have not written to the Minister for Education and Training at this stage. However, I call on the Minister, who is also the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, to examine this issue and afford Mirriwinni Gardens school the time it needs to meet the department's requirements. I ask also that the department provide the school with assistance to meet those requirements.

The school staff is very willing to work with the Government and with the Board of Studies to meet all the requirements. They simply need some time and help to do so. If the Government and the Minister were prepared to assist the school, Mirriwinni Gardens school would continue the great work it does with Aboriginal youth, many of whom I met while I was there. They are terrific kids and at Mirriwinni Gardens they are in the right environment to get a good education, which is a matter of crucial importance for Aboriginal youth.

OUR LADY OF LEBANON CHURCH, WOLLONGONG

Ms HAY (Wollongong) [5.50 p.m.]: On 6 September I had the honour to represent the Premier at a function to celebrate the feast of the birth of Our Lady of Lebanon. The Maronite Catholic Bishop of Australia, his Lordship Bishop Abikaram, hosted a dinner on behalf of Our Lady of Lebanon Church, Wollongong, together with Father Youssef Abouzeid, the parish priest. Lebanese migration to Australia dates back to the 1880s. In those days Lebanese migrants were referred to as Syrians. After 1920, when Lebanon came under French mandate, they were classified as Lebanese. The early migration was made up of many denominations, such as Maronite, Melkite, Orthodox Christians, Druze and Muslim. The first Lebanese church in Sydney was established by Melkite Catholics in 1895, and was followed by a Maronite church in 1897. Many of the descendants, who today extend to five or six generations, assimilated in language, culture and cuisine into the broader Australian community.

Wollongong has a large and varied cultural community in which the Lebanese community plays an important role. The function that I attended was also attended by a large number of people from the Lebanese community, who came together not only to celebrate the birth of Our Lady of Lebanon but also to raise funds for the Wollongong church. Those in attendance included many young people of Arabic-speaking backgrounds. The Government has a strong commitment to cultural diversity throughout the State and has worked closely with Arabic-speaking communities on a number of initiatives. Since 10 July 2001 the Government, community leaders, organisations and young people have been working together to implement the Youth Partnership with Arabic-speaking communities. This partnership is about finding ways to encourage young people of Arabic-speaking backgrounds to perform better in school and to participate in sport, community activities and leadership development. One of the key priorities of the partnership is to establish youth liaison teams, which help to identify young people at risk early so that problems can be prevented.

The Lebanese community in Wollongong is an example to us all of tolerance and understanding of those with differing beliefs. Unfortunately, recent public debate has centred on and attacked a high-profile Islamic person in Wollongong, whom I personally know, admire and respect. While attending this particular Lebanese function it became clear to me that if we concentrate on being more tolerant and accepting of differing views and beliefs, we will go a long way to finding harmony and peace, particularly in the area I represent. I congratulate Father Youssef Abouzeid and Bishop Abikaram, together with the Wollongong Lebanese community, on a job well done.

WOLLONGBAR ADMINISTRATIVE CENTRE

Mr GEORGE (Lismore) [5.55 p.m.]: It is with sadness that I speak in this House in an attempt to prevent the loss of 17 jobs from the Wollongbar administrative centre. Those jobs are to be transferred to Orange. The Wollongbar administrative centre is in a strategic location to provide services to 650 staff throughout the northern area of the State. It provides services to the research station and agricultural institute at Wollongbar and to other offices at Alstonville, Grafton, Glen Innes, Tamworth and Narrabri. It also supplies services to the advisory offices at Mullumbimby, Murwillumbah, Kyogle, Casino, Coffs Harbour, Kempsey, Armidale, Inverell, Moree, Gunnedah and Manilla; the cattle tick offices at Kyogle, Murwillumbah, Woodenbong, Jennings and Goondiwindi; the Wollongbar Board of Tick Control; and Pearces Creek CTP team. Further, it provides services to offices at Bingara, the chemical residue laboratory at Lismore, the beef industry centre at Armidale and various CTP crossing offices.

The Wollongbar administrative centre provides unequalled service and advice to staff at all those sites. All of a sudden the Carr Government has made a decision to transfer 17 jobs out of the Wollongbar administrative centre. Although the centre is in the Ballina electorate, many of the employees to be transferred come from my electorate. Wollongbar is the backbone of the agricultural industry in the Northern Rivers region. I am disappointed that I have to speak in this House in an attempt to convince the Carr Government not to transfer the jobs from our area. The Carr Government does not appreciate the services that are provided by the department and its employees.

The Government does not have a problem telling 17 people to pack up and shift to Orange. But four of the staff members are at Wollongbar as a result of previous forced transfers. To maintain their employment they had to move to Wollongbar. The wives of two of the staff work at the Wollongbar Agricultural Institute. The husbands have been transferred but the wives have not. The Government does not care about that. It tells the employees to move to Orange and work it out. I am surprised and concerned that although 93 people throughout the State will be subject to these transfers, I have been told that there are only 32 or 33 jobs at Orange. Some people will miss out. Perhaps the Government will offer those people redundancies.

If a private company did the same thing to its employees, the matter would be raised in this House and we would try to assist those people. Yet the Carr Government just transfers these jobs. The loss of these 17 jobs is on top of a forecast transfer of jobs from the area office of the Department of Education and Training. Suddenly we could lose 100 jobs from the area. The Government talks about creating jobs in New South Wales! I know that the honourable member for Ballina has spoken about this issue, and I raise it today because we need to protect these people and their jobs.

The Wollongbar administrative centre is the regional headquarters for the provision of current information technology and support services to staff in offices throughout northern New South Wales. All the offices that the centre supports are located in the northern part of New South Wales. By shifting the centre to Orange, the staff will not be able to provide the same level of service from the southern part of the State. The North Coast is an area of high unemployment. The staff at the centre are a large group of highly skilled and motivated people, yet the Government wants to ship them out and send them to Orange.

The staff at Orange may not have an adequate knowledge of the special requirements of our area. Wollongbar Research Station looks after our dairy program and cattle tick program. I am disappointed that the former Minister for Agriculture, the Hon. Richard Amery, is not in the Chamber to hear me talk about the trouble we are having already with the cattle tick program without shifting the administration to Orange in the hope that everything will be all right. I do not believe it will be all right. I call on the Minister for Agriculture to reconsider his decision, and to reinstate the 17 jobs at the Wollongbar Research Station to support the 650 staff and officers that they now support.

HANDITAL NEW SOUTH WALES

Ms D'AMORE (Drummoyne) [6.00 p.m.]: I acknowledge today in the House the vital role of Handital New South Wales. Handital is an association of Italian families and friends of people with a disability. It is a non-profit volunteer organisation made up of people with disabilities, their parents and their friends. The association was established in 1983 to assist and support adults and children with disabilities and their carers, especially those of Italo-Australian background. The association provides information and referral, casework, counselling and advocacy services. It also supports educational, recreational and social activities such as the adult social group. I acknowledge the work of Handital's dedicated management committee, its workers and supporters, and in particular the dedication of the senior office bearers, President Ms Susan Carovigno, Secretary Maria Iaquinto, Treasurer Marina Pagliarini and Public Officer Vito Iaquinto.

On Friday 15 September 2003 I had the honour of representing the Premier of New South Wales at Handital's twentieth anniversary celebration ball hosted at the Conca D'oro Lounge at Riverwood and witnessed first-hand the dedication of Handital. Guest speakers included David Hall, OAM, Handital patron and world number one male wheelchair tennis player, and Kevin Greig, Special Olympian and winner of gold, silver and bronze medals at the recent games held in Dublin, Ireland. They were an inspiration to everyone present.

The association aims to ensure that people with disabilities and their carers are not isolated by virtue of language and cultural barriers. The importance of the work Handital does is further highlighted when we look at the National Ethnic Disability Alliance [NEDA], which estimated that 2.9 per cent of the population living in Australia with a disability speak a language other than English at home. The National Ethnic Disability Alliance

also estimates that 4.9 per cent of the population living in Australia have a disability and come from a non-English speaking background. According to the National Ethnic Disability Alliance, three out of four people from a non-English speaking background with a disability currently miss out on receiving basic and essential services because of their ethnicity. Associations such as Handital provide a vital link in the community. For the past 20 years it has provided an invaluable service to the community and has expanded its services and membership to various other cultural backgrounds. I commend it for that.

Handital is well known for the care, respect and professionalism with which it serves the community. It was instrumental in promoting the Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games within the Italo-Australian community. The association organised the welcoming reception for the entire Paralympic team. The initiative was taken because it was felt that the success of the Games had the potential to leave an unparalleled legacy for all people with a disability, and I am happy to say they did achieve this. Handital also strives to publicise and gain recognition for the International Day of People with a Disability, celebrated on 3 December every year. I commend Handital and its committee, workers, carers and members of the community who have made Handital New South Wales a great community resource.

NORTH EVELEIGH REDEVELOPMENT

Ms MOORE (Bligh) [6.03 p.m.]: The return of the Carr Government for a third term has spurred public and media calls for it to act on the big issues, particularly for long-term planning and the renewal of public infrastructure. The new Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources is a positive sign, and I hope it will progress the substantial reform needed for effective long-term planning and co-ordination. Public land and assets are being disposed of at an alarming rate, without effective scrutiny or process to ensure that the land or property is not needed for future public benefit. The critical issue is whether the Government will tread water rather than address the future, and whether it will provide responsible stewardship of public assets that leaves a long-term legacy. Already substantial former transport land has been redeveloped without a blueprint for future needs or a commitment to direct revenues into long-term infrastructure renewal rather than recurrent spending.

An immediate concern in my electorate is railway land around Redfern station that is targeted for sale and redevelopment, while State Rail's Eveleigh North master plan focuses on income-generating redevelopment, at the expense of ensuring full public benefit from this public railway land. The State Rail proposal conflicts with vital planning principles in Sydney regional environment plan 26, City West, and pre-empts critical State planning initiatives, including the Redfern-Waterloo partnership project and ministerial inquiry into New South Wales public transport. An important component of the Redfern-Waterloo partnership project, sponsored by the Premier's Department, is the RED strategy, which is to develop an integrated planning framework for Redfern, Eveleigh, Darlington and Waterloo.

North Eveleigh redevelopment is being progressed ahead of and in isolation from the RED strategy, even though Sydney regional environment plan 26 requires that "Development is to be compatible with and enhance the surrounding land use in Waterloo, Redfern and Darlington". That vital outcome for this significantly disadvantaged and long-neglected area is not possible until the RED strategy has completed its area planning for improved transport, housing, open space, employment, public infrastructure and the public domain. Sydney regional environment plan 26 also requires that any development preserves heritage, limits private vehicle use, promotes public transport, takes advantage of proximity to universities, provides affordable housing, and provides for continued railway use.

In contrast, State Rail's desired scheme seeks car parking in excess of council's limits, abandons original heritage proposals for a railway museum, targets redevelopment at the highest market expectations, and is isolated from regional transport planning. Just prior to State Rail's master plan application the Government initiated its inquiry into New South Wales public transport, in response to mounting evidence of ageing infrastructure, poor maintenance and expert advice warning that substantial redesign and renewal is urgent and critical. Planning issues associated with the proposed sale of railway land cannot be adequately assessed without a plan detailing future needs, including requirement for heavy and light rail corridors or bus and train interchanges. The Environmental Planning and Assessment Act does not compel South Sydney City Council to react to State Rail's rezoning proposal, but enables it to consider a rezoning based on planning principles and an environmental study prepared by council and exhibited to the public. The involvement of State Rail and a regional planning policy provoke fears of State intervention, which is too often an excuse for abandoning vital local planning concerns and responsibility.

Therefore I ask the Minister for Planning, Infrastructure and Natural Resources to co-ordinate and resource council, as the local planning authority, to responsibly plan for its area by providing a blueprint for transport needs around the Redfern rail corridor to prevent railway land being sold before we know whether it is needed for future transport infrastructure and services; a moratorium on any sale or redevelopment until decisions about site planning can be placed in the context of the findings of the State-sponsored RED strategy; a comprehensive heritage plan that preserves and promotes the internationally significant social, industrial and railway heritage in an inspiring and involving manner; full information, particularly about events proposed for the \$35 million performing arts complex on the site, so that impacts can be accurately assessed; and support for the effective and sensitive implementation of the positive planning principles in Sydney regional environmental plan 26 that promote public transport use, meeting local needs for housing and employment, and taking advantage of the proximity to major universities.

The legal planning procedures for this site must be clear so that council can consider rezoning based on principle and proper process, without pressure of State interference. More broadly, I ask the responsible Ministers to ensure that departments establish priorities which stop government authorities acting in their own interest, rather than considering broad public benefit for public assets. I ask the Ministers to put a moratorium on the sale of public transport land until a transport blueprint has been produced, to prevent further alienation of public assets until alternative public use has been considered, and to ensure that revenue from truly surplus assets fund new or renewed public infrastructure.

MANLY JETCAT SERVICE

Mr BARR (Manly) [6.08 p.m.]: I raise the matter of the recently released interim report of the ministerial inquiry into sustainable transport in New South Wales, prepared by Mr Thomas Parry, and in particular the comments regarding the Manly JetCat service. According to the report, Sydney Ferries currently has a funding gap of \$31 million in its annual revenue needs of \$96 million. The report suggest that about \$3.5 million could be saved through efficiency improvements, and that further savings could be achieved by rationalising services, such as discontinuing the Manly JetCat service.

I wish to record on behalf of my electorate my strong objection to any proposal to discontinue or reduce the Manly to Circular Quay JetCat service. It is the most profitable part of the Sydney Ferries network and accounts for about 45 per cent of its total revenue. It is viable and successful in its own right and is by far the most significant and successful ferry route on Sydney Harbour. It is Sydney Ferries' core service, an icon of Sydney Harbour and an important service for commuters and visitors alike. The fast-ferry service offered by the JetCat is an important part of the route and a key element of its success. It is of particular importance to peak-hour commuters. It is wrong to assume that JetCat commuters would simply switch to the slower ferry service if the fast service were withdrawn. Every extra minute spent travelling to and from work is crucial to many people. The average JetCat service patron works long hours, stays in the city late at night and has tight time schedules.

Constituents have pointed out to me that they must dash their children to child care before catching the JetCat to work. If there were no JetCat service they would arrive late for work. The fast-ferry service makes the Manly to Circular Quay route a viable option for those commuters. It is also a useful backup for commuters who miss the slower ferry or who need to vary their timetable from time to time. If the service were withdrawn JetCat patrons might opt to travel by car rather than spend the extra time on the ferry. It has been argued that having a JetCat service and a regular ferry service is inefficient because the two services compete. That is a simplistic interpretation of how the route operates. The JetCat service and the regular service run at full capacity during peak hours. The JetCat service is patronised by commuters who cannot afford the extra time taken by the regular ferry service and, as I said, it provides an important back-up. The two services complement each other and greatly enhance the viability of the route.

The Parry report's description of the Sydney Ferries operation as a subsidised water taxi service primarily for middle-income to high-income earners and tourists reveals a narrow appreciation of the social and environmental benefits that flow from public transport. It also demonstrates a lack of understanding of the role that ticket prices play in the choice of public transport mode. In addition, it is offensive. Like many other parts of Sydney, the northern beaches suffer high levels of traffic congestion. Transport is the priority issue in my electorate and it was the predominant issue during the recent State election campaign. Sydney must urgently address the environmental problems it faces as a result of air pollution and car usage. Better public transport and higher patronage levels are key issues in dealing with those problems. Simply put, we must encourage more people out of their cars and onto buses and ferries. If the Parry suggestion about the JetCat service were adopted, people could be forced back onto overcrowded roads. Any short-term efficiency gains would be quickly

absorbed by the extra load placed on our roads. It would lead to spending even greater amounts on road funding, which is effectively a subsidy for the motor vehicle.

The Parry report takes a narrow, accounting-based approach to a complex issue and fails to consider the bigger picture. It is wrong simply to focus on cost recovery; a transport system needs substantial investment and better management to make it an attractive and viable alternative to car usage. In that respect, I welcome the allocation of \$10 million to upgrade the Manly wharf. That is an important gesture of support for the ferry service and public transport. I will make a submission to the inquiry and strongly urge the Government to retain the JetCat service. I have been handing out flyers at the wharf and asking people to send their views to the inquiry and to the Minister. It is an important issue and I will fight tooth and nail to maintain those services.

Private members' statements noted.

BILL RETURNED

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

Institute of Sport Amendment Bill

[Mr Deputy-Speaker left the chair at 6.14 p.m. The House resumed at 7.30 p.m.]

BUDGET ESTIMATES AND RELATED PAPERS

Financial Year 2003-04

Debate resumed from an earlier hour.

Ms GADIEL (Parramatta) [7.30 p.m.]: I am honoured to make a contribution to the debate on the 2003-04 budget brought down by the Carr Labor Government. This budget has continued the Government's commitment to strengthening the State's financial position while increasing resources for youth in our schools, hospitals, transport and community services. The 2003-04 budget is the State's eighth consecutive balanced budget. It complements the predicted pick-up in economic growth to 3.25 per cent of gross State product as agricultural conditions improve alongside demand for our exports. It is this trend of balanced budgets and strong economic growth that has allowed the Government to make record investment in our public services, and deliver on its election promises. This is truly a budget that delivers for New South Wales and Parramatta.

For 2003-04 the Government's budget of just under \$35 billion will provide major increases in funding for essential services across the State. There is no other activity in which the State Government is involved that has more impact on the quality of people's lives than health care. An increase of \$920 million in the Health budget to \$9.267 billion will enable the State to better cope with increased strains on the health system that have resulted from the combination of growing demand from an ageing population and a Federal Government that continues to attack Medicare and short-change New South Wales in its health funding agreement. This increased funding in the budget will be available for all area health services, the new Cancer Institute, the Western Sydney strategy and the emergency departments in our hospitals.

When we invest in education and training we are investing, literally, in our children's future. We are not only equipping them with the skills they will need to enjoy successful careers and raise families of their own, we are ensuring that they are able to participate fully in society as active and vigilant citizens. An increase in the Education and Training budget of \$542 million to \$8.159 billion will result in the start of the implementation of a commitment to a \$329 million, four-year plan to add another 1,500 teachers and additional classrooms to public schools, which will result in reduced class sizes from kindergarten to year 2.

Child protection is a priority of the Carr Labor Government. It realises its responsibility to provide support for front-line caseworkers by providing additional resources to early intervention programs and increasing available funding for out-of-home care placements. The 2003-04 budget will increase funding to the Department of Community Services by \$162 million, taking funding to \$803 million. Although this is more than double the funding available to the department when Labor came to office in 1995, there is still much work to be done in this important area of public policy. In speaking to private agencies involved in out-of-home care placements in my electorate I became aware of some tragic stories involving children in precarious circumstances. However, I am heartened by the budget's funding increase, which is part of an increase of \$1.2 billion over five years.

When the Treasurer delivered the budget on 24 June he announced a \$24 billion, four-year program for new public works and investment, a record for New South Wales and any State Government in Australia. In addition, the Government is involved in several major public-private partnerships that will result in the private sector investing about \$1.1 billion into projects like the Western Sydney Orbital. This strong commitment to investment and additional funding for public service, coupled with a sustained reduction in general government net debt, means that the Carr Labor Government has been able to deliver better public service while keeping the State's economic growth strong.

Parramatta, as the second-largest commercial centre in New South Wales, is one of the cornerstones of the State's continued economic performance. The 2003-04 budget is a good news story for Parramatta. Local capital expenditure totals \$113.6 million, which includes \$26.7 million for health, \$21.37 million for roads and \$12.78 for transport initiatives. If we break down the budget aggregates in Parramatta alone there are numerous highlights, most of which my electorate is already aware of. Westmead Hospital, which was opened by Premier Wran in 1978, stands as a tribute to Australia's universal public health system. At the outset I must declare an interest when talking about Westmead Hospital, because it is at the hospital's midwife clinic that I have been helped along every step of the way during my pregnancy. I thank the dedicated staff of the midwife clinic for their care and support.

The Westmead research and hospital precinct is reaching a crossroad. Australian Biohub Westmead currently has an application before the State Government for an enlarged biotechnology cluster with medical-related businesses and research organisations to complement the current research hub. This proposal makes sense because it makes use of existing infrastructure while creating new jobs and investment opportunities for Western Sydney. For 2003-04, the Western Sydney Strategy will be allocated more than \$12.6 million to continue its upgrade of Westmead Hospital's rehabilitation, allied health, cancer care and cardiac services, and maternity, imaging and patient wards, as well as services at St Joseph's, Lottie Stewart and Auburn hospitals.

A constituent has brought to my attention a groundbreaking trial in rehabilitation medicine that is taking place at St Joseph's Hospital in Auburn, just outside my electorate, under Dr. Sandanam. The treatment seeks to reduce the effects of spasticity in stroke victims by injecting botulinum toxin, or "botox". The treatment is quite expensive but the preliminary results for stroke sufferers have been encouraging, and I have made representations to the Minister regarding a possible expansion of the trial. I welcome several other initiatives in the Westmead area, including the earmarking of more than \$960,000 for the new Breast Cancer Centre, which will undertake research, education and breast-screening programs.

This financial year \$2.176 million will be spent to complete the construction of the procedures centre at Westmead Hospital, which will provide an integrated one-stop centre including a new endoscopy suite, an upgraded pre-admission clinic and an improved day surgery unit. I am exceptionally proud to represent an electorate that will house a service that children and parents from all over New South Wales will depend on—that is, the New South Wales Emergency Transfer Service [NETS], a critical care service for children who need intensive care but are in a hospital without it. The Government has provided \$6.5 million for the purpose-built facility, with the final portion of this funding, \$1.566 million, provided in this budget. I have accepted an invitation from Dr Andrew Berry and his team to attend the grand opening of the facility later this year, and I look forward to reporting back to honourable members on the great works that are a daily occurrence for the NETS team.

While the Carr Government has made continual improvements to public health facilities in Parramatta, it has been an uphill battle for the Government against mounting pressure on the public health system, as declining bulk-billing rates have meant that those who cannot afford basic general practitioner [GP] services are forced into hospital emergency departments. The Federal cuts to Medicare and the subsequent decline in bulk-billing is a major issue in Parramatta. I have already received hundreds of responses from constituents on the matter, and so far as I am aware the only person in Parramatta who supports the cuts is the Federal member, Mr Ross Cameron, who has shown nothing but contempt for families in my electorate. He was reported in a *Sydney Morning Herald* article of 8 March as saying, "I think we are a bunch of hypochondriacs and we need to be weaned off our addiction to general practitioners." Mr Cameron went on to comment that bulk-billing removed "effective price signals".

I can assure Mr Cameron that when families in Parramatta take their children off to the local GP, the only thing on their minds is how to get the best quality health care for their children, not how to get something for nothing. Universal public health care, or Medicare, is about providing affordable yet high-quality health care to everyone. Mr Cameron would do well to remember this as he theorises about how best to introduce in Australia the United States tiered health system—under which millions of people are without health cover.

In education and training, Westmead Public School will benefit from a \$3.43 million upgrade provided for in the 2003-04 budget. The upgrade will include improvements to the school's library and classrooms, the provision of landscaping and perimeter fencing, and the installation of a lift between blocks L and J. On 12 August I was privileged to visit Westmead Public School and speak to year 6 students, as part of their Discovering Democracy unit, about the role of a member of Parliament. I also had an opportunity to speak with staff and have a tour of the school grounds with Ms Jenny Simmonds, the school's acting principal. I thoroughly enjoyed my visit to the school. Judging by the students' apparent knowledge of government and democracy, it was clear that the teachers were doing a tremendous job. I look forward to working through the details of the upgrade and any other issues that arise, as Westmead Public School looks to accommodate growing enrolments over the next few years.

Perhaps the greatest threat to educational opportunities in the Parramatta electorate at present comes with the proposed funding cuts of \$14 million over three years to the University of Western Sydney [UWS]. Next year the UWS is expected to cut 450 university places and turn away 3,000 eligible students. Importantly, despite the shortage of nurses across New South Wales public hospitals, and even though the UWS turned away 135 eligible nursing students last year, the university will not receive one new place under the Federal Government's changes to higher education. The UWS is facing growing demand, with the population of Western Sydney expected to increase by 25 per cent over the next 20 years.

Surely families in Parramatta and Western Sydney would be entitled to think that there may be a spot at their local university for their children—or maybe not. I think this will be a real test for the Federal member, Mr Cameron, particularly given the ability of former Federal members like Paul Elliot and John Brown to secure significant Commonwealth funding and services for Parramatta. Mr Cameron, as the local Federal member, has sought to link himself with the UWS on several occasions. He is even on record as saying, "As a local member I advocate for its (UWS's) needs." I just hope that Mr Cameron can meet this challenge by confronting the Prime Minister and the Federal Minister for Education, Science and Training, Dr. Nelson, and securing the full restoration of funding for the UWS, so Western Sydney can accommodate its growing educational needs.

As a former student of public primary and high schools, as well as TAFE, I believe I have a first-hand appreciation of the need for more funding for public education and better wages for teachers. As I have visited public schools around my electorate I have spoken to and received letters from concerned teachers regarding their pay case. Although the teachers decided to carry out industrial action this week, I am encouraged that the Minister has repeated his commitment to honouring the settlement that the Industrial Relations Commission brings down. I have made it clear to teachers and parents alike, as I do to the House today, that I am an unwavering supporter of public education and the wonderful job teachers do. Health and education involve two areas of public policy on which the positions of the Government and the Opposition are miles apart. Labor combines sound economic management with more resources for public services, while Coalition members run around telling those who will listen that the Coalition will simultaneously cut taxes by billions of dollars and increase spending on schools and hospitals.

Health and education are also issues on which the New South Wales and Commonwealth governments stand in stark contrast to one another. The New South Wales Government has sought to increase the capacity of the public health system to cope with growing demands, as demonstrated by improvements to Westmead Hospital, while the Commonwealth has presided over declining bulk-billing rates and forced the State to sign a health care agreement that will cut funding by \$278 million over the five years of the agreement. In my inaugural speech I referred to the Premier unveiling the \$800 million master plan for Parramatta Civic Place. I inform honourable members that Parramatta City Council has approved a final version of the master plan, and I confirm that council is looking for a private sector development partner to assist in making this vision a reality. It is a partnership in every sense of the word, drawing council and the State Government together with local business and the community.

Apart from unlocking thousands of square metres of commercial and residential space, the redevelopment will deliver 6,000 jobs to Parramatta, and will be linked to the \$110 million Parramatta transport interchange. With this project, together with the relocation of Sydney Water and the NSW Police headquarters to Parramatta, the Government is delivering significant job, investment, and growth opportunities to Parramatta and Western Sydney. It is a demonstration that the Government is committed to Parramatta as Sydney's second central business district. The State Government and Parramatta City Council are working closely together on other local issues including storm damage from February last year and the Ermington Naval Store development, a contentious matter having regard to the many spin-off concerns that have been raised, particularly traffic management and urban amenity, and the debate over the section 94 contribution. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

Having listened to the arguments of the residents of Ermington as well as to the council's argument, I made representations to the Minister seeking to secure a financial contribution by the Department of Defence that not only recognises the infrastructure improvements intended to be made but also reflects the requirements of the Ermington community. I am advised that the Minister will shortly be making a decision on the matter. I am confident that the issues that I and others have raised will be seriously considered in determining this important issue. In July I was treated to a tour of the first tower of the new police headquarters with John MacMahon from the Department of Commerce and John Hanley from Multiplex. The \$170 million state-of-the-art building, fully equipped with bombproof glazing and security devices, will ultimately house 2,200 police and civilian personnel. Importantly for Parramatta, this development not only provides more immediate construction job growth, but also has longer lasting external benefits, such as stimulating local residential development to accommodate the permanent jobs that the police headquarters brings to Parramatta.

The 2003-04 budget provides \$1 million towards the \$58 million Sydney West Trial Court Complex, and \$4.362 million towards the \$21.835 million Metropolitan Children's Court Complex. The Sydney West Trial Complex will see an extensive refurbishment of the existing Parramatta courthouse, with nine trial courts, court registry, jury assembly rooms, and conference and interview rooms. This design will allow for sittings of the Local Court, the District Court and the Supreme Court and the New South Wales Parole Board. In Corrective Services, I am pleased to see the continuation of the Parramatta Transitional Centre, which is a limited work-release prison centre for women. I had the opportunity, along with the Minister for Justice and the Premier, of visiting the site in April. It is clear, from speaking to the staff and the inmates, that it is achieving results and breaking the cycle of crime.

In May and September this year, the three local area commands in the electorate of Parramatta received 22 and 24 additional police officers respectively. I was fortunate enough to be invited by Acting Local Area Commander Peroz to have morning tea with the new recruits in May. I am encouraged by their enthusiasm and self-evident dedication to their work. The Minister for Police, John Watkins, should be congratulated on his commitment not only to increasing the numbers of frontline police officers, but also to ensuring that they are a part of high visibility policing operations and have proper technological support.

I am proud to say in the case of Parramatta police station that with the introduction of Livescan electronic and laser fingerprinting technology and PhotoTrac digital photographic identification technology Parramatta's police are well equipped with the latest technological advances. I would like to thank Inspector Jeff Emery for providing a demonstration to community members of the local Police Accountability Community Teams [PACT] forum. I also place on record my full support for Operation Viking and the more than \$20 million that the Government is providing over four years to maintain such policing strategies.

In public transport there is much more that needs to be done to improve bus, train and ferry services in the Parramatta area. I am deeply disappointed in the decision made to defer stage two of the Parramatta rail link. I fully understand the concerns expressed by members of the Parramatta task force, which was formed in June by the Lord Mayor of Parramatta, Paul Garrard, as well as the concerns of constituents who have called at or written in to my office. I do, however, recognise that the Minister has made his decision and so, instead of lingering on the fact, I prefer to move on to secure the best possible public transport system for Parramatta.

The Minister for Transport Services, Mr Costa, has decided to form a working group chaired by John Lee, the Director General of Transport. I am a member of that working group, as are the Lord Mayor, Paul Garrard, and representatives from the chamber of commerce and the Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils [WSROC]. It will examine the transport needs, public and private mix and solutions. This is an admission by the Minister of the need to upgrade and improve public transport in Parramatta. I am pleased that despite the setback, intense lobbying by the Parramatta task force, with community support, has secured early results. Firstly, the Parramatta rail link project team will make acquisitions to secure the Parramatta-Epping corridor for future development. Secondly, the \$110 million Parramatta transport interchange has begun. These works will see an expanded underground western concourse and relocated bus terminus. There will be provision for future linkage to the Epping-Chatswood line in these works.

Finally, the stations along the Carlingford line will undergo a long overdue upgrade. I am committed to continuing dialogue with the people of Parramatta over these transport issues. In the meantime, though, I call on the New South Wales Government to guarantee the daily ferry service to Parramatta, to continue its work on developing the Parramatta-Strathfield T-way, and to examine immediately the feasibility of introducing a Parramatta city loop service that would exclusively service the CBD and the inner residential areas of Parramatta. Although there have been service improvements with the introduction of a new timetable for the 545

and 550 State Transit services, the reduction in levels for the 550 service means that constituents of mine along Kissing Point Road at Dundas are virtually without services on Sundays and public holidays. I will continue to make representations on behalf of those constituents to ensure that that part of Kissing Point Road is properly serviced seven days a week.

With regard to roads, I note that several road projects and safety programs have commenced across the electorate of Parramatta, and as such I welcome them. Included in the roads budget allocation for Parramatta is the final provision of \$6.8 million for the Liverpool to Parramatta T-way with \$9.8 million for pre-construction on the north west T-way that will join a Blacktown to Castle Hill section with Parramatta to Rouse Hill. A large part of the work of a State member of Parliament is tied up with road changes and improvements, and it is no different in the case of Parramatta. I appreciate the responsiveness of the Minister for Roads, Carl Scully, in hearing the concerns of residents in my electorate and in working through solutions with the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA]. This Friday I am hoping to work through minor traffic management issues in Westmead and Ermington with the Minister and other interested parties.

Another important part of the workload of a State member of Parliament is related to Department of Housing matters. I commend the Government for providing \$6.48 million for new capital works in the Parramatta and Ermington areas. In conclusion, the 2003-04 budget is appropriate for its time. It symbolises this Government's twin aims of sound economic management and providing additional resources for schools and hospitals, and for transport and community services. It is a budget that delivers at the macro-budgetary level with increases to departmental resources and the financing of key election commitments. It is also a budget that delivers locally in Parramatta and demonstrates the State Government's commitment to facilitating growth opportunities for jobs and investment in Sydney's second central business district.

This budget's local commitments demonstrate how close co-operation between the State Government, councils and the private sector can drive opportunity and stimulate further regional growth. I congratulate the Government on delivering such a strong budgetary result with good news for Parramatta—and, I am sure, for everywhere else in the State. I conclude by providing a comparison between the Cahill Government in 1953 and the Carr Labor Government 50 years on. It was J. J. Cahill who declared during his policy speech that a vote for Labor was "a vote for development, prosperity, high employment and social justice". As I believe is demonstrated in this budget, a vote for this Government will be a vote for development, prosperity, employment and social justice well into the future.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Yeadon.

EDUCATION AMENDMENT (COMPUTING SKILLS) BILL

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 5 September.

Mr TINK (Epping) [8.00 p.m.]: On behalf of the shadow Minister for Education, who, unfortunately, is ill today I indicate that the Opposition is pleased to support this bill. The bill amends the Education Act to require candidates for the School Certificate to be tested for computing skills. I believe that it is important now to make that a curriculum requirement. It goes without saying that the mastery of computers has become absolutely essential in virtually any form of meaningful work. It is high time that this was recognised as a curriculum requirement.

I have been fascinated to see how the study of computers has developed over the past few years and how people who have basically spent most of their working lives knowing nothing about computers have had to come to grips with them a bit later in life. I am certainly in that category. When I look at my children and their friends I see that the study of computers is probably one of the most fascinating of all things to study in any secondary school curriculum. It strikes me that the technical side of computing is one area of learning where students know more than teachers. As a result, in many cases students can be found teaching the teachers a thing or two about the technical capacity of computers.

On the other hand, of course, school students lack a lot of life experience and they often lack the ability to see the big picture. It is a delight to see that even though the teachers learn aspects of computing from the students, the students still have a great deal to learn from the teachers when it comes to applying some of life's wider lessons to computing. I do not think the study of the technical side of computers alone suffices unless it is

viewed in a wider context. In my view teachers provide a vital longer-term approach to the study of computing that a raw knowledge of the technical side alone does not, and never will, provide. Students cannot learn the capabilities of computers in the wider context unless they have maturer people demonstrating them. I consider that the teaching of computing, more than any other subject in secondary school, must be a partnership between teachers and students in which both sides bring something special that only they can bring to the study of the subject. As far as I can tell in the time that I have been involved with computers, I believe they are an exciting and new education tool.

On the other side of the equation, though, it is not always easy to make sure that the equipment is up to date and fit for contemporary study. I do not mean by that that it is necessarily vital to have absolutely the latest piece of equipment. The generational change in computing is such that a capital works program could be rendered bankrupt by relentlessly updating machines to always have the latest and best. I do not know that that is necessary but, nevertheless, there are from time to time generational changes in machines, generational changes in networks, and generational changes in the workplace that require updated computers. I think it is important for the students to keep within striking distance of those generational developments as distinct from, say, simply pursuing the latest fashion in computers, for want of a better expression.

As all members know, there are great difficulties and great problems with school security. In my electorate there have been problems with the security of computers in schools. Equipment of an enormous value can be stolen overnight. There are stories of gangs going around with shopping lists, watching and waiting for new computers to go into schools, and then stealing them, counting off the days until the insurance claim is dealt with, waiting until new computers are delivered, and then stealing them. That is an ongoing problem. Though I think it is fair to say that some steps have been taken to try to deal with it, it does remain a vexed issue. Computers are very expensive, they can be easily removed, and, unfortunately, they are a target for organised, shopping-list thieves.

The challenge is to have up-to-date computers so students will be familiar with the computers they will have in their workplaces, and to ensure that their security is maintained so that taxpayers do not have to meet the cost of their replacement if they are stolen. The bill is important to prevent an unnecessary increase in a school's capital works budget and to ensure that students have the best opportunity to study computing technology, and we are happy to support it.

Mr YEADON (Granville) [8.06 p.m.]: I support this bill. An extensive review of the Higher School Certificate [HSC] by Professor Barry McGaw led to the Government introducing the HSC white paper entitled "Securing Their Future". This white paper resulted in the most significant reforms to the HSC in 30 years, reforms that were implemented with year 11 in 2000, and with the new HSC exam in 2001. The white paper also reinvigorated and strengthened the School Certificate. Mandatory external tests in English literacy and mathematics were introduced in 1998, science was added in 1999, and Australian history, geography, civics and citizenship were added in 2002.

The Government is committed to ensuring that students are assessed at these points in their schooling to determine whether they possess the necessary skills and knowledge in the use of information and communication technologies [ICT] to succeed in the next stage of their education. In the case of year 10 students, the knowledge and skills assessed are also relevant and necessary in the workplace. Indeed, it is becoming increasingly clear that these types of skills not only will be necessary in the workplace but will be necessary for people to function effectively in society.

The ICT skills and knowledge to be assessed will be delivered not through a separate course of study but through the curriculum available to all students in years 7 to 10. The Board of Studies began to trial the year 10 computing skills assessment in 2001. The trial computing skills assessment has consisted of a school-based assessment of computing skills identified in the current mandatory years 7 to 10 curriculum, an external pen and paper test, and a version of the pen and paper test delivered online. The year 10 computing skills assessment was trialled by 1,500 students across 20 government and non-government schools in 2001. The trial was extended to 150 schools and 15,000 students in 2002.

The 2002 trial of the year 10 computing skills test was conducted successfully on Wednesday 10 September. More than 580 schools participated in the trial. Of these, 166 schools had at least some of their students sit for an online version of the test, with 59,000 year 10 students taking part. Approximately 360 government schools took part in the trial test, 134 from the metropolitan area and 225 from regional areas. The pen and paper test covered knowledge, skills and understanding of aspects of computing such as word processing, multimedia, and Internet research.

The schools that volunteered to take a version of the test in electronic format had the test delivered on line. A sample of students taking the test on line responded to a number of interactive items designed to test the practical application of their computing skills. More than 6,000 students sat the online test. Schools in rural and regional New South Wales, such as Albury, Cobar, Balranald, Bega and Casino, successfully took part in the online trial. Students at the Australian International School in Singapore also sat the online test. That school reported that administering the test was problem free and praised the innovation.

Schools involved in the online trial across New South Wales began to download and sit the online test at approximately 9.00 a.m. By 11.00 a.m. test answers submitted by 3,000 students had been received, marked, and stored electronically by the Office of the Board of Studies. That gives an insight into the power of information technology: it not only provides a great way for people to learn and develop their skills but also has in-built testing and monitoring, which is one of the great aspects of information technology. The initial feedback from some schools indicated that students were very enthusiastic about receiving the test on line. Some teachers conducting the online test commented that it was much easier to administer than other methods.

Students were asked to complete a survey that will provide further feedback about their experience with the tests. The Office of the Board of Studies plans to extend the trialing of the online test in 2004 and 2005. By 2006 it is expected that the office will have progressed to a stage at which a test that would satisfactorily assess a student's computing skills can be delivered and administered online to the majority of schools. In proposing this amendment to the Education Act 1990, the bill seeks to ensure that all schools in the State will be required to conduct a mandatory computing skills assessment of all year 10 students. This amendment will see the Government's commitment to all New South Wales students brought to fruition. That commitment was that the young people of New South Wales would be able to take their place in a world in which competence in using information and communication technology is no longer a luxury but a necessity.

Honourable members should be under no misapprehension that the Government is a world leader in providing information technology to schools. When the Government was elected in 1995 it had a policy of introducing the Internet to all public schools. While other nations had deeper penetration of information technology and connection to the Internet in the majority of their regions, as far as I can ascertain New South Wales was the first place in the world to have all schools connected to the Internet. Some of those connections were fairly narrow in their bandwidth and therefore not optimum. However, it is important to recognise that the Government continues its policy of implementing information technology.

Currently the email hub is being introduced into Government schools for all students. The main feature of that initiative is that it will provide not only email facilities for students but also a major upgrading of bandwidth. That will have the double advantage of providing much better access to the Internet for research and to assist teachers. The honourable member for Epping mentioned the need to ensure that technology in schools is kept up to date. I certainly agree with him, and I add that the Government has been exemplary in ensuring that computers provided in schools through a lease arrangement remain up to date. I am not sure what the honourable member meant about new generation machines. Honourable members who are familiar with computers would know that they are not generational and that there is constant technology upgrading.

The industry refers to that upgrading as Moore's law: the doubling of computer chip capacity every 18 months, which Moore was extraordinarily accurate in predicting. The Government has continued to provide very modern technology in its schools. It has also ensured that teachers receive a basic level of training through the Technology in Learning and Teaching program, which is very worthwhile. One would like to see more comprehensive training in that area, but the logistical difficulty of taking teachers out of a classroom to give them computer training while ensuring that adequate replacement teachers are available is no easy feat. The Government has managed to do that in a very sound way.

I agree with the honourable member for Epping that it is exciting to know that teachers and students can go forward with this technology in partnership. The honourable member suggested that each would bring an individual component to that process. With the future use of information technology the education process will change. Rather than have an authoritative person, such as a teacher, at the front of a classroom relaying known information to the students, the teacher and students will join together in exploring a subject.

We do not need to be too concerned about the disparity that is often pointed out between the skills of students and those of teachers. There will be a change in the way people view traditional teaching and I suppose there will be some implications for the teachers. Instead of exhibiting an attitude of "I know all, and will convey it to the students" teachers will work together with students in an exciting way to garner the unlimited resources

that are available on the Internet. I agree with the honourable member for Epping that that will be a very exciting phenomenon indeed. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr CONSTANCE (Bega) [8.17 p.m.]: The Coalition has indicated its support for the Education Amendment (Computing Skills) Bill. We must all recognise the great value that technology will continue to play in the education process and its flow-on effect for job creation, particularly in regional New South Wales. The Government must recognise that in order to ensure that its education program can be rolled out to provide the necessary computing skills to all students additional pressure should not be placed on the management of technology in schools. If you visit any school in regional New South Wales and talk to the principals you will hear that a lot of their time is spent trying to manage technology. A lot of their time is spent dealing with computer problems—and that soaks up a valuable teaching resource. The way forward is to find ways in which the community can build partnerships with many of the technology providers to ensure that any necessary upgrades and ongoing technology maintenance meet the requirements of the school.

We do not want Australia to experience a digital divide similar to that of other countries. We should take this opportunity to keep pace with technology. At present we are behind the eight ball with technology rollout programs within our schools compared with many Asian countries. Over the past 10 years many governments throughout Asia have implemented initiatives such as Singapore One and other information technology hubs that include education in their programs. It is time that Australia developed a strong technology platform so that we, as a nation, can move forward. Students and teachers, particularly those in regional areas, cannot afford to miss out on the latest advances in information technology.

The geographical hurdle of the Bega electorate provides a wonderful opportunity for technology rollout and great incentives for people to work in regional centres rather than in metropolitan areas. This bill is the first step in driving technology literacy through our schools. However, we must ensure that students are provided with the necessary computing skills to equip them for future employment. This bill is a wonderful opportunity to ensure that our school students do not miss out on opportunities and it is imperative that the Government provides sufficient support to ensure that students are not disadvantaged. Vital to the success of this bill is the fact that the Government must also provide the necessary resources and programs to teachers and we will continue to monitor that. Technology is ever changing and we must ensure that the necessary software upgrades and new technologies continue to be rolled out, certainly up until 1 January 2006. Students must have the latest technologies to enable them to keep pace with the rest of the world. It is not enough for the technology to be provided in one hit. The upgrading of technology is an ongoing process and that is one of the challenges of this bill.

Ms D'AMORE (Drummoyne) [8.22 p.m.]: I speak in support of the bill. The proposed amendment will make computing skills assessment a mandatory part of the School Certificate in 2006. The Government is determined that our young people will develop the skills they need in information and communication technologies for further study and their future employment. Since the Government came to office in 1995 the entire curriculum from kindergarten to year 12 has been reviewed and revitalised. The Government will introduce a new world-class year 7 to year 10 curriculum from 2005. Information and communication technology skills have been embedded in syllabuses for all year 7 to year 10 students.

It is a fact of life that our students need to be computer literate to meet the global and technological challenges of the twenty-first century. The requirements of this bill build on the work the Government has done over the past eight years to make New South Wales a world leader in information technology in the classroom. In 1996 all New South Wales government schools were connected to the Internet, the first State in Australia to do so, ahead of the United States of America and the United Kingdom.

We have in place a four-year \$963 million technology plan for our schools. This plan will deliver broadband to schools, making access to the Internet 30 times faster; upgrade infrastructure; and, most significant, deliver e-learning through personalised e-mail accounts for students and teachers. The Government will provide more than 1.3 million e-learning accounts. This service will also provide filtered access to the Internet and web-hosting facilities for individuals, schools and colleges. All students and teachers in our schools and TAFE colleges will have personalised e-mail accounts. The rollout of this huge number of e-mail accounts in our schools is a key initiative of the Government in its third term of office.

More than 30,000 teachers have been trained in the Government's Technology in Learning and Teaching Program, providing them with advanced and specialised computer skills to bring to schools. There are now approximately 135,000 computers in public schools, which represents a massive investment by the

Government in our students and the development of their information and communication technology skills. During visits to schools in my electorate of Drummoyne I see the benefits of the Government's Computers in Schools Program. Primary school students know how to use Excel and Word, and some secondary school students are technological whizzes. The School Certificate is awarded at the conclusion of compulsory schooling, and must stand as a rigorous and comprehensive measure of student achievement.

The Government's comprehensive approach to including computing skills as part of the School Certificate will enable our students to be at the forefront in a world where this knowledge and ability are essential. In days gone by we used to talk about the importance of our students mastering reading, writing and arithmetic. Now our focus is on literacy, numeracy and technology. At the end of year 10 our students must be able to demonstrate their competency in these areas. This bill continues the Government's strong record of equipping our students to meet the challenges of the information technology society and I am pleased to support this important initiative.

Ms JUDGE (Strathfield) [8.26 p.m.]: I speak in support of the Education Amendment (Computing Skills) Bill. Education holds the key to tackling poverty and extending opportunity to our children. New technologies play an important role in almost all aspects of our lives and it is vital that school-age children—our youth—gain a solid education in computing to equip them fully for their professional lives. Education is about preparing our youth for participation in their communities and preparing them adequately for life, so that all, and not just a few, can grasp the opportunities that exist for them.

I believe that today there is a real danger of a digital divide between the wealthy—those who can afford to buy computers for their children—and the struggling, those who may not have as much access to digital technologies as others. That is why the Government is committed to ensuring that by the end of compulsory schooling, every student in primary and secondary schools in New South Wales are users of information and communication technologies. Since coming to office the Carr Labor Government, under the excellent leadership of the Deputy Premier, the Hon. Dr Andrew Refshauge, has made every effort to reinvigorate the School Certificate. The Government introduced external tests in English literacy and maths in 1998, science in 1999, and Australian history, geography, civics and citizenship in 2002.

This year more than 580 schools will take part in computing skills assessment trials across New South Wales. Today one of my staff members spoke to a teacher from one of the local high schools that took part in the trial. He said the testing was a great idea and that the trial had been very successful at his school. The test will become mandatory as part of the Schools Certificate in 2006. This will give schools sufficient time to ensure that students are prepared to do the test. This bill demonstrates the Carr Government's commitment to ensuring that by school leaving age students are better equipped for the future.

This bill represents another milestone in the Government's plan for putting rigour and relevance into the Higher School Certificate [HSC] and renewed strength and purpose into the year 10 school certificate. The Government places a high value on these world-class credentials that mark significant points in the education of New South Wales students. The Government's reforms of the HSC have resulted in students demonstrating the highest standards in a curriculum that is state-of-the-art in its relevance to youth living in the twenty-first century and beyond. The reforms also reinvigorated and strengthened the school certificate by the introduction of mandatory external tests in English literacy, mathematics, Australia history, et cetera.

The Government places a high value on this credential that marks the end of compulsory schooling. The Government also recognises the importance of students acquiring fundamental knowledge and skills in these subjects to better equip them. Our purpose is to ensure that students are assessed at these points in their schooling to determine whether they possess the necessary skills and knowledge in the use of information and communication technologies to succeed in the next stage of their education if they wish to proceed further. In the case of year 10 students the knowledge and skills assessed would also be relevant and necessary in the world of work and further training. The current year 7 to year 10 curriculum, which has been reviewed, will incorporate, as appropriate, opportunities for students to learn about and use information and communication technologies [ICT] within their studies in each course.

The ICT skills and knowledge to be assessed will be delivered through the mandatory curriculum and will be available to all students in years 7 to 10. The computing skills test is being trialled in our schools. This year the trial was conducted on Wednesday 10 September. In my electorate of Strathfield five schools took part in the trial and successfully conducted the test with well over 500 students. A total of 128 students took the pen and paper test that covered the knowledge, skills and understanding of aspects of computing such as word

processing, multimedia and Internet research. All five schools from my electorate that volunteered to take part in the trial conducted a version of the test in electronic format and had the test delivered on line. That represents an innovation in the delivery of tests to students. I am led to believe that 448 students in my electorate were able to respond on line to computing questions and to a number of interactive items designed to test the practical application of their computing skills.

Teachers and students in these schools in the Strathfield electorate are to be congratulated on their contribution to this important trial. I am pleased that the trial took part in my electorate. Both students and teachers have been positive about sitting the test on line. The enormous potential for the use of technology in testing is realised when we consider that school students involved in the on-line trial, not just in my electorate but across New South Wales, could sit the on-line test, submit their answers and have them marked and stored electronically in a matter of hours by the Office of the Board of Studies. In proposing this amendment to the Education Act 1990 the bill seeks to ensure that all year 10 students in schools in this State will be required to sit for a mandatory computing skills assessment. That amendment will result in the Government achieving its stated purpose to ensure that all year 10 students are tested in their knowledge, understanding and ability to use information and communication technologies.

I refer briefly to the comments made earlier by the honourable member for Epping. The honourable member for Epping informed us that he was concerned about a potential theft of computers in schools. If we took that line of thinking to its logical conclusion we would not put any electronic or technological equipment in our schools. We would be too frightened to put in overhead projectors, equipment in science laboratories or music equipment in school halls. If we followed the line of thinking of the honourable member of Epping we would not put equipment in our schools for fear that it might be stolen. That is an incredibly narrow and negative way of looking at things. The honourable member for Bega, who referred earlier to technology in Asia, incorrectly implied that Australia was lagging behind in technology. I inform the honourable member for Bega that we cannot compare Asian countries with Australia. The population in those Asian countries is not 10 or 20 times larger than the population in Australia—it is probably more than 100 times larger. It is like comparing apples with oranges.

The honourable member for Bega should think carefully before giving us statistics and he should make accurate and honest comparisons. If John Howard were fair dinkum and honest he would give to the hard-working citizens of New South Wales a fair share of the taxes that the Federal Government receives. The honourable member for Bega would be able to allude to those sorts of issues only if the New South Wales Government was getting a fair share of the tax revenue from the Federal Government. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr R. W. TURNER (Orange) [8.36 p.m.]: The Opposition supports the Education Amendment (Computing Skills) Bill. I wish to refer in my contribution to the debate on this bill to small schools in country areas. The overview of the bill states:

Section 94 (2) of the Education Act 1990 requires candidates for the School Certificate to be tested on a State-wide basis in various specified areas. The object of this Bill is to amend section 94 to include Computing Skills as one of those areas. The requirement will be phased in to take effect on 1 January 2006 or, if before that date the Minister for Education and Training after consultation with the Board of Studies determines a later date, on that later date.

The honourable member for Drummoyne, who referred earlier to broadband Internet access, said that it would be up to 30 times faster. One of the problems that confronts computer companies wishing to provide Internet services in country towns—even in Orange which is considered to be a major city—is the speed of that Internet access. Is the honourable member for Drummoyne or are members of the Government able to guarantee that Internet users in small towns in New South Wales will have faster Internet access than they have at present if this legislation were implemented? That is one of the downsides to the provision of Internet services in country towns. Companies that would have loved to provide services in country towns have not been able to do so because they are not able to guarantee Internet access speed.

People in country towns would like a guarantee from the Government that they will receive Internet services that are equal to the services that are provided in the Sydney metropolitan area. The Government has provided a number of New South Wales schools with computers, but some of the parents and citizens associations in small schools in my electorate are still fundraising to provide additional computers or upgrade computers that are 10 to 15 years old. Small businesses often donate to schools computers that have been traded in for more modern ones. We still have a long way to go. Some wonderful advantages are to be gained from computers, for example, video conferencing. Country schools want the same facilities that are provided in schools in the Sydney metropolitan area.

Last week I attended a meeting in Orange at which Telstra announced its sponsorship of video conferencing, in conjunction with the Orange Regional Conservatorium. That means that music facilities and tutors will be brought into small country schools such as Cobar, Wilcannia and Broken Hill. These wonderful electronic facilities are helping small country schools catch up and providing them with facilities equal to those of their city counterparts. Because principals have limited time, and because of the small number of teachers in some schools, in many cases parents come in and assist in bringing the children up to speed in terms of computer skills. As has been pointed out tonight, the pupils are often way ahead of the parents and teachers in relation to computer skills. That is the case with my grandchildren. One of them, who is only eight or nine, is way ahead of her parents or me when it comes to computer skills and confidence. My grandchildren have been brought up with computers, and they do not know the fears experienced by the older section of the community. They will grow up with computers as a normal part of their education and be totally involved with them.

The Government must take on board the fact that schools in regional centres, let alone small country towns, do not have the necessary Internet speed. I call on the Government to ensure that small country schools, whether they be public schools with one teacher or small high schools, such as Canowindra High School or Molong Central School, have facilities equal to those of their city cousins. That will ensure that parents are not forced to get extra tuition for their children or, as happens in some cases, send their children to Sydney or to private schools when they would prefer to send their children to the local public school, where the facilities are not equal to those in other areas. While the Opposition supports the bill, I call on the Government to ensure that small schools in country towns receive the same Internet service and the same quality of equipment as all schools in the Sydney metropolitan area.

Mr ASHTON (East Hills) [8.42 p.m.]: I support the Education Amendment (Computing Skills) Bill. I take on board the comments made by the honourable member for Bega, the honourable member for Orange and the honourable member for Epping. Obviously, if the Government introduces a compulsory exam for computing skills it must ensure that all students have equal access to computers. That cannot necessarily be guaranteed simply by legislation alone or by simply dropping off computers at the school gate if the schools do not have the staff to teach computer skills or the other facilities to go with them. So I take the point that was made, which I am sure the Government is aware of.

The bill represents the culmination of the Government's plan for renewing the strength and purpose of the School Certificate. I am particularly interested in that because when I was teaching some years ago the School Certificate was literally not worth the paper it was written on. In those days only English and mathematics were compulsory subjects. However, since this Government was elected science, Australian history, geography, civics and citizenship have become compulsory subjects as well as English and mathematics. And now computer skills will be a compulsory subject. That shows the Government's great commitment to ensure that the School Certificate is an appropriate, proper certificate that students who leave school at the end of year 10 can show a prospective employer. It will show that the student passed and achieved certain things at school. Obviously it is better for students to go on and do the Higher School Certificate and further tertiary education.

Requiring year 10 students to complete an external computing skills assessment shows that the Government places a high value on students acquiring these skills to better equip themselves for whatever path they choose in life. The Government contends that the computing skills assessment for year 10 students will become part of the School Certificate tests currently in place. As I said, it will join tests in English literacy, mathematics, science, Australian history, geography, civics and citizenship. Information technology is very much the way of the future. I am probably known in some quarters as a bit of a Luddite when it comes to using computers. As a matter of fact, that has been mentioned before. In a sense I blame governments of both persuasions for introducing computers into all levels of the school system. However, having said that, I am a bit of a Luddite simply because I never embraced computers.

All school students, from kindergarten through to year 12, know how to use, and are incredibly capable of using, computers. For example, my two daughters spend most of their time working on the computers we have at home. They spend time on the Internet, using the typing skills they have developed. They produce and print their written work and essays. It is a long way from the days when we had to use a HB lead pencil and a piece of paper; we had to rewrite our work if we made a couple of mistakes, or our work was marked down because our writing was not neat enough. We need to recognise that times have changed. Computers enable all the knowledge in the world to be brought into a student's bedroom, study room or wherever, and that is important. The School Certificate test will ensure that by the time students have completed compulsory schooling they will have the necessary skills to participate in further education, training and employment.

We all know that nowadays one simply cannot turn up for a job and say, "Yes, I would like to do this sort of work." Unless one works for the local council shovelling dirt on the side of a road, as one might have done 20 years ago, one needs computer skills. The staff in our electorate offices must have computer skills, otherwise they would not be able to work there. The Hansard staff, people who write speeches and those who provide the information that is read out in news reports produce their work on computers, including email. As the honourable member for Drummoyne said, there are 135,000 computers in the system, with more to come. The introduction of the lock down system for school computers means that computer theft is not the issue it was. I am told that the number of computer thefts has been reduced by at least half or perhaps three-quarters. Computers are simply not being stolen because the Government had the foresight to introduce the lock down mechanism. That is important as well.

Prior to the introduction of this bill the Board of Studies conducted extensive consultation with key interest groups: government agencies, schools, teachers, parents and the wider community. The consultation process also gave rise to valuable feedback in a number of areas, particularly the timing of the introduction of this compulsory test. I am on the record as saying that when something new is introduced people must be given a lead-in period. We cannot simply introduce the computing skills assessment and say, "Your kid will do this exam next year." For example, I have worked out that my youngest daughter will do the test in 2006, although there is a provision to delay it if necessary. However, I know that she will be keen to have a crack at it. It simply means that she will have a couple more years in which to develop those skills.

In proposing an amendment to the Education Act 1990, this bill seeks to require students from both government and non-government schools to undertake a mandatory year 10 computing skills assessment as part of the School Certificate. It will not be a separate course that clogs up an already busy curriculum; it will be across all faculty areas. All teachers will be responsible for developing computer programs, so all courses—English, Australian history, geography, science and physical education—will involve a degree of computer skills. The amendments will fulfil the Government's ongoing commitment to ensure that all New South Wales students leave school as competent and innovative users of information and community technologies.

Previous speakers asked whether country schools will be looked after. Under the Minister for Education and Training and this Government, they will certainly be looked after. This Government takes the needs of country areas very seriously, and always has done. That is obvious. One of my predecessors in this place, Rodney Cavalier—for whom I had the privilege of working for a couple of years—was very popular in country areas. He often visited country schools and took a great interest in what happened there. If schools in the electorates of Bega or Orange have problems the local members should tell the Minister about them.

Dr Refshauge: I am very amenable.

Mr ASHTON: The Minister is very amenable to such representations. The Government will look after kids in all schools in every part of the State, from the top to the bottom and the east to the west. We wonder sometimes whether every child has access to a computer at home. My kids have that access but not every family has a computer. However, school libraries have computers in abundance, as do the libraries run by municipal and city councils. So there is no reason why students cannot access computers. I invite students to apply to undertake work experience in my electorate office and use the computers there. The Government aims to provide a computer for virtually every student, which will improve students' chances of success in exams and in the job market. I point out that the East Hills Girls Technology High School is the only girls high school in New South Wales to be recognised as a technology high school because it has so many computers. I congratulate the Government and the current Minister on bringing this bill before Parliament.

Mr BARTLETT (Port Stephens) [8.51 p.m.]: I am pleased to support the Education Amendment (Computing Skills) Bill. Although brief, the bill will have a huge impact in the community. Item [1] of schedule 1 to the bill states:

Section 94 School Certificate

Insert after section 94 (2) (d):

(e) Computing Skills

Item [2] specifies that the bill's provisions will apply after 1 January 2006. That is the entire content of the bill, and I think I will never speak in this place to briefer legislation. However, the bill will have a significant impact. New South Wales is a world leader in the provision of information technology in schools. I have travelled to

Japan on many occasions and on a recent trip I visited a very well-funded middle school. A 14-year-old or 15-year-old boy, who spoke perfect English—presumably he also spoke perfect Japanese; I would not know because I do not speak that language—showed us around the school, of which he was obviously extremely proud. As we walked around we saw students cleaning the school, which is one of their duties. Our guide took us to the computer room and said, "This is the computer room. I've never been in there, but this is the computer room." It was apparent that he did not have many computer skills. I understand that Canadian schools receive hand-me-down computers from industry and business—my information is two or three years old so I will stand corrected if the arrangement has changed.

Under the present system we have seen the roll-out of about 130,000 or 140,000 computers in New South Wales schools—I am no longer sure of the exact number. I worked as a librarian in the State school system for 22 years, and the computer roll-out happened during that time. When the Oasis library and administration system was introduced a computer terminal arrived in our office together with a file server. Another computer terminal was eventually supplied for the library and when a second computer arrived we used a console to network them. Today at Tomaree High School one program can be run on the mainframe and sent to every classroom, where students can tap into it and access different parts of the program simultaneously. The technology is simply amazing. Computers have helped students to enhance their skills, create personal wealth and become citizens with a stake in our society.

Computer proficiency, such as the ability to send emails and access the Internet, is vital for today's students. They will use those skills when they search for employment and later in their professional lives. Computer use is fundamental to twenty-first century advancement and personal wealth creation. In the United States of America computer skills are required of anyone seeking to join that country's army. Mandatory computer skills testing will be implemented as part of the higher school certificate curriculum in 2006. From 2005 all students will study computing skills in all subjects as part of the new syllabus. Students will be able to present their results to prospective employers and display their computer proficiency. Delaying testing students on their computer skills until 2006 will give students and teachers time to prepare for the introduction of the new syllabus.

When computers were introduced into schools it soon became apparent that they would quickly change teaching practice. A young whip would visit the library, delve into programs and ask questions that teachers had no idea how to answer. To its credit, the education system required librarians to take courses—we could take as many as we needed—to bring us up to speed with the Oasis library computer system that we were required to operate. However, the kids were already off and running. They were exploring parts of programs about which I had absolutely no knowledge, and it quickly became apparent that, in this area at least, the skills resided not in the teachers but in the students. Our role as teachers became increasingly to direct and focus their skills. Students' interest in, and pick-up of, computer technology was very apparent. School populations were soon divided into those who quickly adjusted to and learned computer skills and those teachers, such as my friend the honourable member for East Hills and I, who had not grown up with this technology and who felt like Luddites as computers swept through the school system.

In my experience, computers in schools changed teaching fundamentally, and students soon gained extensive computer knowledge and skills. They would spend hours on the computer every night while I would go home and read a book. I am extremely pleased to support the bill. In my experience, the education department made training available for those who needed it, and many tens of thousands of teachers took advantage of that training. Today's university graduates have excellent computer skills—my son and daughter leave me far behind when it comes to computer proficiency—so most new teachers do not require computer training. We have done a good job. I commend the bill to the House.

Dr REFSHAUGE (Marrickville—Deputy Premier, Minister for Education and Training, and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs) [8.58 p.m.], in reply: I thank all honourable members for their contributions to this debate and for their support of this bill. I also thank the Legislation Review Committee for examining the bill and recognising its importance. The Government wants to ensure that all New South Wales students can maximise their educational opportunities. It is important that at the end of their years of compulsory schooling our students are competent and capable users of computers, regardless of whether they choose to continue their studies, undertake a TAFE course or move directly into employment.

The move to make computing skills a compulsory part of the School Certificate complements the changes made by the Government to the School Certificate to prepare students for life, learning and employment in the twenty-first century. More than 580 schools took part in this year's trial. While the majority of students sat

a pen-and-paper test, more than 6,000 students sat the test on line. By the time the test becomes compulsory in 2006 it is highly likely that the majority of students will take the test on line. This is important legislation, as it will help equip our young people for life and work in our increasingly complex world.

It is important to reply to some of the small issues raised by members of the Opposition, to allay their fears. The Government is securing schools by a number of means. We are providing a \$20 million program of security fences for some 200 schools around the State. The safety and security unit is to work with schools to make them safer, and we have introduced lockdown devices on new computers as they are being delivered. Our world-class system is recognised internationally. Recently I had the pleasure of meeting with the Welsh Minister for Education and Life Long Learning, who was highly impressed with what we are doing in regard to computer skills and the rollout of computers.

The honourable member for Bega was concerned that the Government is behind in the rollout of computers to schools. That is wrong. We are not behind: 135,000 computers have been provided in schools, and we have in train 1.3 million email accounts. We also have 30,000 teachers trained in advanced and specialised computing skills. We are delivering. We have been leading the world and we intend to continue to do so. Introducing computing skills as a compulsory part of the School Certificate again shows the Government's commitment to ensure that our students are best prepared for information technology for the future. I commend the bill to the House.

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a second time and passed through remaining stages.

SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Dr Refshauge agreed to:

That the House at its rising this day do adjourn until Thursday 18 September 2003 at 10.00 a.m.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Routine of Business: Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Motion by Dr Refshauge agreed to:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to provide that at this sitting:

- (1) until the rising of the House no divisions or quorums be called; and
- (2) the House shall adjourn without motion at the conclusion of Government business.

BUDGET ESTIMATES AND RELATED PAPERS

Financial Year 2003-04

Debate resumed from an earlier hour.

Mr SOURIS (Upper Hunter) [9.03 p.m.]: On behalf of the electorate of Upper Hunter I am grateful for the opportunity to make one or two remarks in respect of the New South Wales budget. To an extent, the comments I intend to make represent the hopes and aspirations of people in the electorate for budgeted expenditure, particularly in the capital area, on various infrastructure projects. The major road link between Muswellbrook and Rylstone, passing between the Goulburn River National Park and the Wollemi National Park, is still unsealed in some sections, particularly the section going through Growee Gulph.

While there has been expenditure from the previous Government and a little from this Government, some considerable expenditure is still required to complete this most important missing link to connect the Central Tablelands—including the towns of Mudgee, Lithgow, Rylstone and Kandos—with the Upper Hunter. It is an important east-west link. Together with other east-west links, it is an important route that governments of the future will need to consider. The Golden Highway is another such east-west route and was given highway status by the previous Government.

Dr Refshauge: The previous Carr Government?

Mr SOURIS: No, the previous philosophical Government. There is no doubt that as the years have unfolded and expenditures have been allocated to the Golden Highway—the Dubbo-Newcastle link—people from the area, and particularly those from either end of the highway, are seeing considerable progress with the road, not only to highway designation but also to highway standard all the way. That includes shoulder widening and the elimination of some 10 single-lane bridges. The road is most important to the electorate of Upper Hunter, as it links the port of Newcastle with the important hinterland, particularly the wheat and coal belt in the northern part of the electorate.

Other projects that ought to have been funded, and are certainly on the drawing board—and about which we are disappointed—include duplication of the railway line at Antiene, between Muswellbrook and Singleton. It is part of the most important railway line between the Upper Hunter and the port of Newcastle. Some 70 million tonnes of coal are transported to the port on that railway line, making Newcastle the second most important coal export port in Australia. It is a major port even by world standards. On two previous occasions the Government included provision in the budget for duplication of the railway line at that point, but on both occasions the Rail Infrastructure Corporation declined to even start the project. In the third budget and in this, the fourth, budget no allocation has been included for the duplication of this railway line. That is particularly disappointing.

The other project that represents the future for the New England and north-western regions of New South Wales north of the Liverpool Range is the Murrurundi tunnel project. There is already a single-track railway tunnel at Murrurundi, but the future development of the natural resources, particularly coal, in the north-west and the New England area is very much determined by this throttle point—the Murrurundi tunnel. The tunnel is quite elevated in the range. It is a single track tunnel and is so difficult to traverse that only a very limited number of trains—42-unit coal trains—can use it. It is quite a sight to see. Usually a 42-unit coal train is led by three locomotives until it reaches the Murrurundi tunnel area. At Willow Tree two additional locomotives are added to the rear of the train to help push the train over the Liverpool Range through the existing Murrurundi tunnel. Those two locomotives disconnect on the other side and shuttle back into position. That goes on all day, and, as one would imagine, greatly restricts the tonnage and the number of movements that can be carried out. It therefore restricts the level of development that can take place, particularly in the north-west coalfields around the Gunnedah-Narrabri area.

I refer also to the lack of rail services on the Lithgow to Gulgong line, which passes through Mudgee. It is disappointing that several years ago the Government saw fit, quite happily, to expend approximately \$15 million to reinstate that railway line and bring it up to a standard whereby it could be used. That was very much welcomed by local people. But it is now four years since that money was expended and there has been no rail traffic apart from two tourist trains, which were one-off incidents. There is no regular passenger or freight traffic on that line. That highlights the fact that different sections of the State Rail Authority [SRA] are not communicating with each other. With the availability of this infrastructure it would be possible to alleviate the need for freight to flow through Sydney and add to its congestion. It is disappointing that sections of the SRA are not in harmony with each other and do not realise that this asset is available.

In respect of Health, I am happy that a multipurpose service [MPS] hospital has been constructed at Denman. That MPS has been funded by both the Federal and the State governments in regard to capital and recurrent expenditure. The Minister for Health recently officially opened the service at Denman. That demonstrates that this level of co-operation, involving budgeted outlays at both a Commonwealth and a State level, can result in the provision of such a wonderful facility. I look forward to the same thing happening at Coolah, and I hope that in due course the Gulgong hospital will be listed for construction of an MPS. Discussions are now taking place in relation to the future needs of Murrurundi hospital and whether they include an MPS or other enhancements for its long-term future.

Coonabarabran has a comparatively new hospital, but the attitude of the Macquarie Area Health Service has been very disappointing. In fact, I would go so far as to say that it has deliberately allowed the use of the hospital to decline, and many patients are now forced to travel considerable distances either to Gunnedah or Dubbo, even for obstetrics services. To some extent that also applies to Quirindi, although I have had some discussions with the New England Area Health Service to ensure that in the future a number of specialists are attracted to Quirindi—probably, but not exclusively, from the Tamworth area—to provide their services locally so that patients are not faced with a two-hour round trip for a consultation.

To a lesser extent Mudgee hospital is suffering from an attitude of centralisation from the Macquarie Area Health Service. People who live in Mudgee have to travel long distances to access surgical procedures, and in many respects it is unfair for them to have to face the prospect of a two- to three-hour journey to Bathurst, Orange or Dubbo. Those services should be available in the major centre of Mudgee. In fact, some people find the trip too much of an ordeal and tend not to go west but to come to Sydney and add to the already congested waiting lists. That is unsatisfactory and needs attention. This is a recurrent expenditure. It is obvious that there is either insufficient recurrent budget expenditure for the Macquarie Area Health Service and the New England Area Health Service or their attitude of centralisation mitigates against proper delivery of health services in these other centres.

In relation to Education, there are three hot spots in my electorate. Forty per cent of the teaching space in Muswellbrook Public School is in demountables. Recently the district inspector, the parents and citizens association president, the school principal and I inspected the school, which has been neglected over recent years. The demountables show dreadful signs of water leakage, to the extent that, for occupational health and safety reasons, several are unable to be used. The water contamination and the rotten carpet have made them unhealthy for use by children. Gulgong High School has approximately 350 students, and 40 per cent of its teaching space is in demountables. As far as high schools are concerned, it would have the highest percentage of demountables in the State.

A ministerial announcement was made in this Chamber during a question time some years ago that a level of expenditure would be embarked upon at Gulgong to eliminate most of the demountables. Unfortunately, in subsequent years the two Ministers in the Education portfolio have reneged on the promises made in this Chamber. When the current Speaker was the Minister for Education and Training he visited Muswellbrook South Public School, with much fanfare and many photographs taken, and announced a \$6 million two-stage program to upgrade that school. The first stage included the construction of a hall, a library and a canteen area, and that has been completed. However, the subsequent Minister, the current Minister for Police, reneged on stage two, and that remains the case as of this budget.

Stage two represents a broken promise. The people of Muswellbrook are very disappointed that the official announcement of one Minister is not sufficient. A Crown commitment, a ministerial commitment, was given and it is bad policy and bad ethics for a subsequent Minister to renege on that project and eliminate it from subsequent budgets. In this case it is even more appalling because stage two was a special education area and the children are jam packed into a couple of demountables. It is a great betrayal of the needs of special education children in the upper Hunter.

The Blue Mountains Highway is perhaps the most vital road infrastructure for the north-western, western, far western, and south-western parts of New South Wales. We would like to see some progress and an allocation for an environmental impact statement and perhaps some preliminary engineering works. We are now entering our second decade in which no new water conservation measure has been proposed. Water is the greatest natural resource issue confronting the State economy and yet, budget after budget—from the later years of the Fahey Government and throughout the eight years of the Carr Government—

Mr Corrigan: Minister Knowles has made a significant announcement about water.

Mr SOURIS: Not about new water conservation measures. Minister Knowles has made announcements about restrictions on the use of existing water. I am talking about the creation of new water conservation measures and the future of country New South Wales. The honourable member for Camden should wait until he knows more about a topic before he dives in incorrectly, as he has done in this instance.

I want to refer to two other issues. The Government has included in this budget a new poker machine tax. I have no doubt that this tax will result in the destruction of many clubs throughout New South Wales. It will result in the elimination of considerable levels of support for community organisations, charities and sporting groups. The greatest impact on the community will be that revenues from clubs will be converted from community donations to consolidated revenue. That money will come out of local communities and go into consolidated revenue. I am fairly confident that in the future the Consolidated Fund will not make contributions to those vital community and sporting organisations and charities which are currently receiving funds from licensed clubs.

If the honourable member for Camden and, in particular, the Minister for Regional Development want to make a contribution, they should look at the impact of this tax on regional communities and their ability to

maintain the social, sporting and community infrastructures that have been well funded by our licensed clubs. Through the imposition of this dreadful tax, the Government will destroy much of the fabric of our communities. I do not believe the Government realises that ultimately it will hurt defenceless people in small communities all over the State.

Mr Campbell: We have hypothecated it to health services.

Mr SOURIS: The hypothecation that the Minister for Regional Development refers to was not included in the budget. There is no hypothecation in the budget papers. He might like to indicate which page it is on. It is not there; there is no hypothecation. In any case, the trick and the trap in hypothecation is that in subsequent years one is unable to identify whether the so-called hypothecation has added to the budget resources available for a particular budget outlay. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

In subsequent years it will be impossible to know to satisfy oneself that the hypothecation to the health budget is an enhancement. It is a nonsense. It is a cheap and quick press release to try to get out of trouble. It was never contemplated, and the Minister knows that it was not incorporated in the budget. It was an after-thought. It was a press release that pretended to create a new level of expenditure in the health budget. No-one in New South Wales has fallen for that story. Government members are still peddling the story, which means they are still daydreaming and have fallen for the line that it somehow neutralises the great political disaster that has fallen upon the Labor Party. The Minister and the honourable member for Camden may not realise that the Government had the same experience in 1996. It had to back down ignominiously, and it now faces a backdown of even greater proportions in the lead-up to the next election. The Government already has enough bushfires burning, and now it has added the new poker machine tax, which will hurt every community in New South Wales.

The final comment I would like to make about this eighth Labor budget is that the Government has maintained a profligate spending regime. It has increased its spending year after year. Eight or nine years ago the New South Wales budget was approximately \$22 billion. It took us about 150 years to get to that figure. In the space of eight years it has become a \$33 billion budget. That has largely been made possible by the continuing boom in revenue, the likes of which have not been experienced before in this State, or in any other State. The increase in budget expenditure has been due to an employment boom and, in particular, a property boom. Most of the conditions associated with the boom are attributable to the good management of the Federal Government. Nevertheless, the combination of a sustained property boom, sustained low interest rates, a low unemployment rate and a low inflation rate have led to increased revenues for each State.

I am not exaggerating when I say that the revenues have been flooding in for eight or nine years. The trap in budgeting is enjoying those years and spending every penny. Little of the money has been invested in the sort of infrastructure that the State is now screaming for. The State is faced with a health system that is almost at the point of collapse, an education system that is lacking in resources and a public transport system that is falling apart. There has been little expenditure on major road works, which are vital to our State. No expenditure has been planned for water conservation measures. The Government has made little investment in the future of the State. Rather, it has been a spendthrift Government. The indicators show a slight rise in interest rates and inflation and respected forecasters throughout the nation point to a levelling out of the property boom, and therefore a levelling out of the revenues.

To some extent it has been easy for the Government to deliver surplus budgets, because New South Wales has received revenue of more than \$1 billion per annum above the increased budget in each successive year. It is not a difficult task for the Government to keep spending and balancing its budgets when the revenue flows at a rate that exceeds even an optimistic budget year after year to the tune of more than \$1 billion. The Government has spent more than the \$8 billion it has budgeted for in its eight budgets. Luckily for the Carr Government, it has received revenues of more than the \$8 billion it had budgeted for.

Mr Campbell: It is not luck.

Mr SOURIS: It is absolute luck. That is the sole reason the Government's budgets have balanced. It is certainly not due to fiscal prudence. It is not due to the Government sticking to the budgets it delivers. The budgets the Government delivers bear no resemblance to the results 12 months later. If the Government acts as though these times will continue forever, it will leave this State with a diabolical legacy. Not only will we have a lack of investment in capital and infrastructure but we will also be locked into recurrent expenditure that we will be unable to pay for, particularly when the property boom peters out. The Government is on borrowed time and it will leave a dreadful fiscal legacy for the future.

Mrs HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [9.28 p.m.]: I wish to make my contribution to the debate on the budget estimates and related papers. The ninth Carr-Egan budget is a varied contribution to this State after eight long years of Labor rule. There are mixed feelings about what this budget will do for the electorate of Hornsby. It seems it is very little. A headline in the Hornsby *Advocate* at the time the budget was delivered was "Not too promising". The Government should hang its head in shame about the double standards it exhibits with a philosophy of acting for the people, that is the workers, but treating one area completely differently. Local communities are cynical about Labor candidates and Ministers who waft in and out of our area, plying the citizens with pipe dreams and half promises.

Talk is cheap. In the case of Hornsby, this is the reality. I have been fossicking amongst the budget figures to find anything new that might be planned for Hornsby. I have located fool's gold that indicates the Carr Government has treated Hornsby residents with contempt. The people in my electorate deserve better. A Cabinet meeting in the electorate last November gave the illusion that the Government was interested in listening to local concerns. There has been no such result. It is all smoke and mirrors. Election stunts were all we saw. Genuine people came to meet with a number of Ministers about their concerns about school maintenance and urgent upgrades, sewerage connection and many other issues. Lip-service was the only outcome. Nothing changes. Even lies were proffered to dupe local residents into voting for Labor.

The lack of thought involved in telling Hornsby residents that the Coalition would move 160 police from Hornsby to Gordon was an atrocious act and unforgivable. I challenge the Government to alter the name of the local area command from Ku-ring-gai to Hornsby so there will no longer be any confusion on the Government's part about the geography of the command. The name change was Coalition policy in the election campaign, and would be a responsible action for this Government to take. We want more police in our areas to provide local policing solutions to local problems. Local communities report to me great dissatisfaction that they see fewer and fewer police on our streets—except, that is, during an election campaign! Our police work hard and need more support.

The ninth Carr budget does not meet local expectations at all. In fact, Hornsby residents have been widely neglected in this year's State budget, with little expenditure for essential services like parking facilities and school buildings. The budget failed to outline any capital works at Berowra Public School that would have included a new hall as well as other much-needed changes. Once again the Government has overlooked the students and staff at Berowra Public School. They are in desperate need of new facilities. The Government has promised repeatedly to formulate a master plan for a major upgrade of the school, but yet again we find that nothing has been done about this upgrade.

Activity last year saw the school engaged in discussions about the needs of the school community, and two plans were formulated for the opinion of the school. The school community was informed that comments put forward would be amalgamated into a final master plan that would seek development approval and await funding. At this time, there is a partially constructed master plan, but no development approval, and some very disillusioned people. There is no mention in this budget, no date and no indication what will happen next. The school is also wondering about its maintenance work. I note from the contribution of the honourable member for Parramatta that the Carr Government is very forward in delivering to schools in that area and has committed funds to upgrade school buildings at Arthur Phillip High, Westmead, Burnside, Dundas, Parramatta and Parramatta North, and also has promised to install security fencing at Parramatta High School and Rydalmere Public School as part of the Safe Schools Program. Again that indicates the lack of consistency across all electorates.

Other schools in the Hornsby electorate are also in need of capital works, including Mount Ku-ring-gai Public School, Asquith Boys High School, Asquith Girls High School and a number of others. I might note here that with the Labor mushroom planning policies and huge numbers of unit dwellings popping up before our eyes, there will be a significant impact on the local schools. This issue was raised in the election campaign by parents at Waitara Public School and is valid. There is no planning in place for the demographic impact on surrounding areas of State Environment Planning Policy 53 and State Environment Planning Policy 5 developments and their effects on local communities, no plans for possible increases in student numbers, and no plans for local roads or transport or other amenities. I might add that Hornsby Shire Council appears not to give this type of consideration when it approves developments.

The budget also failed to allocate any funds for a much-needed multistorey car park in Hornsby. The Government is dragging its heels over the feasibility study for this car park at the expense of local communities. I still do not know when the promise, given by the Labor candidate in sync with the then Minister for Transport,

will be carried out. I have made inquiries, but have received an inadequate answer. In an area that is a transport hub and obviously needs more rail parking, and which has a massive increase in unit construction, to do a feasibility study to seek an answer that is obvious and then to shroud the plan in mystery and make no firm commitment is unfair to the local community. The people are not silly; they do not have amnesia. They will hold the Government accountable for this gross deception.

Berowra railway station is another facility that was promised a feasibility study in relation to the need to build a multistorey car park. Many people travel from Labor electorates in the north and occupy parking spaces not only at Berowra and Hornsby but also at other car parks down the north shore. Berowra and Hornsby need a complete review of the current parking and drop-off areas, and I urge the Minister for Transport Services to look at the needs of commuters in those two areas at the very least. The problems are enormous and need urgent attention.

From a different perspective, the budget has also ignored pleas from rail passengers who use Hawkesbury River railway station. The steep stairs need replacing with an Easy Access upgrade. Why encourage use of public transport when there are so many deterrents to accessing what is currently available? The budget papers state that included in State Rail's \$336.9 million program for 2003-04 is an allocation for Easy Access station upgrades across the CityRail network, including the completion of seven locations currently in progress—to the tune of \$17.2 million in 2003-04—as well as the addition of five new sites at a cost of \$1.4 million allocated in this budget. Unfortunately, there is not one cent for the Hornsby electorate. Waitara needs a complete rebuild. The Government is hypocritical: it complains about nursing homes, yet does not care about the aged and access onto railway stations. We will have a small allocation of \$100,000 to do some maintenance to Waitara station, but for the elderly who face steep stairs at Hawkesbury River railway station this is no compensation.

As far as roads are concerned, there is a regional road block grant and traffic facilities funding with Hornsby Council to get \$86,240 and a like grant for Ku-ring-gai council of \$4,900. Other funding includes \$1,548,090 for traffic management. Since my election in 2002 I have been contacted by local residents about the dangers of exiting from the western side of Mount Colah onto the Pacific Highway to travel south, and I have received some feedback that the Roads and Traffic Authority has assessed the intersections as dangerous. Likewise, people involved with the Federal black spot program have also expressed an interest in the intersections. It will be interesting to see who funds the provision of a means by which local residents can exit the area safely. The Roads and Traffic Authority has been contacted a number of times about the intersections in Mount Colah along the Pacific Highway and to this date has not acknowledged in a meaningful way that the area has a significant problem. They may very well be waiting for a death to occur at those intersections.

I held a public meeting to look at issues associated with the Pacific Highway as it passed through the suburbs of Mount Colah and Mount Ku-ring-gai, and more than 100 residents came up with a page of improvements needed in the general vicinity. The four top requests were to reduce the speed limit from Playfair Road to Beaumont Road to 60 kilometres an hour in 60 days, to add lighting to poorly lit intersections along this length of the Pacific Highway, to place traffic lights at the intersections of Beryl Avenue and Excelsior Road, and to install arrows to assist turning from the Pacific Highway onto the rail bridge at Mount Colah. I have written to the Minister for Roads, but as yet there has been no action. Galston Road is also an area where safety is an issue, and my aim is to improve this situation. I will continue to lobby for some sort of solution for the intersection of Grevillea Crescent and Galston Road in Hornsby Heights.

Mount Ku-ring-gai has an ongoing issue with the intersection of Church Street and the Pacific Highway, as does Asquith with the intersection opposite the railway station and the shops along the Pacific Highway. It saddens me that spin, and not substance, is characterised in the 2003-04 budget, with mention only of money already allocated in previous budgets and scant new projects for Hornsby. It should be noted that for possibly the first time in the State's history, the New South Wales Treasurer handed down an incomplete budget. Significant details were missing from it at the time of its delivery. Once this part of the budget was released, again Hornsby remained the poor relative.

I have to ask the question in relation to sewerage connection and Sydney Water Corporation: What will the Government coffers take from Sydney Water this year? No doubt it will mean the difference between a local community receiving essential sewerage infrastructure or not. The latter is the likely scenario. Last year Brooklyn and Dangar Island could have had three sewerage systems put in place with the money acquired from Sydney Water and placed in Government coffers. I wait in fear as sewerage connections are being reviewed. Are Brooklyn and Dangar Island still on track for commencement of sewerage connections in 2005?

In the area that bounds the Department of Housing footprint for our electorate there are approximately 3,000 people on the waiting list for places in which to live. As part of the \$344 million asset acquisitions funding, Hornsby will receive only a total stock of eight in Thornleigh and one in Berowra, at a cost of \$1,452,000. This is hardly enough for the waiting list. I had reason to contact The Shack in Hornsby recently to offer assistance to a young mother whose plight was reported in the media. More stock will mean more help. Local housing groups expressed great frustration when they are meant to be the stopgap so that people can move from available community housing into Department of Housing dwellings, but this does not happen. This is housing block at its worst. There are homeless people and elderly in inappropriate dwellings, and families in termite-ridden houses—desperate people needing assistance that this Government, due to inefficiency, is unable to provide.

Hornsby needs a town hall as well as an upgraded art gallery or a combination of both. The Hornsby Art Society currently has occupancy of a council-owned property that is too small for its activities and it would be very grateful for bigger premises. I note that the Ministry for the Arts is giving many millions of dollars for the development of carriage works at Everleigh as well as the purchase and renovation of a property in Leichhardt. I urge the Premier to look closely at Hornsby and its arts needs and to reflect those needs in the budget with appropriate funding. Hornsby now has a cultural steering committee, and members of the Hornsby Art Society recently visited the regional art gallery at Gosford. State Government assistance with cultural facilities in the electorate would be warmly welcomed.

The actual growth in health funding is half that claimed by the Minister for Health and is Labor's lowest ever commitment to health capital works. As Shadow Minister for Health, the honourable member for Ku-ring-gai, said the Minister for Health has joined his Labor predecessors in inflating actual health spending. Despite claiming an 11 per cent boost to health funding, the real increase is half that figure. In 2002-03, \$8.8 billion was spent on health services and this year funding was increased to \$9.3 billion, which is an increase of \$491 million or 5.6 per cent. The budget papers state that the cost of the nurses' pay increase will be \$530 million. The claim about a funding increase has thus disappeared.

I congratulate the staff at Hornsby hospital for their dedication and hard work. On a local basis, the budget also failed to allocate any obvious funding for the inclusion of an emergency medical unit [EMU] in the new accident and emergency facility at Hornsby hospital. The original 2002 budget promise of \$16.4 million for the rebuilding of the accident and emergency, maternity and paediatric units resulted in only \$1.5 million allocated last year and only \$6.5 million for the coming financial year. I wonder about the EMU that is required near the accident and emergency unit. The EMU has only six months of funding, and plans to move it to the new complex are not firm. We do not know how it will happen or even that it will happen. I am still waiting for final plans to be exhibited for the new maternity, paediatrics and accident and emergency departments.

The concerns I have raised about the x-ray processing equipment and the cessation of thoracic surgery will have an impact on the proposed new units as well as the overall operation of the hospital. It is obvious that Hornsby hospital is out of the loop and that it is being downgraded by stealth. The loss of these services will mean the loss of even more services. It is interesting that the Government can afford \$82,000 for full-page advertisements in metropolitan newspapers, yet again criticising the Federal Government, but that no money can be found to provide Hornsby hospital with state-of-the-art computerised x-ray processing equipment that would have allowed the hospital to communicate results to all surrounding hospitals.

Hospital waiting lists are still a concern with some patients waiting two years for certain types of surgery. Since Labor came into power in 1995 it has closed 4,400 hospital beds. In June this year 647 people were waiting for surgery at Hornsby hospital and 421 of them had been waiting for more than 12 months. With two-thirds of nurses choosing not to work in nursing, where are the State Government's policies designed to encourage a significant number of those trained people to return to the hospital system? It appears that under the Carr Government the proportion of the health budget spent on capital works has halved. When Labor was elected capital works expenditure represented 10.4 per cent of total health spending. It is now down to just 4.9 per cent. This year's allocation for capital works is the lowest percentage of total health spending since Labor came to power.

Similarly, mental health services in Hornsby have received no increase in funding. The Government has gone silent on accommodation improvements for people with a mental illness. What of acute services for those with a mental illness, what of beds for adolescents with mental health issues who need immediate admission—but not into an adult ward?

The Brooklyn Ratepayers Association has been working long and hard to draw attention to the need for a sewerage connection in the area. The association is vitally interested in the health of the Hawkesbury River, which is polluted and needs immediate attention. No mention is made in the 2003-04 budget of the Sydney Water's capital works program for the commencement of the long-awaited sewerage connections at Brooklyn and Dangar Island. During a meeting with the Minister I was told that funding had been allocated for that purpose. During a recent council sewerage committee meeting a representative from Sydney Water also said that funding had been allocated. We all know how quickly funding can be moved from one place to another. Last year more than \$20 million was spent on upgrades of the Hornsby and Hornsby Heights sewerage treatment plants, and this year more than \$5 million will be spent on pumping station upgrades. However, with pipes that allow rainwater to mix with sewage, overflows still cause havoc with partially treated sewage flowing into Berowra Creek. The Minister has acknowledged the problem with overflow at the plants.

I hope that the pre-election promises will be honoured. The people who currently endure onsite sewerage systems, pump-out inconveniences and high cost are not stupid and have long memories—and just as well, given the extensive wait they have had to endure even to get close to sewerage connections being commenced. Although the Brooklyn and Dangar Island connections appear finally to be on track for 2005—I will believe it when I see it—the residents of Cowan are still very much in the dark about the timeframe in store for them. I am strongly lobbying for Cowan to parallel Brooklyn and Dangar Island with sewerage connection. If that does not take place, the people of Cowan will face horrendous pump-out charges. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

Labor must admit to failing to give the people of New South Wales any tax relief. Many families will no doubt suffer as a result of the taxes that are being ripped out of decent struggling people purchasing their own home. The budget takes an extra \$830 million in stamp duty from families, homeowners, farmers and businesses, and has not given any money back. This Government is a high-taxing and overspending entity that cannot take any credit or feel pride from the fact that it is continually in the back pocket of the local person. This Government continues a culture of waste and overspending, with the budget documents confirming that the Government overspent its own budget in 2002-03 by over \$1.4 billion. It also ensures that now more than ever young people and families are kept out of the property market and stopped from owning their own homes. What a disgraceful impact on families.

This Government supports a culture of surprises. It hid its plans to cut 1,000 jobs in the Department of Education, to remove workers compensation exemption for trainees, and it hid new charges on TAFE students. The TAFE college in the Hornsby electorate will no doubt experience the fallout from that measure, as will local businesses. The Government also hid its tax increases on hotels and clubs. I have been approached by a number of representatives of clubs. The Government also hid a \$3.2 billion deficit in WorkCover and another multi-billion dollar loss in the State's superannuation fund. In addition, it hid safety concerns about the Menangle bridge and the Millennium train and cutbacks to elective surgery in the bush. The railway bridge at Mt Ku-ring-gai in my electorate is causing great concern with regard to its safety.

We did not have the details for more than \$4.5 billion of Government spending. Cover-ups and lies form part of the budget. The deception is never ending. The Government's inability to manage projects is obvious. Sydney Water's \$61 million failed billing system is one of many examples of cost blowouts. Without the \$830 million windfall from stamp duty, the 2003-04 budget would have been \$631 million in deficit. The Treasurer has said he will be collecting only \$3.4 billion in stamp duty in the coming year, but that is hard to believe. While house prices have doubled, stamp duty has tripled. In more than 100 suburbs in Sydney the average house buyer is paying in excess of \$20,000 in stamp duty.

The TAFE fee increase will hurt small business. I call on the Carr Government to reverse its significant TAFE fee increases. Small business is concerned about the shortage of skilled workers hindering prospects for continued growth. TAFE colleges provide students with skills that are directly useful for industry and business. However, the Treasurer announced in the budget that fees will increase up to 300 per cent in many cases. Trainees will now have to pay up to \$350 for courses they did not have to pay for previously. The apprenticeship system will be in jeopardy. The working poor and youth at risk will be excluded from TAFE. The fee impost could easily add to the shortages already existing in many trade areas.

The jury is still out on the new Lifelong Learning document. It is extremely difficult to determine the impact of the boundary and other changes. The Hornsby Ku-ring-gai Community College is extremely concerned about the future in the area of adult education, which is almost totally excluded from the document. In the lead-up to the State election there was a flurry of activity in relation to, and large sums of money

announced for, various additions to the provision of emergency services for Hornsby. Although some of that money has been allocated, I still have not found out where a new fire control centre will be located in my electorate. There is not enough money to fund a community fire unit in my street—and I expect many others—a street that runs immediately along the interface with the bush. Winter was the time to set up community fire units, but the opportunity to be prepared for bushfires over summer is fading.

The only sizeable allocation for education in the area is for the Mount Colah Public School redevelopment, an item that has been on the books for a number of years and is not a new project. My congratulations go to the local parent community, the principal and staff of the school and the previous member for Hornsby, Stephen O'Doherty, for resurrecting the project for a school hall, and other additions and alterations to be built on the school grounds. Virginia Chadwick was the first to put the plan in a budget, but the 1995 incoming Labor Government dropped it. Great fortitude by the previous member for Hornsby and the local community saw the project back in the State budget, and now it is very close to completion. I deplore the electioneering that allowed the Labor candidate during the recent election campaign to crow about something she had nothing to do with.

If the Government has any commonsense, it will agree with the shadow Minister for Education and the private member's bill to institute a school status report and school building plan. Schools need more help to do their job. It is deplorable that these important institutions must come to us, begging bowl in hand, for money. The Government spends more than \$100 million on advertising, but it cannot afford the basic needs of the people it is supposed to serve. The Government made television advertisements costing \$200,000 for the Millennium Train, but did not show them because they would have breached fair trading laws. As the Leader of the Opposition said:

The Coalition is committed to tax reform, and it is committed to seeing cuts in stamp duty, and keeping the pressure on this Government to deliver those cuts over the next four years.

Since July 2000 New South Wales has lost 30,200 full-time jobs. During the same period 11,400 full-time jobs were created in Victoria, 16,700 were created in South Australia, 27,700 were created in Western Australia and 46,000 were created in Queensland. Why not in New South Wales? Every State, except New South Wales, has created new full-time jobs since July 2000. Nothing in this budget creates jobs and brings investment to New South Wales, and that will be a serious problem should we experience an economic downturn. The Government continues to backslide on reform, on chasing jobs and on creating investment. Hornsby needs investment in commercial space to increase opportunities for employment. The chamber of commerce is working actively to this end, and is to be commended.

Before the handing down of the budget the *Sunday Telegraph* described the Treasurer as a man addicted to an unfair tax, and the prediction was accurate. In 2003 there is no change to the stamp duty impost on the people of New South Wales, and no indication that there will be one in the near future. The Government has become very used to the easy cop-out and the easy income. It is hard to understand why our citizens do not have better facilities and services when one considers the Government's windfall. The recent introduction of increased costs for motorists, court costs, conveyancing costs and other charges is more of this money-grabbing behaviour. Residents have had to deal with an increase in costs on 1,000 items.

The seven licensed clubs in my electorate will be hit one way or another by the sliding scale tax impost proposed in the Carr-Egan budget. Clubs spend a great deal of money not only on providing for their members, many of whom are elderly and benefit from subsidised meals and entertainment, but also on the wider community. Sporting groups, including football clubs, organisations such as the police citizens youth club, the Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol and a local disabled tenpin bowling group—the Rockets—benefit from donations from local clubs. Who will compensate community groups for the losses they will no doubt suffer when clubs can no longer afford donations? The Carr Government has converted funding for community, sporting and charity groups from club revenue to consolidated revenue.

The phoney attachment of tax from clubs going into the health portfolio is an illusion designed to soften a very heavy blow. I am working with my local clubs to send a clear message to the Government that the new tax is not acceptable. My electorate has two shopfront police stations, one in Brooklyn and one in Berowra, and it is experiencing problems that were not solved by Operation Vikings, which took place in June. I have concerns about preparations for the bushfire season. As I stated earlier, dollars are much needed to fund community fire units. People in my electorate have to deal with inadequate car parking facilities at railway stations, septic tanks in metropolitan residential areas and roads in need of improvement. My constituents report an almost total dissatisfaction with transport services. The majority of people I surveyed recently indicated their

displeasure with paying more for substandard public transport. Too few train services go past Hornsby. My constituents also worry about train cleanliness and security.

I am concerned about the secretive approach to the provision of health services. How much general metropolitan transition task force money was received by Hornsby hospital? Schools in my electorate need halls and various other works. Waterways in my electorate are polluted. Local communities need halls and facilities for our young people. I am concerned also about aged care where young brain-injured people and others with degenerative diseases are placed in nursing homes when the State should provide them with specialised facilities. They are taking up valuable elderly places. Money is wasted on advertising, consultants and top-heavy bureaucracies. Too much taxation is ripped from our citizens and too many barriers exist to buying a home and accessing child care. The Carr-Egan budget is a little black book with inadequate provision for the needs of the people of the Hornsby electorate. The community will remember the oversight of this greedy and opportunistic Government.

I will continue to fight for improvements in Hornsby. I am not deterred by abject neglect and an ignorance of what needs to be done. I do not commend this budget. It is misleading, incomplete and leaves much to be desired. The Government has been in office for more than eight years during an unprecedented property boom, and it has collected more than \$1 billion in unexpected revenue. It seems to be a case of pre-election Labor policies providing votes not values. However, many examples were not obvious until after the election. Now we have a budget that cements the belief of the Coalition that the Government cares more about itself than it does about the people it purports to represent. People stop me to ask where all the collected funds go. They see plenty of things around the electorate that need attention. With a record tax pouring into the Government coffers I also ask where all the money has gone.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Maguire.

The House adjourned at 9.56 p.m. until Thursday 18 September 2003 at 10.00 a.m.
