

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Friday 12 November 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 Registration) Amendment Bill
Protected Estates Amendment (Missing Persons) Bill

UNIVERSITY LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 26 October.

Mr NEVILLE NEWELL (Tweed—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.01 a.m.]: Having pre-audience under Standing Order 181 I speak again to the University Legislation Amendment Bill, on behalf of the Minister for Education and Training, and make some brief remarks to assist members in the second reading debate on this bill. I also foreshadow that in Committee I will move amendments to ensure that the University of Western Sydney complies with Protocol 3 of the National Governance Protocols. I will move the amendments because, despite the Commonwealth Minister for Education, Science and Training confirming that our legislation complied with the National Governance Protocols, the Commonwealth very recently informed the University of Western Sydney that in order for it to satisfy the Commonwealth Minister that the requirements of the protocols are met, the reference to "Deputy Chancellors" must be removed from the provision in schedule 9 to the bill relating to official members of the University of Western Sydney Board, as official members or the university will not qualify for increased funding.

With the threat of a funding penalty hanging over the University of Western Sydney I have no choice but to move these amendments to delete that reference in the bill to Deputy Chancellors as official members. The Commonwealth will still allow the university to have Deputy Chancellors on its board, but they cannot be official members and they must be elected from among members of the board. In order to meet the Commonwealth's requirements, section 14 of the University of Western Sydney Act will need to be amended to stipulate that the Deputy Chancellor or Deputy Chancellors are elected only from among members of the board.

The Commonwealth has advised the university that this amendment to section 14 is required to ensure that other than the Chancellor, the Vice-Chancellor and the presiding member of the academic board, each member is appointed or elected to the board ad personam. This requirement is mandatory. The ad personam requirements of protocol 3 mean that the University of Western Sydney will no longer be able to elect Deputy Chancellors who are not board members. In addition, the amendments include savings and transitional provisions for the two persons who currently hold positions as Deputy Chancellors, and are therefore members of the board by virtue of section 12 (3) (c). They will also ensure that the University of Western Sydney board has the means to transfer smoothly to its new governance arrangements. I urge the House to support this amendment in order that the University of Western Sydney can be assured it is eligible for the additional badly needed funding.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER (North Shore) [10.05 a.m.]: The University Legislation Amendment Bill amends various university Acts to meet the requirements of the Commonwealth's National Governance Protocols for higher education providers to qualify for increased Commonwealth funding. As the honourable member for Tweed said, in the main the bill meets these requirements, with the exception of schedule 9, which relates to the University of Western Sydney Act. I find it very unfortunate that, after there have been discussions between the Minister's office and me, the honourable member for Tweed has suggested that this is somehow the fault of the Commonwealth Government.

I contacted the Minister's office when I discovered, after I consulted with the Commonwealth, that this was flawed legislation and that under the Act the University of Western Sydney would be ineligible for additional funding. It is that which has led to these amendments. It is extraordinary that, having introduced a bill, and before the Opposition has had any opportunity to respond, the Government has to amend it. It is shonky draughtsmanship that would have put the University of Western Sydney at risk of losing funding.

The bill makes changes that relate to the functions and responsibilities of the university's governing body, and it is particularly about the composition of the university's governing bodies to be called a council with a maximum of 22 members; removing the requirement that it include members of Parliament; and requiring members to possess financial and commercial expertise, amongst other experience; and having those qualifications set out in the university's bylaws, which will also set out procedures regarding the nomination of appointments.

With the amendment now foreshadowed by the Government, the composition of the councils in all the Acts will be as follows: three official members, being the Chancellor, the Vice-Chancellor, the person who is the presiding member of the Academic Senate or the deputy presiding member of the Academic Senate; six external persons appointed by the Minister; one or more external persons as prescribed by the bylaws and appointed by the council; two members of the academic staff of the university elected by members of the academic staff; one member of the general staff of the university elected by members of the general staff of the University; two students of the university who are not members of the academic or general staff to be elected by students of the university; and one or more external persons as prescribed by the bylaws who are graduates of the university and elected by graduates of the university.

Schedules 1 to 10 of the bill amend the Acts of the following universities: Charles Sturt University, Macquarie University, Southern Cross University, University of New England, University of New South Wales, University of Newcastle, University of Sydney, University of Technology, University of Western Sydney and the University of Wollongong. All those Acts are amended in relation to the size, composition, and role of the councils as above, with the exception of schedule 9 in this bill, which, instead of allowing for only three official members of the governing body, provides for five official members. The Commonwealth has advised me that this does not comply with the protocols and means that the University of Western Sydney risks not being granted additional funding, which is conditional on meeting the protocols.

I contacted the University of Western Sydney and made it aware of this. There were negotiations between the university and the Commonwealth and State governments. Obviously the Coalition will support the amendment because it simply tidies up some sloppiness in the initial Act. It is important to have legislation which complies with the National Governance Protocols and which makes more accountable and open the process choosing members of university councils and the way in which they are appointed. I had discussions with a graduate from the University of Sydney who has been on the governing body of that university. In earlier discussions concerns were expressed about how graduates were elected and the fact that they may no longer be elected. I am pleased the bill addresses that concern. The Coalition supports the bill because it makes the process more accountable and open. It enables universities to undertake the important reforms introduced by the Commonwealth Government through its National Governance Protocols. I have pleasure in supporting the bill and the foreshadowed amendments.

Mr KIM YEADON (Granville) [10.10 a.m.]: I support the University Legislation Amendment Bill and the amendments foreshadowed by the honourable member for Tweed. The bill implements the requirements of the National Governance Protocols. As my colleague the Minister for Education and Training explained in his second reading speech, the bill will enable our universities to receive much-needed additional Commonwealth funds. Universities complying with the protocols will share in an additional \$404 million nationally from next year to 2007, of which it is estimated that New South Wales universities will receive in the order of \$104 million over three years—approximately one-quarter of the Commonwealth funding. I bring to the attention of the House the importance of good governance in universities and how good governance establishes and cements good relationships with local communities. Effective governance can enable Australian communities to realise more local benefits from their investment in universities. Effective governance can also provide universities with many benefits that may flow to them from their broader community.

Universities will be able to implement changes to their governance structures so they can constitute their governing bodies and harness a range of skills and experience. At least two members of a university governing body must have financial expertise and at least one member must have commercial expertise, as well as provide representation to the range of interests that constitute a university. The New South Wales

Government has been keen to ensure that the bill allows for appropriate representation from alumni graduates, or convocation, whichever term is preferred by the university. It allows for staff and student representation, the Minister, and each university governing body to make its own appointments. The New South Wales Government recognises the importance of student, graduate, and staff representation on university governing bodies as a necessary complement to managerial and financial expertise.

Good governance principles cover the need for different perspectives to sit at the table, and encourage speaking up and engaging in robust debate to act in the best interests of the higher education provider. The bill ensures a nomination process for all appointed members on university governing bodies. It establishes, in effect, formal opportunities for dialogue between the university governing body and the Minister. The Minister will consult with universities on his appointments and ensure his appointments are people who have made significant achievements in academia, research, business and professional life, and that they are community leaders. It is important that people of this calibre contribute to decisions that will guide our universities in the future. Of course, our universities need to be business-like, but this is not their core tradition or core identity. Stakeholders, communities and the public need a voice in setting the directions of the organisations that they work for, help to fund through taxes, and sustain and regulate through subsidies and legislation.

Without stakeholder voices in the governing bodies of universities, the realisation of the full potential of those institutions is less likely to be achieved. Of course, our universities are key linchpins in State development, and not just in the dollars they bring to regional economies, which is conservatively estimated at \$817 million each year. When the flow-on economic impacts are taken into account, this expenditure results in an additional \$1.1 billion each year, generating more than 28,000 full-time equivalent jobs in regional New South Wales. Our rural and regional universities are often the major employer in their communities, thus strengthening ties with local communities, who feel ownership and benefit both materially and, importantly, intellectually from the presence of the institution. This sense of the broader community derives in part from knowledge transfer out into the communities in which our universities are located.

Universities operate today in an environment of increasing challenge. Declining public funding accompanied by globalisation of the learning and research marketplace, international competition for students, the fees they can contribute to assist university finances, and the commercialisation of research all place universities in an environment where specific financial and commercial expertise in their governing bodies are essential. But this must not be at the expense of our stakeholders or the amenity and variety of the universities' own regions.

I am currently a parliamentary member of the University of Western Sydney Board of Trustees. I continue to enjoy the experience and believe I make a worthwhile contribution to that board. Members of Parliament can be a very effective sounding-board for their communities. To this end, the bill includes a provision to enable the Minister to appoint members of Parliament, if nominated by the university governing body. The Commonwealth Minister for Education, Science and Training has endorsed the draft New South Wales legislation, with the foreshadowed amendments, as meeting the requirements of the protocols.

In recognition of the links that local members of Parliament have with their broad communities, and of the benefits that can flow into the university from such an appointment, I am certain that I am not alone in this forum in strongly supporting a continuing role on university governing bodies for members of Parliament. I urge the House to support the bill so that our universities can go forward to implement the necessary changes to their governing bodies to meet the requirements of the National Governance Protocols. I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs BARBARA PERRY (Auburn) [10.17 a.m.]: I thank the House for giving me the opportunity to contribute to debate on the University Legislation Amendment Bill and the amendments foreshadowed by my parliamentary colleague the honourable member for Tweed. The bill amends all New South Wales University Acts to give effect, where necessary, to Commonwealth legislation regarding the national governance protocols. My colleague the Hon. Andrew Refshauge, Deputy Premier, Minister for Education and Training, and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, has informed the House that the passage of this legislation will enable New South Wales public universities to receive their share of the nationally available \$404 million of much-needed Commonwealth funding.

The New South Wales Government has a direct interest in the performance and management of our universities. Despite the current Federal arrangements for the university sector proving to be increasingly unworkable, New South Wales is responsible for legislation that establishes universities. The legislation

establishes their objects, functions and powers, and the propriety of their operating procedures, financial management and compliance with other State legislation, including annual reporting requirements. This process includes an audit of the financial statements of universities by the New South Wales Auditor-General to assure the Parliament and the people of New South Wales that the universities have complied with public financing and accounting requirements governing the proper use of public funds.

New South Wales has led the way in providing an appropriate legislative environment that protects the use of public funds, yet lets universities operate in an increasingly commercial environment. Our approach in New South Wales has been to allow our universities a long lead to achieve their missions, as opposed to imposing a short restrictive leash on their operations. As the Minister said, the National Governance Protocols address many areas already covered by New South Wales legislation. No State has been more concerned about commercial risk to universities than New South Wales. This State was the first to enact statutory guidelines for commercial activities. These were felt necessary chiefly because of the increased pressure on universities to expand commercial activities as a result of the Commonwealth's significant withdrawal of funding.

Further changes to New South Wales university legislation in relation to commercial activities will occur through the passage of this bill. In many respects, however, New South Wales university legislation is well in advance of the requirements of the Commonwealth's National Governance Protocols. The bill provides university governing bodies with flexibility and control to use by-laws to tailor their membership and expertise to meet current challenges.

The Government considers this a crucial aspect of the legislation. It broadens the avenues through which governing bodies can access the financial and commercial expertise which must always be present if universities are to demonstrate ongoing compliance with the protocols. These requirements of the Commonwealth Government have highlighted some of the complexity of State and Commonwealth governance and accountability arrangements for universities. As my colleague the Minister said, the Commonwealth already exercises de facto control of Australian universities through its funding arrangements.

At the same time, however, universities face another layer of financial accountability to State governments and are subject to the oversight of State Treasurers and State Government legislation concerning annual reporting requirements. For example, in 2001 the New South Wales Government amended the university legislation to provide universities with the necessary authority to engage in commercial and other activities in Australia and overseas. Currently, I am a parliamentary member of the Macquarie University council, together with my colleague in the upper House, Ian West. We think our time on the Macquarie University council has been productive, and that we have contributed to that council. We are proud of the achievements of Macquarie University, particularly in relation to engaging in commercial and other activities overseas.

The Universities Legislation Amendment (Financial and Other Powers) Act 2001 has ensured that New South Wales universities have the necessary powers and controls in place to enable them to prudently undertake commercial activities consistent with their core missions of quality teaching and research. All New South Wales universities now have guidelines in place, approved by the Minister on the advice of the Treasurer. They govern the way they conduct their entrepreneurial activities but also give them room to move, which is very important for universities in this State and, indeed, in Australia. The amendments in this bill also include further aspects focusing on the commercial activities of universities.

In response to the views of university representatives made clear during the consultation on the draft bill, the amendments broaden the current provisions relating to pecuniary interests and ensure that other non-fiscal conflicts of interest are covered. The bill also allows elected members of governing bodies, as well as appointed members, to fulfil the requirement of protocol 5 for commercial and financial expertise. The bill will do everything the New South Wales Government needs to do to allow our universities to put in place the required arrangements under the National Governance Protocols. New South Wales universities will thereby qualify for the contingent Commonwealth funding, which they will begin to receive next year. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr NEVILLE NEWELL (Tweed—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.25 a.m.], in reply: I thank the shadow Minister for Education and Training, the honourable member for Auburn and the honourable member for Granville for their contributions to this debate. I shall respond to comments made by the shadow Minister. I point out that the Commonwealth Government had already endorsed our draft legislation; we have a letter dated 10 August 2004 from Brendan Nelson to this effect. I seek leave to table the letter.

Leave not granted.

The shadow Minister is refusing me leave to table a letter from her Federal Minister! As I said, the letter from the Federal Minister for Education, Science and Training, Brendan Nelson, is dated 10 August 2004, but the Opposition has refused to allow me to table it. Subsequently, on 29 October, the University of Western Sydney advised that the Commonwealth had been in touch with the university indicating that this amendment was required. On 9 November the Commonwealth confirmed with the Department of Education and Training that this amendment was required, and the State Government acted accordingly. So the criticism of the drafting process is entirely out of order, and the shadow Minister should recognise that. Nevertheless, I thank the shadow Minister for her support for the bill.

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

In Committee

Clauses 1 to 5 agreed to.

Schedules 1 to 8 agreed to.

Mr NEVILLE NEWELL (Tweed—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.28 a.m.], by leave: I move Government amendments Nos 1 to 5 in globo:

No. 1 Page 112, schedule 9 [2], proposed section 12 (1) (a), line 11. Omit "5". Insert instead "3".

No. 2 Page 112, schedule 9 [2], proposed section 12 (1) (a) (iii), line 15. Omit all words on that line.

No. 3 Page 114, schedule 9. Insert after line 28:

[3] Section 14 Deputy Chancellors

Omit "(whether or not members of the Board)" from section 14 (1).

Insert instead "from the members of the Board".

[4] Section 14 (1)

Omit "(whether or not a member of the Board)".

Insert instead "from the members of the Board".

No. 4 Page 123, schedule 9 [18], proposed clause 28 (1) (b), lines 11-14. Omit all words on those lines. Insert instead:

(b) a person holding office under former section 12 (3) (c) or (6) is taken to be appointed as a member under new section 12 (1) (c), and

(c) a person holding office under former section 12 (4) is taken to be appointed as a member under new section 12 (1) (b), and

No. 5 Page 124, schedule 9 [18], proposed clause 28 (8) (a), line 22. Omit "or (c)". Insert instead ", (c) or (d)".

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER (North Shore) [10.28 a.m.]: The Opposition supports these amendments, as I explained during the second reading debate. To clarify the matter, in his second reading speech the Minister made no reference to the fact that measures in the original bill relating to the University of Western Sydney Act were different from those relating to all the other universities. The Minister and the State Government should have been well aware that that was outside the national protocols, which clearly stipulate that each university governing body is to have three official members. The bill clearly stated that the University of Western Sydney governing body would have five official members. Anybody carefully reading this bill would immediately see that it is not compliant and would put the University of Western Sydney at risk. It was only when the Commonwealth Government raised this with me and I rang the Minister's office that this came to attention.

Amendments agreed to.

Schedule 9 as amended agreed to.

Schedule 10 agreed to.

Bill reported from Committee with amendments and report adopted.

Third reading ordered to stand as an order of the day.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

KOOREH PARK WILDLIFE SANCTUARY STORM DAMAGE

Mr STEVE CANSDELL (Clarence) [10.32 a.m.]: It is fitting that I recognise the commitment, dedication and contribution to saving our injured native wildlife by Doug and Yvonne Howitt of Sandy Crossing near Grafton. After retiring as State secretary of the Federated Miscellaneous Workers Union in 1974, Doug retired with his wife, Yvonne, to the beautiful seaside village of Wooli on the North Coast, 50 kilometres from Grafton. No sooner had they settled into their beach home when people started dropping in injured and orphaned wildlife, many times just dropping them at their front door pleading with them to save them. As they were saving all this injured wildlife, within 12 months they outgrew the small house in which they lived at Wooli, which had only a small backyard. So, in 1979, with much distress, they had to sell out and bought 26 acres with a caravan and shed at Pillar Valley between Wooli and Grafton. They built a purpose-built house and sheds to cater for injured wildlife and a rapidly growing family of animals in their care. At that stage there was no organisation like the Wildlife Information and Rescue Service, so locals, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the police and the general public kept dropping animals at their door and in their front yard. As Doug and Yvonne say, they just copped the lot.

This started many years of full-time commitment and a very demanding routine. Although it has been very rewarding, it has taken its toll on their finances and health. As honourable members can imagine, up to 350 macropods—kangaroos, wallabies and small animal like that—plus many other species such as sugar gliders, possums, birds and so on have been in their care. These people are in their late seventies and early eighties. They bring these possums through the humidicribs and feed them daily. They have their little sacks and they crawl into bed with them. Yvonne would have scratches from the possums crawling under her nightgown at night because they treat her like a mother. The cost of feed, including pellets, green lucerne feed, supplements, specialised diets, and veterinary care, shelter and sheds for wet weather feeding, intensive care equipment such as the humidicrib, and heating facilities especially for the unfurred baby animals, was overwhelming. At present they are down to 80 macropods and 60 possums.

Because of their selfless sacrifice and dedication to ensuring these native animals survive, the Howitts have had to miss out on many luxuries as well as basic necessities. This is why I raise their plight in Parliament today. On 20 October a savage storm hit the North Coast. Areas of Coffs Harbour and Bellingen were declared natural disaster areas, but the storm continued up the coast through the Howitt's Kooreh Park Wildlife Refuge property, destroying their animal-feeding shed. About 10 years ago this shed cost about \$9,000 to build. Although Coffs Harbour and Bellingen were declared natural disaster areas, as I said, they were outside the zone and were not eligible for assistance. In recent years they have been hard-pressed keeping the refuge functioning because of ever-increasing costs of animal feed during the long drought periods. Honourable members will be aware this does not come cheap.

At this stage they have not asked for funding from the National Parks and Wildlife Service and are not entitled to any funding because they are not classed as farmers. So, they have had a lot of problems. The Howitt's property was proclaimed a wildlife refuge in 1982 under the National Parks and Wildlife Service Act. In 1980 a general licence was issued by the National Parks and Wildlife Service to the Howitts covering all protected fauna requiring care. The Howitts are honorary rangers, and the list goes on. They have been endorsed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service as carers for animals. We have already approached the Minister for the Environment and the Hon. Tony Kelly, through their respective departments, to seek funding. There has been positive feedback to date. I hope these departments come on board and repay the dedication and commitment that these people have shown to saving our natural wildlife. [*Time expired.*]

MAITLAND ELECTORATE SCHOOLS

Mr JOHN PRICE (Maitland) [10.37 a.m.]: I want to talk about a number of aspects of public education in the electorate of Maitland. Furthermore, I congratulate the Government and thank the Minister on behalf of the citizens of Clarence Town for the reconstructed Clarence Town Public School, which is more than 127 years old. After the expenditure of some \$4 million the school has a brace of brand-new classrooms and a magnificent multipurpose centre with an open area that will accommodate under cover in all weathers today's entire school population and its anticipated enrolments over the next five years. It is a magnificent sight and it has an interesting history.

The school was built on a long, narrow strip of land adjacent to the then Presbyterian Church. The Presbyterian Church had a significant glebe alongside it, so the education department hired the glebe as an extension for the school playground. This arrangement was never particularly satisfactory. The country town did not have sewerage, and as the years went by the school's septic tanks became overloaded and, particularly in times of heavy rain, was quite unpleasant. The Government recognised this problem and acted on it and the school is now complete. The original principal's residence has been refurbished and now acts as a general office for the school. Hopefully the Minister will be available early in the New Year for an official opening, because it is quite a dramatic improvement to public education in that area.

The principal and the students are delighted. When one looks at the situation in a number of country towns, Clarence Town Public School has been singularly fortunate in having its problems recognised and addressed. The work undertaken involved the relocation of the Presbyterian Church. The Government considered a number of alternative sites. The only site that was suitable for the school's purposes was a koala habitat and, therefore, was deemed inappropriate. I differed from that view because I believed the children would have protected the koalas. The decision was made to purchase the property next door and relocate the church to a property across the road. As luck would have it, the property across the road included a residence. So the church now has a refurbished building relocated on its own title plus a rental property from which it enjoys additional income opportunities.

Dungog High School is a central school that has been hit with new enrolments because people are moving into the expanded catchment area. The school does not have any more room for demountables on the site. I know that the department's demographers have been at the school over the past 18 months and have prepared reports on the situation, but the Government should move to provide additional accommodation to this high school, which is an important education facility in Dungog shire. It is a large school and for the past three years it has received the top results in the Higher School Certificate for a non-metropolitan school. It is recognised as a significant centre of learning in the region.

The school is prepared to share its facilities. Recently I was able to obtain funds to upgrade the school soccer field so that it could be used in conjunction with the local soccer clubs. Through a joint labour program and special grant funding, the soccer field is now universally available to the school and the community. That is the attitude taken by communities in many country areas. Give them \$1,000 and they will turn it into \$5,000. Their voluntary labour and enthusiasm make a great difference to schools and to the entire town. I give credit to the Dungog community and I hope that provision is made in the next budget or the one after for a significant increase in the availability and construction of permanent buildings on the Dungog High School site. Dungog High School is an agricultural school and the children and teachers have been very successful at the local shows displaying their cattle and produce. It is important that we not only properly maintain our schools but ensure that they are world-class educational facilities. I am very pleased with the progress at these schools and look forward to further progress on the Dungog High School site.

BALLINA BYPASS

Mr DONALD PAGE (Ballina—Deputy Leader of The Nationals) [10.42 a.m.]: Last Tuesday the Pacific Highway was again blocked at Tintenbar Hill during peak morning travelling time as a result of a jack-knifed semitrailer. The truck, being unable to make it up the hill, rolled back and jack-knifed across both lanes of the Pacific Highway. Last year I raised in Parliament the need to build the Ballina bypass when a semitrailer rolled at the base of Tintenbar Hill. The driver was killed. Heavy vehicle accidents at this point on the Pacific Highway happen all too frequently. The Tintenbar Hill gradient is dangerously high, about a 9 per cent gradient, with more than 1,500 heavy vehicles passing this point every day. If the Government steps up to the plate and undertakes to commence the Ballina bypass, the Tintenbar Hill section will be replaced as part of that project.

The arguments remain for completing the Pacific Highway dual carriageway projects as quickly as possible. In 2003, 56 fatalities occurred on the Pacific Highway north of Hexham. Of those crashes 50 per cent were head-on collisions. Further, 85 per cent of fatal Pacific Highway crashes occurred on the section of the highway yet to be upgraded to dual carriageway. Given the preference of heavy vehicles travelling between Brisbane and Sydney to use the Pacific Highway, as opposed to the New England Highway, the lack of a dual carriageway is of great concern to all users of the highway. At present, about only one-third of the highway has been upgraded. Heavy vehicles are overrepresented in fatal crashes on the Pacific Highway. They account for 15 per cent of Pacific Highway traffic but are involved in 35 per cent of fatal crashes.

Every time I have raised the issue of the Ballina bypass I have received the same lame excuses from the Minister for Roads about the lack of funds. His excuses do not wash with the residents of Ballina. Ballina

residents are only too aware of the amount of money that has flowed to Macquarie Street from coastal stamp duty and land tax windfalls. They know the Government has reaped an extra \$8 billion in revenue over the past nine years. Ballina residents have to cope with the impact of the Pacific Highway passing directly through their town, which includes 1,500 heavy vehicles per day. That is one heavy vehicle every minute in a 24-hour period. Sadly, a pedestrian who was hit on the Pacific Highway at the beginning of this month in the heart of Ballina passed away earlier this week.

Indeed, the section of the Pacific Highway south of Ballina, through Ballina and to the north has one of the worst accident rates on the entire highway. Ballina residents should not have to put up with the noise, pollution and danger to public safety generated by the level of traffic that passes through Ballina every day. Pacific Highway users are inconvenienced by long delays, particularly at holiday times when the road through Ballina becomes a bottleneck. Prior to the Federal election the Coalition Government committed funding for half the cost of the Ballina bypass, even though it is a State responsibility under the current 10-year agreement. The Minister for Roads responded to this announcement in the local media by saying, "The Ballina bypass is now quite possible." His statement sounded good at the time.

The Federal commitment of \$645 million for the upgrade of the Pacific Highway, including the Ballina bypass, is a significant one. I am disappointed to hear that the Minister for Roads has an expectation that the Ballina bypass will not be completed until 2016—12 years away. What is he waiting for? With Federal money now committed to the project, construction could commence immediately and the project could be completed by 2008. Previous State budget papers showed the completion date for this project as 2004. All planning considerations and approvals are concluded. All we need now is a commitment from the State Government. The residents of Ballina and the users of the Pacific Highway suffer as a result of the reluctance of the Minister for Roads to accept responsibility for the completion of the project.

When I have raised this issue in the past the Minister has said, "Go and talk to your mates in Canberra." We have done that, we have talked to them, and the Federal money is on the table. Prior to the last Federal election I suggested to the Minister that the committed Federal funds could be used to undertake the first half of the project and that State funding be used for the second half. To date, the Minister has not responded to my suggestion. If the New South Wales Labor Government will not commit to this project, a State Coalition government, if elected in 2007, certainly will. I re-emphasise that all the planning approvals have been given and the project has been on the drawing board for a long time. It is a much-needed project for the safety of Pacific Highway users and for the interests of the residents of Ballina. The Federal Government has made a commitment to provide half the funding, although it did not have to do so. The money is on the table. Again I ask the Government to make a commitment that it will use Federal money for the first half of the project, which will take approximately four years to complete. I call on the Minister for Roads to leave aside political partisanship and address this matter with a sense of urgency. We have funding from the Federal Government to undertake half the project. I call on the Minister for Roads to get on with project and to do it straightaway.

CHARLESTOWN ELECTORATE SCHOOLS

Mr MATTHEW MORRIS (Charlestown) [10.47 a.m.]: I want to inform the House about issues affecting schools in the electorate of Charlestown. On a positive note, last Thursday 4 November I had the privilege of representing the Minister for Education and Training to officially declare open the Kahibah Public School community hall. This facility has come to fruition by the hard work and dedication of teaching staff, students and the broader community. The cost of the project was \$360,000, of which \$110,000 came from the community. Through their fundraising they have made a great contribution to this important piece of infrastructure for the school and the community of Kahibah.

In particular, I want to mention Ms Pam Richardson, who has served as principal of the school but in recent times has acted as principal support officer. During that time Ms Denise Rispen has been the relieving principal at the school, and I congratulate her on her commitment to the school during her time there. She will finish with Kahibah Public School at the end of this year and Mrs Richardson will return early in the new year. These projects come to fruition only after hard work and commitment. Time and again parents and citizens association members play a significant role in helping to achieve good outcomes and move schools forward.

I also acknowledge the efforts of Mr Col Curry, the president of the parents and citizens association and the school council. He is a humble gentleman; nonetheless he should be praised for the work he has done in co-ordinating the project, organising tradespeople, supervising the job and spending hours on the site to ensure that the final product is something of which we can all be proud. He should be congratulated and I thank him

very much on behalf of the broader community for his commitment to the school. The hall, which I have mentioned previously in this place, is rather grand. Importantly, it will ensure that the students no longer have to leave the school to participate in many sporting activities, particularly in wet weather. It is another environment they can use to enhance their education. The students also played a significant role in the project by helping to distribute mulch, plant trees and so on. They are very proud, and so they should be.

I also take this opportunity to make some comments about Hunter Sports High School, which was known as Gateshead High School. It has faced many challenges over the years and in my view its facilities are below standard. I have taken up that issue with the Minister for Education and Training, will continue to do so. The school has one of the old dome-shaped halls that were built some years ago and it is in very poor condition. I have requested the Minister to have an inspection undertaken to establish its structural soundness. It is run down and dirty and it often needs repair. I support the school's aim to have the facility replaced and I will continue to pursue that goal with the Minister. The school also has science laboratories that need new floors, benches and so on. The school deserves support. The teachers and students are committed to it and I am wholeheartedly behind them.

MYALL LAKES ELECTORATE YOUTH ACHIEVEMENTS

Mr JOHN TURNER (Myall Lakes) [10.52 a.m.]: A few weeks ago in this House I spoke about the achievements of some young students in my electorate. I take this opportunity to do so again because it is important that we recognise what young people do in our community, whether it involves sporting, cultural or other activities. Many young people help the community in various ways. Young people will be working on the beaches this weekend saving lives and looking after tourists and residents. Young members of the town band provide entertainment and others provide companionship to the elderly and so on. Often these young people are not recognised for what they do but a few of them can make a difference for everyone else.

Today I will refer to three schools: Taree Christian Community School, Great Lakes College junior campus at Forster, and Great Lakes College junior campus at Tuncurry. I am indebted to Ken Greenwood, the head of secondary education at Taree Christian Community School, who has informed me that the school has a number of students who have reached State level in athletics, swimming and cross-country running. He specifically mentioned Ben Dean, a year 12 student who won the Australian Guitar Competition Composer's Award and People's Choice Award. He also won the State Division (NSW) Somerset Nouvella Award for his short novel about the experience of a refugee coming to Australia. Daniel Stevenson, a year 11 student, travelled to Argentina recently to represent New South Wales in an all-schools rugby carnival. Nicole Brisby, a 2003 year 12 student, was awarded the Rotary Youth of the Year Award for academic, creative arts and community service achievements. Carla Clough, another year 12 student, was awarded the International Olympic Committee Pierre De Coubertin Award 2004 for service to school sport. They are truly amazing achievements.

Jessica Newman of the Tuncurry junior campus of the Great Lakes College has shown outstanding leadership. Mark Noonan, the principal, has told me that she has a good chance of being elected the school captain. She has an excellent academic record and at only 14 years of age was chosen to captain the State under-16 volleyball team at the national championships. Well done, Jessica.

Many students at the Forster junior campus of the Great Lakes College have also excelled. Robbie Bishop-Taylor and Tara Ashford, both year 8 students, achieved high distinctions in the Australian English Competition, and Alanna Bowd achieved a distinction. Noa Hackett, another year 8 student, achieved third place in the Write For Fun Poetry Competition, which attracted 12,000 entries from across Australia. That is an outstanding achievement. The junior debating team—comprising Noa Hackett, Patrick Koche, Brayden March and Penny Parker—reached the regional finals. There has also been significant activity in the sporting arena at that school. Emily Boragry represented the school in the New South Wales Athletics titles in the 100-metres, 200-metres and long-jump events. Sean Robertson, Talisa Eason, Aaron Woolly, Kyle Brewis, Nioka Simon, Emily Boragry and Darren Willis all represented the school at those titles. Matt Robinson represented the school in the State 50-metre relay event and Curtis Champion competed in the State cross-country event.

It does not stop there. Laura Higgins swam at the national titles and Kurt Higman swam at the State Combined High Schools [CHS] titles. The school also has a proud record in canoeing and kayaking. Many students have succeeded in those sports. Judy Hall, the principal of the Forster campus, has informed me that Jordan Stewart competed in canoeing and Lewis Onley competed in kayaking in the State CHS titles. Brooke Melzer competed in the State titles in touch football, netball and rhythmic gymnastics. She obviously has a great range of abilities. Anna Lamming also competed in the State titles in rhythmic gymnastics and in the national

titles in gymnastics. Phoebe Moss competed in the State netball finals, Rachelle Linhart competed in the State finals in hockey, James Welton competed in the State championships in Volleyball and Nicole Said competed in the State soccer championships. That is an amazing list of achievements for such a small school. I congratulate all those young people on their achievements.

TONTINE SCHEMES

Mr PAUL LYNCH (Liverpool) [10.59 a.m.]: I will inform the House about a tontine or money agreement which has been operating in south-west Sydney and which has caused considerable grief to a number of my constituents and other residents of south-west Sydney. I first spoke in this place about a tontine on 26 October. A tontine, or money agreement, involves people handing over money in the expectation—indeed, the promise—that they will get money back. In these cases no money has been returned and many people have lost significant sums. When I last spoke on this issue in October, I dealt with the involvement of three of my constituents: Seak Lev Ly, Chanthy Dos and Sok Kheng Dos. Collectively they have been defrauded of \$35,000. The organiser of the tontine is Sideth Kong. Since I last raised the matter I have met a number of other people who have been victims of tontines. Some of them were victims of the tontine in which the three persons I have referred to were involved, and some were victims of another tontine. Both those tontines, however, had been organised by Sideth Kong.

The new cases I have come across include that of Naro Bun, who paid \$2,600 into a tontine that started on 5 August 2003. Payments were due on the fifth of the month. The initial payment was \$500, followed by \$300 per month. Sideth Kong was well known to Mr Bun's family, and she was well regarded, she was trusted—which is why people were prepared to be involved with her. However, Sideth Kong is now not providing any money and has avoided Mr Bun's attempts to contact her. She was very well known in the Cambodian community. Another person to whom I have spoken is Aent Touch. She was involved in the tontine that commenced on the twenty-first of the month. She had three shares in that tontine, and she put \$15,000 into it. Early this year the organiser told her that the tontine was "closed" and that she would not be getting any money back. Additionally, the organiser borrowed money from Ms Touch. A small amount of that money has been paid back, but Sideth Kong still owes Ms Touch \$55,000 in relation to the loan.

Another victim of a tontine is Yun Ang of Sadleir, who is a pensioner with no money. Over 15 months he paid \$4,700 into a tontine. The money was borrowed from the ANZ Bank. When he heard that other people were told that the tontine was closed, he tried to contact Sideth Kong. However, she did not communicate with him. Another victim, Chanthya Aphia, has been involved in two separate tontines, one on the twenty-first of the month and the other on the fifth of the month. She paid \$4,700 into the first tontine and \$2,600 into the second—a total of \$6,300—and has recovered none of it. Chanthya Aphia's uncle is Naro Bun, to whom I referred a moment ago. Sideth Kong is extremely well known to Chanthya Aphia and her family, and she is well respected by them. They regarded Sideth Kong as being quite wealthy. Sideth Kong and her husband own several properties, including a farm, they drive a 2004 model Mercedes and own several new cars, and they have a very large house in Cecil Hills. Chanthya Aphia's brother, Chanthysen Aphia, put \$2,600 into the tontine on the fifth of the month. I have not met him, but his mother and sister have told me that.

Consistently, all efforts to contact the organiser have been unsuccessful. When people ring her, her children answer the phone and will not put her on the phone. When people who have put in money go to the house, they are not allowed access. There is a large gate on the house, and it is locked. There is also a dog. Even though lights are on in the house and people are apparently there, no-one responds to inquiries. I raise this matter for a number of reasons. One is to warn other members of the community, particularly the Cambodian and Khmer community, of this scam. I also urge the Office of Fair Trading to take action. Complaints were first made to the department in relation to these matters on 10 August 2004. I received a fax from the electorate office of the Minister for Fair Trading on 16 August alerting me to what was happening. I have made written representations, and I have raised the matter in this place. However, I have yet to receive a substantive response in relation to the matters. I urge someone to deal with this problem as a matter of urgency.

GALSTON DISTRICT EISTEDDFOD

Mr STEVEN PRINGLE (Hawkesbury) [11.02 a.m.]: As the State member for Hawkesbury I am privileged to represent an area that has an extraordinary community spirit and exceptional level of talent. Galston, a semi-rural village in my electorate, has been showcasing its achievements over the last couple of months. The many community activities undertaken recently include the Galston Country Music Festival—which, in my view, is second only to the Tamworth festival—the Open Garden Weekend for Charity instituted

by the Galston District Garden Club, which has been the subject of a previous private member's statement, and the Galston District Eisteddfod, an initiative of the community-based Galston Uniting Church and run by an exceptional band of volunteers under the extremely competent leadership of Mrs Janet Fuller.

The eisteddfod is also blessed with active support from the Galston Seventh Day Adventist Church, whose large hall is a well-utilised venue. The Galston District Eisteddfod was developed from a suggestion by a member of the congregation of the Galston Uniting Church, Mrs Amy Longworth, to whom I pay tribute. Mrs Longworth saw the opportunity for the church to become further involved in the community by encouraging the talents of many people in the art of speech and music. The suggestion was subsequently adopted by the ways and means committee of the church as one of its projects to assist with the church building fund.

The mission statement of the eisteddfod—"To encourage the talents of people in the Art of Speech and Music and to involve the Church in community outreach"—certainly encapsulates some very worthy aims and important aspects of church life. This is the fourteenth year of operation of the eisteddfod, which is a fabulous community event with widespread community support. It is the major cultural activity for the region. Recently the name of the eisteddfod was changed to the Galston District Eisteddfod to reflect the location of events and changed circumstances. When the eisteddfod was initiated it was known as the Dural District Eisteddfod as a result of the Galston church being part of the Dural parish. The church is now known as the Galston Uniting Church.

I also commend local businesses for their strong support for the eisteddfod. In particular I pay tribute to John Cordina, the President of the Galston District Chamber of Commerce, for the great support he has continually provided to the eisteddfod. Many adjudicators are involved in the eisteddfod, and they have often said that it is one of the friendliest and best-run eisteddfods in New South Wales. The Eisteddfod involves many hours of community work, as there are three different venues for the 9.00 a.m., 2.00 p.m. and 7.00 p.m. sessions, so there is a lot of work for all those dedicated volunteers. The eisteddfod has many benefits. It shows children how to be well organised, intrinsically motivated, and dedicated, how to develop self-confidence, and how to look after, clean and care for expensive instruments. It also allows children to see the value in, and take pride in, what they do. It helps with relationship building, being part of a group, being actively involved in musical activities, encouraging routine in practice, and developing lifelong skills, which is so important.

This year the eisteddfod attracted almost 1,000 entries. The categories included primary instrumental ensemble, in which there were 18 entries; primary training band, 19 entries; and primary popular concert band, 12 entries. Around 40 to 50 students were involved in each of those categories. Other categories were open jazz band, six entries; open piano, 14 entries; 8 years any poem, 19 entries; and 10 years any poem, 27 entries. Some \$10,000 worth of prize money was awarded. Awards of \$1,000 each were presented for the categories of open aria, open instrumental, open pianoforte and open speech, and there were many other awards. Some of the prizes were dedicated to people who have made an outstanding contribution to the church. They were Ossie Jackson, Mel Branze, Reverend Jim Udy and W. E. Bennaj. The last prize was presented by Reverend Jim Udy's daughter, Anne Udy.

I commend the executive committee of the Galston District Eisteddfod: Janet Fuller, Denise Werry, Ron Halloran, Marge Brown and Linda Morgan. I also commend the adjudicators at the event: Patricia Oertel, Kathryn Phillips, William Clark and Helen Marchant. I pay particular tribute to Janet Fuller for her absolutely outstanding effort, and, of course, her husband, Graham, who put in many hours looking after the children while Janet was so busy. May God bless the efforts of the Galston Uniting Church and may there be many, many eisteddfods to come. I congratulate all those involved on this absolutely outstanding local community event.

BERKELEY VALE PUBLIC ACCESS WAY SALE

Mr PAUL CRITTENDEN (Wyang) [11.07 a.m.]: I wish to raise the concerns of Berkeley Vale residents about the potential sale of a public access way to Tuggerah Lakes between houses at No. 355 and No. 357 Lakedge Avenue. Honourable members will recall that during the last sitting week I spoke about Wyong Shire Council seeking to sell off Brennon Road Park, Gorokan, and therefore its community hall, for residential housing. The same device is being used by council on this occasion to sell off the access way. If council has its way, residents will receive notification regarding a change to the local environmental plan converting the land from community land to what is known as operational land. However, what council does not tell residents is that it wants to sell the public access way.

The council, even if it claims that is not the case on this occasion—which invariably it is—cannot argue that, because the minutes of the ordinary meeting of Wyong Council on 10 March this year clearly show

that one of the residents adjacent to this access way wants to purchase the land "because her security is threatened by antisocial behaviour of youths using the land and theft from her detached garage is a frequent occurrence". Other neighbours state that that is not the case, and that if there was a proper fence between this person's property and the walkway no-one could get into her garage.

Even more worrying is that our local paper, the *Central Coast Express Advocate*, has taken this matter up. Two people telephoned my electorate office when they received a letter from me advising them of Wyong Shire Council's intentions. Those people said that there is not an access way between the properties I mentioned because it is partially fenced. For all intents and purposes, it looks as though it is part of the property of the person who now wants to purchase the land. The residents are ringing up saying, "If this person is getting some sort of deal to purchase the land, why can't we?" It is an issue of probity, accountability and transparency of government operations. Be that as it may, I do not think this land should be sold because an access way to the lake is required. As one of its bases for selling this access way, the council states that there are other access points. If you call an open drain to the lake an access way, maybe the council is correct. However, I do not accept that view. I would not encourage any child of mine to get into an open drain. I am not sure that Wyong Council should be encouraging that practice either. In any event, people in wheelchairs and people with prams cannot negotiate an open drain to access the lake.

This issue beggars belief. It is part of Wyong Council's mad sell-off of public land that has valid community use. The council should ensure that it acts on its previous orders. One of the neighbours adjacent to this access way came to see me. She had been told as early as 11 March 2004 that there had been an order from Wyong Council to remove the illegally erected fence over the access way. In fact, according to her notes, the order number was 672640. The council needs to have a regulatory system if something has gone wrong. If someone has acted inappropriately and if the council has issued an order in relation to an inappropriate construction on public land it has to act and have that construction removed. The council should not then say, "Oh well, you haven't done what we have told you so we will let you buy the land." That is probably what the person wanted in the first place.

MISS WAGGA WAGGA QUEST

Mr DARYL MAGUIRE (Wagga Wagga) [11.12 a.m.]: Last Saturday evening my wife and I attended the crowning of Miss Wagga Wagga and Miss Community Princess. Honourable members might be led to believe that this event is a beauty quest. It is not. It is about personal development of young women in the community, and it is about the contribution they make to our community through fundraising and supporting local charities. This quest has been running for many years. For much of the time it has been running it has required an entrant to select a charity, to form a committee and to raise funds on behalf of that charity. In some ways it was adversarial, with each contestant trying to better the fundraising efforts of other contestants—sometimes as many as 10 contestants.

Recently the committee decided it was time for a change and it changed the rules. All the contestants now work together to raise funds for charities they have selected. The results of the last two quests have been outstanding, and they have demonstrated a fundamental change in the quest. A bond is created between the girls, and they work closer together and support each other. This year Qantas sponsored the event. The girls raised more than \$20,000, which they will be presenting to the following charities: the Forest Centre, the Wagga Wagga branch of Diabetes Australia, the Wagga Wagga Women's Health Centre, Micah House, Uranquinty Neighbourhood Centre, Noahs Ark Toy Library and Remembrance Village. These are worthwhile causes that support the frail and aged, people with diabetes, children and women's health in our region. The title of Miss Wagga Wagga went to Morgan Jones, who said:

I feel a little bit guilty, these seven girls are amazing, we've bonded so well, we've worked so hard.

That statement says it all. It says how the quest has changed and how it brings the girls together to work for a common cause. I pay tribute to all the girls who entered this year: Sarah Annetts, Rebecca Miller, Jessica Francis, Belinda Cook, 2004 Miss Wagga Wagga Alicia Richardson, 2004 Community Princess Melanie Richards, Cassandra Sheahan, Melissa Smeeth, Rachel O'Shea and Morgan Jones, this year's Miss Wagga Wagga. I had the great pleasure of announcing the Community Princess, Melissa Smeeth. Both girls will be wonderful representatives of our city when they travel to America. Wagga Wagga has three sister cities: Kuming in Yunnan, China, Nordlingen in Germany and Leavenworth in the United States of America. The girls will travel to Leavenworth to represent our city as Miss Wagga Wagga and Community Princess 2005. During their 12-month reign they have the great experience of representing the youth of our community, becoming

involved in functions, raising the concerns of charities and organisations and making representations on their behalf. They will be required to make many speeches.

The Miss Wagga Wagga and Community Princess quest is not a beauty contest, as I said earlier. It is about developing the girls' skills and it is about them representing their community. They will be asked to judge baby shows and they will be invited to participate at the judging of fashions on the field at the races, et cetera. The community has appreciated this quest for almost 60 years and the many millions of dollars it has contributed to worthwhile causes. It is with a great deal of pleasure that I congratulate all the girls and their families. I am very proud of them. Wagga Wagga is proud of their efforts and the way they conducted the quest this year. I look forward to many more successful quests in the years to come.

CANTERBURY HOSPITAL SEVENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY

Ms LINDA BURNEY (Canterbury) [11.17 a.m.]: I send a birthday message today. It is the seventy-fifth birthday of Canterbury Hospital. Last Saturday night I had the great pleasure of attending the seventy-fifth anniversary ball. It is a fantastic hospital and a facility that New South Wales can be proud of. The hospital is on the border of the Canterbury and Lakemba electorates. It was officially opened in 1929, with only 28 beds to serve the then population of 70,000. It now provides 188 beds and services 135,000 people, 57 per cent of whom come from overseas. An \$80 million redevelopment took place in 1998, providing five new operating theatres, a 24-hour emergency unit, a new radiology department and a maternity ward with private rooms for mothers. It is a maternity ward that I have visited. It has a lovely atmosphere.

This influx of funding saw Canterbury Hospital offer advanced health care to local residents, using latest technology and culturally specific treatments. A new community health centre also opened as part of the redevelopment, offering paediatrics, aged care, ethnic health and adult mental health facilities. The hospital has enjoyed phenomenal community support throughout its operation. I pay tribute to the many people who have given up their valuable time to ensure that Canterbury Hospital provides the best care possible. Gary Miller, the General Manager of Canterbury Hospital, paid tribute to the Canterbury community, which has been instrumental in the foundation and growth of the hospital, citing public campaigning to keep the hospital open in the 1980s and campaigning back to 1895. Gary shared this history with us at the seventy-fifth anniversary bash.

To celebrate the hospital's birthday, a ball with the theme "Caring for our community" was held to raise additional funds. My predecessor, Kevin Moss, was a member of the organising committee for the ball and attended the evening, along with his predecessor, Kevin Stewart, former Minister for Health in this Parliament. It was wonderful to see both men in attendance. Also present were the mayor of Canterbury, Robert Furolo, and former mayor, Kayee Griffin. Shirley Smith, who has been associated with the hospital for many years, also assisted in the organisation. Shirley is one of the incredible mainstays at Canterbury Hospital. Also present was Vick Manning, chairperson of the committee. Together with Edmond Capon, I had the privilege of judging the school art competition, which was part of the seventy-fifth anniversary celebrations. I was in esteemed company indeed.

A major sponsor for the evening was the Canterbury-Hurlstone Park RSL Club, which I thank for its support. The club is an important institution in the area. It provides enormous support to so many community organisations, as well as being very much a part of our community. Many great people have served at the hospital over the years. I pay tribute to a nurse who attended the official ceremony on 26 October. That gracious lady was 94-year-old Mrs Eileen Holden-Smith. Sadly, she passed away in her sleep a few days later, but she was honoured at the seventy-fifth anniversary for being one of the first nurses to train at the hospital.

Among other great serving nurses are the legendary Frances Carolan and Shirley Fairweather. Naturally, many other great nurses have travelled the corridors of Canterbury Hospital. As well as nurses there are other incredibly dedicated staff who are committed to excellent health care, to the hospital and to the Canterbury-Bankstown area. I am extremely proud that Canterbury Hospital is part of my electorate. I acknowledge the many outstanding people right across the hospital sector. The ball proved to be a great financial success and raised over \$100,000, of which \$50,000 was donated by the Minister for Health.

NEUTRAL BAY BUS DEPOT RELOCATION

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER (North Shore) [11.22 a.m.]: I raise a matter relating to my electorate that was brought to my attention by my neighbour and good friend the honourable member for Willoughby. I was concerned to learn that apparently discussions have been taking place between the developer of the former ABC

television site at Gore Hill and the State Transit Authority regarding the relocation of the bus depot at Neutral Bay. This news was extremely alarming because I am sure that no members of the local community have been notified or consulted about the possible relocation. In discussions with local residents on previous occasions they have expressed grave concerns about the future of the site.

I have placed a number of questions on notice and I await answers from the Minister for Transport, but fear that further action may be taken before those questions can be answered. That is the reason for my raising the matter today. I asked: Can the Minister confirm that discussions have taken place? Who has been involved in these discussions? Will there be public consultation about any proposed move; and, should the depot be moved, will the site be sold or will it be used for other government services? I do not think many people would object to relocation of the bus depot per se because it is an almighty waste of space for Sydney buses to be on prime real estate when the site could be used for many other community services.

For many years we have been looking for a site on which to relocate the police and community youth club. Discussion is now taking place about the need to move local community-based mental health services and, indeed, a number of community services require a home. Local residents are concerned that the proposal will be for high-rise, maximum-density residential development or a tower block of offices. They are concerned about the impact of such a proposal on traffic in local streets, which is already almost at gridlock, and about lack of consultation on planning.

I join with my colleague the honourable member for Willoughby in calling on the Government to ensure that this issue is on the agenda. I note that she, too, has a motion on the notice paper because it also affects a depot in Ann Street, Willoughby. I always support her in matters that affect both our constituencies in making sure that the Government comes clean. If the Minister plans to do something different on these sites, all interested parties should be involved in the consultation process to ensure that these valuable and scarce resources in our electorates are put to good use.

AUBURN ELECTORATE SCHOOL STUDENTS

Mrs BARBARA PERRY (Auburn) [11.27 a.m.]: It is with great pleasure that I take this opportunity to present a personal tribute to the students of my electorate, of whom I am immensely proud. Since being appointed as the local member in 2001 I have developed strong ties with the many schools in the Auburn electorate through my involvement in school assemblies, parliamentary visits, multicultural festival days, graduation dinners and other functions to which I have been invited. I have met and developed friendships with numerous students and feel their general respect for, interest in and appreciation of me. Even more, my respect for and appreciation of them has grown.

A good number of these young people are from non-English-speaking homes and thus do not have the kind of educational support and advantage that is taken for granted by others. In many cases their parents are on limited incomes and they help care for younger siblings. Then there are those who have recently arrived from war-torn countries in the horn of Africa and Africa itself, still traumatised from the memories of their past lives. Yet, in spite of all this seeming disadvantage, I see an unquenchable enthusiasm for life, learning and the pursuit of excellence and good citizenship.

There are too many examples and stories to enumerate, although a few from the past couple of months or so will suffice. Auburn students Ahmed Amin and Azeena Nuhumaan, who were both recent recipients of the 2004 Minister's Award for Excellence for their outstanding contributions in care support, charity and community work, were described by the Director-General of the Department of Education and Training as "wonderful examples of what is being achieved in our public schools" and "fantastic ambassadors for the New South Wales public education system". Stephanie Wise and Faten Muhieddine from Trinity Catholic College received an award just weeks ago in Parliament from the Minister for Education and Training for their historical research projects submitted in the National History Challenge. I am particularly pleased to note that the girls' work was done with the aim of drawing important lessons from the past and encouraging a spirit of harmony and appreciation of the important cultural contributions of immigrants. Faten's brilliant essay on the Afghan camel man, who migrated to Australia in the mid-nineteenth century, concluded with the statement:

The Afghan cameleers are a page in the book of Australia's heritage and so without this page Australia's heritage would not be complete ... The Afghan cameleers taught Australians many lessons not only in transportation but in tolerance.

Moving beyond our shores, Kelly Lane, a student from Sefton in my electorate, represented Australia in Washington DC at the Global Young Leaders Conference. It was a sheer delight meeting Kelly; she has a lovely

nature and a very mature outlook on life that will stand her in great stead. I feel tremendously proud knowing that she represented our country at an international event. One of my favourite stories is that of 13-year-old St John's primary school student, Metu Dawo, who arrived from war-torn Liberia in March. Recently, when winning the New South Wales Primary School Sports Association under-13s cross-country event, she slowed down to help the second place runner, whom she did not know, who was struggling desperately to finish the race. The story was subsequently picked up by the local media, the *Auburn Review*, much to my delight. What better example of good sportsmanship and care for others could one hope for?

But there is so much more. Students who are eager to work on developing a multicultural awareness campaign to reduce plastic bag consumption, and others, have stopped me on the street and come into my office with ideas on how they can help our community. It makes me proud to think that so many of my local students think not only of success for their own sake but, rather, measure it in terms of how it can benefit others. I pay tribute not only to them but to the love and good guidance that is afforded by the many excellent teachers and principals in the schools of the Auburn electorate, and, perhaps most importantly, the parents, who have proved themselves faithful time and again. As the chairperson of the parliamentary Committee on Children and Young People I am greatly encouraged by having such wonderful young people in my life and in my electorate. They are the hope and promise of our future, and I honour them before the House today.

CRONULLA ELECTORATE WATER USE

Mr MALCOLM KERR (Cronulla) [11.32 a.m.]: Today I will talk about the use of water in my electorate. One bad use of water is for chemical pollution. Earlier this year a two-kilometre toxic plume came into existence under Orica's Banksmeadow site. Honourable members may remember Orica as being Imperial Chemical Industries some years ago. The plume contained ethylene dichloride [EDC], a chemical used to produce PVC. The concentration was 3,000 times higher than drinking water standards. EDC causes nausea, vomiting and dizziness. It attacks the liver, kidneys and central nervous system, and in extreme cases causes death due to respiratory failure.

Subsequent to the plume appearing, Orica executive Roy Rose wrote to the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning, and Minister for Natural Resources requesting preferential treatment to help the company deal with the enormous plume under its Banksmeadow plant. It is important for Orica and the Government to come clean about what is being done, what effect the plume will have and what will be the consequences for water quality in Botany Bay, which is in my electorate. The Sutherland Shire Environment Centre has a keen interest in this matter, as does Sutherland Shire Council. I am asking for full disclosure in relation to the incident that occurred in Botany Bay, and the impact it will have on the future of Botany Bay.

Another use of water, and it is a good use, is for swimming. I am fortunate to have a number of Olympic swimmers in my electorate, including Ian Thorpe. Many of the swimmers do boxercise at a gym operated by Les Motto. They do this free of charge; Les does it as a community service. However, many of these fine young athletes will be affected by cuts in funding for the New South Wales Institute of Sport. In the past the Government has provided funding for these athletes, and that has been appreciated. However, I suggest that the Government provide adequate funding for these fine young athletes. I am sure that a person such as Tracey Menzies, Ian Thorpe's coach, would be more than happy to speak to the Minister and point out the problems. The Commonwealth Games are coming up, and it is important that we encourage these young athletes because they will be taking our country's colours into those Games. We all wish them well, and we should provide adequate funding for these fine young champions.

MORISSET MULTIPURPOSE CENTRE

Mr JEFF HUNTER (Lake Macquarie) [11.36 a.m.]: Today I advise the House of a function that will take place on Monday 15 November, that is, the official opening of the Morisset Multipurpose Centre. This community and health facility has been built at Morisset in the South Lake Macquarie region and will service the Southlakes community. Honourable members may recall that on a number of occasions over the years I have raised in the House the issue of providing health and community services to the growing South Lake Macquarie area. It gives me great pleasure to advise the House that the \$3-million multipurpose centre is now complete. The centre, which has been constructed next to the recently built Morisset ambulance station, was built by Lake Macquarie City Council, and was jointly funded by the council and the State and Federal governments.

A number of government-funded organisations recently moved into the multipurpose centre, and they will provide a range of community and health services for the South Lake Macquarie area. The groups include

Southlake Neighbourhood Centre Incorporated, which is providing community development, disability support, a toy library and young programs; the Samaritans, which provides out of school hours care; and Southlakes Carers Incorporated, which provides neighbour aid and aged day care programs. The State Government, through Hunter health, will also locate child, family and some community health services at the centre.

The centre is being run by the acting manager, Andrew Waters, who is doing a very good job. He has been associated with the neighbourhood centre for a number of years. The centre will provide a base for projects of the Southlake Neighbourhood Centre, including the Horizons disability support programs, the toy library, which I mentioned earlier, and community development and youth programs. Activity and meeting rooms are also part of the neighbourhood centre component of the centre, and they are available for hire. Current usage includes out-of-school-hours care, a multicultural friendship group, a women's group and a range of community groups, meetings and activities.

The home and community care facility provides a base for Southlakes Carers, which provides neighbour aid and centre-based respite care projects. These projects assist frail older people and people with a disability to remain in their own homes. I congratulate the co-ordinator of the neighbourhood centre, Elizabeth Hyslop, and the management committee chair, Bill Carr, on the great work they have done over the years at the neighbourhood centre. I also congratulate Julia Sugden, the co-ordinator of Southlakes Carers. I have worked closely with Julia and her team over many years, and Monday will be a very proud day for Southlakes Carers when the centre is officially opened.

Earlier I said there will be a health facility as part of the multipurpose centre. The State Government has contributed something like \$450,000 so we can provide child and family health services, and community health services from the centre. We are also working with Lake Macquarie City Council to recruit a general practitioner so that on evenings and at weekends we will be able to provide after-hours medical services from the centre. All up, the centre has received a Home and Community Care grant of \$358,000—a joint State-Federal grant—and the Department of Health and Hunter Area Health have provided \$450,000.

I thank former Minister for Health Andrew Refshauge, who committed that money a number of years ago, and the honourable member for Macquarie Fields for coming through with the money when he was Minister for Health. The council has contributed most towards the centre—more than \$2 million. I congratulate Lake Macquarie council—not only the current councillors who were elected in March this year and the current mayor, Greg Piper, but also the former mayor, Councillor John Kilpatrick, and particularly the councillors in West Ward, who worked for many years to see this centre come to fruition.

The centre is a great boost for the Southlakes community, something we have been working towards for many years. The neighbourhood centre is so proud of its new multipurpose centre that it is planning an open day on 10 December from 10.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m. An invitation has been extended to all in the Southlakes community to come along to the new multipurpose centre, have a look at it, and find out about the services the Government is funding in our community. I congratulate everyone involved in the construction of this new multipurpose centre.

MANLY ELECTORATE SCHOOLS

Mr DAVID BARR (Manly) [11.41 a.m.]: I am pleased to say that I have a thriving primary schools sector in my electorate. Those primary schools are public schools, and the public schools sector is so important in shaping the country we have become. Public schools allow children to realise their full potential, irrespective of background, the financial status of parents or their social standing. It is one of the great contributors to the egalitarian nation that we are. It is vitally important that we continue to encourage public education and to adequately fund it.

Over the past week I have attended three functions—all good-news functions—in relation to primary schools, and I have some other good news as well. On Wednesday of last week I attended the opening of the new library at Manly West Public School. The local school community raised \$180,000, which the Government matched with a joint funding program. It is a terrific tribute to what the principal, Ray Daley, and the school committee have done. It has been a few years in the making, but libraries are incredibly important to schools. Also on the subject of libraries, last Saturday night I attended the opening of Seaforth Public School's million dollar library. The school community supported the sell-off of some of the school's surplus land to raise money to build the library and make other improvements at the school. Once again, that is a tribute to the school community, to Ray Ogilvy, the principal, and particularly to Mr Doug Price, who was so energetic in pushing this matter forward.

North Curl Curl Public School will receive \$81,500 for an extension to the school hall, the school community having raised \$140,000. Trish Cavanagh, the school principal, and the local community have done a good job in lobbying for the hall and raising the money. The works should be under way some time this financial year. A \$3.228 million block was recently built at Harbord Public School, which included a library, administration rooms and 10 classrooms. A stage two capital works program involving approximately \$2.5 million will involve the refurbishment of block Q, a new canteen, covered outdoor learning area, storage and refurbishment of four classrooms. The stage two works are due to be completed in the first half of 2006. That will make Harbord Public School a ripper of a school; it has a great local feel about it. Ted Hemmings, the principal, and the local committee have been very active in pushing for these works over the years.

I also attended the opening last Sunday of the Farmhouse Montessori School. Warringah Council recently gave approval for 50 places, including a program for children under three. In my book, the Farmhouse Montessori School is a public school, in the sense that there is no systemic public preschool system, and it is open to everyone who wishes to apply. That school previously occupied land on Campbell Parade that was owned by the education department, but had to vacate it when the department decided to sell it. After significant difficulties, it has now found a home within the grounds of the North Balgowlah Public School. It leases land from the school, and some students will probably move on to the school when they complete their education at Montessori school. That will obviously benefit both parties. Last but not least, North Balgowlah Public School has not yet received the works it deserves. It is in need of significant improvement. I have been pursuing that issue and I will continue to pursue the Minister to get funding for that school. In my book, it is the last primary school in the area that needs significant work, and that must happen soon. I will do all I can to make sure it happens.

Private members' statements noted.

The House adjourned at 11.46 a.m. until Tuesday 16 November 2004 at 2.15 p.m.
