

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Friday 25 June 2004

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

Mr Speaker offered the Prayer.

BILLS RETURNED

The following bills were returned from the Legislative Council without amendment:

Child Protection (Offenders Prohibition Orders) Bill
Criminal Procedure Amendment (Sexual Offence Evidence) Bill
Workers Compensation Legislation Amendment Bill

PARLIAMENTARY LIBRARIAN

Mr SPEAKER: I inform the House of the retirement of the Parliamentary Librarian, Mr Robert Francis Brian, as from 30 June 2004. Mr Brian was appointed Parliamentary Librarian on 6 January 1992. On behalf of all members I extend to Mr Brian thanks for his service and best wishes for a long and healthy retirement.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Special Adjournment

Divisions and Quorums: Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Mr CARL SCULLY (Smithfield—Minister for Roads, and Minister for Housing) [10.06 a.m.]: I move:

- (1) That the House at its rising this day do adjourn until Tuesday 31 August 2004 at 2.15 p.m., unless the House is recalled in accordance with Standing Order 53; and
- (2) that standing and sessional orders be suspended to not permit divisions and quorums upon the commencement of private members' statements at this sitting.

In moving the motion I indicate that, as per the program, the session will finish this morning and we are not expected back until Tuesday 31 August, but there is a slight chance that amendments from the upper House may need to be dealt with. I say "slight"—it is less than likely—to inform members of the small risk that the Legislative Assembly may need to be recalled if there are amendments of an urgent nature that need to be dealt with. I am reluctant to recall the House, and I am happy to indicate to members that it is not likely we will need to come back before 31 August. The motion for suspension of standing and sessional orders is to enable business to be dealt with this morning and, on the commencement of private members' statements, honourable members who will not be making a statement may return to their electorates.

Motion agreed to.

PRINTING OF PAPERS

Motion, by leave, by Mr Carl Scully agreed to:

That the following reports be printed:

Report of the Wild Dog Destruction Board for 2003
Report of the Wine Grapes Marketing Board for 2003
Report of the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal on Electricity Distribution and Retail Licences—Compliance report for 2002-2003
Report of the New South Wales State Coroner into Deaths in Custody/Policy Operations for 2003
Report by the Attorney General of Applications Pursuant to Section 26 of the Workplace Video Surveillance Act 1998 for 2003

COURTS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**In Committee****Consideration of the Legislative Council's amendments.***Schedule of amendments referred to in message of 24 June*

No. 1 Page 23, Schedule 8. Insert after line 5:

[2] Section 26 Persons selected to be summoned

Omit "at the court or coronial inquest at the time specified".

Insert instead "at the court or coronial inquest, at the place and at the time specified".

No. 2 Page 23, Schedule 8 [2], lines 13 and 14. Omit all words on those lines.

No. 3 Page 23, Schedule 8 [3], lines 16-27. Omit all words on those lines.

Legislative Council's amendments agreed to on motion by Mr Neville Newell.**Resolution reported from Committee and report adopted.****Message sent to the Legislative Council advising it of the resolution.****STATE WATER CORPORATION BILL****In Committee****Consideration of the Legislative Council's amendment.***Schedule of the amendment referred to in message of 24 June*

Page 26, Schedule 1. Insert after line 18:

- (2) Despite subclause (1), if the transferor or transferee is a local authority, compensation may be paid in relation to any asset or right the subject of the transfer.
- (3) Despite clause 6, the amount of any compensation payable under subclause (2) in relation to any such asset or right is to be determined by the Valuer-General.

Mr NEVILLE NEWELL (Tweed—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.11 a.m.]: I move:

That the Legislative Council's amendment be agreed to.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI (Murrumbidgee) [10.11 a.m.]: Whilst the Opposition will not oppose the Legislative Council's amendment, it is appropriate, on the day of the Council of Australian Governments [COAG] meeting, to comment on it. Water management is a very important issue in New South Wales and, indeed, right across Australia. The State Government's corporatisation of State Water is part of the reform process that many people in both country and urban New South Wales have called for. It is appropriate that State Water be corporatised so corporate parameters are put in place to ensure that it operates as an efficient and effective business. Hopefully the reform process will ensure the delivery of a far more efficient and equitable service than is currently delivered. The corporatisation of the irrigation areas of Murrumbidgee, Colleambly and Murray has led to increased efficiencies and reduced costs for end water users. We hope that the corporatisation of State Water will achieve a similar outcome.

What State Water will have to deal with over the next couple of decades could well be determined by the outcome of today's COAG meeting. I take this opportunity to urge the Premier to stand by the water users of New South Wales. I hope he takes as strong a stance in defending the people of this State as Premier Beattie does in defending the rights of water users in Queensland. An ABC report yesterday quoted Premier Beattie as saying that he would not be giving away anything that would prejudice the rights of water users in Queensland. I certainly hope that Premier Carr stands just as firmly in defence of New South Wales water users. However, I am not optimistic about that. As I said yesterday, the Premier of Queensland seems to have it all over the Premier of New South Wales—

Mr Alan Ashton: Point of order: The honourable member for Murrumbidgee is clearly entering into a debate about the Premiers of various States, which has nothing to do with the amendment before the Committee. I ask you to direct him to speak to the upper House amendment, which the Government accepts.

The CHAIRMAN (Mr John Mills): Order! I apologise to the Committee. I was not paying sufficient attention to the remarks of the honourable member for Murrumbidgee. However, I remind him of his obligation to confine his remarks to the amendment before the Committee.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: I consider my comments to be extremely relevant. I am not surprised that the honourable member for East Hills does not understand their relevance, because he is so far from the action regarding State Water. State Water will deal with the water resources of New South Wales, and the outcome of today's COAG meeting in Canberra will determine what those resources will be.

Mr Alan Ashton: Point of order: Once again I raise the same point of order. *Hansard* will show that in the last couple of minutes the honourable member for Murrumbidgee has debated merely the merits of Premier Beattie and the demerits of Premier Carr at today's COAG meeting. He has spoken about what has been reported on the ABC and what has not. I also had the benefit of listening to Premier Beattie on radio ABC today. Once again I ask you to direct the honourable member for Murrumbidgee to speak to the upper House amendment.

The CHAIRMAN (Mr John Mills): Order! The remarks of the honourable member for Murrumbidgee seem to be more appropriate to a second reading debate than to a debate in Committee on a Legislative Council amendment. I suggest that he obtain from the table a copy of the amendment so he is able to direct his comments to the correct form of words.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: I apologise to the honourable member for East Hills if this upsets him. The amendment to the State Water Corporation Bill is very important to the people of western New South Wales. If the honourable member ceases taking points of order, the pain will not last too long. State Water will be a very important institution in New South Wales. However, I am not entirely confident that the Minister for Energy and Utilities will be able to properly oversee it. Last week a meeting was held in Deniliquin that was attended by 300 people who are strongly opposed to what is happening in terms of urban water use and what the Minister for Energy and Utilities is doing—

Mr Alan Ashton: Point of order—

The CHAIRMAN (Mr John Mills): Order! If the honourable member for East Hills intends to take the same point of order I will not uphold it. However, I will uphold the next point of order if the honourable member for Murrumbidgee does not ensure that his remarks are relevant to the Legislative Council's amendment. This is not a second reading debate and the honourable member for Murrumbidgee is bound by the standing orders of the House.

Mr Alan Ashton: Get on with it!

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: I would have finished my contribution by now if the honourable member for East Hills had ceased taking points of order. I know that this upsets members opposite, but we are here for the day to allow members the opportunity to speak in this Chamber. If the honourable member for East Hills does not like it, that is his bad luck. All members of this Chamber have rights, and I am taking advantage of my rights—

The CHAIRMAN (Mr John Mills): Order! The honourable member for Murrumbidgee has now spent a minute and a half canvassing my ruling. If he wants to address the amendment, he should do so. If he does not, I will direct him to resume his seat.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: As I said, the Opposition will not oppose the Legislative Council's amendment, but we have raised significant concerns about the operation of State Water. The Government has a history of not managing water in this State appropriately. I hope that either that will change or the Government will change as soon as possible.

Motion agreed to.

Legislative Council's amendment agreed to.

Resolution reported from Committee and report adopted.

Message sent to the Legislative Council advising it of the resolution.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills): I welcome to the public gallery Gary Fenlon, MP, the Chair of the Parliamentary Public Accounts Committee of the Queensland Parliament, who is accompanied by Rosemary Menkens, MP, and Bonny Barry, MP, who are members of the Queensland Parliamentary Public Accounts Committee.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

BILPIN COMMUNITY FIRE PLAN

Mr STEVEN PRINGLE (Hawkesbury) [10.18 a.m.]: At this time many of us would have forgotten some of the major devastation that fires have caused in various parts of Sydney over the last few years. Recently I had the privilege of attending Bilpin Rural Fire Service's presentation of its community fire plan, which is a most impressive document. Most of us would have tasted a Bilpin apple or two in our time, and most of us also would have enjoyed some of the delights of the Blue Mountains and Wollemi national parks, which surround Bilpin. This community fire plan has put Bilpin on the map. In summary, the plan is designed to enable firefighters to protect more efficiently the assets of the community from the effects of fire by:

- Knowing the location, fire risk and contacts for each property
- Keeping the information up to date
- Being able to access information quickly and easily during a fire
- Integrating this information into a Fire Plan for the Brigade.

The fire plan will be utilised on a regular basis by the local fire brigade and by fire headquarters. The results so far have been outstanding. Every property in the Bilpin area has now been identified. Every person and all the major phone numbers have been identified. People are able to enter data into the computer database simply by pressing a series of buttons. The digital maps that have been put in place take into account community survey data, fire history, regional topographical and vegetation data and visual information, for example, photographs, floor plans and property maps.

Bilpin Fire Brigade is now able automatically to generate a risk rating for all built assets, using Rural Fire Service standards. It is able to identify the most vulnerable residents and assets and unusual hazards on individual properties. The fire plan also enables rapid communication with Bilpin residents. Phone numbers are dialled automatically simply by a click of the mouse. Bilpin Fire Brigade can now produce mail-merged Word documents simply and easily and letters are sent out quickly. It is also able to focus its attention on community education, and to highlight some of the most vulnerable areas. The community fire plan will also enable the fire brigade to:

- Refine security and risk-assessment weightings of the landholder survey database
- Document the structure of the database
- Write a user manual.

That will enable not only current staff but also future staff to use the system. The plan will also enable the fire brigade to:

- Set it up at Hawkesbury District level for other brigades
- Train Hawkesbury RFS staff and volunteers in the eight frontline Hawkesbury brigades to use the data collection and entry methods
- Deal with the glitches that emerge as it is rolled out.

So far the project's results have been extremely impressive. The structure of the database has been investigated by a development team which has key specialist skills, map information and mathematical problem-solving skills. So Bilpin has a first-class database. That team has consulted extensively with the wider community. The

landholder database that has been forwarded to council provides basic landowner information as a text file or as a spreadsheet. The database processes information from which it can generate mail-merged word documents, and survey forms have been incorporated. I hope many rural fire brigades throughout this State adopt this first-class world-standard system.

As I said earlier, every property has been identified and the database contains regional topographical and vegetation data and property maps so that everyone can be contacted in times of emergency. I commend the Bilpin Rural Fire Service and, in particular, Bill Shields, Margaret Tadrosse and Paul Timmerman on their first-class efforts. I am sure that in years to come this plan will save many lives and will serve as a model for future brigades.

TWEED HEADS GREYHOUND CLUB

Mr NEVILLE NEWELL (Tweed—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.23 a.m.]: I pay tribute to the Tweed Heads Greyhound Club, an organisation in my electorate that has been in existence for a long time. The club occupies premises at Border Park, where it has been located since the mid-1970s—about 30 years. However, the club was in operation before that time and greyhound races were held at what is now called Recreation Park. The Tweed Heads Greyhound Club is not a designated TAB club, but it is a successful club. Over the past 12 months it has paid out \$420,000 in prize money and it received \$380,000 in subsidies from the central body in Sydney. The club contributed \$40,000 of that \$420,000 in prize money from its own funds, which indicates just how successful it is.

On Monday 14 June—the Queen's birthday weekend—I had the pleasure of attending the 2004 Border Park Galaxy meeting, which was well attended. This annual event, which has been held since 1971, is well known in greyhound racing circles. Trainers, owners and supporters come to the North Coast from Victoria, the Illawarra, Sydney and other areas because the prize money for the 2004 Border Park Galaxy, a major event that is held on that day, is \$39,500. The owner of the first and fastest dog home receives a prize of \$30,000, a considerable amount of money when the fact that this club is not a designated TAB club is taken in to account. The club continues to exist because of the success of its committee. I pay tribute to its chairman, Mr Harry Pledger, directors Mr Bryant Jackson, Mr McKeering and Mr Ahrens, and the secretary, Huey Clarke.

As I said, the club is successful despite the fact that it is not a designated TAB club. However, TAB clubs operate to the north: in Brisbane, on the lower Gold Coast and at Parklands, Casino and Lismore. Following a strategic review of the New South Wales greyhound racing industry, Greyhound Racing NSW is determined to change the scheme of distribution for 29 non-TAB clubs, which includes the Tweed Heads club. Greyhound Racing NSW has said that no club, whether a TAB club or non-TAB club, would be closed. However, as a result of the proposed distribution formula the Tweed Heads club will be severely affected. Directors at the Tweed Heads Greyhound Club are extremely concerned about the exposure draft of the proposed new scheme of distribution, which has been circulated to all clubs for their comments.

If the board of Greyhound Racing NSW adopts that exposure draft and implements it on 1 July 2004, 20 non-TAB clubs will benefit and nine clubs will be adversely affected. I am concerned that the Tweed Heads Greyhound Racing Club will be severely affected. I ask Mr Percy Allan, Chairman of Greyhound Racing NSW, and the Chief Executive Officer, George Bawtree, who have met with Harry Pledger and Huey Clarke, to establish what impact the proposed scheme will have on the club. I ask them to seriously consider some rearrangements so that the Tweed Heads Greyhound Club will not be severely affected. Many people are employed by the related greyhound club industry on the North Coast. Any setback to this club would have a severe impact on industry, training and jobs in that area. The local economy benefits from money that is distributed by the club either in prize money or to greyhound owners and trainers in the Tweed region.

MURRAY HUME BUSINESS ENTERPRISE CENTRE

Mr GREG APLIN (Albury) [10.28 a.m.]: Centralisation is a current policy of the Carr Government and is clearly evidenced by cuts to services and government agencies in regional areas. The lack of prior consultation is a common factor, but even more disturbing for the staff involved is the surreptitious way in which the news is delivered—usually by way of announcements through the media. That is not an acceptable way of conducting business, let alone managing human resources. Recently I spoke of the manner in which the Mature Workers Program in Albury was axed. Then on Monday 7 June came the media announcement of the cuts to small business services through the slashing of business enterprise centres across the State.

My office in Albury was contacted by the Murray Hume Business Enterprise Centre to verify what had been heard on the radio. Yes, we found it was true. In a media release embargoed to 5.00 a.m. that Monday morning, the Minister for Regional Development, and Minister for Small Business had announced the abolition of 50 business enterprise centres, with 18 centralised operations to replace them. There was no contact or advice to the existing contract holders, no thought of the job losses in 30 centres, only a limp attempt at defending so called high-powered super centres, which would provide information and referrals for people wanting to establish their own small business, and would run a range of workshops and seminars for operators.

Those functions are the very work currently undertaken so efficiently by the existing community-owned business enterprise centres. Those programs are being delivered in small regional centres across New South Wales. But they are to be cut away. The engine room of the New South Wales economy is to be rationalised; it will be restricted to 18 areas instead of 50, and the life blood of many small rural communities will be drained just that little bit more. The assumption by this centralist, high-taxing Government is that small business can be serviced more effectively from a so-called super centre with increased use of electronic media. That defies the recognised view that small business advice is more effectively delivered through a truly decentralised network providing grass roots, face-to-face counselling services from professionally skilled and experienced business mentors.

Over the past 15 years local business enterprise centres have provided this service and have achieved considerable economic, business, industry and employment outcomes for local communities, contributing to the very economic survival of rural communities. That network of knowledge, skill and experience will now be dissipated: no consultation, no attempt to retain the momentum. At a time when regional New South Wales desperately needs decentralisation of jobs, businesses and services, the Carr Labor Government is amalgamating councils, cutting services like the Mature Workers Program, axing business enterprise centres and removing agricultural field research stations. The Government is removing effective programs and resources away from the communities that most need them.

In the region I represent, the Murray Hume Business Enterprise Centre is to be replaced by a new super business centre. The expected location of the centre will be in Albury, but it will service the local government areas of Albury city, Balranald, Berrigan, Conargo, Corowa, Deniliquin, Greater Hume, Jerilderie, Murray, Tumbarumba, Urana, Wakool and Wentworth—all this for only \$110,000 per year. Since Lindsay Hanchett first commenced the Albury-Wodonga Small Business Training Committee in 1983, the Murray Hume Business Enterprise Centre has supported and assisted thousands of business operators to commence and grow their businesses. I will list some of the outstanding achievements of the local Murray Hume Business Enterprise Centre.

The centre has provided training in Certificate IV in Business Management to more than 1,000 New Enterprise Incentive Scheme participants from around the region; 82 per cent of the participants who established businesses were still operating successfully after 12 months. It has been contracted to deliver the New Enterprise Incentive Scheme in the New South Wales region for the next three years. It offers programs in e-commerce, business start-ups, Certificate IV in Business Customer Service, and many other customised courses, depending on the needs of local businesses. It provided assistance to the Corowa business community with development of its strategic business plan under the Main Street project. It provided assistance to the Holbrook business community with development of its strategic business plan under the Main Street project. It has provided customer service training to 60 participants from Holbrook businesses through the Chamber of Commerce and Holbrook Council. It is conducting the establishment of business incubators and it has assisted more than 250 start-up and 80 established businesses per quarter. As the manager of the Murray Hume Business Enterprise Centre, James Burgess, says, it will be extremely difficult to operate the centre successfully under the arrangements proposed by the New South Wales Government.

COUNTRY ROADS FUNDING

Mr GERARD MARTIN (Bathurst) [10.33 a.m.]: This morning I refer to road safety, particularly safety on country roads. On 27 and 28 May, together with a number of members of this House, I attended a Country Roads Safety Summit at Port Macquarie organised by the Minister for Roads, the Hon. Carl Scully, through the auspices of the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA]. It was an excellent summit and there were some very worthwhile contributions. In his opening speech the Minister pointed out that over the past 20 years there have been two silver bullets, to use his words, that have been very effective in helping to reduce the road toll: random breath testing and the compulsory wearing of seatbelts. The road toll has dropped dramatically during those two decades but, unfortunately, the decline in road fatalities has plateaued. There are too many fatalities

on country roads in comparison to those on city roads. I believe that there is one more silver bullet left, and that is adequate roads funding. More funds need to be made available quickly if an impact is to be made on the road toll. It is obvious that people are being killed on country roads because of the standard of the roads, but, of course, speed and alcohol are also factors.

In 2003 the cost of the road toll and trauma in Australia was estimated by the Bureau of Transport Economics to have been \$17 billion, and the New South Wales share of that cost is estimated at about \$3.5 billion. When one adds to that the personal cost of the social problems that result from road trauma we can see what a dramatic problem it is. The honourable member for Port Macquarie, the local member, pointed out at the opening of the conference that if the number of people who are killed on our roads were war casualties there would be national outrage and people would be calling for action. Those thoughts are echoed by people such as Ross Turnbull from the NRMA, who spoke about the need to look at new ways of funding our roads if the problem is to be addressed.

It is time that New South Wales, with the co-operation of the other States, elevated road safety and the problem of roads funding to a national status and treated it in the same way as the Chifley Government treated projects such as the Snowy Mountains scheme following World War II. The Deputy Prime Minister recently released the Auslink white paper, part of which referred to funding of \$11.8 billion for roads over a number of years. Disregarding the fact that the release of the white paper may have had something to do with the fact that this is an election year, even with that large amount of money it will still not be until 2016 that the Pacific Highway, the most prominent of the national roads chasing road funding, becomes four-lane highway between Sydney and Brisbane. Surely that cannot be acceptable. We need to find a way forward on this matter.

The honourable member for Lachlan and I have been working on a committee that has undertaken a study for a four-lane Bells Line of Road over the Blue Mountains, a second egress. Unless we can find a better and faster way of funding these roads we will always be playing catch-up. There will always be the circle of local government blaming the State Government, and the State Government blaming the Federal Government. We should look outside the square. For instance, if we can have a sunset tax to raise funds for a gun buy-back or to keep a peacekeeping force in East Timor, why can we not have a transparent tax, with an agreed program of road works, between local government and the States?

If we had a sunset clause that would expire in, say, 10 years, people would know exactly how many dollars would go into the roads funding account. Each State would have a share of it. The funding would not all be put into big bang projects along the coast and in metropolitan areas, but we would have to look at those areas that are still serviced by gravel roads. If such a proposal were put together with bipartisan support, people would accept it. They would accept paying a little more to fix the problem of inadequate roads funding, because this is a large country with a relatively sparse population. This is a debate we need to have if we are serious about attacking the problem of reducing the road toll.

Mr NEVILLE NEWELL (Tweed—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.38 a.m.]: I also attended the Country Roads Safety Summit at Port Macquarie, and I congratulate the honourable member for Bathurst on bringing its success to the attention of the House. Random breath testing and the compulsory use of seatbelts have made a tremendous difference to the State's road toll. However, there is concern that the downward trend has now plateaued. As the honourable member for Bathurst pointed out, the number of deaths and injuries on country roads is out of proportion to the distances travelled. The combination of speed and alcohol is obviously contributing to those horrendous statistics. The present Federal-State agreement regarding the Pacific Highway will expire in 2006. The State Government is obviously keen to extend that agreement until 2016 to ensure that future highway projects can be funded adequately and that the road is upgraded to a dual carriageway. I compliment the honourable member for Bathurst on his suggestions, particularly regarding funding. We need to advance funding decisions so that not only the Pacific Highway but all regional roads are upgraded to a safer standard.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT WATER BILLING SYSTEM

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI (Murrumbidgee) [10.40 a.m.]: Last Thursday night a public meeting was called in Deniliquin to express concern about the new system of water billing that local councils across New South Wales are introducing at the behest of the State Government, particularly the Minister for Energy and Utilities. About 12 months ago representatives of the Berrigan shire travelled to Sydney—perhaps at the time of the shires conference—to speak to the Minister and to air their concerns about the new billing regime. The system will make it difficult for shires such as Berrigan to balance their budgets. Last Thursday's meeting was

Deniliquin's turn to express its concerns. The new regime will have a significant impact on Deniliquin Council and its ratepayers. At present most councils, including Deniliquin Council, charge a fixed rate for water up to a certain usage point, above which they charge a rate per kilolitre.

Councils must raise 80 per cent of their revenue from water charges through fixed rates so that the income is guaranteed, irrespective of how much water is used each year. Some 80 per cent of the costs of water provision are also fixed. This charging structure has been in place for some time. However, the best practice guidelines that the State Government is imposing on local councils will reverse the equation so that only a maximum of 25 per cent of a council's rates revenue can come from fixed charges. That arrangement is fine in an average year, but most honourable members will agree that it is fairly hard to find an average year in country New South Wales when it comes to rainfall and, therefore, urban water use.

The problem is that if councils can raise only 25 per cent of their water rates revenue through fixed charges, it is a particularly wet year and not much water is used on gardens, in parks and so on, that revenue will be reduced significantly, to the point where it will be less than the cost of providing the water. Under the new best practice regime councils are forced to charge 25 per cent at a fixed rate but then charge more than 75 per cent in usage charges in order to compensate for those years when water usage will be reduced. This practice will have a significant impact: Councils will find it much more difficult to budget for the future and ratepayers will have to pay more for their water.

At last week's meeting in Deniliquin several individuals produced sample water bills—most people's water rates will increase by between \$60 and \$90 a year. However, some water users in Deniliquin and Finley, such as Deniliquin High School and Finley High School—and I am sure elsewhere in country New South Wales—will see their water bills increase by \$9,000 a year. That money will come not from head office in additional funding but from the schools' individual budgets, and we all know how tight those budgets are. It will be very difficult for Deniliquin High School and Finley High School to find an extra \$9,000.

While the best practice regime may work well in Sydney, in metropolitan areas or even on the coast, it does not work in western New South Wales. Councils such as those in Berrigan, Deniliquin and Griffith have told the Minister that. They have explained why it does not work and asked the Minister to find an alternative arrangement—and alternatives are available. We understand and accept the need to use less water. Economic considerations are involved but we must also consider the practical implications of the new regime. I call on the Minister for Energy and Utilities to reconsider his plan for urban water use in country areas of New South Wales. I urge him to give us a break. He should deal directly with local government and come up with a better plan that will achieve water savings while leaving councils viable and ratepayers free from additional charges.

Mr NEVILLE NEWELL (Tweed—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.45 a.m.]: I commend the honourable member for Murrumbidgee for bringing the concerns of the ratepayers of Deniliquin Council and the township of Berrigan to the attention of the House. However, I point out to the honourable member that New South Wales is not the only State that has moved to a user-pays system of water charging; it has been happening across Australia for some time at the behest of the Federal Government. I suspect that only a few New South Wales councils have not switched to the new system. If Deniliquin Council has unique circumstances I am sure that the Minister for Energy and Utilities will be receptive to its representations. The honourable member for Murrumbidgee also mentioned the impact of the new regime on local schools and their budgets. I will refer that matter to the Minister for Education and Training to ascertain whether the honourable member's assertions are correct and to ensure that an appropriate response is forthcoming.

CAMPSIE POLICE LOCAL AREA COMMAND AWARDS

Ms LINDA BURNEY (Canterbury) [10.47 a.m.]: I congratulate officers of the Campsie Local Area Command [LAC] following the Local Area Commands Awards ceremony. At the event the National Medal, the NSW Police Medal, the NSW Police Medallion, Commander's Commendations and Certificates of Appreciation were presented to outstanding officers for their service. The National Medal is presented to recipients upon completion of 15 years diligent police service and an examination of a nominee's service history. Campsie LAC award recipients were Senior Constable Tom Cusack, who was awarded a Region Citation in 2000 for professionalism and excellence, and Senior Constable Alan Gilford.

The NSW Police Medal was awarded to Sergeant David Wood for 25 years service and to Ms Leslie White for 30 years service. Commander's Commendations and Certificates of Appreciation were handed out for a variety of meritorious service highlights, for example, apprehension of violent persons, quick and selfless

assistance to people at risk, such as checking for occupants of a car that was alight, and the preparation of briefs for presentation at court hearings. I congratulate and thank the recipients—they deserve the accolades. I will not provide their ranks, but their names are Tom Cusack, Bibiana Passack, Belinda Simpson, Adam Wilson, Glen Morrissey, Brett Van Akker, Michael Pellegrini, Damian Saunders, Rick Jebara, Shane Callaghan, Marina Nestoriadis, Victor Seto, Zabiullah Azimi, Debra Nelson and Scott Davis.

With so many awards, it was understandable that the Campsie LAC has reported a reduction of crime in the area to an all-time low. I gave notice of a motion earlier in the week along those lines. Last week the honourable member for Bankstown and I attended a Police Accountability Community Team meeting and were most impressed by the fact that, for the first time ever, in the week up to 13 June not a single home was broken into in the area for which the Campsie LAC is responsible. That is particularly notable in the Campsie LAC. There has been a drop in all crime categories across the command, most notably robbery. I commend Commander John Richardson, the command leader, for the incredible professionalism that he has displayed. He and his officers have made good connections in the Canterbury-Bankstown local government areas, with the businesses, local members of Parliament and many community groups in the area.

These significant community partnerships have led to a reduction in crime across all categories, and that can be attributed to the work of the outstanding officers within the command who were recently recognised by these awards, and to the efforts of Operation Vikings, Task Force Gain and local initiatives. Their significant work has received extremely good local media attention. It is important that we recognise excellence in any profession, and police are often at the wrong end of media attention and used as scapegoats by some members of the community when something is not working. We must recognise the enormous personal risk they face, as well as their professionalism. We should focus on what is working and support good officers and good partnerships in our areas. Once again I congratulate all those who were involved in the awards ceremony.

Mr TONY STEWART (Bankstown—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.52 a.m.]: I also have great pleasure in commending the Campsie Local Area Command [LAC] for its efforts, work and achievements. As the honourable member for Canterbury said, recently we both attended a Police Accountability Community Team meeting which dealt with what police are doing in the community and with peak community groups. Campsie LAC is doing an outstanding job. There has been a significant reduction in most categories of crime within that area: crime is at its lowest point for approximately 10 years. That is a fantastic achievement for the Campsie LAC and I commend Commander John Richardson for his outstanding leadership. I know he would be the first to say that those achievements would not have been possible without the great team of police officers and support staff in the Campsie LAC. I commend the Campsie LAC for its great efforts and acknowledge its achievements. As local members, the honourable member for Canterbury and I look forward to working closely with the command.

CRONULLA ELECTORATE RAIL SERVICES

Mr MALCOLM KERR (Cronulla) [10.54 a.m.]: I refer to the safety and reliability of rail services in my electorate. I recently received information from a constituent who travels to Circular Quay with a friend and colleague from the Sutherland shire five days a week. She told me of the chaos with the trains, which was particularly bad in early April and May, and continues to be unsatisfactory. On 18 May my constituent arrived at Town Hall station at about 5.35 p.m. to travel home, and did not arrive home at Sylvania Waters until 7.15 p.m. This person can travel by car from the city to her home in approximately 45 minutes, but the train journey took approximately 1 hour and 45 minutes, which is clearly ridiculous.

My constituent advised me that the Waterfall service was running late, and that caused following trains to be late. When the 5.40 p.m. train to Cronulla arrived at Town Hall station it pulled in at platform 6 instead of platform 4. An announcement was made when the train pulled in at the station, but not everybody had time to race up the stairs or escalators to catch it. Not everybody is able to use station facilities such as those described in Harry Potter novels, which the Wagga Wagga *Daily Advertiser* says the Premier can do. My constituent said the 5.25 p.m. and the 5.40 p.m. Cronulla services were cancelled. Occasionally a morning peak hour train from Miranda is cancelled. Trains are often stationary on the tracks during journeys, many trains do not travel at a comfortable speed—they are too slow—and they are severely overcrowded. Some peak hour services have only six carriages, which is not enough to accommodate peak hour commuters. Some trains stop in the underground tunnels of the city for 10 minutes or more without any message being conveyed to passengers.

My constituent told me that about three months ago, in the heat of summer, a train travelling to Waterfall during the evening peak hour developed brake problems. The train guard was not made aware of the

problem until the train pulled into Sydenham station, when passengers, almost asphyxiated, spilled out of the carriages. Negating all passenger safety, the guard made a harsh announcement telling customers to reboard the train, that it was only brake smoke, and he refused to "hold the train for us" any longer. My constituent reboarded the train. She told me that, not surprisingly, the next day she suffered a throbbing headache.

On 14 May she boarded a six-carriage train that was more than 10 minutes late, although CityRail had not advised commuters of the delay. The guard was literally yelling through the microphone at every station for people to move into the carriages because no-one could alight or board the train. However, hundreds of daily commuters were already packed into the train. She said she felt as though she was in India. According to the front page of the *Daily Telegraph* some years ago, Sydney trains were more crowded than trains in India. The train arrived at Redfern station and when passengers starting spilling out the doors a girl passed out and fell out of the train.

My constituent, who was a St John Ambulance first-aid officer, quickly helped the girl, whose foot was caught between the train and the platform. She worked frantically to free the girl's foot and get her onto the platform before the train pulled out of the station. The guard was oblivious to what was going on. The girl had fallen and hit her head, was unconscious, and spent more than four minutes lying on the platform at Redfern station. My constituent asked the platform guard to call a paramedic and he responded that she was probably on drugs. She then asked another guard to call a paramedic, who took 16 minutes to arrive. The platform guard retrieved the girl's thong that had gone onto the tracks, and my constituent boarded the next train for Town Hall. Not surprisingly, she was very shaky. She has never seen the railway in such a state of chaos in 26 years.

Mr TONY STEWART (Bankstown—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.59 a.m.]: I note the honourable member's concerns, which I will pass on to the relevant Minister. In terms of character and metaphors drawn from Harry Potter, I point out that the honourable member for Cronulla may be considered the Voldemort of Cronulla.

Mr Malcolm Kerr: Point of order: It is probably a point of clarification. Can I ask the Parliamentary Secretary to withdraw what he said? I am not sure whether it is an insult or a compliment.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills): Order! There is no point of order.

ROXY THEATRE, PARRAMATTA

Ms TANYA GADIEL (Parramatta) [11.01 p.m.]: This morning I share with the House a story that is quintessential to understanding the changes that Parramatta has undergone in the past century. It is a story of an iconic legend reborn. I refer to the Roxy Theatre in George Street, Parramatta. The Roxy was originally opened as a cinema on 6 February 1930, with the first audience spellbound by Maurice Chevalier's *Innocents of Paris*. The Roxy, along with the other classic cinemas in Parramatta—the Civic and the Astra—functioned as great entertainment venues until the end of the 1950s, when the Roxy, along with other historic cinemas, confronted two crises of faith. The first related to the advent of television, and the second related to competition from the video cassette recorder. However, while video managed to kill the radio star, it could not quite finish off the Roxy. For those who have not had the opportunity to see the Roxy, architecturally speaking it is a classic example of art deco design.

The theatre's main entrance is surmounted by an impressive arch and an ornate Spanish mission tower, which has been retained throughout refurbishment. The refurbishment has preserved the original cinema mezzanine and 750-seat cinema, including the velour seats, not to mention the lounge bar. The character of the Roxy then and now has been immortalised by the National Trust, which made the Roxy the second cinema in New South Wales, after the State Theatre, to be placed on the heritage list. The Roxy is a place of historical importance to Parramatta, having opened in 1930, but it also has a living history that should be cherished and acknowledged. I place on record some of the comments of some of my senior constituents, who recall the Roxy in its heyday. Tom Lamb, aged 89 and formally a long-time resident of Westmead and now at Parkes, said this:

The only thing I can remember about the Roxy is that it was the place where I went to meet all those beautiful girls... and go to parties afterwards.

I am happy to tell the House that, despite Tom's early frivolity, he has now been happily married to Merle for more than 60 years. Tom is also a life member of the Australian Labor Party and his father, William Henry Lamb, was the member for Granville from 1938 to 1962, and the Speaker of this House from 1947 to 1959. Tom also told me that he used to know some of the organists who played at the theatre, and that he would frequent

the Roxy with Bruce Morris, who was later a partner in the funeral directors firm Metcalfe and Morris. Frank Bloxham, also in his 80s, who is a patron and fellow of Parramatta Historical Society, recalls how he used to come in from Maroubra, where he lived at the time, and take his Dundas-based girlfriend to the cinema at the Roxy. This was in the late 1930s.

After 30 months and much speculation as to the future of the iconic legend of Parramatta, the Roxy re-opened on Friday 13 February 2004, which we hope will be a lucky date for the new management, the Palace Group of companies. It has done a great job in managing to preserve the heritage value of the old girl while injecting a touch of sophistication into the heart of the central business district. Not only did I have the privilege of attending the re-opening night of the Roxy, which featured the talented Christine Anu, but during the 2004 National Heritage Trust Week, on behalf of the Minister responsible for heritage matters, the Hon. Diane Beamer, I presented the General Manager of the Palace Group, Andrew Jolliffe, with a certificate of commendation for its adaptive re-use of a key landmark in Parramatta.

The New South Wales Heritage Council approved the refurbishment in April last year. Although it is only early in the new career of the Roxy, and all the early signs are incredibly promising, I believe that this restoration is a fine example to the rest of the State of how to merge commercial prerogatives with community demand for heritage preservation. By creating the Roxy complex as a multipurpose venue, with al fresco dining, luxurious bars, live music, cinema and stage shows, the new management is preserving a piece of Parramatta heritage, and I congratulate it on that. I encourage all honourable members and the general public to experience the Roxy first hand, because I truly believe that such a place deserves our support.

COUNTRYLINK RAIL SERVICES

Mr DARYL MAGUIRE (Wagga Wagga) [11.06 a.m.]: I express to the Minister for Transport Services my deep concern about the impact proposed closures to CountryLink ticketing services will have on regional communities, particularly my railway station, which provides CountryLink travel services. If CountryLink services are centralised elsewhere, we will lose the hub that has become, after negotiations with our local council, a major interchange. Not only does the CountryLink office sell rail tickets and travel products and deal with telephone bookings and inquiries, it also sells tickets for Great Southern Railways, the Indian Pacific, the Ghan and other products. It is an agent for local airlines, Virgin, Qantas and Rex Airlines, and for road coaches McCafferty's, Greyhound, Murrays, Fearnese, and Premier Coaches. It also retails accommodation for motels Australiawide. The ticketing office also contributes to our community by providing work experience to local youth. It also provides tourist information.

The staff at our CountryLink office are well regarded. They live in our community; they are part of our community. While the centre is operating, the staff provide customer services. They move booked luggage, offer cloakroom services, recover lost property, and deal with customer complaints and inquiries. They make public announcements about train movements, et cetera, and they control the station with departures, hand signalling, et cetera. Importantly, they assist elderly people. As honourable members know, elderly people and the disabled use public transport services, more so in the country. Today I represent the elderly and the disadvantaged in the Wagga Wagga community and surrounding areas. Those people depend on this service. If the staff are no longer there, who will help them?

Old people travelling by bus to the rail station and then trying to board the local train have difficulty lugging big cases and luggage. Trains and buses often arrive late at night. The incidence of assaults, unsavoury behaviour, and vandalism at the local railway station has been reduced because the staff deal with such matters promptly, and they work closely with the police. That provides an environment in which the travelling public can at least wait for connecting trains or buses in safety. Nowhere else in our city of 58,000 people is such an environment provided. As a result of problems with bus and train services, the community agreed that the local CountryLink ticketing centre would become the transport hub for our region.

In the assessment, CountryLink ticketing centres are being judged, quite unfairly, on a revenue basis. I say "unfairly" because CountryLink provides a ticketing service to the disadvantaged and the aged travellers as a community service obligation. That is not being taken into consideration in the assessment process. That is unjust; it is not right. In relation to revenue, there are warrants for concessions, special concessions and student travel passes. All those matters must be considered when the Minister is deciding the future of CountryLink rail services. A community service obligation is a tool provided for rural and regional areas. It is put in place to deliver services, even those of a basic nature, to the most disadvantaged who rely on CountryLink train services and bus services. I urge the Minister to carefully consider the ramifications of this decision for country people. It

will add to the woes of those in smaller communities who use train services to visit loved ones in hospital or to attend medical appointments. If the Minister is intent on getting rid of CountryLink ticketing services, I urge him to locate the service in Wagga Wagga, where we can accommodate those needs.

TOMAREE REAL FUTURES PROGRAM

Mr JOHN BARTLETT (Port Stephens) [11.11 a.m.]: I wish to advise the House about a project on the Tomaree Peninsula. The Real Futures Beacon Foundation School Industry Partnership is being run from Tomaree High School. In 1998-99 when I was mayor of Port Stephens, the general manager of the council and I were approached by the Beacon Foundation people to tell us about its program. Since then I have been one of its supporters. The reason for the establishment of the Beacon Foundation is that some 700,000 of the 2.7 million students at schools in Australia are from households that rely on welfare. The foundation initially became involved with a Tasmanian high school principal who said, "The goal of 50 per cent of my students is to go on the dole."

Over three years the Beacon Foundation gave the Tomaree High School a series of grants of about \$20,000 to set up a program. Basically, the foundation recognised that there were already too many skills shortages, and determined that as long as students had training there will be jobs for them. But students need to focus on lives with directions and goals. The program is based on the idea that it takes the whole village to raise a child. For year 10, students and the community are asked to attend to sign a pledge that by March the following year they will either be in work, under training or be back at school receiving some type of further education. The program tries to ensure that alienated young people who have given up on school or society remain connected to education and training systems.

The program was run last year for the first time. I am pleased to report to the House that, of 280 year 10 students, only two are not back at school, at work or undertaking some sort of training. The problem is that it is often difficult to track the children involved. If they are at risk, they are even more difficult to track. These are young people who were not succeeding at school and went out into society and caused problems because they were not enjoying the gains that come from being an active participant in the work force and society generally. We were very pleased that only two of last year's 280 year 10 students did not end up working, receiving further training further education, or returning to school.

We invited the local community to the launch of the program, because the Beacon Foundation money will run out at the end of next year, and we raised about \$20,000 from the community to keep it fully involved in the project. In the time remaining, I will not be able to outline the six main projects in the program. Project 1 involves funding an education and liaison officer to keep the Beacon Foundation program running in schools. This year we are hoping to take the program to year 9 students, identify earlier the children who are at risk and then concentrate on giving them some goals for school and later life.

Project 2 aims to employ the Tomaree High School Real Futures co-ordinator, who will have a fund-raising role because the program is outside the normal school funding system. The co-ordinator's role will be to assist students to set goals and to identify students who might be at risk, and then help them. Project 3 involves a funded position of education/industry/student support officer at Tomaree High School. That officer will have the role of supporting the year adviser to identify at-risk children. Project 4 is the charter signing ceremony, project 5 relates to tracking students, and project 6 involves the mentoring of students considered to be at risk, a project we are working on this year. This project involves mentoring of students by the community, which is paying to keep the scheme running. I commend the program to the House.

HORNSBY ELECTORATE INTERSECTIONS CRASH STATISTICS

Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [11.16 a.m.]: I wish to speak about intersections in the Hornsby electorate. As many honourable members would appreciate, local communities frequently, and sometimes regularly, express concern about intersections that either are dangerous or are perceived to be dangerous. I would like to place on record the crash histories of some intersections in the Hornsby electorate. In doing so I should note that I am not aware of any more recent data on injuries and crashes at intersections, other than by anecdotal evidence. Between January 2000 and December 2002 the Pacific Highway and F3 Berowra entry intersection had a total of nine crashes, two of which involved injuries; at the intersection of the Pacific Highway and Baldwin Avenue, Asquith, there were four crashes, three of which involved injury; at the intersection of the Pacific Highway with Galston Road at Hornsby there were 16 crashes, six involving injury; at the Pacific Highway and Ingram Road, Waitara, intersection there were 22 crashes, 12 involving injury; at the

Pacific Highway and Pretoria Parade, Hornsby, there were 20 crashes, six involving injury; and at the Pacific Highway and Unwin Road, Waitara, there were 15 crashes, six involving injury.

The following are intersections in respect of which the Roads and Traffic Authority and the Government need to take action to improve safety. The first is the Berowra intersection, connecting northbound traffic on the F3 to the Berowra village. This intersection last year, tragically, claimed one gentleman's life. The intersection has quite a lot of truck movements and it needs urgent attention, perhaps involving the construction of a roundabout, to make it safer. At Mt Kuring-gai there is the multi-access intersection at Glenview Road and the Pacific Highway, with an overbridge that could carry cars into the east side of Mt Kuring-gai. This intersection is very dangerous. Moving the traffic lights on the northern side of the intersection a little further north would help to solve problems. I am pleased to say that the Federal Government has agreed to black spot funding for Mount Colah. The Roads and Traffic Authority is going back to the local community to determine where the lights will be placed. It has been suggested that they will be placed at the intersection of Foxglove Road and the Pacific Highway.

At a public meeting last year local residents said they would like two sets of lights, the second set at Excelsior Road, the other at a re-opened Beryl Avenue, which would make the whole area a lot safer for people exiting to travel south down the Pacific Highway. Arrows are needed at the lights at the intersection of the Pacific Highway and the railway bridge to gain access to the Mount Colah entry onto the F3 at Mount Colah travelling north and to gain access to the local shopping centre travelling south. We need a roundabout south of the Baldwin Avenue intersection at Asquith opposite the shops, where traffic gains access to the east side of the railway, to stop traffic turning right to travel north. I invite the Minister to examine the intersection and undertake a road study. Crashes that cause injury are not the only things that should be taken into account: a lot of near misses and minor accidents that are not reported should also be included as part of the statistics because they have the potential to be fatal. I do not want my community to be put at risk.

Mr TONY STEWART (Bankstown—Parliamentary Secretary) [11.21 a.m.]: As the Parliamentary Secretary for Roads, I will pass on the concerns of the honourable member for Hornsby. I point out, and I do not want to lecture, that it is important that members of Parliament represent in a constructive way the needs of their community to relevant Ministers. I certainly see a lot of the correspondence that comes to the Minister, but I am not aware of representations from the honourable member. It is one thing to use a scatter-gun approach and mention particular areas of concern, it is another to make constructive and strong representations to the Minister. Such presentations are diligently followed through.

The RTA is extremely proactive in the corridor of the Pacific Highway referred to by the honourable member. A good deal of resources and time have gone into examining concerns relating to accident zones. As the honourable member pointed out, black spot funding is important. The State Government has a limited budget—as we found out only too well in the past few days—because, over time, the Federal Government has residually reduced our budget. We now know that we are nearly \$400 million down on previous funding from the Federal Government, and that is having a major impact on infrastructure in this State. It is important that the honourable member make strong representations Federally, given her links to the Howard-Costello Government, and ask for black spot funding for the areas with which she is concerned.

Mrs Judy Hopwood: Point of order: Obviously the Parliamentary Secretary does not read the correspondence I have written.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills): Order! The member is debating the substance of the matter. What standing order has been breached?

Mrs Judy Hopwood: The relevance of the reply.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills): I listened to the reply of the Parliamentary Secretary and it was entirely relevant. There is no point of order.

LIVERPOOL PIONEERS' MEMORIAL PARK

Mr PAUL LYNCH (Liverpool) [11.23 a.m.]: I draw to the attention of the House a part of Liverpool known as Liverpool Pioneers' Memorial Park and plans for the park by Liverpool City Council, which are causing considerable concern to a number of my constituents. The park is a significant two-hectare site located within the Liverpool central business district to the north of Westfield Shopping Centre. It is bounded by

Macquarie, Campbell and Northumberland streets and the Hume Highway. The site commenced operating as a cemetery in 1821 and officially stopped operating as a cemetery in 1958, with the last burial in 1956. Subsequently it was turned into a park and renamed Liverpool Memorial Pioneers' Park. By itself, this is fairly rare. It is uncommon for cemeteries to be turned into a park. I understand that only about 10 or 15 such cemetery parks exist in New South Wales. That change flowed from the old Liverpool Cemetery Act of this Parliament in 1970. Council then took control of the area and the park was officially opened in 1974.

Many people in Liverpool regard the park as having heritage significance. Heritage experts describe it as having regional heritage significance. Certainly, it is a site of great interest. It is estimated that about 15,000 people are buried there. At first glance that seems to many people to be an extraordinarily large number of burials for the area. However, local historians have identified at least 12,000 names of people buried there. The title of the park jars a little with some. A pioneers' memorial park suggests a triumphalist Anglo-centric colonialist place with an exclusivist tone. The truth is far from that. The reality of Liverpool's history often defeats conservative ideologies.

The range of people buried in the park is quite diverse. They include a number of First Fleeters, people who came out on the First Fleet, a number of indigenous inhabitants, and people from many parts of the world, including German and Croatian internees from the 1914-1918 war. In 2000 the Liverpool Regional Museum, in association with the Liverpool and District Family History Society, developed an exhibition entitled "Whispering Bones" based on some of those buried there. Those interested in the heritage of Liverpool, especially members of the Liverpool Historical Society, have been concerned for some time by Liverpool council's plans for the park. In short, there is concern that council proposes to cut off part of the park and put a road over it.

Such a suggestion has stirred significant and understandable disquiet. The fact that precisely this was done several decades ago has not, of course, helped. There is a range of obvious objections. Apart from the obvious, there is another issue, which, to my mind, is quite powerful. Under this suggestion the road will be built over paupers' graves. It is almost as if the people thinking of such a plan care only about the history of the powerful, important Anglo colonists and that paupers do not count. As I said, the park should not be about a narrow exclusivist elitist version of Liverpool's history. The paupers' graves are quite significant for Liverpool's history.

One of the central institutions in Liverpool's history was the Liverpool Asylum, which is the proposed site of the new medical school. It was designed by Francis Greenway and it is now physically part of Liverpool TAFE. The usual image conjured up by current usage of the word "asylum" is quite wrong. In fact, it was a poor house: it was where poor working-class people, not infrequently ex-convicts in the early days, would spend the end of their lives. One assumes that many of the people from the asylum are buried in this cemetery. They were the poor and the working class from all over the State.

Council is in the process of preparing a master plan and a plan of management for the park. As part of that process some public consultation occurred in the form of a public meeting on site on 17 April, at which I was present. It was revealed that one option for future development in the area would be to institute right-hand turns, which are currently prohibited, from the Hume Highway into Macquarie Street. This was said to be a possibility, but only if the direction of Macquarie Street were altered so that it formed a four-way intersection with the Hume Highway and Homepride Avenue. This would mean that a significant portion of one section of the park, currently containing paupers' graves, would be used for roadway. The public meeting was told that no decision had been taken and that it was only a possibility. What was very interesting at the meeting, and I made a note of it, was that it was said that this may be required by the RTA at some time in the future. A strong impression was given that this was the RTA's plan. Understandably, I approached the Minister for Roads to try to prevent this proposal from proceeding. I received a letter dated 4 June from the Parliamentary Secretary for Roads which said in part:

The Roads and Traffic Authority has advised that it has no current proposal to introduce the right turn movement as outlined in your representations.

However, the RTA believes that Liverpool City Council is examining proposals to reinvigorate the gateway to Liverpool CBD from the north, and this proposal is one of many being investigated by Council.

As the proposal is one being investigated by Council, I suggest that you approach Council direct on this matter.

Needless to say, I have indeed been approaching the council on the matter, and the letter in response is not exactly a masterpiece of clarity. It would seem that it is attempting to blame the RTA for something that it is doing. Council should unequivocally declare that no more of this park should be sacrificed or alienated for development, and that no road will go over the paupers' graves.

BLUE MOUNTAINS TOURISM

BELLS LINE OF ROAD UPGRADE

Mr IAN ARMSTRONG (Lachlan) [11.28 a.m.]: I welcome to the House representatives of high schools in the western areas of New South Wales. In the gallery are some of the pride of New South Wales from the shires of Lachlan, Forbes, Bland, Weddin, Cootamundra and Cowra. I am pleased to see them here in this Parliament, the oldest working Parliament in Australia. Today I want to speak about an issue affecting tourism in the Blue Mountains. I have been told that the Minister for Tourism and Sport and Recreation has recently been to the Blue Mountains on two or three occasions to investigate a problem that has arisen between various tourism groups in that area. I call on the Minister to acknowledge the ongoing dispute between Blue Mountains and Leura Tourism Pty Ltd, Blue Mountains City Council and Blue Mountains Tourism Ltd and to put in place a process of arbitration to resolve the damaging domestic political situation. Although I have not been to the Blue Mountains in relation to this matter, I have been lobbied by both sides. I do not pretend to understand the nuances, but I know that the dispute is not in the interests of tourism.

As the shadow Minister for Tourism and Sport and Recreation, I am concerned about this issue. From my discussions with the Minister I understand that she has a good grasp of the situation, and I look forward to working with her to resolve this matter. Whilst speaking about the Blue Mountains, I also refer to the Bells Line of Road. My colleague the honourable member for Bathurst also spoke on this issue this morning. Every month there is a greater need for the upgrade of the Bells Line of Road into a four-lane divided highway. Nearly \$300 million has been spent on the Great Western Highway in the past 10 years, but the program still has another two years until completion. Currently, the highway accommodates about 27,000 vehicle movements a day and the Bells Line of road, which goes up through Kurrajong and comes out at Lithgow, has about 12,700 movements a day. Both of those roadways have some of the highest accident rates per kilometre in New South Wales.

When the upgrade of the Great Western Highway is completed, there will still be 31 speed changes and 15 school zones between Blackheath and the bottom of the highway. Motorists traversing that road on a weekday during school hours face 45 potential speed changes. The speed changes are not sequential or progressive. The speed limit goes from 100 kilometres per hour to 80, back up to 90, down to 70 then up to 100. Because of the terrain and built-up areas adjacent to the Great Western Highway, the speed limit changes cannot be made on a sequential basis. Another issue is the high risk created by the difficulty motorists have in seeing the speed signs. If motorists driving in the inside lane pass a truck in the outside lane, they cannot see the sign because the truck blocks the view. The same situation applies to speed cameras.

An upgrade of the Bells Line of Road is urgently required to improve access to the west of the State. Sydney is spilling over into the towns of Oberon, Portland, Lithgow and Bathurst. The future growth in those towns will take some of the pressures off the water supply and urban development of Sydney. Another reason for an upgrade to be urgently undertaken is to allow light industry to have access to lower priced land so that those operations employing up to 10 people can have reasonable infrastructure costs and their employees can live at a place with a reasonable cost of living, compared to the savage escalating costs in Sydney of recent times.

A report commissioned by the Federal and State governments as a result of a committee recommendation and representing every elected politician—Federal, State and local government; Labor, Liberal, The Nationals and Independents—in inland New South Wales is near completion and will be released during the next few months. It is important that honourable members appreciate that we are looking at a proposition for some exciting infrastructure that will not only benefit the west of New South Wales and allow B-double trucks access to the air and sea ports in Sydney but, most importantly, will improve safety and allow Sydney to grow into the west of the State. Such a project will encourage population growth, consolidate industry and assist tourism in the west of New South Wales. Only 2 per cent of the international tourism that comes through Sydney goes to the west of the State.

Mr TONY STEWART (Bankstown—Parliamentary Secretary) [11.33 a.m.]: I commend the honourable member for Lachlan for the interest he shows in roads, particularly the Great Western Highway and the Bells Line of Road in the Blue Mountains region. As the Parliamentary Secretary for Roads, I will pass on the issues he has raised to the Minister for Roads. As the honourable member for Lachlan is aware, considerable studies are currently being undertaken, particularly on the Bells Line of Road, about heavy vehicle movements and the opportunity for further upgrades in the future. Consideration has to be given to the pristine environment that surrounds the Great Western Highway and the Bells Line of Road.

At one stage The Nationals had on their web site a submission on building a tunnel beneath the Blue Mountains. That is not something the Government wants to pursue. We want to put in place win-win initiatives for the community and the environment that recognise the needs of both tourism and heavy vehicle transport in the area. I also welcome to the House the young people who are visiting from the various shires of country and regional New South Wales. This is budget week in Parliament. One of the key priorities of the Government's budget has been country and regional New South Wales. I note that 26 per cent of the community of New South Wales live in country and regional areas, and 36 per cent of our total budget has gone to country and regional areas. You do not need to be an actuarial genius to work out that these future leaders from country and regional areas of New South Wales have done very well out of the Carr Labor Government.

WILD DOG CONTROL

Mr STEVE WHAN (Monaro) [11.35 a.m.]: Today I want to assure the people of the Snowy Mountains area, the farmers and the landowners in areas surrounding the Kosciuszko National Park, about my commitment and the commitment of the Government to the fight against wild dogs. Despite a record level of Government commitment and a record amount of funding being provided to the area, in the wake of the budget we have heard a number of false comments about the commitment to wild dog control. One such comment was from a member of the Opposition, a Nationals member, who shadows me in Eden-Monaro, who said:

Wild dog attacks in the Monaro region are on the increase, not only affecting sheep but also native wildlife such as the protected quoll. The wild dog destruction board spent \$1.1 million last year but has only been allocated \$200,00 for 2004/05. With this reduction in funding, wild dog numbers will continue to rise causing additional livestock and wildlife deaths.

Those comments were repeated by the Leader of The Nationals in his speech on the budget and by the honourable member for Bega. They are wrong. The Wild Dog Destruction Board, which was referred to, has no role in Monaro and never has. Indeed, its legislation specifically establishes that it only deals with wild dogs in the Western Division of New South Wales, that is, the Far West of the State at Broken Hill. Clearly, the board's funding has absolutely nothing to do with the fight against wild dogs in the Kosciuszko area. The claim made was even wrong in reference to the Western Division, but I will not speak about that now. As to the area I represent, the real story is much better. This year there will be expenditure of about \$1 million in the Kosciuszko National Park to tackle wild dogs. That is a significant increase over any previous allocation.

The election commitment, which I was instrumental in gaining and which the Minister for the Environment made and is delivering in full, provides 17 times more funding for the eradication of wild dogs and feral pests than was allocated by the previous Coalition Government. As a result of significantly increased resources being provided, many additional trappers have been employed in the region. Those additional trappers are starting to have an impact. There is a serious problem of wild dogs in this area, and that is why we need to take this action. The farmers in the region are right to keep calling for action and I have continued to raise the issue with the Minister. There are still too many sheep being taken by wild dogs. I am aware that the Minister for the Environment recently received a very positive letter from a landowner in the area where the Wee Jasper-Brindabella dog control model has been put in place. He complimented the Minister and told him that he needs to continue with his commitment to eradicate wild dogs.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Paul Lynch): Order! The honourable member for Bega will remain silent or he will be removed from the Chamber.

[Interruption]

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Paul Lynch): Order! The honourable member for Bega will come to order. I ask the Clerk to fetch the Deputy Serjeant-at-Arms.

Mr STEVE WHAN: It is interesting that the people who have been spreading this misinformation, including the honourable member for Bega, are not big enough to admit that they have made a mistake. That makes one think that if one is not willing to admit a mistake when it is pointed out, it must be an outright lie. This year \$1 million will be spent in the Kosciuszko National Park to fight wild dogs. That is a significant increase in funding, of which the Government is very proud, and which the people of the region deserve. Wild dogs are a serious problem in the area and this Government is the only one to have addressed the problem.

I will clarify some other important matters in the budget for the region. A Nationals member of the Legislative Council, Melinda Pavey, gave a false figure in her press release about the amount of capital works funding in Monaro. Once again, a bit of research would have shown that the figure was false. She also made a

false statement about the upgrading of the Queanbeyan hospital, continuing a misinformation campaign. The budget contains excellent commitments to Monaro. Some good projects are to be undertaken, about which people in Cooma and the Snowy Mountains areas are very pleased. For instance, there will be an additional overtaking lane on the Monaro Highway. The key correction to be made today, before the House goes into recess, is that the Government is committed to wild dog control in my electorate. [*Time expired.*]

LISMORE ELECTORATE EDUCATION

Mr THOMAS GEORGE (Lismore) [11.40 a.m.]: Today I pay tribute to the educators in the electorate of Lismore. In saying that, I give due recognition to all government and non-government schools in my electorate. On Saturday 1 May I had the pleasure of attending the Excellence Awards 2003 at Lismore City Hall, conducted by the North Coast Institute of TAFE for the Ballina, Casino, Lismore and Wollongbar campuses. On that great night the institute's director, Neil Black, presented achievement awards to the students of all campuses. The student of the year award was presented to Deborah Barker, who is a real credit to the TAFE system, herself, her family and her friends. The ceremony, organised by Peter Jarrett and his team, gave us all an opportunity to feel proud of the achievements of our young people, especially those who attend courses at the North Coast Institute of TAFE.

On 24 April I attended the second day of the graduation ceremonies of the Southern Cross University, which is based in Lismore, with campuses at Tweed Heads, Coffs Harbour and Sydney. On that day the graduands from the Division of Health and Applied Sciences were presented with their degrees, and the occasional speaker was Robin Williams. He delivered a wonderful address which I am sure the graduates will remember forever. On the same day graduands from the Division of Business and the Division of Arts were presented with their degrees. The occasional speaker was Michael Reid, who is well known in this House as a former Director-General of Health. He is now the Director-General of the Ministry of Science and Medical Research. It was obvious to me that everyone present was proud of the achievement of the students who had been educated in the Lismore electorate.

On 10 May the Southern Cross University held its first graduation ceremony in Sydney at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music in Macquarie Street. On that evening the Division of Arts, Division of Business, and Division of Health and Applied Sciences graduands were presented with their degrees. It was a wonderful night, of which the university can be very proud. The Chancellor of the Southern Cross University, the Hon. John Dowd, is well known to members of this House. The contribution to that university by its Chancellor, Deputy-Chancellor—Liz Rummery—and Vice-Chancellor, John Rickard, who is moving to the University of Central Queensland, is well documented. He leaves the university in good condition. Its achievements are well and truly documented as this year it celebrates its tenth anniversary. It is young in age but old in achievements. That has been assisted by the contributions of John Rickard. On behalf of the electorate of Lismore, I pay tribute to him. He has been well supported by his wife, Veronica. People of the electorate and the university are sad that John and Veronica are leaving our area. On behalf of the community, the graduates and everyone at the university, I place on record our appreciation of his work. I trust that God's blessings be with them both in their move to Queensland.

Mr TONY STEWART (Bankstown—Parliamentary Secretary) [11.45 a.m.]: I thank the ever proactive and diligent honourable member for Lismore for bringing to the attention of the House the importance of education in the Lismore electorate. Currently the public gallery is filled with young people, future leaders, drawn from regional New South Wales. It is important that they hear this discussion about how important education is to our future. That is not a cliché, it is the reality. It is widely recognised that without education we will not have a future. The honourable member for Lismore has the virtue of being surrounded by centres of educational excellence, including the Southern Cross University, of which I was previously a councillor, some great private schools and a fantastic TAFE system. Today the honourable member commended and supported those institutions and I thank him for that.

PENRITH STUDENTS FORUM

Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO (Penrith) [11.46 a.m.]: People who have lived in Penrith, especially within the Federal electorate of Lindsay, for a long time know that knowledge is power: to aspire to heights and to explore and achieve is a wonderful thing. Today I will speak about education within the Penrith electorate and its broad spectrum of activities and successes. I refer to the Penrith Students Forum, an initiative I introduced at the beginning of this year. I contacted a number of high schools in my electorate. A number of representatives from those high schools meet with me each month to talk about issues of youth and education, and youth and their broader areas of interest in Penrith. A number of high schools participate in the students forum. The

members of the forum are Christian Burner from Nepean High School, whose motto is "Aspire the Heights"; Danielle Gregory from Nepean High School; Zac Law and Samantha Dawson from Jamison High School; Alison Madden and Glen Pink from Penrith High School; Vanessa Robinson, Wayne Roy and Natalie Cartwright from Kingswood High School; and Rina Anwar from Cranebrook High School.

Representatives from those schools have met with me since the beginning of the year and we have discussed a number of issues. The youth officer from Penrith City Council addressed one forum at which the students discussed youth activities, or the lack of them, in Penrith. They discussed also weekend activities and Youth Week activities. The students wrote a letter, which I co-signed, requesting that a skate park be established within the electorate. Currently there are two skate parks in the Penrith electorate, one at Glenbrook and one in Jamison Park. However, the idea was mooted that there be a mobile skate park which could move from place to place, rather than a permanent skate park.

The students and I also discussed the State Government's education policies. At the last meeting we discussed the metropolitan strategy, which was launched by the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning, and Minister for Natural Resources. I put to the students a series of questions about their views as to the future of Penrith over the next 20 or 30 years, the years in which they will be working adults and perhaps raising families. The students raised with me broad issues to do with living. We discussed, for example, whether there should be more residential areas within the central business district [CBD]. Currently the Penrith CBD is zoned commercial, rather than residential. The students and I also discussed public transport issues. Currently, the electorate of Penrith has only one major form of public transport: rail. The remainder of the transport in the electorate comprises privately operated bus services.

The students also raised the issue of open space. The Penrith electorate has many little "pocket" parks, a regional park known as Jamison Park and Tench Reserve, which is on the Nepean River. However, there is no major park in the Penrith CBD. There is nowhere for people to sit and have a picnic. For people who wish to go to the shops or simply visit Penrith, the only major parkland is along the river. There is no major park in the CBD, where the cafes and restaurants are. The students and I also discussed that issue. The Federal Government owns 50 hectares of land adjacent to the railway station but it has not yet made a decision about the use of that land. The Federal Government is currently holding discussions with the local council about that matter. The council has determined that the land should be used for housing and businesses.

The Federal local member has suggested that it should be used for businesses and high-rise housing, and that the land should be fenced off from public open space. The students and I discussed the need for an area of open space within the Penrith CBD. The journey through Penrith by rail involves travel across a floodplain from St Marys, across to Emu Plains and then into the Blue Mountains. The land near Penrith railway station, which, as I said, was formerly Department of Defence land, is currently fenced-off open space. The journey I have shared with the Penrith Students Forum has been interesting, and I look forward to hearing the voices of the students in future.

ANTI-SEMITISM

Mr PETER DEBNAM (Vaucluse) [11.51 a.m.]: Once again I wish to speak about anti-Semitism. In introducing the topic I note that over the last 24 hours there has been a fair amount of publicity about another racist attack on a mosque under construction in Western Sydney. My comments today are a call for the action by the Premier not only on that attack but on another person in Sydney who is continuing to spew out anti-Semitic racial vilification. A person by the name of Mike Barclay has a billboard in North Sydney. I understand he has had the billboard for about a year and a half and it has carried a number of messages. In the last four to six weeks the messages on that billboard have been against Israel and Jews. The messages reflect the sort of inflammatory hate message we sought to target many years ago with racial vilification legislation. I implore the Premier to take urgent action on this issue.

I wish to cite a few of the messages that Mike Barclay has put up on the billboard in the last six weeks. The first of the anti-Jewish and anti-Israel messages read, "Jews make fantastic lampshades. Why is Israel above the law?" Every weekday 70,000 motorists drive past that sign. It is the sort of message that will inflame hatred. A private citizen, Anita Sekely, took exception to the billboard and lodged a complaint with the New South Wales Anti-Discrimination Board. The billboard was then changed to read, "Anita Sekely thinks I should be crucified. Jews are good at that." As reported in this week's issue of the *Jewish News*, despite approaches to various authorities, including Mosman Council, NSW Police and the New South Wales Anti-Discrimination Board, the issue appears to be regarded as too complex, too insignificant, or both. The point I make here is that the authorities are floundering.

The Parliament has been very specific on these issues. These are the sorts of racist bigots we need to stamp on very quickly. Clearly, Mike Barclay is a racist bigot and the authorities should stamp on him. However, it appears that it requires a message from the Premier for the authorities to take action. Therefore, I urge the Premier to get involved in this issue and ensure that action is taken against Mike Barclay either this morning or this afternoon. As I said a few weeks ago, I have spoken in this House many times about anti-Semitism. We are currently seeing the rise of virulent anti-Semitism in Europe, especially in France. We are also seeing the rise of anti-Semitism here in Australia. I have spoken about this issue on a number of occasions—17 November 2000, 26 October 2001, 9 May 2002, 27 September 2002, 22 November 2002 and 16 February 2004.

On the last occasion, 16 February 2004, a bipartisan motion deploring anti-Semitism was passed in this House. During debate on that motion I made the point that we have had racist bigots in Sydney for some time but effectively no action has been taken against them. I also made the point that the performance measure in this area is convictions, rather than the Carr Government's media strategies. I reiterate that point today. Mike Barclay is clearly a racist bigot. Not only do we want action taken against the people who recently attacked the mosque in Western Sydney, but we want action taken urgently against Mike Barclay. It appears that to get beyond the authorities floundering over the issue and ensure that action is taken will require the Premier's Office ringing everyone involved. As soon as I leave the Chamber after my private member's statement, I intend to ring the Premier's Office to emphasise that point.

CONSUMER, TRADER AND TENANCY TRIBUNAL AND MR PHIL MYLES AND MS JACQUI DORAN

Mr JOHN MILLS (Wallsend) [11.56 a.m.], by leave: I raise the Myles and Doran Fair Trading case because, unfortunately, there is a lesson to be learnt from the case by all consumers in New South Wales. Part of the consumer protection system has been unhelpful to consumers; it argues that consumers have to help themselves by their own wits as best they can. I refer to the Consumer, Trader and Tenancy Tribunal actions and processes in the Myles and Doran case during last November, December and January. My constituents Phil Myles and Jacqui Doran encountered a tribunal member and staff whose response appeared to be legalistic and had the effect of setting traps for my unwary constituent consumers. The consumers were given no advice about the processes, nor any explanation about their further options.

My constituents had a dispute with their builder regarding final payments on their residential building contract. They approached the Office of Fair Trading as consumers. They and their builder, with claim and counterclaim, attended preliminary hearings and subsequently substantive hearings before the Home Building Division of the Consumer, Trader and Tenancy Tribunal in Newcastle in February, April, June and September last year. At the end of the conciliation process there were 10 items still in dispute and a sum of \$2,853 was calculated as being still owed, subject to the rulings of the tribunal on the 10 remaining items. The final hearing was held on 6 November 2003. A letter from the Registrar of the Consumer, Trader and Tenancy Tribunal [CTTT] dated 11 November 2003, which enclosed a notice of order, read:

Please find enclosed a copy of the reserved decision and orders from the hearing of the application on 6/11/03.

In small print at the bottom, the document read:

Any party may, within 14 days of receiving notice of the decision, request the Tribunal to provide a statement of reasons for its decision. The request should be, in writing, addressed to the Registrar of the Tribunal.

My constituents received that letter on 13 November and they wrote back to the tribunal and said:

We have no objection to the findings however, the way in which... the amounts of all the items were to be calculated prior to the hearing meant that we will in fact pay for items that you have ordered that we need not pay...

We have calculated that the amount we owe... should be \$528. That is \$2162.70 in the order, less the three items.

The tribunal found in their favour. Myles and Doran requested a correction of the mistakes that were made when the sum that was owed by them was calculated. The amount in question was \$1,634. The 14-day clock started ticking on 13 November. On 28 November the tribunal sent a letter to the registrar, which states:

I refer to your recent letter concerning Tribunal orders made on the 15/11/03. If you wish to apply for a rehearing of the application under section 68 of the Consumer, Trader and Tenancy Tribunal Act, 2001 you must complete a new application and pay the filing fee of \$28.00. I have enclosed an application form for this purpose.

Why would they apply for a rehearing when only a recalculation of the mistakes was required? No explanation was offered concerning this process. This letter was dated one day after the expiry of the 14-day deadline for the application for rehearing. Myles and Doran were not advised that they needed to apply for an extension of time if their matter was to be reheard. In any case, a rehearing application seemed an inappropriate response by the CTTT to the request for recalculation. Myles and Doran made a mistake. They assumed that they were in time with their rehearing application and they answered "No" to question No. 9 on the form regarding the extension of time. Honourable members should remember that the CTTT had sent them the form after the deadline had already expired, but it did not advise them of that fact. So the inevitable happened. On 23 December the following order was made:

The application for a re-hearing... is not granted as the application was not made within time.

In January my constituents attempted to retrieve the situation and wrote to the tribunal as follows:

We are not seasoned veterans of the CTTT and rely on advice afforded by your office as to our rights...

A rehearing is sought in regard to this matter so that we can be afforded the opportunity to correct the discrepancies.

No help was available. The deputy chairperson wrote back in the following terms:

I have no legislative authority to overturn or amend the Member's decision...

I... note your rehearing application was refused... If you consider lodging a second rehearing application I direct your attention to... the Act which states that the Chairperson's decision whether to grant or refuse is "final and not subject to review of any kind"...

It is not standard practice for the presiding member to advise parties of their appeal rights at the conclusion of proceedings. Parties considering appealing against a decision of the Tribunal or applying for rehearing must make their own inquiries.

I have described the tribunal's responses as legalistic. It is a shame that this matter was not heard in the main court system, as I understand from my lawyer colleague the honourable member for Liverpool that the courts have what is known as the slip rule, which means that requests for recalculation of mistakes in money sums and orders do not require a formal appeal process but can be dealt with by the registrar in consultation with the judicial member. The tribunal needs to use the slip rule to help to protect consumers. If people had to go to the Supreme Court they would start with a lot more than the \$1,600 that was in dispute in this case. The tribunal needs to change its approach. It should be prepared to guide consumers with plain language explanations of its processes. It should be open, honest and fair and advise likely applicants about deadlines that have expired. I urge the Minister to consider these recommendations.

COUNTRY SCHOOLS STAFFING

Mr PETER DRAPER (Tamworth [12.01 p.m.]: Today I again refer to the staffing formula that the Government applies to small rural schools in New South Wales. I spoke earlier with the school captains of Farrer, Gunnedah, Peel, Tamworth and Walcha schools, who have just left the Chamber. On 14 November 2002 the honourable member for Northern Tablelands moved a motion in the following terms:

That this House calls on the Government to immediately implement a review of the formula determining the staffing levels of country schools.

Hansard shows that the then Minister for Education and Training, the Hon. John Watkins, recognised the need for flexibility "to ensure the public education system was as strong as possible" and he expressed strong support for the motion. The Hon. John Watkins said he was "absolutely committed to our small schools and to ensuring they have the best possible resources to do the precious job of teaching our children". All honourable members agreed to the motion, which was subsequently carried. More than 18 months down the track it is with disappointment and frustration that I report that there has been a complete lack of action by the Government, despite its commitment to immediately review the formula.

In the meantime Bendemeer Public School in my electorate and Black Mountain Public School in the Northern Tablelands electorate face the prospect of losing a teacher due to dropping student numbers. After intense lobbying by the school communities, the honourable member for Northern Tablelands and me, the schools were granted an exemption due to the drought and they retained their second teachers. Had the staffing formula been reviewed as agreed, these schools might not have been subjected to the ordeal. Bronwyn Reid, president of the Bendemeer parents and citizens association, described the intense pressure during this time of uncertainty as unbearable. She wrote:

This year we lost a whole term of constructive education due to the black cloud of despair created by the possibility of Bendemeer losing its second teacher.

Similarly, Nundle Public School wrote:

Every year parents, staff and children are in trepidation of the school not reaching the special number of students required to keep teachers.

Niangala Public School wrote:

Imagine the anxiety parents and whole communities feel as the enrolment numbers fail to reach the magical number of 26 and we face the loss of a teacher.

Nowendoc Public School wrote:

The uncertainty of the staffing formula is a threat to our stable environment and will disadvantage our children.

Attunga Public School wrote:

It is not fair on teachers, children and the community wondering from year to year if we are going to have that magic number to keep our teachers.

Moonbi Public School wrote:

In a community of our size, local education is a top priority and we vote for the people who care for our children.

I would like Minister Refshauge to recognise that this crisis extends also to the provision of school administrative and support staff. Like other small rural schools in the electorate, Bendemeer's troubles were not over. Following the stay of execution on the second teacher the school has been advised that school administrative and support [SAS] members' hours will be cut from two days a week to one day a week. Mullaley Public School had its administrative staff hours cut from five days per week to 2.5 days. The letters that I have received are about the spectre of losing a teacher and about the stress placed on all staff due to administrative support staff cuts.

Teachers are not only expected to prepare lessons and to teach the children. While catering for students with special needs they also have to answer the phone, run the office, care for sick children, provide adequate and constant supervision for child protection, carry out principal duties and meet visitors. As an example, Tintinhull Public School has 51 students in two classes with one teacher and a teaching principal. The students include 17 children with special needs, for example, Asperger syndrome, behavioural disorders, emotional disturbances such as introversion, extraverted aggression requiring antidepressants, a child incontinent of faeces, one with hip dysplasia, one with English as a second language, two with immense but unidentified learning difficulties, two who have been home schooled and who need extra attention, and two at risk in relation to literacy. At the start of term one, although there were fewer than the 51 students required to warrant a full-time administrative support staff member, the school is not deemed to be eligible to have a full-time member.

Mr Richard Torbay: That is disgraceful.

Mr PETER DRAPER: It is disgraceful. The teaching principal has 27 students across three stages, and that principal is constantly distracted when there is no SAS member. A recent meeting was held in the region to discuss this issue, to which we received an overwhelming response. Representatives from the 30 schools in my electorate and in the electorate of the honourable member for Northern Tablelands who could not attend the meeting sent letters of support, while representatives from 15 schools who travelled up to three hours to contribute at that meeting all expressed dire concern over the current and future viability of their schools.

This issue affects the education of hundreds of children, the work and personal lives of their teachers and administrative staff, and the welfare of rural communities. It seems to be a deliberate attempt to force public education to be centralised to the bigger centres. Teachers and parents in small schools want the Government to undertake this review. The need to review the staffing formula has not gone away. Along with the drought, floods and tough economic times, small schools constantly face the threat of losing their teachers. The Government can no longer afford to ignore this problem. I intend to keep working actively and to continue to raise this issue as a matter of importance.

TUGGERAH TRACTORS AND MOWERS PTY LTD WORKERS COMPENSATION INSURANCE PREMIUM

Mr PAUL CRITTENDEN (Wyong) [12.06 p.m.]: I refer today to Mark Davidson and his partner, Denise, and to their business, Tuggerah Tractors and Mowers Pty Ltd, which has operated in Tuggerah since 2003. At present Mark and Denise employ eight to nine people. Mark worked for nine years and Denise worked for four years in that business when it was called Wyong Farm Machinery. The former owners went bankrupt and Mark and Denise bought the business in an attempt to protect their jobs and secure their future. They managed to arrange the necessary finance and set up the business. Unfortunately, this week they got a rude shock when they discovered that the workers compensation insurance premium they will have to pay is twice the figure for which they had budgeted.

The premium is \$10,857.07 but an experience premium of \$10,949.39 has also been added. So they will have to pay the massive amount of \$21,806.46 in workers compensation if they are to be able to retain those eight to nine people. Mark believes that this is totally unfair and uses the analogy of someone buying a second-hand car. He pointed out that the driving record of the seller does not affect the insurance of the purchaser of a second-hand car. He believes the same should apply to his business. I think there is some logic in what Mark is saying and that whilst he might have worked in the business previously, he did not have control over the direction and operating practices of the business. However, as a new business owner, he has been hit with a massive impost under the guise of an experience premium.

Mr Richard Torbay: It's an outrage.

Mr PAUL CRITTENDEN: It is outrageous. Whilst I am not a member of Country Labor, a number of my constituents have a rural background: Neville Wran, John Laws, Charles Lloyd-Jones and several others are great pastoralists in my electorate and I am sure they spend a lot of money. Mark has provided commercial information that he needs a sales turnover of \$200,000 to be able to pay this \$21,806.46 premium. Many people do not realise just how tough it is for small business when they have to face these sorts of imposts. Politics is full of spenders, so I have a few suggestions. I think this is a matter not only for the Special Minister of State, John Della Bosca, but also for the Minister for Small Business. In the past this Government has supported the Central Coast business review, and I suggest we set up an enhancement fund for small business on the Central Coast and divert funds away from supporting the Central Coast business review because I do not believe the Central Coast business review based in Gosford necessarily understands or can empathise with small business people such as Mark Davidson.

It is even more important that we look at diverting funds into an enhancement fund for small business on the Central Coast because that is where we can generate a lot of jobs. We do not need big business. The demographics of the Central Coast and the nature of the work force there means that we can soak up a lot of unemployment quickly by helping small business. But it is even more important that we look at ways in which we can spend money effectively. The Central Coast business review is so out of touch that in June 1996 the editor/owner, Edgar Adams, had this to say when I was fighting for my constituents on the Warnervale airport. He said:

They're agin everything! They're agin the Airport ... Are they those old-timers who, not content with receiving the age pension, half council rates, half car registration fees, half telephone rates etc, still expect to have an equal vote with [others] ...

I think it is crazy to have someone who has those sorts of views in this day and age. We need to make sure that scarce resources for business and the promotion of business are channelled very effectively, and I am certainly concerned to ensure that people such as Mark and Denise can continue their business, continue their livelihood, and get a secure stake in their future.

G AND C FOUNDRY, URALLA

Mr RICHARD TORBAY (Northern Tablelands) [12.11 p.m.]: Today I advise the House about G and C Foundry. The enterprise is set on the family wool growing property "Shenandoah", at Uralla, in the beautiful New England region of New South Wales. "Shenandoah" was purchased in 1974 by its present owners and operators of the foundry—great people—Geoff and Carol Swilks. The land at the time of purchase was non-productive, and many years of hard work were put in by Geoff, Carol, son Murray, and daughter Vanessa to convert the land into a viable wool-producing farm. Like many others on the land, a time came, some years ago, when the property was not viable to produce wool alone, and it became evident that an alternate source of income needed to be created. Geoff spent 25 years as a farming contractor before purchasing "Shenandoah" and the thought of possibly leaving the property to work away from rural life was unattractive.

Geoff's other passion—collecting and restoring antique steam engines—was soon to be the catalyst in the formation of the new enterprise. Sourcing parts in the restoration process of the steam engines, some of which were nearly 100 years old, was next to impossible, as the original manufacturers had long since ceased trading. Geoff is an amazing man and his creative ability in manufacturing from metal bits and pieces that are long out of production is just fantastic, and it gave him the idea to cast all sorts of parts required to rebuild such engines. These machines represent an important historical link with Australia's agricultural past.

Among Geoff and Carol's collection is a traction engine made in 1912 by J. and H. McLaren, Midland Engine Works, Lincoln, England. This machine was used extensively by farming contractors across the country, being taken from farm to farm and used to power a variety of farm equipment from thrashing machines, milling saws, and shearing plants. It was also used regularly for cultivation. To say that this type of machine and its operators were imperative to the survival of our farming industry in the early days is not an understatement. Included in the collection are fully restored engines, all of which played their respective part in developing and sustaining our early agricultural industry in this country. These units are fully functional and make appearances at local events, such as the Armidale Autumn Festival parade.

So the rudimentary framework of the foundry was formed at "Shenandoah". The original furnace was hand-built by Geoff and it gave many years of faithful service. The furnace has now been replaced by state-of-the-art equipment, but it still retains its place "in the corner" as a piece of nostalgia. The casting of the parts for Geoff's engine was a complete success. Geoff had to draw the plans for the parts, often having to estimate specifications, as there were no original plans available. Then he would design a sand mould into which the molten metal would be poured. In a recent visit to the foundry we saw this taking place. It is incredible that he came up with this whole process. From relative humble beginnings, and with Geoff and Carol's tenacity to succeed, and the enduring support of their family, they set about growing their business from a small operation, producing a limited number of items, to today's ever-increasing scale of operation, producing over 250 various implements for use on farms and related industry.

"Shenandoah" continues to operate as a wool-producing property, and production of agricultural implements is continuing to grow and expand. The foundry has produced a range of replicated sections of iron lace work used in the restoration of a number of historic and heritage listed properties, and it has also diversified into the production of an innovative Interrow cultivator. The need for this new implement arose from necessity to meet a particular demand from a major cotton grower in north-west New South Wales to draw up to 13 cultivators, and thereby tilling 12 rows, instead of eight rows, behind the current tractors.

Implements presently on the market have a number of weight and length restrictions that generally prevent more than nine units being drawn behind the tractors traditionally used by these operators. The business represents an important part of the local economy by providing jobs for up to 14 employees, and helping to support at least 40 other industry groups, in the form of their direct suppliers. Their son, Murray, told me that should their cultivator business flourish, they envisage recruiting an additional two full-time employees. I commend this wonderful business to the House.

CO.AS.IT.

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE (Strathfield) [12.16 p.m.]: Today I wish to tell the House about the wonderful organisation called Co.As.It. and the ball it held on Saturday 19 June at Star City. I pay tribute to Co.As.It. It was first established by the New South Wales Government in 1968 under the auspices of the Italian Government. The initial aim of this great organisation was to assist the large number of Italian migrants who came to Australia in the post-war era. The organisation was formed with two distinct aims: to assist migrants through a co-ordinated settlement welfare program, and to preserve and promote an awareness of the Italian language and culture in Australia.

Today Co.As.It is one of the major and most active ethnic voluntary agencies in the State. It offers a wide range of services and programs focused on community services and educational and cultural activities. It is a registered charity and in 1983 it was incorporated under the New South Wales Companies Code. One of the great things about this organisation is that it is very much a grassroots organisation. I believe it has more than 300 dedicated volunteers and a growing membership base, which is great because people's needs change and we need to make sure that these organisations grow to support the changing needs of the people they serve.

Elections for the board of directors were held recently and I acknowledge its members in the House. The new president is Lorenzo Fazzini, the vice-president is Peter Todaro, the treasurer is John De Bellis and the

honorary secretary is Romano Di Donato. The directors are Maria Daniele, Patrizia Favorito, Guiseppe Fin, Francesco Lo Pizzo, Lawrence Picone and Linda Restuccia. The executive officer is Susi Schio and the administration and marketing manager is Andrea Comastri. I thank Vanessa Pilla, who gave me background information at very short notice so I could give the House exact details of the new board's composition.

This year's Italian National Ball was themed "Preserving our Past to Enrich our Future". That is a great title, and shows that the organisation remains in tune with its original mission statement. The Italian National Ball is a celebration of the Italian national day, and is the largest and most important event for the Italian community in New South Wales. This was its fifty-eighth celebration of the Italian national day. A wide range of dignitaries were present at the ball. I commend Co.As.It. for its presentation of the ball, right down to the table setting. The band was absolutely fantastic.

VIPs in attendance included the Italian Consul General, representing the Italian Ambassador, Dott. Dino Volpicelli; the honourable member for Drummoyne, my hardworking local colleague, representing our great Premier; the Hon. John Ryan, representing the State Leader of the Opposition, and his lovely wife; the Hon. Bronwyn Bishop, representing the Prime Minister, John Howard; Mr John Murphy, our hardworking local Federal member of Parliament, representing the Federal Leader of the Opposition, Mark Latham, and his wife, Adriana; Dott. Gerlando Butti, from the Italian Institute of Culture; Mr Paul Dovico, President of the Italian Chamber of Commerce, whom I had the pleasure of meeting personally; Mr John Gullotta, Comites NSW; Sandra Nori, the Minister for Tourism and Sport and Recreation; Ms Alice Murphy, the newly elected Mayor of Leichhardt, who is doing a wonderful job, and her husband; Dott.ssa Luciana De Leon, the Italian Education Attaché; Mr Armando Tornari from the great local newspaper *La Fiamma*, which is circulated throughout the State; Mr Quang Luu, the head of SBS Radio; Mr Gary Spiteri, President of the Leichhardt Chamber of Commerce; Mr Chris Mitchell, Co.As.It.'s honorary solicitor; and my husband and me. Many other distinguished guests also attended the ball.

Co.As.It. aims to establish an Italian bilingual school and is looking for a suitable venue. I have assured the association that I will do my best, as the member for Strathfield, to assist and support it in that endeavour. It is currently looking at a couple of properties. There must be due process and tenders will be offered, but I am happy to lend my support by corresponding with the councils involved in order to help the association find the venue it sorely needs to give staff and students an appropriate facility in which to work and study. [*Time expired.*]

BOORAL PUBLIC SCHOOL

Mr JOHN TURNER (Myall Lakes) [12.21 p.m.], by leave: I speak on behalf of the Parents and Citizens Association of Booral Public School, which is a small but very important school in my electorate. Booral school has operated continuously since 1846. It is a beautiful school. Unfortunately the Christmas before last contractors cut down every tree at the school, which created enormous problems. However, the parents and citizens association rose to the challenge and erected shade shelters for the children and initiated a replanting program. But the association has now raised other concerns with me about the inadequacies of existing school buildings and some of the school's assets.

More than half the school buildings, including the girls toilets, are temporary demountable structures, the oldest of which has been in situ for 20 years and is in a perilous state of disrepair. The smell of mould from this demountable is such that it requires an hour's airing each morning before the students can enter it. The walls are paper thin and in certain light conditions appear almost transparent. In another classroom the oil heater emits pungent fumes and cannot be used. This situation is particularly dangerous as all the windows are painted shut. The school has a stable student population of more than 100 yet it is officially sanctioned to accommodate only half that number. The parents and citizens association has told me, through its president, Mrs Jodie Waters, that it and the school community want the demountable structures replaced with permanent facilities and not just reclassified as has been tentatively proposed by the Department of Education and Training.

There are also a number of occupational health and safety issues at the school. The staff facilities are "primitive"—to quote Mrs Waters—with no fixed heating in the offices and severely limited storage and power supply. The situation is so poor that the principal is unable to operate her computer and a small fan simultaneously. The canteen cum staff kitchen lacks a safe hot water supply and a decent stove. There is no security lighting in the school grounds, which not only makes it hazardous for the entire staff, who are female, when they work after dark, but also makes the school unsuitable for use by local community groups after hours. It also makes the school more vulnerable to attacks by vandals and thieves. Schools everywhere, but in

particular in country areas, play a vital community role, and being unable to utilise Booral school to benefit the community is a great disadvantage.

A single carport provides the only storage space for the school trailer, mowers and other garden tools and equipment, ladders, mower fuel, garden chemicals, the barbecue and gas bottle, trestle tables and larger sporting equipment. As Mrs Waters observes, it is an occupational health and safety officer's worst nightmare. There is no enclosed assembly or performance venue on school grounds. Children must sit on the concrete for assemblies under a barely adequate exterior shelter. They must carry small carpet squares to sit on in the winter because it is so cold. For concerts and rehearsals of the school's fledgling concert band, the children must trudge down the street to the local community hall, which the school pays to use because it does not have adequate facilities in-house. Many of the matters that I have raised are clearly occupational health and safety issues and should be acted on. I understand that the principal has raised some of those issues with the Department of Education and Training. But the parents and citizens association states:

Our aim is to ensure that there are adequate funds to rectify the safety issues and to lobby for the additional funds to make the improvements we deem important for our school.

I support the parents and citizens association fully. I have visited the school and seen the problems at first hand. The fact that the school is one of the oldest in the State—as I said, it was built in 1846—suggests that it has heritage significance. However, it must be modernised for the benefit of students and staff.

Private members' statements noted.

The House adjourned at 12.26 p.m. until Tuesday 31 August 2004 at 2.15 p.m.
