

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 28 March 2006

Mr Speaker (The Hon. John Joseph Aquilina) took the chair at 2.15 p.m.

Mr Speaker offered the Prayer.

Mr SPEAKER: I acknowledge the Gadigal clan of the Eora nation and their elders and thank them for the custodianship of this land.

ASSENT TO BILLS

Assent to the following bills reported:

Industrial Relations Amendment Bill
Public Sector Employment Legislation Amendment Bill
Governor-General's Residence (Grant) Amendment Bill
Property, Stock and Business Agents Amendment Bill
Transport Administration Amendment (Public Transport Ticketing Corporation) Bill

TRIBUTE TO MR KEVIN CHARLES "PRO" HART

Ministerial Statement

Mr MORRIS IEMMA (Lakemba—Premier, Minister for State Development, and Minister for Citizenship) [2.20 p.m.]: Honourable members would have been saddened to hear this morning of the death of Pro Hart at the age of 77, thus bringing to an end an extraordinary career that brought him to the peak of popular respect and regard. The sadness of Mr Hart's passing is shared not only among the people of Broken Hill or by those who loved the arts, but also among those who admired his self-made success and his irrepressible larrikin attitude. Pro Hart's vivid style and personality made his art widely accessible and enjoyable for all Australians. He made art fun; he made it look simple. But behind the pyrotechnics was a gifted craftsman whose works won serious international acclaim. Pro Hart lived all his life in and around Broken Hill. All the inspiration he ever needed was found in the landscapes and townscape of this great country centre. Therefore, it was fitting that Pro Hart ended his days in the city that commanded his lifelong loyalty, the city he turned into Australia's greatest regional arts centre.

An exceptional life like that of Pro Hart deserves to be honoured and marked by the community to which he gave so much enjoyment. I can advise the House that the Hart family has accepted the New South Wales Government's offer of a State funeral for this gifted and extraordinary Australian. The funeral will be held, appropriately, in Broken Hill next Tuesday. The honour of a State funeral historically has been reserved for senior political leaders, governors and chief justices. But since the slaying in 1992 of Dr Victor Chang, State funerals have been used increasingly to honour a wider and more representative variety of distinguished citizens, including Great War veterans Charlie Mance and Marcel Caux. Similarly, singer Slim Dusty and football legend Johnny Warren received State funerals.

Pro Hart, the self-taught genius who started work in the mines of Broken Hill and worked his way up to become one of our loved and recognised artists, has an appropriate place alongside those distinguished Australians who have been accorded the honour of a State Funeral. Despite great wealth and fame, Pro Hart remained an artist for the people and a loyal son of his beloved Broken Hill. His memory will endure in galleries and homes across the nation, and across the world, as part of the artistic and cultural history of this State, but, most important, in the minds of everyone touched by his gifts and by his enormous zest for life. Now that his life has run its course I ask the House to join me and all those who held this gifted larrikin in affection and esteem in honouring the memory of Pro Hart and in conveying our sincere and heartfelt condolences to his widow, Raylee, and their five children.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER (North Shore) [2.23 p.m.]: On behalf of the Coalition I join with the Government in expressing condolences to Pro Hart's family. I had the honour of meeting Pro Hart when I visited his gallery in Broken Hill on a number of occasions. I have two Pro Hart paintings at home and I know that he

was an extremely generous man. One of those paintings I bought in relation to an auction to raise funds for a hospital. Pro Hart was generous in supporting worthy causes, and I know that he was generous with his time as well to those who visited the gallery at Broken Hill. It would be true to say that Pro Hart led the push to have Broken Hill known as an artists' centre.

He was born Kevin Charles Hart in Broken Hill on 30 May 1928. He spent his early years on the family sheep property near Menindee. His interest in art surfaced at an early age: it was said that he preferred to write with his brush rather than his pen. As a young man he worked as a miner during the day and as an artist at night. He was virtually self-taught, but he captured that evocative spirit of the Australian bush. He is an artist much loved by many people, and he will be sadly missed. I join with the Government in expressing the view that we have lost a great Australian artist.

Members and officers of the House stood in their places.

AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT

The Clerk announced the receipt, pursuant to section 63C of the Public Finance and Audit Act 1983 of the report entitled "Auditor-General's Report—Financial Reports—Volume One 2006."

AUDIT OFFICE

Report

The Clerk announced the receipt, pursuant to section 63C of the Public Finance and Audit Act 1983, of the performance audit report of the Auditor-General entitled "Agencies Working Together to Improve Services", dated March 2006.

LEGISLATION REVIEW COMMITTEE

Report

The Clerk announced the receipt, pursuant to section 10 of the Legislation Review Act 1987, of the report entitled "Legislation Review Digest No. 3 of 2006", dated 24 March 2006.

PETITIONS

Pensioner Travel Voucher Booking Fee

Petitions requesting the removal of the \$10 booking fee on pensioner travel vouchers, received from **Mr Greg Aplin, Mrs Shelley Hancock and Mr Andrew Stoner.**

South Coast Rail Services

Petition opposing any reduction in rail services on the South Coast, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock.**

Hornsby and Berowra Train Station Parking Facilities

Petition requesting adequate commuter parking facilities at Hornsby and Berowra train stations, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood.**

Macdonaldtown Train Stabling Facility

Petition opposing the construction of a train stabling facility at Macdonaldtown, received from **Mr Barry O'Farrell.**

Murwillumbah to Casino Rail Service

Petition requesting the retention of the CountryLink rail service from Murwillumbah to Casino, received from **Mr Donald Page.**

CountryLink Rail Services

Petition opposing the abolition of CountryLink rail services and their replacement with bus services in rural and regional New South Wales, received from **Mr Andrew Stoner**.

Jervis Bay Marine Park Fishing Competitions

Petition requesting amendment of the zoning policy to preclude fishing competitions, by both spear and line, in the Jervis Bay Marine Park, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

Shoalhaven River Water Extraction

Petition opposing the extraction of water from the Shoalhaven River to support Sydney's water supply, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

Shoalhaven Policing

Petition requesting the allocation of more police resources to the Shoalhaven Local Area command, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

Boorowa Policing

Petition requesting the reinstatement of the second police officer position at the Boorowa Police Station, received from **Ms Katrina Hodgkinson**.

Mount Austin Public School

Petition requesting funding for the provision of a school assembly hall facility at Mount Austin Public School, received from **Mr Daryl Maguire**.

Wagga Wagga Electorate Schools Airconditioning

Petition requesting the installation of airconditioning in all learning spaces in public schools in the Wagga Wagga electorate, received from **Mr Daryl Maguire**.

Colo High School Airconditioning

Petition requesting the installation of airconditioning in all classrooms and the library of Colo High School, received from **Mr Steven Pringle**.

Campbell Hospital, Coraki

Petition opposing the closure of inpatient beds and the reduction in emergency department hours of Campbell Hospital, Coraki, received from **Mr Steve Cansdell**.

Breast Screening Funding

Petitions requesting funding for BreastScreen NSW, received from **Mr Steve Cansdell**, **Ms Katrina Hodgkinson** and **Mr Michael Richardson**.

Lismore Base Hospital

Petition requesting that Lismore Base Hospital remains an accredited centre of excellence, received from **Mr Thomas George**.

Shoalhaven Mental Health Services

Petition requesting funding for the establishment of a dedicated mental health service in the Shoalhaven, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

Yass District Hospital

Petition opposing the downgrading of existing services at Yass District Hospital, received from **Ms Katrina Hodgkinson**.

Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme

Petition objecting to the criteria for country cancer patients to qualify for the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme, received from **Mr Andrew Stoner**.

Kurnell Sandmining

Petition opposing sandmining on the Kurnell Peninsula, received from **Mr Barry Collier**.

Manyana Residential Land Rezoning

Petition opposing the proposal by Kylor to rezone residential land in Manyana, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

Community-based Preschools

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

Recreational Fishing

Petitions opposing any restrictions on recreational fishing in the mid North Coast waters, received from **Mr Andrew Stoner** and **Mr John Turner**.

Crown Land Leases

Petition requesting the withdrawal of changes to the rental structure of Crown land leases, particularly enclosed road permits, received from **Ms Katrina Hodgkinson**.

Shoalhaven City Council Rate Structure

Petition opposing a 27 per cent rate increase proposed by Shoalhaven City Council, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

CSR Quarry, Hornsby

Petition requesting a public inquiry into Hornsby Shire Council's acquisition of CSR Quarry in Hornsby, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

F6 Corridor Community Use

Petition noting the decision of the Minister for Roads, gazetted in February 2003, to abandon the construction of any freeway or motorway in the F6 corridor, and requesting preservation of the corridor for open space, community use and public transport, received from **Mr Barry Collier**.

Grafton Bridge

Petition requesting the construction of a new bridge over the Clarence River at Grafton, received from **Mr Steve Cansdell**.

Barton Highway Dual Carriageway Funding

Petition requesting that the Minister for Roads change the Roads and Traffic Authority's priority for Federal AusLink funding for the Barton Highway to allow the construction of a dual carriageway, received from **Ms Katrina Hodgkinson**.

The Rock/Bullenbong Road Upgrade

Petition requesting funding for the immediate upgrade of The Rock/Bullenbong Road, received from **Mr Daryl Maguire**.

Old Northern and New Line Roads Strategic Route Development Study

Petition requesting funding for implementation of the Old Northern and New Line roads strategic route development study, received from **Mr Steven Pringle**.

Forster-Tuncurry Cycleways

Petition requesting the building of a cycleway in the Forster-Tuncurry area as shown on plans of the State coastal cycleway, received from **Mr John Turner**.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

M5 EAST TUNNEL AIR POLLUTION

Mr PETER DEBNAM: My question is directed to the Premier. Given that as Minister for Health he was fully briefed on the risk of toxic fumes in the M5 East and he has confirmed he winds up his own car windows when going through the M5 East, why did he not use his powers as Minister for Health to force the Roads and Traffic Authority to put up warning signs?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: The planning conditions for all Sydney tunnels require that strict air quality standards be met. The air standards both inside and outside the M5 East tunnel are very strict. The point about the M5 is that it has taken 100,000 vehicles a day off the stop-start traffic on the surface roads—King Georges Road, Stony Creek Road, Forest Road and Moorefields Road—reducing vehicle emissions and pollution of homes and businesses along those road corridors.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is far too much audible conversation in the Chamber. Questions without notice have only just commenced. The Premier will be heard in silence.

Mr Steve Whan: They should give up smoking as well!

Mr SPEAKER: Order! My warning applies to the honourable member for Monaro.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: The tunnel has taken vehicles off those roads and onto the motorway, which has been a success in that respect in that it has removed 100,000 vehicles that were formerly on those roads.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of The Nationals will come to order.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: The Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] constantly monitors world's best practice on air quality standards, and our compliance standards are the toughest in the world. The Department of Health undertook a study on air quality inside the tunnel. Its July 2003 report on in-tunnel air quality was released to the public and the media and is still on the department's web site. There is a warning to motorists to wind up their windows in times of traffic congestion, and that was widely reported at the time the recommendation was made. It is a commonsense measure. At the time I directed the director general to meet the chief executive of the RTA. As a result of those discussions I am advised that the RTA produced the material warning motorists to wind up their windows when travelling through the M5 East tunnel.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS LEGISLATION

Mr STEVEN CHAYTOR: My question is addressed to the Premier. What is the latest information on this Government's efforts to protect New South Wales residents from the impact of the Commonwealth's WorkChoices legislation?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: I thank the honourable member for Macquarie Fields for his efforts to protect workers against the attacks of the Howard Government. I can inform the House that I have formally asked the Government members of the Legislative Council's Standing Committee on Social Issues to move to examine the effects of the Commonwealth's WorkChoices legislation on the most vulnerable workers in our community. The committee will examine the impact of WorkChoices in the following areas: on families, young workers, women workers, rural workers, injured workers, employees on low wages, compliance costs and red tape for business, work and family balance, and gender equity.

John Howard's WorkChoices legislation shuts the gate on a range of important employee protections. Families and their pay packets stand to suffer the most. Put simply, Work Choices will remove the conditions, hard-won over many decades, that help workers and their families pay the bills. The constant threat that will prevail now is that workers will have more and more of these hard-won conditions taken away through individual contracts, and the legislation fails to protect them if they are outside the five minimum standards. As we can already see from media reports employers are seeking to urgently change and reduce workers' employment conditions. Workers are being fired then immediately re-hired with reduced conditions, supported by these laws. Just look at the reports! The inquiry will provide workers with an opportunity to reveal the impacts on them.

Mr Peter Debnam: Point of order: My point of order is relevance. What about the workers—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will direct his remarks to the Chair.

[Interruption]

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

[Interruption]

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition is wasting the time of the House. I order him to resume his seat. When he takes a point of order in future he will address the Chair.

[Interruption]

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the Minister for Police to order.

[Interruption]

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: Why do members opposite not ask a question about workers compensation—say on Wednesday? Did we hear from the member for Murrumbidgee when the Government announced late last year an additional \$36 million in extra benefits under the scheme for the most catastrophically injured workers? No, nothing at all. Ask me a question on Wednesday about workers compensation. I will be more than happy to give you even more information about workers compensation later this week. The inquiry should receive bipartisan support. Here is an opportunity for the Leader of the Opposition to stand up for workers in this State. That is something he has refused to do, as he made clear two weeks ago that he would still hand over the State's industrial system to John Howard.

Mr Brad Hazzard: Point of order: The workers of this State remember—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Wakehurst will resume his seat. I have just given a direction to the Leader of the Opposition and the honourable member for Wakehurst is now deliberately flouting the standing orders. I call him to order.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: Will Opposition members stand up for the workers of this State? Will they vote with the Government to support this inquiry? Will Opposition members support the members of the inquiry throughout the course of the year as they examine the impact of WorkChoices on the conditions of workers in this State? Will they stand up for the workers of this State—not just public sector workers but all workers in this State? They have an opportunity to support this legislation, they have an opportunity to support the work of the committee, and they have an opportunity to stare down their friends in Canberra and say that they will support the State's legal challenge, that they will support the maintenance of a State industrial relations system with an independent umpire, and that they will support all public sector workers in this State. That is something they

have failed to do. At the end of the day they will never stand up to John Howard and his attack on workers, in the same way as they will never stand up for the taxpayers of this State to get back their GST money, or stand up for the clubs after the latest attack on them by John Howard and Peter Costello.

M5 EAST TUNNEL AIR POLLUTION

Mr PETER DEBNAM: My question without notice is directed to the Premier. Given that the M5 East has totally inadequate ventilation, no filtration and no warning signs about toxic pollutants and that the Premier, as a former health Minister, was formally entrusted to protect public health, why did he betray the community by failing to act to protect the health of motorists?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: About five minutes ago I outlined the actions that the Department of Health was taking and I referred to a report and to warnings that have been issued. In July 2003 I was health Minister.

Mr Peter Debnam: Point of order: My point of order relates to relevance. This is the letter that—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Premier had uttered little more than five words. The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat.

[Interruption]

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I order the Leader of the Opposition to resume his seat.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: In a 2003 report the chief medical officer, the director-general of the Department of Health and the chief executive of the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] made public recommendations. As I mentioned earlier, the material produced by the RTA contains a commonsense warning about winding up windows in the tunnel.

MINISTERS AND MEMBERS POST-SEPARATION EMPLOYMENT GUIDELINES

Ms NOREEN HAY: My question without notice is directed to the Premier. What is the latest information on changes to post-separation and secondary employment procedures for former Ministers and members of the New South Wales Parliament?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I am sure that a number of people are interested in the Premier's reply.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: In 2004 the Independent Commission Against Corruption [ICAC] identified a range of options to regulate the employment of Ministers once they leave office. The Government has carefully considered those options and, as a result, the ministerial code of conduct will be amended to impose new obligations on Ministers and former Ministers, balancing the risk of conflicts of interest and the right of former Ministers to earn a living after politics. The amendments to the ministerial code of conduct, which is based on the United Kingdom model, will provide that former Ministers must, during the first 12 months of leaving office, obtain written advice from the Parliamentary Ethics Adviser before accepting any employment or engagement, or providing services to third parties. This obligation will apply where the proposed employment relates to portfolio responsibilities held during the last two years of ministerial office. A similar obligation will apply to current Ministers who, while still in office, are planning post-separation employment or businesses.

The adviser will be required to express his view as to whether the acceptance of the position could give rise to a reasonable concern that the Minister's conduct while in office was influenced by the prospect of future employment or engagement, or that the Minister might make improper use of confidential information to which he or she had access. The ethics adviser may advise that a position should not be taken, or should be taken subject only to certain conditions. It will, of course, be a matter for former Ministers to decide whether or not they accept that advice, but if they accept the position regardless, the ethics adviser will forward his advice to the Presiding Officer of the relevant House.

A former Minister would be unlikely to run the risk of damaging his or her reputation by acting against the advice of the independent ethics adviser. Another key ICAC recommendation affecting public life in New South Wales concerns the secondary employment of members of Parliament. The ICAC was asked to advise on

this issue after it was revealed that the former Leader of the Opposition had a paid consultancy for PricewaterhouseCoopers while he was a member of Parliament. Accordingly, the Government will propose amendments to the Constitution (Disclosure by Members) Regulation to strengthen the disclosure obligations on members who hold outside employment or engagements. The regulations will require members of Parliament to describe the services and activities to be undertaken. Members will also, in certain circumstances, be required to disclose details of the clients to whom the services are to be provided.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will come to order.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: In addition, members of Parliament will be required to update the register of members' interests every six months instead of every year. The Government will also introduce motions in each House to amend the members' code of conduct, requiring members to disclose at the start of a parliamentary debate the identity of any person by whom they are employed or engaged. It will also require disclosure of the identity of any client of any such person or any former client who benefited from a member's services within the previous two years.

This disclosure obligation will not apply if a member simply votes on a matter; it will apply only when he or she participates in a debate. If the member has already disclosed the information in the member's entry in the register of members' interests, he or she will not be required to make a further disclosure during the proceedings. The Government will also propose amendments to the members' codes of conduct to strengthen the prohibition on bribery in response to recommendations made by the former Legislative Assembly Standing Ethics Committee.

This will make it clear that bribery can occur when a member knowingly or improperly agrees to take action in Parliament in return for payment to a party. A third party might include a family member, a business associate, or a person with whom the member has a financial relationship. Amendments to the codes will also ensure that the ICAC is entitled to investigate any breach of the prohibition on bribery. These reforms will bring in a new standard of probity to public life in this State. They are not a judgment on the past. After all, Ministers and members from both sides of politics have operated under the current system for 150 years. Rather, this is a line in the sand—an appropriate new direction for this Parliament to take in the 150th anniversary of its existence, reinforcing, as it does, the confidence of the people who put us here in the first place.

LANE COVE TUNNEL

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: My question is directed to the Premier. Given that the Lane Cove tunnel operators have said that stage one, when the tunnel will be open to traffic, will be completed in September and have started discussions with the Roads and Traffic Authority about a September opening, will the Premier officiate at the September Lane Cove tunnel opening?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: As the honourable member for Lane Cove knows, the Lane Cove tunnel will be opened when it is finished.

Mrs Jillian Skinner: When will it be finished?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: It will be finished when the contractor has completed the work. And it will be opened when it is finished.

BULLDOGS RUGBY LEAGUE CLUB FAN BEHAVIOUR

Mr MATTHEW MORRIS: My question is addressed to the Minister for Police. What is the Government's response to policing resources at Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs games and related matters?

Mr CARL SCULLY: I thank the honourable member for Charlestown for his question.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Murrumbidgee will come to order.

Mr CARL SCULLY: Last week I chaired a meeting with Malcolm Noad; David Gallop; Ken Edwards, who is the head of Telstra Stadium; the Commissioner of Police; and the deputy commissioner. It followed pretty ugly scenes at a game between the Bulldogs and the Tigers last Friday week. It was a frank, productive meeting, at which a number of issues were canvassed. I am pleased to say that the behaviour of fans

at the game last Friday night was exemplary, and I take this opportunity to thank Canterbury supporters for behaving themselves. The efforts of Malcolm Noad and David Gallop were terrific: they took a number of steps to ensure that the behaviour of the crowd was as good as possible. I acknowledge also the work done by Canterbury over the past couple of years. Apart from the incident about 10 days or so ago, there had been no similar incidents for about two years.

Mr Andrew Stoner: Point of order: My point of order goes to relevance. It is relevant that 10 days or so ago there were some pretty ugly scenes in Bourke. There was a riot in Bourke. People were in fear of their lives but there was no media involved so the Minister did not send police up there, did he?

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

Mr Andrew Stoner: What is the Minister going to do for the bush?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of The Nationals will restrict his policy speeches to the appropriate times. The Minister has the call.

Mr CARL SCULLY: That is outrageous. We cannot use the word "lie" in this place and I will not do so now, but that was an outrageous untruth and a slur on the police who did a damn good job in Bourke. How dare the Leader of The Nationals say that!

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order. The Minister has the call.

Mr CARL SCULLY: I will not have the Leader of The Nationals taking points of order and slurring the police. Those opposite are always bagging the cops. Yet again, the police did a good job managing the Bulldogs game last Friday. We must respond strongly to inappropriate behaviour by fans. I have told the head of the Bulldogs club that we will shadow the team for the rest of the season until we get an absolute assurance that its supporters will either stay away if they cannot behave or behave when they attend games.

It is important to ensure that there is proper cost recovery on behalf of the taxpayers of the cost of providing extra police at games. I am pleased to say that the Bulldogs Rugby League Club has agreed to make a significant contribution towards the cost of policing its away matches for both general duties and riot police. Those opposite may know this already but, for the benefit of those who do not, the way that user pays works in National Rugby League games is that the home team pays the cost of the police, which is calculated on a risk assessment basis. The Bulldogs have agreed to pay a significant proportion of the cost of the additional police who are required to be present at the team's away games. That is very important. How many police will be required at each game depends on a risk assessment done by police at each game. But I assure honourable members that riot police will be present in reasonable numbers at every game, particularly at home games.

Mr Peter Debnam: Is that 150?

Mr CARL SCULLY: Not necessarily.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Bathurst will contain his enthusiasm.

Mr CARL SCULLY: I am entitled to respond. I referred to the riot squad and the Leader of the Opposition wants to know how many police will be present at games. His shadow Minister for Police referred to that squad as being "dubious". He is dubious.

Mr Peter Debnam: Point of order—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! This has almost become a debate. What is the point of order?

Mr Peter Debnam: The Minister asked me a question. He introduced the concept of a water cannon 12 months after the police commissioner said, "When we introduce water cannon it's an admission of failure and we've lost control of the streets".

Mr SPEAKER: Order! During question time questions are directed to Ministers, not to the Leader of the Opposition. The Leader of the Opposition may ask a question but he cannot provide the answer.

Mr Peter Debnam: What are we going to get next—a helicopter gunship? What are you going to use—six water cannons, six helicopter gunships?

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

[Interruption]

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

[Interruption]

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Minister for Police has the call.

Mr CARL SCULLY: The shadow Minister for Police regards the riot squad as "dubious" so I can only assume that we now have two commitments from the Opposition. There is the commitment to abolish the riot squad—that is what must logically flow from labelling it "dubious". So we can bank on that. So now we have a situation where, if the Coalition is elected in April and there is a riot—

Mr Andrew Tink: April? The election is in March.

Mr CARL SCULLY: When there is a new government it takes a few days. I remember because I was sworn in on my thirty-eighth birthday—the best birthday present I ever had! So let us assume that Coalition members are sworn in next April and then Steve Cullen says to them, "I want to use the water cannon to deal with this riot". But the shadow Minister has said that he will not allow that to happen. Shame on him! Not only have Opposition members been bagging the cops, but now they are starting to bag the equipment we give the cops when they ask for it.

Mr Peter Debnam: Point of order: My understanding is that the water cannon will be freely available—

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

Mr Peter Debnam: —except the Government has agreed with the Labor Council that it will not be used on union picket lines. Is that the case?

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

[Interruption]

Mr SPEAKER: Order! If the Leader of the Opposition wishes to continue to make policy statements he should do so at the appropriate time, which is not question time. The Minister has the call.

Mr CARL SCULLY: Yesterday the Leader of the Opposition held a function—the Millennium Forum, or whatever they call it. All the white shoe brigade turned up to raise funds for the Coalition. The Leader of the Opposition released a pamphlet containing a range of commitments, most of which were dubious. The Leader of the Opposition actually made the commitment that, if elected, the Coalition will recruit 600 police. The trouble is—

Mr Barry O'Farrell: Point of order: My point of order relates to relevance and honesty. If the Minister is going to quote the brochure he should quote it correctly. We promised to replace the 600 police that the Government have slashed since the last election.

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

[Interruption]

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. This is question time, not explanation time.

Mr CARL SCULLY: The Opposition produced this pamphlet before we announced a commitment to increase authorised strength by 750 officers. So by January next year we will have 15,206 police—authorised strength. Those opposite have promised 600; we have promised—and we will deliver—750 officers. Those opposite do not like it. We have to interpret quite reasonably what Opposition members have said.

Mr Peter Debnam: Mr Speaker—

Mr CARL SCULLY: What this means is that you are going to reduce the police by 150, you scoundrel!

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Minister has been constantly interrupted during his reply. Question time has almost become a debate. I will hear the point of order of the Leader of the Opposition, which I hope will comply with the standing orders. The House will then be able to continue with question time, as set out in the routine of business. The Leader of the Opposition has the call.

Mr Peter Debnam: Mr Speaker, it is about the use of props. We got a call from the Premier's department, wanting to send someone along, but I did not get a call from the alternative Premier's department—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. He is deliberately flouting the standing orders of this House. I call him to order.

Mr CARL SCULLY: Much will be said about police numbers between now and the end of March next year. I welcome the debate because I know the public and the police also welcome that this Government is not going to just promise to increase police numbers but will deliver increased police numbers. Members of the Opposition roam around the State with considerable mischief but I want honourable members to remember that when the Coalition was rightly defeated about 11 years ago it had an authorised police strength of 12,907. This Government is above an authorised strength at 15,206. The Coalition could not even meet that figure. This Government has the solutions and is delivering for the people of this State and the Opposition is not.

TERRANORA QUARRY PROPOSAL

Mr ANDREW STONER: My question is directed to the Minister for Planning. One for you, Frank!

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of The Nationals will address the Minister for Planning by his proper title.

Mr ANDREW STONER: I ask the Minister for Planning: Following community outrage over the proposed development of a major quarry in the residential suburb of Terranora in the Tweed, will the Minister now heed the concerns of the community and reject the proposal?

Mr FRANK SARTOR: I am surprised that the honourable member would want me to make proper assessment decisions about a planning matter in a political forum. I actually take the role of planning Minister very seriously, and, as always, I intend to look at this matter thoroughly. If the honourable member wants to make representations to me—

Mr Andrew Stoner: You never get an answer!

Mr FRANK SARTOR: Others on that side frequently make representations to me.

Mr Andrew Stoner: Point of order: Firstly the Minister is supposed to sit down while the point of order is being taken. On a point of relevance, the Minister said he is taking this matter seriously but he didn't even bother to visit the site last week and neither did the honourable member for Tweed.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. As I said before, this is question time, not explanation time.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: I assume the honourable member is referring to the Readymix Holdings Pty Ltd proposal to extend the Tweed quarry at Terranora, in the Tweed local government area. Yes, I am the approving authority for this application. The environmental assessment of the proposal is currently on exhibition and I encourage all parties to make a submission on the proposal before 4 April. If the honourable member wishes to make direct representations to me, I will be happy to hear them. I am aware of the significant opposition to this proposal, particularly the concerns about the potential traffic, noise and blasting impacts of the proposal. I can assure the House that I will examine those concerns very closely before I determine the application.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT PASSENGER INFORMATION

Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO: My question without notice is addressed to the Deputy Premier, and Minister for Transport. What is the latest information on improvements to public transport passenger information?

Mr JOHN WATKINS: The Leader of the Opposition asked where the Government got his information of yesterday. The Leader of the Opposition leaned across the table and demanded where the Government got it. It got the information from the Internet site of the Liberal Party. He does not even know it was published! Today the Iemma Government has unveiled a new development in public transport information because that is what the travelling public want. Whether one is travelling on a train, bus or ferry, or is a regular commuter or a visitor to Sydney, one is entitled to the latest information that is easily accessed to plan a trip. Commuters deserve timely, up-to-date and accurate advice about any disruptions to services and information on factors that may change their normal journey, such as track work.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Wakehurst will come to order.

Mr JOHN WATKINS: Today I announce that, for the first time, commuters can access the latest information on train, bus and ferry services on mobile phones, Palm Pilots and other electronic organisers, and the information can all be downloaded quickly from the Internet. The popular 131500 Transport Infoline service—featuring timetables, service information and special event transport—is now accessible on-the-go, at the touch of a button. It is the equivalent of having all of Sydney's public transport timetables in one's pocket and it is available every day, all day.

The information is available with compatible devices through the link "mobile.131500.info" and includes the latest breaking news on public transport services, next service timetables for trains, buses and ferries, updated information on service changes, and the latest information on highlighted events. Commuters with compatible phones can check on the next bus, train or ferry to their desired destination. They can receive real-time updates on any disruptions to services and they can look up alternative ways of getting to their destination. It also provides free advice on transport options for major events like the Royal Easter Show and Randwick races.

When I travel the network, commuters tell me the service is improving. The reliability of our trains is vastly improved from two years ago, and while there is more work to do, the Government is making unprecedented investment in our public transport infrastructure. Across the public transport portfolio, the Government is spending \$7 billion over the next five years on major infrastructure projects. And in rail alone, that figure rises to more than \$14 billion during the next 15 years. While commuters acknowledge the improvements the Government has made and the strong investment it is making in the future, it is often the little things that can make a journey on public transport more enjoyable. The Government is listening to the concerns expressed by commuters, and it will use whatever technology is available to it to improve that experience.

The 131500 Transport Infoline has become even more popular in the past year with consumers accessing that information more than ever before. The number of people now accessing information has more than doubled in the past year, with more than 380,000 people per month using the 131500 web site. Now commuters can access this same information using the mobile phone technology. The mobile.131500 service operates on WAP or GPRS mobile phones and devices. More than one million Australians already use phones with that access, and communication experts suggest that by 2010 some 90 per cent of mobile phone users will use this type of technology.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Baulkham Hills will come to order.

Mr JOHN WATKINS: Currently the service is being made available through Telstra and Optus but other service providers are expected to join shortly. Commuters can also access a desktop version of the service through the same link, mobile.131500.info, so commuters can check the same information from their home or office computer before leaving. It is powered by the 131500 web site. The only costs involved are the standard charges associated with accessing on-line information from a mobile phone account. In most cases it will be cheaper than a mobile phone call to the 131500 hotline. Projects such as this, combined with the Government's record expenditure in public transport, will encourage even more people back to public transport and build further on recent patronage increases.

TAMWORTH SCHOOL PROPOSAL

Mr GEORGE SOURIS: My question is directed to the Minister for Education and Training. Given that the people of West Tamworth have been fighting during the whole period this Government has been in office to build a new public school on the Goonoo Goonoo Road site, and that the Opposition has raised this issue nine times in Parliament, will the Minister admit that the time for consultation is over and she must make a decision on this matter?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Recently I had the opportunity to visit Tamworth with the honourable member for Tamworth and talk with a number of school principals, as well as visit Gunnedah and inspect the progress of the new hall. It is certainly the case that education provision in the Tamworth area has some challenges, and I think a range of views have been presented about the best way forward. The department has been working on a consultation paper that looks at the provision of education for all schools within the city of Tamworth, including West Tamworth. The paper has been developed by the department and is currently under consideration. When I visited Tamworth recently I gave the school principals a commitment that the consultation paper would be released as quickly as possible and that there would be broad consultation on the appropriate way forward, because some Tamworth schools are over capacity and some are under capacity.

Mr Andrew Stoner: We know all that. Make a decision.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of The Nationals will resume his seat. I call him to order.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: It is all very well for the Opposition to say, "Make a decision." Colourful rhetoric like that does not get us far. There needs to be a process that has the support of the broader community. It is all very well for Coalition members to visit Tamworth—as they did last year—and make all sorts of commitments to build super schools, but the reality is that those commitments will never come to anything; they are unfunded and are never grounded in proper community consultation.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Minister will be heard in silence.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Their commitments are made in order to get a run in the local media on the day of their visit, without ongoing follow-up.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of The Nationals will cease calling out.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I found my meeting in Tamworth with the school principals very productive. I look forward to the release of the consultation paper in the very near future and to hearing the views of the Tamworth community on how they want to progress with education provision and on some of the issues that impact on schools in that area.

MAJOR EVENTS FOR SYDNEY

Mr JOHN PRICE: My question without notice is to the Minister for Tourism. What is the latest information on the Government's continuing success in attracting major events to Sydney?

Mr Wayne Merton: The Commonwealth Games. This will be a short answer!

Ms SANDRA NORI: Someone interjected, "The Commonwealth Games." I am the first to say we should all congratulate Justin Madden, the Victorian Government and the people of Melbourne and Victoria on having held a fantastic Commonwealth Games. They were held in great spirit, the venues were great, and the city was sparkling. Of course, that makes me ponder what possessed the Prime Minister to make his recent petty and ungracious comments that the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne were better than the Olympic Games in Sydney. Only a divide-and-rule, mean-spirited Prime Minister like Mr Howard would say such a thing.

He could quite easily and quite proudly have said, "Aren't we lucky to have a city that can put on a fantastic Commonwealth Games, and aren't we lucky to have one that can put on the best Olympic Games ever?" He could have said that, but did not, because he cannot help himself when it comes to New South Wales. One of the things the Olympic Games did for Sydney was boost our bids to win convention and exhibition business. Those successes soared after we won the bid for the Olympic Games, because Sydney is seen as the place to hold conferences—and just as well!

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Baulkham Hills will come to order.

Ms SANDRA NORI: It is just as well that Sydney continues to maintain its reputation and continues to win the largest and most prestigious and economically viable business, because if we had to rely on the Federal Government's television campaigns to bring people here, the pickings would be very slim. Honourable member might not realise—it might have been lost in the controversy over the recent television campaign—that barely two years ago the Australian Government launched a multimillion campaign that had to be junked within about eighteen months! Then it came up with the campaign that was released a month ago.

I think that is a nice campaign: it has great visuals, it has warmth, and it has a nice pace. Pity about the tag line! The tag line has already drawn us into controversy in the United Kingdom and Canada, and there are rumblings in the United States of America. It could never be used in Asia, our fastest-growing inbound market. It cannot be used in China or India. And it could never be translated into French, Italian or German and still be polite!

Mr Brad Hazzard: Point of order: If we have to put up with this, it's easy to work out why the bloody hell they aren't here. The Minister is the cause.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Wakehurst will resume his seat. I call him to order for the second time.

Ms SANDRA NORI: It can never be used in Asia, it will not really work in America, it has been controversial in the United Kingdom, and it cannot be used in Continental Europe. So where does that leave us with this tag line? The Commonwealth Government has committed the cardinal sin: making the advertisement more important than the message! Funnily enough, I happen to think Australia is beautiful enough and appealing enough and inspirational enough that we do not have to be controversial.

Ms Katrina Hodgkinson: Point of order: I am afraid the Minister is misleading the House.

Mr SPEAKER: What is the point of order?

Ms Katrina Hodgkinson: She should look at the Bledisloe Cup, and the State of Origin, which was lost to Victoria.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Burrinjuck will resume her seat.

[Interruption]

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Burrinjuck will resume her seat.

[Interruption]

Mr SPEAKER: Order! From this point, any member who takes a spurious point of order will be deemed to be on three calls to order.

Ms SANDRA NORI: It is okay, Mr Speaker: it is the first time she has risen to her feet about tourism. And, by the way, thanks for the apology.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Minister will address the Chair.

Ms SANDRA NORI: I have to say this about the shadow Minister: When she put an appalling press release on her web site, I am glad it took only one letter from my solicitor for her to pull the press release and put an apology on the site. I really appreciate the apology. It was good. Thank you very much. Sydney has won the right to hold the Rotary International Conference 2014, which will bring 22,000 delegates to this city, 12,000 of whom will be from overseas, 6,000 from interstate, and 4,000 from New South Wales.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is too much audible conversation on both sides of the House.

Ms SANDRA NORI: That conference will inject about \$60 million worth of economic activity into this State. Of course, those attending the conference will use the infrastructure we have provided at the

Exhibition Centre, at Darling Harbour, the Entertainment Centre, and of course the Superdome. On top of that, many of the delegates will be significant business people. Again, we hope that will provide an opportunity for some business matching and investment opportunities.

We owe John Hutcheson, Chief Executive Officer of the Sydney Convention and Visitors Bureau, a great vote of thanks. He has devoted 10 years to securing this event for Sydney. The feedback we have had from the organisers is that they have never seen such a professional document, and they awarded the conference to Sydney sight unseen and without calling for any further bids. That is to the great credit of the Sydney Convention and Visitors Bureau, and it is a great credit to this city, no matter what the Prime Minister thinks.

Questions without notice concluded.

COMMITTEE ON THE INDEPENDENT COMMISSION AGAINST CORRUPTION

Membership

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

That:

- (1) Malcolm John Kerr be appointed to serve on the Committee on the Independent Commission Against Corruption in place of Andrew Arnold Tink, discharged; and
- (2) a message be sent informing the Legislative Council.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Routine of Business: Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Motion by Mr Carl Scully agreed to:

That:

- (1) standing and sessional orders be suspended to permit:
 - (a) at 7.30 p.m., the introduction of the following bills, notice of which was given this day for tomorrow, up to and including the Minister's second reading speech:

Courts Legislation Amendment Bill
Environmental Planning and Assessment Amendment (Reserved Land Acquisition) Bill
Workers Compensation Legislation Amendment Bill
 - (b) at the conclusion of Government Business, the House to adjourn without motion moved; and
 - (c) from 7.30 p.m. until the rising of the House, no divisions or quorums to be called.
- (2) That the House at its rising this day do adjourn until Wednesday 29 March 2006 at 10.00 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF URGENT MOTIONS

Gaming Machine Tax

Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO (Penrith) [3.19 p.m.]: My motion is of the utmost urgency. Today the House must recognise the hard work and determination of the Premier, Morris Iemma, and Clubs New South Wales that yesterday resulted in a great win for our clubs, their members, their workers and their communities. Today all members must acknowledge this practical and responsible solution to its obligation to the community to pay a fair rate of tax, together with its valuable social and economic contribution to New South Wales.

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

Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO: The motion is urgent because the Opposition owes it to the New South Wales club industry to stop carping at it from the sidelines and to stand up for clubs like Souths Juniors in the face of a Federal challenge to their tax-free status. The motion is urgent because today the House can unite to commend our clubs and the Iemma Government for this practical and achievable agreement, which will result in

60 per cent of our clubs paying no tax and the other 40 per cent paying less tax than was envisaged originally. As Clubs New South Wales Chief Executive David Costello said yesterday, "Premier Morris Iemma is a man of his word. He has delivered on his promise,"—unlike the Leader of the Opposition, who makes unaffordable, pie-in-the-sky promises that would achieve nothing except wreck the New South Wales economy.

M5 East Tunnel Air Pollution

Mr PETER DEBNAM (Vaucluse—Leader of the Opposition) [3.21 p.m.]: It is urgent that we debate public health. We are happy to go to the electorate on 24 March next year with a very simple question: Do you trust Labor? For clubs the answer is "No". That was evident at the last election and it will be evident in the run-up to the next election. The urgent issue today is the Premier's betrayal of the people of New South Wales, especially the hundreds of thousands of motorists who use the M5 East. From the documentation we made available it was very clear that when the Premier was the Minister for Health he was under pressure from his department to take action in the public interest. But what did he do? He did nothing. He rolled up his windows. He did not tell anybody about it, and that is the problem.

State governments have many Ministers, but only a couple of them are in absolutely critical positions. The No. 1 issue for the people of New South Wales is public safety, and the first responsibility for any government is public safety. Therefore the Minister for Police becomes important. But the person they entrust with great responsibility, the person they entrust to work on public health in the public interest, is the Minister for Health. That is why the Minister for Health in New South Wales has the power to force certain things, one of which is to force the Roads and Traffic Authority, or certainly the Minister, who at the time was the current Minister for Police, Carl Scully, to warn people and act in the public interest.

Ms Kristina Keneally: Point of order: The point of this debate is to establish why this matter is urgent. The member is debating the substantive points of his motion and not putting a case as to why his matter is urgent. I ask you to direct him to follow the standing orders of this House.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Although the purpose of this debate is to establish priority, the Leader of the Opposition may make passing references to the substance of his motion. At this stage he is in order.

Mr PETER DEBNAM: The motion is urgent because today is 28 March 2006. When the Premier was the Minister for Health he referred to a health report dated July 2003 and he received a memo from the Public Health Division dated 21 February 2005. One of the bullet points in the memo states, "New South Wales Health recommendations to notify the public about potential air pollution effects in road tunnels have not been implemented by RTA." That is advice to the former Minister for Health, Morris Iemma, saying that the former Minister for Roads, Carl Scully, had not done his job. It is urgent when, one year later, it still has not been done. It has been debated within the Labor Party while hundreds of thousands of motorists have been going through the poisoning tunnel every single day for the past year. Departmental staff of the former Minister for Health, Morris Iemma, were so concerned that a letter was drafted for him in these terms,

Dear Mr Scully,

I am writing to you concerning signage and warning about air pollution in road tunnels. The pollutant nitrogen dioxide is, at times, at a level representing a potential increased risk to sensitive people, such as those with asthma. Significantly higher concentrations of other toxic air pollutants, such as fine particles and benzene, are also found inside the tunnel compared to other places open to the general public.

Bear in mind that one year ago the letter refers to the need to put up signage and the need to warn the public. One year ago Labor's two most senior Ministers discussed this matter.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for East Hills will come to order.

Mr PETER DEBNAM: The letter continues:

This could be effectively implemented by placing advisory signage at the entrance to the road tunnels.

The fact is that the former Minister for Health, Morris Iemma, did not have the guts to force the former Minister for Roads, Carl Scully—who he thought would become Premier—to act in the public interest. [*Time expired.*]

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

The House divided.**Ayes, 51**

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

Noes, 37

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

Question resolved in the affirmative.**GAMING MACHINE TAX****Urgent Motion**

Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO (Penrith) [3.35 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) congratulates the Premier on negotiating new poker machine tax rates for New South Wales clubs;
- (2) notes that the agreement represents the fifth tax cut the Premier has delivered in just eight months;
- (3) supports this fair and responsible agreement, which does not compromise the Government's ability to expand essential services like health, education, policing and transport; and
- (4) condemns the Opposition for its continued scare campaign and attack on the clubs industry for reaching agreement with the Government.

When Morris Iemma became Premier eight months ago, he promised to listen to the New South Wales club movement's concerns about the poker machine taxation rates. He also promised that any decision on reducing poker machine taxation rates must be made in the context of delivering a responsible budget for the people of New South Wales. He made it clear that the Government's priorities are schools, hospitals, roads, policing, and community services. I am delighted that the Government has reached agreement with Clubs New South Wales

on a new taxation deal that is fair, affordable and reasonable. It balances the valuable social and economic contribution the club industry makes to New South Wales with its obligation to the community to pay a fair rate of tax.

Yesterday I spoke to representatives of most of the clubs in the Penrith electorate—the Emu Plains Sporting Club, the Nepean Rowing Club, the Penrith Bowling Club, the Penrith Leagues Club, the Kingswood Sports Club—and they are delighted with the arrangements. A meeting held at Club Paceway yesterday was attended by a representative from Penrith RSL, Carl Riley; a representative from Penrith Gael's Irish Club, Sue Denton; and a representative of Club Paceway, Lorraine Pozza. Carl Riley, the Secretary-Manager of Penrith RSL, said, "We know we have to pay tax but this deal between Clubs New South Wales and the Government is good, we can move forward." The Penrith Gael's Irish Club representative, Sue Denton, said it was a great day for clubs and the Government. The representative of Club Paceway, Lorraine Pozza, said, "All parts of the MOU are good." [*Quorum formed.*]

As I was saying, I met with some of the Penrith clubs. They were delighted with the arrangements. Lorraine Pozza from Club Paceway said, "All parts of the MOU are good, especially because we contribute to the community beyond our CDSE." This evident link between the clubs and the community is manifested in important ways. Two Sundays ago the Penrith Gael's Irish club held a children's disco in the Jim Anderson Room. As my Government colleagues and the sole Opposition member who is present in the Chamber would know, the late Jim Anderson was the parliamentary representative for Londonderry for many years. The room was named in his honour to reflect his tireless dedication to his community. The club held a community event above and beyond its Community Development Support Expenditure Scheme contribution: it helped the Relay For Life organising committee host a children's disco to support the Cancer Council of New South Wales.

The Penrith RSL supports 17 intra-clubs, ranging from netball, soccer, photography and euchre to travel. The Penrith RSL netball club has been facilitating netball for a number of years and is very successful, and I commend the organisers of the club. I also commend the soccer club. The Penrith RSL supports not only those intra-clubs but also the RSL sub-branch. Clive Connor is its Chair and Laurie Tucker is the Secretary. I also note that the Penrith Woman of the Year, Pat Tucker, is the secretary of the Penrith RSL women's sub-branch. She should be commended for her unsung, quiet work behind the scenes for her group. The RSL also supported the Naval Association conference that was held there. I helped with the certificates for the post-World War II service personnel at the Macquarie room. Those certificates were well received.

The clubs are pleased with the arrangements because they provide certainty to their members and workers, to the charitable, sporting and social groups they support, and to the businesses that rely on the clubs for much of their trade. Importantly, the Premier's agreement with Clubs New South Wales increases the tax-free threshold to \$1 million, a fivefold increase from the existing \$200,000 threshold. This will completely exempt hundreds of small community clubs, such as the Penrith Golf Club and Dunheved Golf Club, from State gaming machine taxes.

There is also substantial relief for clubs of all sizes in future years. We have done this at half the cost of the irresponsible, unachievable proposal from the member for Vacluse. That is another of his unaffordable promises that would put the wrecking ball through the State's economy. The Premier's negotiations with Clubs New South Wales were extensive and detailed, but the final result shows what can be achieved when you work hard and maintain goodwill to find a reasonable outcome. This outcome is balanced, fair and, above all, affordable. Clubs receiving less than \$1 million in gaming revenue will pay no poker machine tax. Other clubs will receive a substantial ongoing reduction in the amount of tax they pay. Overall these measures mean that 60 per cent of clubs will pay no tax and 40 per cent will pay less tax.

The New South Wales Government wants to ensure the ongoing viability of our vibrant club industry while providing practical solutions to improve our infrastructure and deliver better services and more nurses, teachers and police. This task is made all the more difficult when we are cheated out of \$2 billion of GST revenue each year. The member for Vacluse's approach to these challenges is to irresponsibly over-commit to every special interest group that knocks on his door and promise billions of dollars to buy votes around the State. These are pie-in-the-sky promises that Peter Debnam will not and cannot keep. The Premier told us yesterday that he would personally examine the impact of the tax increases. As Clubs New South Wales chief executive David Costello said yesterday, this agreement shows once again that Morris Iemma is a man of his word and he has delivered on his promise.

Mr GEORGE SOURIS (Upper Hunter) [3.43 p.m.]: Well may the Labor Party put up the member for Penrith to defend the indefensible. She is the most vulnerable member of this Parliament in terms of the clubs movement. One thing will happen very shortly: in September 2006—

[Interruption]

Mr Gerard Martin: Where is your support over there, George?

Mr GEORGE SOURIS: Mr Deputy Speaker, if this is going to go on for 10 minutes it will be quite unparliamentary. The next thing that will happen to clubs in New South Wales is they will get another tax hike out of the ALP in September, just a few months from now. There is a further tax hike to go: one more year, one more step prior to the next election. A great and glorious deal by the ALP, but come September the Government will lose the clubs again. The Government thinks it has bought peace with the clubs movement until the next election. Then it will dud them straight after the election. Labor did it last time and it will do it again next time. Last time the Government promised them consultation.

Mr Peter Black: You finally said something right. We are going to get elected.

Mr GEORGE SOURIS: Mr Deputy Speaker, the honourable member for Murray-Darling should be brought under control if he cannot exert it on himself. The honourable member for Bathurst ought to grow up. He is supposed to be the Parliamentary Labor Whip and he is nothing more than a child. I do not know that anyone could be proud of him.

Mr DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! Members of the Opposition will control themselves.

Mr GEORGE SOURIS: Labor intends, if it wins the next election, to dud the clubs straight away. The question today is: would you trust Labor? Even in its press release the Government indicates there will be legislation, as if to create an aura that this will be supported, unchallengeable, and fixed in blood. Of course there will be legislation. It is called the budget. That is where the damage was done in 2003 and I presume this deal will be put in place in the next budget. The legislation people should worry about, should Labor win the next election, is that which will be introduced in May 2007. That is when the dudding will occur.

When the Coalition announced its memorandum of understanding with the clubs it also included in principle a replication for the hotel movement. I have not heard a thing about the plight of hotels, which are equally struck by the pernicious taxation regime being imposed by the Labor Party. Labor's record prior to 1999 was an attempt to calm the clubs down after an acrimonious battle in 1998-99 when the Labor Party again tried to increase taxes on clubs. It had to back down but it promised consultation. Ask former member Pat Rogan what he thought about the consultation. Michael Egan told Pat Rogan the night before the budget that that was their consultation and they could wait until the next day to find out what the rates would be. The Egan-Carr-Iemma era is one of abuse, vitriol and bad faith towards clubs. One has only to look at section 41X of the amending legislation to see exactly the sort of venom that the ALP is prepared to invoke in the seat of Penrith against the Penrith Panthers Rugby League Club. Ask anyone associated with the rugby league club what ALP stands for and they will tell you.

I am not surprised that I have received correspondence from a director of the Hexham Bowling Club, Mr Alan Mitchell. Mr Mitchell has been faithfully voting Labor at State and Federal levels for 37 years and so has his wife. His son will be a first-time voter at the next State election. Mr Mitchell will never vote Labor again. He has told me this in writing and has happily allowed me to use his name in this debate to show members opposite how Labor has destroyed its former heartland over the past three years.

It was the Coalition's memorandum of understanding and the impact it was having on 2.5 million members of registered clubs that brought the Government to its knees over club taxes. It was the Coalition that delivered this relief for the hotels and clubs, not the ALP. The ALP's position remains inferior to that of the Coalition. The Coalition's position is to fix the rates at 2005; the ALP's position is to fix the rates at 2006, a whole year more. The big question is: would you trust them to hold to that position after the election if they are re-elected? Members opposite broke the faith with the clubs movement in New South Wales. They lost their votes long ago.

Clubs hate members of the Australian Labor Party. Many other lifetime Labor supporters believe that they abandoned their principles of support for ordinary hard-working Australians when they scuttled off in pursuit of the intellectual snobs in our society—the chardonnay set and the glitterati of big business—and pandered to big unions. That is what the Labor Party is all about; it is not what ordinary people, the millions of registered club members in New South Wales, are about. Members of the Labor Party forgot long ago the hopes and aspirations of millions of club members and their families.

The Labor Party has already damaged clubs, and club members will not forget it. When the tax goes up again in September its impact on clubs will continue, resulting in job losses, closures of clubs and a loss of community contributions for charities and sport. Food prices will go up and there will be a deferral of capital works for club member amenities. Members of the Labor Party did not make that decision; we all know that Mark Arbib, the big hand at Labor headquarters holding up their jelly backs, told them what damage had been done to their so-called, taken-for-granted Labor heartland, which comprises the electorates of Tweed, Monaro, Dubbo, Tamworth, The Entrance, Parramatta, Murray-Darling, Penrith, Miranda, Menai, Heathcote and many other electorates.

Mr Gerard Martin: Point of order: I remind the honourable member, who is talking about Labor losing its heartland, that he has cut his margin by 300 per cent.

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

Mr GERARD MARTIN (Bathurst) [3.51 p.m.]: Welcome, Mr Deputy-Speaker. It is good to see you back in the chair. The honourable member for Upper Hunter, who led in debate on this urgent motion, looks with disdain at clubs. He would not go in and rub shoulders with members of the working class; that is not his cup of tea at all. Opposition members are clearly out of touch with industry and community reaction to yesterday's announcement. They are continuing a pointless scare campaign instead of recognising the hard work that has been put into these negotiations by members on both sides of this Chamber. They should stand up for our clubs and oppose the Federal Government's decision to remove the tax-free status of South Sydney Junior Rugby League Club.

What are Opposition members prepared to do about that? That decision could have terrible ramifications for thousands of sporting clubs, the bowling club in Blayney and smaller clubs throughout my electorate. Yesterday, as clubs across New South Wales marked the agreement between Clubs New South Wales and the Iemma Government, a Federal bureaucracy poured cold water on their celebrations. It is a matter of utmost urgency that this House recognise and congratulate the clubs movement and the Iemma Government on reaching this accord. It is important that we place on the parliamentary record the real and lasting benefits of this agreement—an agreement delivered by our Premier who is a man of his word.

In the Central West, Orana and Lachlan regions we have clubs such as the Orange Ex-Services Club, which will pay no poker machine tax under the agreement announced yesterday. The clubs industry has welcomed this agreement. Today Mr Guy Chapman, Assistant General Manager of the Orange Ex-Services Club, told the *Central Western Daily*:

We are very happy with the situation ... this means we're no longer facing the prospect of local jobs being lost, and it means our money stays here in Orange to help the Orange community.

As the honourable member for Penrith said earlier, 60 per cent of clubs will pay no tax. Narromine Bowling Club, Deniliquin Golf Club, Batlow RSL, Lithgow City Bowling Club, which is now known as Club Lithgow, and bigger clubs will pay no tax. The other 40 per cent of clubs with poker machine profits of more than \$1 million will receive substantial tax relief. Throughout debate on this motion Opposition members have promised everything to everyone. The Leader of the Opposition said from day one that there would be no further tax hikes, but on the other side of the ledger Opposition members are spending billions of dollars.

If we look at the history of the club movement in this State we find that it has one political friend, that is, the Labor Party. After going back to the commencement of the club movement I established that the oldest registered club in New South Wales is the Lithgow and District Workmen's Club, which is located in my electorate. I am a proud member of that club which was established in 1889 and which does a magnificent job.

Mr DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Upper Hunter will resume his seat.

Mr GERARD MARTIN: The honourable member for Upper Hunter would have nothing in common with that club.

Mr DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Upper Hunter has had an opportunity to speak in the debate.

Mr GERARD MARTIN: Opposition members have done the begging for the big end of town. They are not concerned about the impact of this tax on the club movement. Has the honourable member for Upper

Hunter ever been to Gulgong or visited his electorate recently? He is a laughing stock in his electorate. He never visits his electorate, let alone the clubs located in it. Every time I visit his electorate members of the community ask, "George who?" My electorate shares a common border with the electorate of Upper Hunter. No-one in the town of Kandos, which used to be located in the electorate of the honourable member for Upper Hunter, remembers him.

Mr DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Upper Hunter will resume his seat.

Mr GERARD MARTIN: Do honourable members remember the Mudgee small field days last year when George was caught skulking into town? He drove around the corner, had a cup of tea and whizzed off when members of the community wanted to welcome him. When he was torpedoed by a journalist he was highly embarrassed and said, "I really just drove in and out. There did not seem to be any problems." He did not want to be seen and, more importantly, he did not want to do any work. I am not sure what is his favourite club, but I bet it is in the eastern suburbs of Sydney. It might be the University Club, but it certainly would not be the Lithgow and District Workmen's Club or one of the local clubs where people work for their community. The honourable member for Upper Hunter and a long list of former Leaders of the National Party are snobs who have nothing in common with the club movement.

Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [3.56 p.m.]: Mr Deputy-Speaker, welcome back. I support my Opposition colleagues in opposing this urgent motion. Government members had the appalling gall to state that they have solved the problems of clubs when for many years they have neglected clubs and the communities that support them, certainly for as long as I have been a member of Parliament. What an appalling backflip! Government members had the gall to state that Opposition members had not done their job and addressed the concerns of these clubs. Opposition members have referred on a daily basis to the problems that clubs are encountering.

I want the Government to answer this question: Where did it get the money to implement its policy when it has a budget black hole? I have a number of strong clubs in my electorate. The Hornsby RSL, a proud club that is 50 years old, is worried about the effects of this unfair tax on its activities. I met with Colin Bourke, the club president, and his executive and I have discussed these issues with them. That club selflessly collected money to donate to the victims of the tsunami; it has given money to sports clubs; and it has let out its rooms for nothing, and all for good causes. The same thing applies to Berowra RSL, Asquith Rugby League Club, Asquith Golf Club and Asquith Bowling Club.

All those clubs are under threat as a result of the policies of this spineless Government, which has not been able to overturn the policy of the former Carr Government and former Treasurer Michael Egan, both of whom are no longer members of this Parliament. The Government suddenly reinvented its policy, did a backflip, blamed all these problems on the Opposition and said that no blame could be attributed to it. This spineless, lazy Government deserves to be thrown out on its ear next year. What an appalling display! I am shocked, horrified and alarmed at the garbage that has been spoken by Government members, who are panicking.

Community members who use their clubs and sporting facilities and who participate in cultural activities have this Government's number. Members of the Coalition are friends of the clubs and the clubs are friends of the Coalition. Today the Government implemented this agreement but after the tax hike in September it will do another backflip. I hope that after the next election members opposite are no longer able to perform any backflips. I hope that they will be on the opposition benches and the new Coalition government will be implementing its good policies. This Government was dragged kicking and screaming to make these changes because many Labor electorates are vulnerable. It is too little, too late. It is not good enough. It is policy on the run. It is a patchwork policy that will not make any difference to the opinion that the New South Wales people have of this Government.

The Opposition and the community are scared of what the Government will do next. Look at Labor's polling numbers. They are going down the gurgler—as they should. How many clubs have closed as a result of this tax? Who has been deprived of services—and many people have been? Clubs in my electorate have come to me in distress and alarm. They received community requests for money and assistance and, for the first time, they had to say no. They could no longer help all those whom they used to assist because the Government has dropped the ball. It failed to recognise the community concern and appreciate the urgent need to turn the policy around. That should have happened before today.

Clubs in my area were happy to sign the memorandum of understanding because they could see that the Coalition cares about clubs. Opposition members attended the two rallies held by the clubs movement. Father

Chris Riley spoke out against the tax a couple of years ago, when the Government created this mess. But the Government took no notice even of people of the calibre of Father Chris Riley, who called on Labor to support his Youth Off The Streets project and many others like it. Father Chris Riley stood outside Governor Macquarie Tower and told the Government not to do this to the New South Wales community. But the Government went ahead and introduced the gaming machine tax. Labor was deaf to the needs of the community and of the clubs and it deserves everything that comes its way in March next year.

Mr NEVILLE NEWELL (Tweed—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.01 p.m.]: I am very proud to join my colleagues the honourable member for Penrith and the honourable member for Bathurst in debating this urgent motion. I congratulate the Premier, as the motion does, on negotiating the new poker machine tax rates for clubs in New South Wales. The agreement reached between the New South Wales clubs movement and the New South Wales Government represents the fifth tax cut delivered by Premier Iemma in just eight months. A few weeks ago I had the pleasure of drawing to the attention of the House the overwhelmingly positive community and business response to the Premier's payroll incentive tax package for the North Coast. Boy, was that well received! Today I can report to the House that this latest tax cut has received a similar response on the North Coast. Page 7 of today's edition of the *Northern Star* carries the headline, "Pokie tax deal is a winner, says Ballina RSL". The accompanying article states:

"The State Government and ClubsNSW's new deal on poker machine taxes is a significant win for the Ballina RSL Club", general manager Bill Coulter, said yesterday.

I look forward to hearing the honourable member for Ballina and the honourable member for Lismore, whose electorate is not far from Ballina, also applauding the new agreement. I welcome the good news for North Coast clubs on behalf of members opposite, who seem to be a bit shy about doing so. Under the new agreement clubs such as Bellingen RSL Country Club and Ocean Shores Country Club will pay no tax.

Mr Thomas George: You're the member for Tweed. What do the clubs there say?

Mr NEVILLE NEWELL: I am moving up the coast geographically to the top seat in New South Wales. I am about to get to the Tweed. This is thanks to a very fair and responsible agreement that will provide tax relief for clubs into the future without compromising our ability to expand essential services and provide practical solutions for community needs in areas such as health, education and policing. This agreement is the culmination of hard work and dedication on both sides. I acknowledge the work of Clubs New South Wales in returning to the table to work towards achieving agreement. Those opposite are a bit annoyed about this agreement because they wanted this little dispute to continue for quite some time. They are upset that the Premier has gazumped them.

Let us consider the clubs in the electorate of the honourable member for Upper Hunter that will benefit as a result of this agreement. Clubs such as the Scone Bowling Club, Muswellbrook Golf Club and Murrurundi Bowling Club will be subject to no tax under this agreement. What did the shadow Minister say about that? We heard only his usual carping and whingeing. Unfortunately, that is the sort of out-of-touch attitude that we have come to expect from Opposition members.

Mr Thomas George: Name the Lismore clubs.

Mr NEVILLE NEWELL: We will get there.

Mr DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! Opposition members will allow the honourable member for Tweed to speak.

Mr NEVILLE NEWELL: Let us go right to the top to the Twin Towns Services Club. The newspaper carried the headline, "Tweed clubs welcome jobs certainty"—because that is what this announcement means. Why would they not? After all, Twin Towns is one of the biggest employers in the area and I am delighted that this agreement has been reached. The 10 per cent reduction from 2011 on represents a saving of \$2.5 million per year for Twin Towns. I am delighted that that money will stay in the Tweed economy. The club's commitment to the local community through community development support expenditure funding will continue—as it would have continued under the previous arrangement. The \$2.5 million that Twin Towns will save will be invested in the club industry through entertainment and members' benefits. Twin Towns is the biggest club in my electorate. Let us step down to smaller clubs such as Tweed Heads Bowls Club and Seagulls leagues club. They will benefit by more than \$1 million under this agreement. That money will stay in their pockets and be invested in the local economy. I know that Opposition members will be happy about that, although it does not help them politically. [*Time expired.*]

Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO (Penrith) [4.06 p.m.], in reply: I thank the honourable member for Bathurst, the honourable member for Tweed and those Opposition members who have contributed to the debate this afternoon. I listened with interest to the speech of the honourable member for Upper Hunter. The agreement from the other side was unfunded, unfounded and unreasonable. It would have sent a wrecking ball through the New South Wales economy. I alluded to the impact of this new agreement on clubs in the Penrith area. Penrith RSL will have an 11 per cent reduction in taxes. I say to the honourable member for Hornsby: In this place we need actions rather than emotions. This is a new Premier, a new Government, a new direction and a new agreement. The community does not want "I" and "me" statements; it wants to hear statements from its elected members that consider community needs.

I have outlined the clubs' contributions to the community on numerous occasions in private member's statements, and again today. The Gaels club supports not only the Relay For Life but people in the community learning Irish dancing and the Gaelic language. Glenbrook Bowling Club supports its ladies' and men's bowling teams. The Penrith Nepean Rowing Club supports its teams and their commitments at rowing championships. The honourable member for Upper Hunter referred to scaremongering and taxation changes. I hope that he was not alluding to the decision by the Administrative Appeals Tribunal regarding Souths Juniors. The withdrawal of that club's Federal tax-free threshold could have major ramifications for clubs in New South Wales. On a day when Premier Iemma—who is a man of his word—is delivering on a promise, the Federal Government is putting a New South Wales club at risk.

For the benefit of members opposite, I will speak very slowly. Clubs New South Wales and the New South Wales Government have settled the long-running negotiation about the poker machines tax. What does this mean? It means more than half of New South Wales clubs will pay no State tax and the zero tax threshold will rise from \$200,000 to \$1 million. Today the people at Penrith Golf Club and Dunheved Golf Club are extremely happy. From 1 September 2007 every single club will be better off under the new agreement. New gaming tax rates will apply to poker machine revenue in clubs between 2006 and 2011-12. The agreement balances the valuable social and economic contributions the club industry makes to New South Wales and its obligation to pay a fair rate of tax. The agreement is about the obligation of the club industry to pay a fair rate of tax. It is a fair and reasonable agreement that provides tax relief for clubs in future years without compromising the Government's ability to expand essential services, such as health, education, policing and transport.

From day one the Iemma Government has listened to the case put by clubs and objectively reviewed their proposals. This outcome provides certainty for clubs, their members, the charitable and social groups they support and the businesses that rely on them for much of their trade. Importantly, hundreds of smaller community clubs, which are often those in rural and regional areas, will not be liable to pay State-based gaming tax under the new tax scale. I also remind honourable members that Clubs New South Wales Chairman, Peter Newell, said yesterday:

The revised tax increases afford clubs a degree of financial security which allows them to continue providing and supporting the community as they have always done.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 49

Ms Allan	Mr Gibson	Mr Orkopoulos
Mr Amery	Mr Greene	Mrs Paluzzano
Ms Andrews	Ms Hay	Mr Pearce
Mr Bartlett	Mr Hickey	Mrs Perry
Ms Beamer	Mr Hunter	Mr Price
Mr Black	Ms Judge	Ms Saliba
Mr Brown	Ms Keneally	Mr Sartor
Miss Burton	Mr Lynch	Mr Shearan
Mr Campbell	Mr McBride	Mr Stewart
Mr Chaytor	Mr McLeay	Ms Tebbutt
Mr Collier	Mr McTaggart	Mr Tripodi
Mr Corrigan	Ms Meagher	Mr Watkins
Mr Crittenden	Ms Megarrity	Mr Yeadon
Ms D'Amore	Mr Mills	
Mr Daley	Mr Morris	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Debus	Mr Newell	Mr Ashton
Mr Gaudry	Ms Nori	Mr Martin

Noes, 33

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

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

LOCAL COUNCILS RATE PEGGING**Matter of Public Importance**

Mr KERRY HICKEY (Cessnock—Minister for Local Government) [4.20 p.m.]: I ask the House to note as a matter of public importance the Opposition's policy on rate pegging. The people of New South Wales deserve to know what impact the Opposition's policy will have on their council rates and what it will do to their family budgets. Rate pegging was introduced by the Wran Labor Government in 1976, and it has been the policy of the New South Wales government of the day ever since. It is not surprising that this law has had widespread support from the families, small businesses and farmers of New South Wales.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: We have paid for it.

Mr KERRY HICKEY: The honourable member's interjection verifies that he does not support rate pegging. That seems to be the common theme of The Nationals on this policy, even though for the past 30 years rate pegging has protected the people of New South Wales from large rate increases. The Government also monitors councils to make sure that communities get the quality of service they deserve in the most effective and efficient ways possible. That is done by checking that councils are complying with the law and by working with them to improve their performance, so that in the end communities get better services.

A key part of the Government's monitoring of councils is the rate pegging cap, or limit, which is the maximum percentage by which councils can increase their income from ordinary rates in any one year. Councils have the power to set the level of rates on individual properties in line with local needs and with the Local Government Act, which requires that rates that councils set must be fair and equitable. The law caps the income that councils get from rates paid by any one community. Across New South Wales income from rates and annual charges represents about 47 per cent of total ordinary council revenue. However, that figure tends to be higher in metropolitan areas. Rates are mainly based on land values and are assessed by the Valuer General. That framework allows councils to set rates that reflect local circumstances, as well as the community's ability to pay and the level of services received by the landowner.

Councils are required to advertise the rates proposed for the next year in their draft management plans. Ratepayers can look at the draft plans and provide comments to their council, which must consider those comments when setting rates. The Iemma Labor Government is committed to the rate pegging limit, because communities can only pay so much and councils are able to get income from other areas. We do not shy away from our policy of making councils responsible and accountable to their communities. It is what people expect and deserve.

Councils must be accountable to their ratepayers for the impact that their rates policies will have on individual landowners. That is in line with our overall approach to local government in New South Wales: helping councils to improve accountability and services to their communities while monitoring overall council performance. The rate pegging limit does not apply to income from water and sewerage rates and charges or to

waste charges, which includes domestic waste. There are provisions that permit councils to levy special rates and annual charges for particular works and services such as water, sewer, waste and drainage. That is the policy the Government has in place to protect the ratepayers of this State.

People should be aware that the Opposition's policy is to review rate pegging, a measure that has enormous support and one that has served our communities extremely well. That so-called review calls into question the current oversight of council operations. Why would you review something that the community supports? The well-proven policy of rate pegging is in danger. We do not want to go back to the bad old days of councils setting their own rates without any consultation with the community or consideration of ratepayers' capacity to pay. Already the Opposition spendometer has reached \$22 billion in unfunded promises—except this time they propose spending ratepayers money and putting the rate pegging safety net in jeopardy.

Mr John Turner: Don't verbal me.

Mr KERRY HICKEY: Coalition members would say anything and spend anything to get elected. It depends on which interest group they are talking to. In National Party heartland at Urana, in a room full of councillors, they said they will get rid of cost shifting, review rate pegging and generally promise councils whatever they want, with reckless abandon. Ratepayers want the Opposition to come clean, put forward its policies and tell ratepayers what it will do. When they write letters to me on behalf of constituents, members of the Opposition want investigations of council operations and tighter controls on council functions. That is from the top of The Nationals at the State level. That is a role the Department of Local Government plays in investigating performance and high levels of community complaints about councils. Each and every year the department deals with a huge number of requests just like that. It also checks all 152 New South Wales councils' annual reports to make sure they comply with the Act. There is also a lot of support in communities for the Government's Promoting Better Practice reviews to check the health and performance of councils. The Coalition's plans to remove rate pegging are hard to believe, as is what has come from the honourable member for Myall Lakes.

Mr John Turner: Don't verbal me.

Mr KERRY HICKEY: As usual, he has no ideas, no plans and no details. The inexperience is showing. The time he has spent sitting on the Opposition benches is showing. It is not that long ago that the former Leader of the Opposition, John Brogden, said at a shires annual conference that the Opposition would de-amalgamate councils. That policy is still on the books. I have news for The Nationals: the way forward is not backwards. Their policy to de-amalgamate councils would cost ratepayers double for the same thing. It is not hard to imagine what members of the Coalition will say to their communities: they will say whatever they think the community wants to hear. But they have got it wrong this time. Right across New South Wales people support rate pegging. It gives them the certainty that their rates will not increase dramatically, on a whim. I believe The Nationals generally would sell their grandmothers if they thought that would get them elected.

The Opposition's promise to review rate pegging is irresponsible, careless and lacks foresight. It smells like something that they have cooked up on the run: a greasy attempt to get support from councillors without thinking of the impact on ratepayers. In fact, The Nationals did not even announce the policy, because it was designed to curry favour with The Nationals councillors and not for general release. The Shires Association—not The Nationals—had to break the news to the rest of local government across New South Wales by issuing a press release. The other part of the ill-conceived promise is to take away the Minister's power to approve special rate variations.

Mr John Turner: Read the speech!

Mr KERRY HICKEY: That is an absolute absurdity. They want to put a tier of bureaucracy between the Minister and the applicants. That is quite bizarre.

Mr John Turner: Wrong! Go back and do your homework.

Mr KERRY HICKEY: The honourable member for Myall Lakes interjects, when he himself has stated that he wants to put another tier of bureaucracy between him—if he were to be Minister—and rate applicants. What would that achieve? He does not even know the composition of the board. He has said that the board will be made up of representatives of the Shires Association, a senior general manager, a representative of the ratepayers or residents association, and three independent persons with extensive business experience.

Mr John Turner: Wrong!

Mr KERRY HICKEY: Those are your words. They are trying to hide their ineptitude and inexperience. They could not make a decision if their lives depended upon it.

Mr DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Myall Lakes will have an opportunity to contribute to the debate in a few moments.

Mr KERRY HICKEY: It is sad that members of the Opposition put out press releases and put things forward through the Shires Association but will not defend in this place what they have proposed, which is to have a board between the Minister and councils making the applications for rate increases. On the board they want representatives of the Shires Association, a senior general manager and persons with extensive business experience. The bottom line is that the honourable member for Myall Lakes does not care one iota about the ratepayer. He is talking to councillors, believing that no-one will hear. He should have the decency to come into this House and tell the truth. Ratepayers across New South Wales know that it is clear that the Coalition plans to implement massive rate hikes that will have such an impact on family budgets that people will be unable to pay their rates. The proposal to set up a board to consider rate variations over which the Minister will have no control is ill conceived and totally wrong. The Opposition spokesperson for local government should come clean in this forum. [*Time expired.*]

Mr JOHN TURNER (Myall Lakes) [4.30 p.m.]: Verballing is an offence, and if the Minister were outside the Chamber he would be guilty of that offence. Obviously he has a copy of the speech that I delivered around the countryside, but he does not have the ability to understand it. I suggest that he go back to school and do his reading homework so that he can understand the speech, which I made in public forums all over the State in places such as Broken Hill, Urana and Casino. I said clearly that the Opposition would have an inquiry into rate pegging, but I said also that we might retain rate pegging. I said that there would be a board and that it could be made up of certain people.

Mr Kerry Hickey: Why have an inquiry?

Mr JOHN TURNER: I will get to the inquiry. In the same paragraph of the speech I said that the Minister probably would have a prerogative to determine increases. In 1975, 31 years ago, Mr Jensen, the Labor Party Minister for Local Government, introduced the Local Government (Rating) Further Amendment Bill. If the Minister wants to live in the past, that is fine, but I do not. In his second reading speech Mr Jensen said that there would be an inquiry into rate pegging after the implementation of the bill. Perhaps we will implement Labor Party policy, which is to have an inquiry into rate pegging. Don't come the raw prawn with me about doing away with rate pegging! We have said that we will have an inquiry. The Minister was all over the shop when he spoke about rate pegging, which has been in force for 31 years. It is time to re-evaluate it; it may stay or it may go. We certainly will not live in the past, like the Minister and the Government. We have written in public documents and said around the State that we will examine the Local Government Act, which we introduced in 1993.

The arrogance of the Minister is unbelievable. He has travelled around the countryside belittling councils—and he came from a council. Some 42 members of this House come from councils. By belittling councils he is belittling those on his own side who came from councils. We make no bones about it: We will work with councils and local communities. I reiterate that I have not said that we will remove rate pegging—the Minister verballing me. I said that we would have an inquiry. It may come to pass that rate pegging could be retained but we certainly want to have a look at the concept.

If we want to talk about abandoning rate pegging we will have to think about what the Minister has done. First of all he big-noted himself by saying around the countryside, "This is my telephone number, ring me and my staff will answer—not me—feel free to do it." He said also, "Please come to talk to me at any time about any increase over the pegged amount." Then he said, "I will look at anything under 10 per cent, I will not look at double-digit figures." Clearly that is code for abandoning rate pegging. Last year 50 councils sought to have their rates varied above the pegged amount. The Minister is now saying via press release, phone calls, public utterances and conferences, "Come and see me and I will look at it clearly and concisely." We will now have rate pegging of about 9.9 per cent, not 3.6 per cent, because the Minister has indicated clearly that he is prepared to increase it over and above the pegged rate.

Mr Kerry Hickey: Point of order: My point of order is relevance. It is clear that the honourable member for Myall Lakes has introduced absolute absurdities. He is talking about my verballing him. He is misrepresenting the truth.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills): Order! There is no point of order. The remarks of the honourable member for Myall Lakes are relevant. I remind the Minister that he has a right of reply.

Mr JOHN TURNER: The Minister should know the rules of his House. Goodness me! It is his debate on rate pegging, and I am talking about rate pegging. I suspect that quite a few councils will want to increase their rates by 9.9 per cent, and because the Minister has big-noted himself around the country he probably will be forced into acceding to the increases. He is starting to move away from rate pegging. He referred to amalgamation. If, in the worst case scenario, the Government is returned at the next election it will force councils to amalgamate all over the State. The Minister referred to the role of councils. Why has he been so deadly silent on the grab for power by Frank Sartor, the Minister for Planning? We have not heard him defend the right of councils to retain their planning powers. I can only suspect that he agrees with the Minister and that he is happy for councils to lose those powers. If that were to happen I suppose the Minister would say, "You do not need as much in rates because you will not have to pay for all the planners and other ancillary workers."

We have not heard one thing from the Minister on the legislation introduced by the Minister for Planning. This morning local government representatives demonstrated out the front of Parliament House, but I did not see the Minister out there defending the Government's legislation to take planning powers away from them. We need to know where the Minister stands. I invite him to tell us in his reply whether he will stand up to the Minister for Planning and tell him to withdraw the legislation that will take planning powers away from local councils. If the legislation is successful councils will be all but stripped of their powers. Yet the Minister is sitting by idly while in conferences he says, "Speak to me, give me a ring and I will fix it for you."

Mr Kerry Hickey: Point of order: I ask you to bring the honourable member for Myall Lakes back to the issue. At no stage did I speak about planning issues. This matter of public importance is about rate pegging; it has nothing to do with planning. The honourable member should be brought back to the detail of the matter, which is rate pegging.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills): Order! I remind the Minister that the honourable member for Myall Lakes is allowed to draw matters such as planning into his contribution if they are relevant to rate pegging. At this stage he is in order.

Mr JOHN TURNER: The Minister's point of order indicates clearly that he fully supports the Minister for Planning in his unilateral grab to take planning powers away from councils. Surveys show that the community, not only councils, overwhelmingly condemns the Government for its attempt to remove those planning powers. The record will show that the Minister for Local Government has not said that he would stand up for the community or local government and tell the Minister for Planning to back off on his grab of planning powers from councils.

Clearly, the Minister submitted this matter of public importance because he is starting to hurt. He is the butt of jokes in the local government community all over the countryside, which has condemned his condescending and arrogant approach. He is telling people to do their homework, to go back to school to learn how to read balance sheets and to learn how to chair meetings. His rhetoric has gone down like a lead balloon. He is trying to restore some relevance to it, but I can repeat unequivocally that the Coalition makes no apologies for saying it will have an inquiry into rate pegging. Thirty-one years of a system of rate pegging is long enough. In Government, the Coalition will examine the system's efficacy. I also point out that, after examination of the issues, it may well be that rate pegging will remain, but the Coalition is determined to examine the issues: it would be irresponsible not to do so.

No other State in Australia has rate pegging. The system has operated in New South Wales for 31 years and it is time for rate pegging and local government generally to be examined. I am sure that the overwhelming majority of the community would accept that perhaps a better deal is possible and that there may be a better way to create equity between councils and the ratepayers. We will not know that unless we have an inquiry. The Coalition will examine the issues and if the inquiry shows that the present system of rate pegging has some efficiencies, we will retain it, but in government the Coalition will not adopt a head-in-the-sand attitude of the type that prevails in the current Government and that is so evident in the current Minister in relation rate pegging.

Mr ALLAN SHEARAN (Londonderry) [4.40 p.m.]: I support the Minister's approach to rate pegging. No-one likes taxes, and some of us explore all options to avoid taxes. However, governments at all levels have a responsibility to deliver the infrastructure and services that are expected by the community. Inherent in the

community's expectation is the assumption that the responsibilities will be exercised in an appropriate way. It is for this reason that rate pegging was originally introduced—as a way of preventing outrageous increases from occurring. I illustrate the point by reference to a current proposal by Hawkesbury City Council to increase rates by 43 per cent over four years. This is a proposal by a council that has been described as being in a satisfactory financial position. The council has accrued operating surpluses above capital expenditure items for at least the past five years and has negligible debt, yet is seeking approval for a massive increase of 43 per cent over four years.

What has happened to that council? After the recent election, five new councillors were elected and no doubt these councillors want the best for their constituency. However, they have embarked on a program to fix what they claim are infrastructure problems. One can forgive the exuberance of new councillors, but one cannot accept their desire to inflict financial mismanagement and inappropriate demands on ratepayers—the very people they are supposed to represent. The question of what is fair and equitable must be considered. The Act certainly specifies fairness and equity as a fundamental criterion. The approach adopted by Mayor Mark Bassett and his supporting councillors is to ignore what the ratepayers are saying and proceed with a massive rates hike. Mayor Bassett embarked on a community consultation program for consideration of the proposal by ratepayers. The proposal had two options, but both involved significant rate increases. Honourable members will note that there was no proposal for having no rate increases at all.

During the consultation the five councillors, led by Mayor Bassett, held a press conference to blame their current predicament on other councillor colleagues and on those who had served on previous councils. They wanted to place on the public record that the rate increases were not their fault. In the *Hawkesbury Gazette* of 8 February 2006 Mayor Bassett said that he and his team of four councillors had broken ranks with their colleagues to express their frustration at the inaction of former councillors in dealing with the council's revenue base. However, later in the article that claim was disputed by his Liberal colleague, councillor Conolly, who said there were no general rate increases recommended by staff in the last term of the council. The pattern is similar to the one adopted by members opposite: a pattern of conflict and infighting.

The results of the blame shifting have not stopped there. Other than accepting responsibility for efficient, co-operative and effective financial management, Mayor Bassett continues to blame everyone except himself and his team of four councillors. In the farce that was supposed to be community consultation, approximately 800 people responded to the community consultation options. Not surprisingly, 70 per cent rejected Mayor Bassett's call for the 43 per cent hike, but what did the majority of his merry councillors do? They voted in support of the massive increases.

In response to an approach made by an independent group of residents in the Hawkesbury known as the Hawkesbury Council Watch, I arranged a meeting with Minister Hickey to enable the group to express its concerns about the actions of the council. To be fair, I also arranged for the mayor, one of the councillors and two officers to meet with the Minister to outline their approach. The outcomes of those meetings did not change my stance. In fact I learnt that an 8.5 per cent environmental levy has also been imposed on the ratepayers of the Hawkesbury, and it still has another couple of years to run. On top of the first year's increase of 14 per cent, if the rates increase is approved in the next financial year there will be a 22.5 per cent increase in rates.

Moreover, during our meeting with the Minister, Mayor Bassett was asked whether he attended the Local Government Conference late last year, and he indicated that he had, and he acknowledged that the Minister alerted councillors to the fact that he would not be encouraging above double digit rate increases. Despite that and several forms of notice of the Minister's attitude, the mayor proceeded with the increase. The Minister also stated on the record that any increase above rate pegging would have to be the subject a business plan, community consultation and support, and minimal impact upon ratepayers. In the Hawkesbury City Council example, the level of support from the community for the proposal is poor and the impact upon ratepayers will be extreme. I am sure ratepayers would like to arrange a similar increase in their salaries! I have received numerous petitions supporting my stance in relation to the proposal. I suggest there is very little support in Hawkesbury for the rates increase. In my view, this proposal demonstrates the benefit of rate pegging in curbing the excesses of councils. [*Time expired.*]

Mr KERRY HICKEY (Cessnock—Minister for Local Government) [4.45 p.m.], in reply: I quote from a press release issued by the New South Wales Shires Association on 8 February 2006 under the heading "Opposition Promise Councils New Deal on Rate Pegging":

The Shires Association of NSW today welcomed an Opposition commitment to establish an independent board of experts to consider rate increases by councils, and to establish an inquiry to determine if rate pegging should be abolished.

That statement was issued on 8 February 2006, so it is a bit sad that during this discussion members opposite have not supported that press release by the association. Directly meeting a Minister is a last resort that communities may exercise in raising concerns relating to special rate variations. Last year ministerial discretion was used to stop a 23 per cent rate increase because local residents in a council area could not afford it. Ditching rate pegging to give a stand-alone board the power to examine rates will take away ratepayers' ability to stop any increases. What a contrast—while the Government is working to create activity, growth and jobs, the Coalition wants to put the fox in charge of the hen house!

Mr John Turner: Point of order: The Minister has been a member of this House long enough to know that a reply is intended to address what has been said in the debate, not an opportunity to read a prepared speech. Surely the Minister has been a member of the Parliament long enough to be able to speak off the cuff in his reply and address the issues I raised during the debate instead of reading the same speech he read 15 or 20 minutes ago. Throw the notes away and try to be a Minister!

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills): Order! The Minister may proceed.

Mr KERRY HICKEY: Is it not sad that the best the honourable member for Myall Lakes can do is come in here and talk about planning? He could not even talk about rate variations and rate pegging for 10 minutes. How long has he been a member of the House? Who actually woke him up? Someone would have had to go up to his room to drag him to the Chamber, kicking and screaming, to talk about rate pegging.

Mrs Jillian Skinner: Point of order—

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills): Order! Before the point of order is taken, I ask the Minister to direct his remarks through the Chair and not across the Chamber.

Mrs Jillian Skinner: Point of order: As a member of this Parliament, I find the Minister's behaviour offensive. I ask that you direct the Minister to retract those statements. Referring to the honourable member for Myall Lakes in that manner is quite insulting.

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

Mr KERRY HICKEY: Very clearly, the Opposition spokesman for local government has not been able to speak for 10 minutes on rate pegging without bringing other issues into the debate. He has not even considered the things he has said at meetings of the Shires Association, where the Opposition's intention to establish an inquiry to abolish rate pegging was stated very clearly. I cite the press release of the Shires Association on 8 February. The Opposition has said that it will "establish an independent board of experts to consider rate increases by councils".

They are the words of the Local Government and Shires Associations, an independent body. They are not words I have made up. The member should come clean to the ratepayers of New South Wales. Are we going back to the days of hefty 20, 30 or 40 per cent increases? Can the Opposition guarantee that rates will not double or triple while it reviews rate pegging? Cost-shifting issues have been raised by the Opposition. Why have members opposite not been back to the Federal Government? The silence is deafening. They will not speak about the GST, they will not speak about the Federal assistance grants. The member raised these issues in his speech.

Mr John Turner: Point of order: The Minister asked me to talk on rate pegging and now he wants me to talk on other issues. Let us talk about them.

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

Mr KERRY HICKEY: The Opposition raised these issues in the member's speech. I am replying to his speech and now they want to carry on in this place in a very childish way. Mr Acting-Speaker, I really think you ought to pull them into line.

Mr John Turner: Point of order: The Minister said I referred to cost shifting in my speech. I did not. He did. If he wants to have a debate about it—

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills): Order! The honourable member for Myall Lakes will resume his seat. There is no point of order. He has been here long enough to know that was a frivolous point of order.

Discussion concluded.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of Motions

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills): Order! There being no business before the House and it being before 5.15 p.m., the House will now deal with General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices).

General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) given.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

BLACKTOWN ELECTORATE SUDANESE REFUGEES

Mr PAUL GIBSON (Blacktown) [5.05 p.m.]: Tonight I wish to speak about an issue that is affecting Blacktown. Blacktown has nearly 300,000 residents of 80 or 90 different nationalities. The people of Blacktown live in great harmony and have great respect and love for one another. The Blacktown community recently welcomed with open arms some new Sudanese arrivals. At the moment we have roughly 3,000 Sudanese in Blacktown, and another 2,000 are on their way. They are all welcome in Blacktown. In a humanitarian move the Federal Government and the United Nations decided to take refugees from the Sudan, and the Federal Government pays their airfares.

When they arrive in Australia most of them cannot speak English or Sudanese; they can speak only the dialect that is spoken in their villages. The Federal Government gives them a tax file number—which I am sure assists them greatly! It then links them up with Centrelink, and they are paid the dole. The Federal Government pays organisations such as the Australian Centre for Languages [ACL], Anglicare, the Catholic Church and local organisations to mother them and to find them accommodation.

Only last week I wrote to the Prime Minister and asked him to show some compassion on humanitarian grounds. I believe that 98 per cent of the people who have been taken from the Sudan and placed in Blacktown had a better future in the Sudan than they have in Blacktown. In the Sudan they knew how to survive and they knew where their next meal was coming from. It is almost impossible to get these people jobs in Blacktown and there is a lack of facilities. We need to convene workshops.

As I said earlier, most of these people cannot speak English. I was recently called to a railway station because the police picked up some Sudanese people who had been travelling on a train without tickets. It was the first time they had seen a train and they did not know they had to buy tickets. They also go to shopping centres, fill their trolleys with groceries and, when attempting to walk out with them, are told that they have to pay for them. Of course, that is the first time they have seen a shopping centre, so they do not know they have to pay for the groceries!

They are the conditions in which these people are living. As I said earlier, in many cases they cannot speak Sudanese or English. We are not giving these people any more hope of a better future than they had in the Sudan. The organisations to which I referred are trying to find them housing. The average age of these Sudanese refugees is 29, so I am talking about a young group of people with expectations, just like any other group of people.

Ten-year-old Sudanese children are being placed in schools with our 10-year-old children and they cannot compete. As they cannot speak English they stay in school for a few days and then leave because they cannot cope. They should be put in special schools for a year or more to assess their educational abilities and then put in appropriate classes based on their ability rather than their age. Local people have to find them homes. If ACL, Anglicare or other organisations do not find them homes after four weeks, they are left to find their own accommodation. Most of these Sudanese refugees are in private accommodation. Imagine being on the dole, paying private rent and trying to survive in a country that one never knew existed.

Australia is crying out for agricultural workers. Why did the Federal Government not think about putting them in agricultural areas where they can work on the land, which is their forte? In that way they could become good citizens and take pride in what they are doing. We are using people from overseas to pick our fruit. I do not know why the Federal Government placed these refugees in Blacktown, where there are few job opportunities. I ask the Federal Government and the Prime Minister to examine this issue, to show some compassion and look after these people.

CENTRAL COAST POLICING

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER (Gosford) [5.09 p.m.]: Today I detail the latest crime statistics from the Central Coast and ask the Minister for the Central Coast to take more of an interest in reducing crime and increasing police numbers on the Central Coast. Kincumber police station was opened in 1996 with great fanfare by the then Minister for Police and Premier, Bob Carr. Yet in 2000 the Coalition revealed that the station, built at a cost of \$1.4 million, had only ever been manned by a lone police officer without a patrol car or a gun, even though the station was built to accommodate 14 officers.

In 2002 the Coalition revealed the terrible story of two young girls, both eight years old. They had mistakenly caught the wrong bus and were forced to get off at the shopping centre in Kincumber before the bus continued in the wrong direction. They wanted to get home and had been told by their parents—all caring parents tell their children this—that if they were in trouble they could contact the police. The girls went to Kincumber police station for help but when they arrived they found a sign on the door and a doorbell. The sign told them that the station was unmanned and that they could ring the bell for police attention. They rang the bell but were told by police in Gosford that all officers were busy and did not have time to come out and see them. The girls tried to walk home and were eventually seen in the darkness by one of their class teachers walking alone along Avoca Drive, which has no footpaths. Their teacher took them home. This is the attitude that the Government has to policing on the Central Coast.

Terrigal police station—a major police station in a major tourist area—now operates only from 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. This is despite the fact that there have been spates of violent incidents in Terrigal after dark. Terrigal is a known nightspot. In fact, Terrigal is so well known as a nightspot that police moved in and placed a curfew on local venues, pubs, bars and clubs to stop them from accepting any new patrons after midnight. The Government is happy to restrict businesses from taking on any new patrons after midnight, but when the revellers are turned away the police are no longer in Terrigal to make sure everything is under control. It is a sad situation indicative of this Government's attitude to crime reduction and policing. The Government wants to force fewer police to do more work without the use of suburban police stations. It is quite happy to see police packed into dilapidated mega stations—and the results speak for themselves.

Since 1995 individual crimes have been placed into categories for the purpose of producing crime statistics. There are 24 categories—and one should bear in mind that these are the Government's figures. Of the 24 categories, 16 saw increases. Crime rose in 16 out of 24 separate categories. Most significant are increases in the areas considered "street crime"—that is, medium-level street crimes, assaults and minor drug crimes. These are the sorts of crimes that detract from the overall safety of residents. In 1995 there were 1,512 assaults on the Central Coast. In 2004—the most recent year for which a complete set of figures is available—there were 3,295 assaults, which is an increase of 117 per cent. In 1995 there were 17 robberies with weapons other than a firearm on the Central Coast. In 2004 there were 45, which is an increase of 164 per cent. There was a 38.5 per cent increase in robberies with firearms.

In 1995 there were 1,446 motor vehicle break-ins on the Central Coast. In 2004 there were 2,110, which is an increase of 45.9 per cent. In 1995 there were 2,649 cases of malicious damage to property—otherwise known as vandalism—on the Central Coast. In 2004 there were 5,562, which is a massive increase of 110 per cent. The list goes on. There was a 77 per cent increase in narcotics possession, massive increases in the number of breaches of apprehended violence orders, a 27 per cent increase in the number of indecent assaults, and a massive 72.7 per cent increase in sexual assaults.

Our police need support and more resources. They need offices and police stations that will allow them to do their job properly. Our police also need more fellow police. At the moment they are being left in the dark by a Government that cares more about spin than substance. The number of police officers on the Central Coast has declined, and continues to decline. The Government needs to get its act together. New South Wales requires a major overhaul of the police hierarchy, which includes issues of funding, command, response, police protection, police numbers and the notorious police media unit. The Minister for the Central Coast needs to start looking seriously at the need for police and at the levels of crime when that need is not met. The Minister must look into Terrigal police station, Kincumber police station and Woy Woy police station. These serious matters deserve urgent attention. [*Time expired.*]

MR ROBERT FISK LECTURE

Mr PAUL LYNCH (Liverpool) [5.14 p.m.]: Today I advise the House of an event that I attended on Friday 10 March. This event was of significance to many in my electorate. A number of my constituents were present at the event and the topic was of importance to a considerable number of others. The event was a lecture by the outstanding writer and journalist Robert Fisk. The lecture was organised by the Centre for Middle East and North African Studies at Macquarie University. The director of the centre is Dr Andrew Vincent, and both the centre and the director should be congratulated on organising this public lecture.

Robert Fisk is arguably the most impressive European reporter from the Middle East. He has been based in Beirut for three decades. His work is regularly heard in Australia, especially on Radio National. He is the Middle East correspondent for the *Independent* newspaper. I first came across his work many years ago when I read his book *Pity the Nation: Lebanon at War*. I regard this as the best account that I have read of twentieth century Lebanon's history and politics. It is a work that I have quoted from in this place several times. Fisk was one of the first journalists into the Chatila and Sabra camps after the massacre of Palestinians there.

His most recent book is just as impressive and is entitled *The Great War for Civilisation: The Conquest of the Middle East*. Fisk speaks with rare authority about contemporary issues—he has, for example, interviewed Osama bin Laden three times. He starts from the premise that he does not support violence anywhere, at any time. He does, however, have the temerity to ask "Why". Why, for example, did the attacks of September 11 in America occur? For asking that question he was accused of being an enemy of the West and a supporter of terrorism. The attacks upon him go to the core of his role and responsibility as a journalist. His speech, as with his book, revolved around issues of truth, of accuracy in reporting, of holding centres of power accountable, and of journalists having the courage to publish the truth. These are, of course, very real issues in relation to the Middle East and they are certainly relevant to a significant proportion of my electorate.

Fisk is particularly critical of journalists writing on these issues who exhibit professional failure and who write consistently only what is approved by the official institutions of the United States of America. He is also scathing of journalists who dehumanise Muslims. That is not only bad journalism, but profoundly dangerous. He also points to the extraordinary amount of pain inflicted upon Muslim communities worldwide. Of course I cannot do justice to the complexity of Fisk's argument and the wealth of detail he provides in a couple of minutes in this place. It is appropriate to make the point that anyone seriously interested in either the Middle East or the implications of developments there on the people of Australia should read his book.

Fisk is particularly instructive on topics such as Israeli and American destruction of United Nations resolution 242; the consistent reneging by Israel on major accords and understandings concerning Palestine; the immense and counterproductive damage done to the Iraqi people by sanctions; the impact of depleted uranium from the first Gulf War; the Western support for Saddam Hussein, including when he was gassing Kurds; and, indeed, the massive Western support for Saddam Hussein when he was the West's champion against Iran. I particularly enjoyed his description of Jack Straw as "Britain's most famous ex-Trot". I leave others to draw broader conclusions about ex-Trots.

I also pay particular tribute to the Centre for Middle East and North African Studies at Macquarie University, which organised the lecture. The centre was established in 1993 to improve Australian understanding of the Middle East and North Africa. It was designed to build upon Macquarie University's international reputation in the field of Middle Eastern studies. The centre offers a number of resources for students, academics and the general public. It runs regular seminars conducted by resident and visiting academics, as well as various specialists. These seminars, such as the lecture by Robert Fisk, are open to the public. It also organises a Middle East politics simulation with various interstate and international universities.

The centre expresses its three main areas of activities in the following terms. The centre is, first and foremost, an academic unit. It has been designed to assist specialist scholars to encourage interdisciplinary research on the region, to promote and co-ordinate Middle Eastern studies at Macquarie University, and to publicise research and seminar papers. A second objective of the Centre for Middle East and North African Studies is economic and trade related. The centre aims to improve the Australian business community's knowledge of the area, its customs and history, way of life, and religions and language. This, in turn, will make Australian business more effective in the Middle East. Finally, the centre provides a valuable resource for the community as a whole. By providing adult education courses, public lectures, access to resources and specialist advice to the media, the centre hopes to promote knowledge and discussion of the Middle East and North Africa and related issues amongst the wider community.

The activities of the centre include a wide range of speakers, including Peter Rogers, former Australian ambassador to Israel, Professor Eli Salzberger from Haifa university, Andrew Wilkie, and Dr Ilan Poppe, also from the University of Haifa. I also note that its director, Andrew Vincent, addressed an audience at the Warringah community forum hosted by Bronwyn Bishop and Tony Abbott. The breadth of speakers and interests is as it ought to be for a centre such as that. I once again congratulate the centre and Dr Vincent on arranging the opportunity for Robert Fisk to give a public lecture in Sydney.

COUNTRY SCHOOL BUS SERVICES

Mr JOHN TURNER (Myall Lakes) [5.19 p.m.]: I refer to representations I received from Melissa Warner, of Minimbah West Branch Road, near Nabitac, in relation to concerns about her son and the school bus timetable. I say from the outset this is not an attack on the bus company, I have no issue with it, but it is a timetabling matter that I believe the Government can fix. Her complaint is that a high school bus run and then a primary school bus run services the area of Nabitac. The high school bus run starts at 6.35 a.m. on Minimbah West Branch Road, travels onto Minimbah East Branch Road, onto Minimbah Road, along the highway, and then down Glenora Road for seven kilometres.

The bus then turns around and travels into Nabitac where the children change onto a Forster company bus which leaves Nabitac at 7.30 a.m., an hour after the children left home, and only a few kilometres down the road. On that bus there are other children from Coolongolook, Wootton and Nabitac. The Forster bus drops the children at school—the Great Lakes College at Tuncurry—at 8.10 a.m., a half hour before school commences when there is little supervision. Therefore, the children often leave home in the dark at 6.35 a.m. to travel the bus route, which is a 28-kilometre journey. It is shorter in fact to travel directly from house to school.

In the afternoon the journey also presents difficulties. The children from Nabitac are the last to be collected some 25 to 30 minutes after school finishes because the Forster bus company does a town run prior to collecting them from the Tuncurry campus. One can only imagine the behaviour of the children because of the minimal supervision when they wait in the bus line of an afternoon. There have been identified incidents of misconduct, bullying et cetera. Once again at Nabitac in the afternoon the children wait another 20 to 25 minutes, with absolutely no supervision, for the Minimbah bus to finish its primary school run and return to town to collect the high school students. The children wait in Memorial Park in the town centre where there are no toilets or water available and only minimum shelter can be found on wet days. The bus finishes its run on Minimbah East Branch Road, where Mrs Warner and her children live, with the last child being dropped off between 4.50 p.m. and 5.00 p.m.

It is unreasonable for these children to have to leave home at 6.35 a.m. and return at 5.00 p.m. They spend 2 hours and 10 minutes on a bus to travel 29 kilometres to school. Often the children have to stand on the bus, which is extremely dangerous particularly on the Pacific Highway. In addition, Mrs Warner's son spends 1 hour and 20 minutes either not supervised or under minimal supervision. I wrote to the Minister for Transport and curiously received two replies, one on 23 February and the other on 8 March. The Minister said:

I am advised that bus operators provide services under the terms and conditions of contracts entered into with the Ministry of Transport. The contract allows Busways to design the school bus network within their contracted area. The conditions of the contract under which Busways North Coast Pty Ltd currently operates include minimum service levels for route coverage and bus frequencies ... The Ministry of Transport cannot direct Busways North Coast Pty Ltd to operate more services than are required by the company's contract.

That is exactly why I wrote to the Minister. I wanted him to look at the contract with a view to easing the burden on these people. The Minister cannot wash his hands of the matter and say that the current operators are working within the conditions of the contract entered into. Obviously the minimum standard is not working when children have to go to school in the dark at 6.35 a.m. and return, again often in the dark, at 5.00 p.m. The Minister for Transport is a party to the contract and can renegotiate or vary it to improve travel arrangements. Obviously he will have to allow for another bus or make some other arrangement. It is disastrous for young people to have to travel such long hours. I invite consideration of the outrage that would be highlighted by my city colleagues if any of their children had to get up at 5.45 a.m., have breakfast and get ready for school to catch the bus at 6.35 a.m. I want the Minister to look at renegotiating the bus contract, which might cost a few dollars extra, but do not subject the children in their tender years to these arduous hours. I have no difficulty with the bus company, which has to work with what it has been given.

SYDNEY CITY COUNCIL GREENING PROJECTS

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY (Heffron) [5.24 p.m.]: It was reported yesterday that the Lord Mayor of the City of Sydney was set to announce her vision for the greening of Sydney, but South Sydney residents will recognise that the vision is nothing more than a list of projects, some of which have been announced several

times, and most of them not even begun. The Lord Mayor's continual re-packaging of previously announced projects as vision statements is starting to wear a bit thin for the residents of South Sydney. In the case of one of the projects—the \$1 million upgrade of parks in Eveleigh—the greening announcement marks the fifth time the City of Sydney had announced it in two years. To announce this project again is laughable. This project was announced on 24 March 2004, 28 July 2005, 4 May 2005, 15 September 2005 and then again yesterday, yet these parks still await their promised upgrades.

Last September, in her vision statement for Redfern, the Lord Mayor said the city is about action, not talk. Well, five announcements of the same project in two years suggests a lot of talk and very little action. My message to the Lord Mayor is clear: we heard her the first time she promised these upgrades. Just get on with it already. The State Government gave money for the purpose of upgrading those parks 24 months ago and I want the City of Sydney to put that money to use. This greening vision statement demonstrated yet again that the Lord Mayor continues to neglect South Sydney or, more accurately, tries to govern by press release alone.

The council has a growing list of announced but unfinished—or even in most cases, not started—projects in our local area, including: the upgrade of Redfern Oval leaving the Rabbitohs and local sporting groups with an uncertain future; the Green Square Town Centre master plan, still not approved by council despite being put out for public comment in 2003; the upgrade of Regent Street and Redfern Street, now ridiculously several years behind schedule; and a vague promise in last year's budget for a swimming pool somewhere in Green Square. I want to contrast that with the State Government's achievements through the Redfern-Waterloo Authority [RWA]. The RWA has negotiated for the Indigenous Land Corporation to invest \$25 million to develop the former Redfern Public School site into a national centre for Aboriginal sporting, social and cultural excellence.

The RWA has publicly released two parts of the three-part Redfern-Waterloo plan to provide an overall strategic vision and a comprehensive strategy to facilitate social and economic revitalisation for the Redfern-Waterloo area. The human services plan was approved in December and is currently being implemented. Public exhibition of the employment and enterprise plan recently concluded. It proposes a range of innovative strategies to stimulate jobs growth of up to 18,000 new jobs over the next 10 years. I note at this point that the Lord Mayor, the honourable member for Bligh, made no submission to the public exhibition of either plan.

Also, an indigenous enterprise hub to facilitate Aboriginal enterprise operates out of the RWA's office. The enterprise hub is a joint initiative between the RWA, the Department of State and Regional Development and the Department of Education and Training. The RWA assumed direct management of the Australian Technology Park [ATP] in April 2005 and a new master plan for the park was approved in June 2005. The site will focus on industry development, a significant factor in attracting valuable investment opportunities to New South Wales. Also at the ATP, construction of the National ICT Australia Ltd and Defence Science and Technology Organisation building has commenced, along with \$5 million in major infrastructure works. It is the first building to be constructed at the ATP in more than five years, and is expected to bring approximately 600 jobs to Redfern. Approximately 2,000 new jobs are expected to be created at the ATP over the next three years.

A jobs compact was signed with the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union in May 2005 to enable job creation and enterprise support strategies, particularly for the local Aboriginal community. It has already created 19 jobs for unemployed locals at the \$40 million carriage works site and 26 indigenous jobseekers will start work this month at the ATP site. The final section of the Redfern-Waterloo plan, the built environment plan, has been released and is currently available for public comment. I go back to the point about the neglect of south Sydney. It is important that the Lord Mayor starts to realise that the city of Sydney boundaries actually extend south of Cleveland Street. It is time to stop neglecting the residents south of Cleveland Street. It is time for them to start sharing in the good things that the city of Sydney can deliver for its residents. I think it is a shameful record when contrasted with all the good things that this State Government is doing in the Redfern-Waterloo area.

Mr MATT BROWN (Kiama—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.29 p.m.]: I praise the honourable member for Heffron for her excellent work in looking after the residents of her electorate, and particularly in the southern Sydney suburbs that the honourable member just mentioned. Nothing infuriates a local member more than hearing people in authority re-announce projects for this and for that. I am pleased the honourable member has brought the Lord Mayor's continual re-announcements to the attention of the Chamber. I am aware of the commitment of the honourable member for Heffron to parks and outdoor space in her area. It is important for families and outdoor workers not only that they have a proper vision for outdoor recreation but that plans are put in place to ensure they can enjoy a quality of life, which is a necessary social aspect of living in such a large city.

As the honourable member for Heffron mentioned, the New South Wales Iemma Labor Government has committed money to these projects, and I encourage her in her efforts to ensure the commitment is realised in money being put into those projects so that there will be real results for her constituents. The points made about the Green Square master plan, and the need for a swimming pool, have been well made and articulated, and I congratulate the honourable member for Heffron on her outstanding work in representing her constituents.

WAGGA WAGGA BASE HOSPITAL DIALYSIS SERVICES

Mr DARYL MAGUIRE (Wagga Wagga) [5.31 p.m.]: I wish to draw to the attention of the House the concerns of Roger and June Southwood, constituents of mine in the electorate of Wagga Wagga. In January 2003 Mr Craig Knowles, who was then Minister for Health, announced that the renal dialysis service at Wagga Wagga Base Hospital would be expanded to double its current capacity from six to twelve patients. In June 2003 the new Minister for Health, Mr Morris Iemma, announced that an initial \$2 million would be allocated to expand kidney dialysis services in rural areas.

On 31 January 2006 I wrote a letter to the Chief Executive of the Greater Southern Area Health Service concerning a request from Roger Southwood for assistance regarding the waiting list for renal dialysis, and seeking assurances that a second shift would be operational no later than mid-April 2006. Roger Southwood, who is 74 years of age, has to drive from Wagga Wagga to Canberra and return, a distance of 490 kilometres, twice a week so that his 72-year-old wife can receive dialysis treatment. Roger and June Southwood celebrated their fifty-second wedding anniversary on 20 March by travelling 6 hours to Canberra and spending 4 hours on dialysis. By 27 March they had travelled a total of 10,480 kilometres for treatment. Their situation will soon worsen as they will have to go to Canberra three times a week for treatment—nearly 1,500 kilometres per week.

In February 2006 a former Wagga Wagga man, Reg Howard, was in Wagga Wagga on a family visit and had to travel to Griffith for dialysis treatment, because no chairs were available in Wagga Wagga—that is, 2 hours of driving, 6 hours of dialysis, and 2 hours returning. On 1 March 2006 a reply was received from the Greater Southern Area Health Service stating that Mr Southwood's concerns would be investigated. On 20 March 2006 I received a letter from the Greater South Area Health Service suggesting the alternative of Griffith Base Hospital and stating that financial assistance is available where patients are required to travel further than 100 kilometres for treatment. Greater Southern advised that the number of renal dialysis places were doubled in 2003. Greater Southern has applied to the New South Wales Department of Health for additional funding, and said if granted it will take approx three months to recruit and train the staff. I quote from that letter:

To further support the need for renal services in Wagga Wagga, the number of renal dialysis places was doubled in 2003. Greater Southern Area Health Service has applied to the NSW Department of Health for additional funding to further increase the number of renal dialysis places available at the Wagga Wagga Base Hospital. Once funding has been announced by the Department of Health and received by Greater Southern, it will take approx 3 months to recruit and train staff prior to extending the hours of the renal service.

What has the Government got in store? Does it have up its sleeve an announcement that it is waiting to make at an appropriate time, or will it continue to make these patients suffer by requiring them soon to drive 1,500 kilometres every week to access services? There are eight Wagga Wagga people who are currently waiting for dialysis services but who are not able to receive that treatment in Wagga Wagga and are forced to travel elsewhere.

Another constituent who came to see me said that in March 2006—three years after Craig Knowles' announcements about the expansion of dialysis services in Wagga Wagga—when she was trying to arrange treatment for her mother, she was informed that the unit had only six beds available and that they were hoping for more funding. I repeat, this was in March 2006. She was told that her mother could be put on a waiting list, and that she would be eighth on the waiting list. On 21 March the lady telephoned the Albury dialysis unit and spoke to someone at the unit who told her she would have to phone the Royal Hospital renal co-ordinator in Melbourne. Two telephone calls and a message requesting to speak to someone urgently did not result in even the return of her calls. A return trip to Albury is 381 kilometres.

I note that Minister Hatzistergos announced \$21 million to assist with uncapped flows of patients seeking treatment in other States. That was to help the Greater Southern Area Health Service realign its budget. I ask the questions: Are there six chairs available in Wagga Wagga? Are there 12 chairs available in Wagga Wagga? And just what are the Minister and the Government trying to prove by making these people suffer and travel enormous distances to seek treatment, when the correspondence I have makes it clear that the Greater Southern Area Health Service has applied for funding and has stated that training will commence "once funding

has been announced"? That makes clear to me that the Government, typically, is playing its political cards and is waiting for an opportune time to make the announcement. That is not good enough. It is appalling that a 74-year-old man has to drive so far to access health services for his ill wife, only to receive platitudes and learn of the Government's secret agenda exposed by the announcements referred to in this correspondence.

RUTHERFORD INDUSTRIAL PARK RECYCLING PLANT PROPOSAL

Mr JOHN PRICE (Maitland) [5.36 p.m.]: I place on record my objections to a proposal put to the Department of Planning by Transpacific Industries, which seeks to establish a polluting recycling plant in the Rutherford Industrial Park, in my electorate. This company has been the subject of a major public meeting at which many residents and owners of adjacent properties have raised significant objections to the proposals that the company has put forward. Such was the objection that I understand one of its outside proposals has been shelved for the moment. It involves decaying materials. The community is concerned about the odours that emit from the site. I have spoken briefly with the Minister about this matter, and I know it is subject to review by the department.

Considering the Rutherford Industrial Park already has industries involved in waste oil refining, an oil seed processor and an oil reclaiming facility, and is adjacent to the Maitland saleyards, it is apparent that there are already a considerable number of unpleasant aromas, or smells, in the area. I have received a particularly disturbing letter from a company known as Ultrafloor Pty Ltd, which claims—I have no reason to doubt the claim—that over the past 39 months there have been 51 bad offensive odour days when the smell and pollution made its employees suffer one or more of the symptoms of headaches, sore throats, vomiting and sore eyes. This is a most unsatisfactory proposal. People who work predominantly in an outdoor industry—as Ultrafloor's do—would be subjected to smells and pollutants that could result in potential significant health problems. They also have difficulties with their occupational health and safety committee, but they do acknowledge that they have a job.

If another major operation were planted in this area—I am talking about an operation that is 20 times the size in physical area of the other industries to which I have referred, excluding the saleyards—it would be almost impossible for organisations that currently operate safely, profitably and with good employment prospects to continue, and may well result in migration from that area in my electorate to other areas around the State or, even worse, interstate. We cannot afford to lose jobs. We are talking about an industry that will be planted, if the department agrees. I raise the strongest protest against this organisation. I quote from the Sinclair Knight Merz report, which was done for Ultrafloor and outlines associated problems in a number of specific areas. The report states on page 5:

There is insufficient information regarding air quality issues such as the pollution control equipment and air emission points.

The report then details specific problems that seem to have been brushed over by the regional environmental assessment report that accompanied the company's claim to the department. Page 6 of the report states:

The emission of ammonia (NH₃), hydrogen chloride (HCl) and cyanide (CN) are first mentioned in section 5.2.2 (p. 22), but no explanation is offered for selection of these pollutants.

These are seriously dangerous pollutants. The employment of people in the immediate surroundings and the residential areas of Aberglasslyn and Rutherford could be affected. The assessment shows that only five people per hectare are working in the area, but 70 industries surround the proposed site. At least 70 people are currently employed. With expansion over time it is anticipated that more than 3,000 jobs will be affected. I implore the Minister to ensure that his department goes through the company's application very carefully. I am sure that Transpacific could find a greenfields site. I understand that is what it has done in its interstate operations. We certainly do not need this type of polluting industry in Maitland. [*Time expired.*]

Mr MATT BROWN (Kiama—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.41 p.m.]: I commend the honourable member for Maitland for his tireless work. He has brought to the House his concerns about an industrial waste recycling plant and is fighting for his community. As he said, he has already met with the Minister and other appropriate people about the matter. The fastidiousness with which he ensures that every stone is turned in his fight for what he thinks is right is a tribute to his dedication to his community. He has raised serious issues about pollution and employment in his electorate. I congratulate him on his representation of the people of Maitland over the years and encourage him to continue it.

PACIFIC HIGHWAY ULMARRA UPGRADE AND MS JENNY EDWARDS

Mr STEVE CANSDELL (Clarence) [5.43 p.m.]: Tonight I highlight the increased traffic noise, vibration and danger endured by one of my constituents, Ms Jenny Edwards, her daughter Shanae and partner Peter, as a result of the upgrading of the Pacific Highway at Ulmarra. In 2000 the Pacific Highway outside Ms Edwards' property was realigned and raised by the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA], bringing the shoulder white line a mere 10 metres from her front door and only eight metres from her front veranda. The roadway height is now level with the veranda of the house. The opening of the Yelgun to Chinderah and Bulahdelah bypasses has increased heavy vehicle traffic just metres from their bedrooms. I have sat in the lounge room and felt the house shake every time a truck passes. It is almost impossible to continue a conversation because the noise is constant. I understand that her daughter sleeps in the front room, but because she is often too scared to go to sleep at night she moves into the lounge room.

On 19 November 1992 the Lawson family home on the Pacific Highway at Ulmarra, which was outside the front of the Edwards' house, was demolished by a truck. On 30 November 2002 the Stokes' family home on the Pacific Highway at Ulmarra, which was right next door to the Edwards' house, was demolished by a truck. On 10 September 1999 a car and truck collided on the Pacific Highway at Ulmarra, narrowly missing the Irons' family home, which is the house in question. One person was killed. On 8 February 2004 a car and truck collided on the Pacific Highway at Ulmarra. A semitrailer narrowly missed the Irons' family home, again the house in question. One person was killed. The list of accidents and near misses near Ulmarra recorded by Jennifer Edwards goes on and on. She can list 13 incidents witnessed by her or her neighbours since 1992 between Cowells Lane and the Cowper turn-off, including two at her own home. The latest in a long string of incidents in the area was the near miss of Ms Edwards' home this year by an out-of-control prime mover carrying seven cars.

A semitrailer bounced off the kerb in front of the house, took 50 metres of fence posts, skidded across the other side of the road and smashed into the ditch on the opposite side. Some 2½ years ago a car went through the same area. Two neighbouring homes have been damaged. The accidents continue. The Edwards family are happy to stay on their land and in their home, which they bought as their dream home. They did not mind the highway being next to it, but they do not want it as close as it is now. They have ponies. Their daughter is an avid pony rider, and both she and her mother compete in equestrian events throughout the State. They have asked the RTA to move their house back from the Pacific Highway to ensure their welfare and safety. The land allows up to 50 metres for the house to be relocated back from the highway. Considering that the upgrading works have contributed directly to their unacceptable living conditions, I have asked the RTA and the New South Wales Government to take some action to rectify the problem.

The work is an add-on to the work that should have been completed when the highway was upgraded. If a major highway is put in front of someone's house and trucks and B-doubles off the New England Highway are encouraged to go flying past the house the people who live in the house cannot be expected to maintain the same lifestyle. These matters should have been taken into consideration prior to the work being carried out. The house should have been moved back so that these people do not have to live in fear of their lives. Ms Edwards' partner, Peter, who travels all over the State for his job, says is that he stands by the phone constantly, especially as night, waiting for a phone call to say that a truck has gone through their house and wiped out his loved ones. Mrs Edwards wrote me a long letter to read to the House, but I do not think I need to do that. We are talking about the safety and wellbeing of people who, as I said earlier, are happy to live by the highway. But they want the RTA to live up to its responsibilities and move their house back before someone is hurt or even killed.

AGRITOURISM

Mr NEVILLE NEWELL (Tweed—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.48 p.m.]: I bring to the attention of the House the difficult situation faced by many farmers in New South Wales, particularly in the popular coastal regions. Farming is not only a way of life; it is a livelihood for thousands of farmers and the foundation on which the economy of rural and regional New South Wales is built. However, agriculture is now under enormous pressure. Increasing land costs and ever-reducing returns for produce have left many farmers struggling to make a profit by following the traditional system of selling produce through the markets and to major retailers. Add to the pressure of high land prices the ever-present threat of urban encroachment and coastal tourism development and it can be seen that for many farmers the future today may seem difficult, if not impossible, to navigate.

Farming is a dynamic industry in the Northern Rivers. As in many regions, it has evolved with the market, the climate and the economy. It is predicted that the decline in returns to farmers will continue

proportionately to the increasing returns to the retail sector, now dominated by Coles and Woolworths, with some 70 per cent of the retail sector and growing, a factor that seems to be ignored by John Howard and his lackeys and the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission. It seems that the time has now arrived for farmers to evolve once more to ensure their viability well into the future. Throughout New South Wales, farmers are the custodians of rural landscapes. Rural landscapes and experiences are significant factors in attracting tourism to regional New South Wales.

Indeed, in my electorate one can stand on the rich red farming lands of the Cudgen-Duranbah plateau, which has been identified by the Government as State-significant farming land, and witness the rapid growth of the coastal tourism industry—almost faster than a crop of sweet potatoes can be grown! As a Government we have encouraged economic growth in tourism and the housing sector, so it is my belief that as a Government we have a responsibility to work with the farming sector to ensure it can continue to provide this essential industry, to provide the people of New South Wales and the rest of the world with high-quality fresh produce.

What can be done to ensure farming remains a profitable business, attracting future generations of farmers who want to continue in this important industry? How can we ensure that in areas of high growth, such as the Northern Rivers region, farmers are not driven out by the threat of development and high land values? The future for farming should not be threatened by the growth in tourism and population but should be welcomed as new opportunities. Farmers should have direct access to consequential markets, to increase their bottom line and to add value through agritourism. For this to happen we must take the lead. That happened recently when Country Labor visited the Tweed. The Minister for Primary Industries, Ian Macdonald, launched the Dairy Pathways Program to co-ordinate the extension activities between Dairy Australia and the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries. The Minister also launched the Northern Rivers Dairy Strategy, which is a program involving the co-ordination of major players in north-eastern New South Wales and south-eastern Queensland.

The Government is able to facilitate the next stage of farming evolution through an integrated approach, working in partnership with regional stakeholders such as the Australian Regional Tourism Research Centre at Southern Cross University and supporting that university in the delivery of the Farm and Country Tourism on Your Property Program. That innovative program is based on research undertaken by Sustainable Tourism CRC Pty Ltd and is designed to guide farmers through the process of establishing agritourism ventures on their properties. The program will assist farmers by linking them and their products with potential customers in the growing tourism and hospitality sectors and will enable them to promote their high-quality produce as a point of difference in regional tourism destinations.

My Country Labor colleagues and I recently met with a broad cross-section of farmers in the Tweed region. Their concerns echoed my own: we must do more to assist farmers to evolve and to remain at the forefront of the sector. A co-ordination program gives farmers the tools to restructure their farm business and to profit from the very things that have been threatening their farming future—tourism and population growth. By supporting this initiative, the Government is demonstrating that it is able to adopt a whole-of-government approach, ensuring our policies result in a positive outcome for rural and regional New South Wales.

The Farmland Protection Project that has been initiated by Department of Planning has identified farming lands as a resource of importance to the future of New South Wales. In 1999 the Government jointly funded the Northern Rivers Region Sustainable Horticultural Strategy through the Department of State and Regional Development. The study recommended agritourism, value adding and the development of niche markets as key strategies to ensure the sustainability of farming in this region. Of the 24,284 tourism businesses that were operating in New South Wales in 2003, in excess of 11,123 are located in regional New South Wales.

Tourism New South Wales continues to promote the regions as part of our diverse and rich tourism experience. It makes perfect sense that we should commit to a program that links agriculture to tourism. While that may not be the only action we can take to support farming, it is a significant step to take a strategic co-ordination approach to building growth in regional and rural New South Wales. Linking agriculture, tourism, and economic and business development with planning programs will ensure the viability of farmers and rural communities well into the future.

Mr MATT BROWN (Kiama—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.53 p.m.]: I pay tribute to the honourable member for Tweed for his continuing fight for farmers. He is a friend of farmers. Every week he speaks in this House about the importance of keeping the farming sector in his electorate viable and profitable. My electorate of Kiama on the South Coast is similar to his electorate, so I understand only too well the impact of rising prices

and the pressure imposed on farmland by development. Farms serve the tourism industry well by maintaining beautiful green hills and breeding happy and contented cows. However, the farming sector should not be regarded as providing those benefits solely for the tourism sector.

Farming is an important sector in its own right. I am pleased that the honourable member for Tweed drew to the attention of the House the Northern Rivers Dairy Strategy, and the recognition paid by the Minister for Primary Industries to the dairy industry through the Dairy Pathways Program. Both programs were launched in the Tweed electorate. The honourable member for referred to agritourism as one aspect of a potential source of revenue for farms. I encourage the honourable member for Tweed and wish him every success in his continual fight to ensure that the farming sector is well represented in this House.

SUTHERLAND HOSPITAL

Mr MALCOLM KERR (Cronulla) [5.55 p.m.]: I wish to draw two matters relating to Sutherland Hospital to the attention of the House. Sutherland Hospital was established by the community. It is important that the community and public consultation continue to play a vital part in shaping the future of my electorate's hospital. However, for some months now the community has been awaiting the release of the clinical services document that is reported to be part of the management restructuring of the Sutherland Hospital. The Government has not released the whole document, but merely over the past month, without prior consultation, has little by little informed the community of the various services to be introduced at Sutherland Hospital, or I should say the various services that will be affected.

A service that has been identified is the cannabis clinic. The plan was reported thanks to the investigative reporting of the *St George and Sutherland Shire Leader*. It would seem that the clinic will be part of the proposed new community health centre at Sutherland, but the Minister's announcement is a little short on detail. The whole proposal focuses only on the cannabis clinic. As a community we have not been provided with all the details and many questions remain unanswered. Hopefully, the Parliamentary Secretary will be able to answer them.

Mr Matt Brown: I am the Parliamentary Secretary for roads, not health.

Mr MALCOLM KERR: We want a road to a better hospital. Answers to my questions would provide some of the detail that is required. The first question is: Will the cannabis clinic be part of a methadone clinic? Will a needle and syringe exchange program operate within the same site of the Sutherland Hospital? Is it acceptable that such a program should be operating in premises so close and adjacent to the Koala Early Childhood Centre on the Sutherland Hospital site? I invite any members of the public or reporters to have a look at the proximity of the clinic to that centre. Once again the Government's planning has proceeded without any community consultation. The Cronulla electorate continues to be ignored by the Iemma Government. Does the Government accept that its plans would not have met with community approval, which is the reason we are getting stage-managed announcements? These are vital questions that need to be answered before the future of the hospital is determined.

There is another aspect of the hospital that the Government must act on immediately. The Government should ensure that the proposed relocation of Meals on Wheels at Sutherland Hospital proceeds smoothly. The South Eastern Sydney and Illawarra Area Health Service proposed to relocate Meals on Wheels in the hospital grounds and initially assured the management committee that the relocation would occur at no cost and with no disruption to the service. However, the health service has failed to undertake any consultation regarding the service's needs or a timetable for its relocation. It is crucial that this information be made available to organise food storage, food packaging, washing facilities and parking for the volunteers who deliver the meals.

Mr Robert Oakeshott: Hear! Hear!

Mr MALCOLM KERR: As the honourable member for Port Macquarie quite rightly says, "Hear! Hear!"—and I could take that further. Meals on Wheels is a vital service for frail aged people and people with disabilities. Any disruption to such an important service cannot be tolerated. It is crucial that full consultation occur so that required planning can be undertaken. A lack of consultation with the public has been the hallmark of the Iemma Government to date. Irrespective of whether the issue is the closure of roads associated with the cross-city tunnel, the proposal for a desalination plant in my electorate or, in this case, the relocation of Meals on Wheels, this arrogant Government believes it can disregard the public and do what it likes. In addition there is the deterioration of services and the lack of communication in relation to Sutherland Hospital. The wheels may be falling off the Government but it is important that Meals on Wheels has a future.

MULTIPLE CHEMICAL SENSITIVITY

Mrs DAWN FARDELL (Dubbo) [6.00 p.m.]: Today I broach a subject that affects a silent minority, those who suffer ill-effects from the use of chemicals and fragrances entrenched in modern life. Recently I received a letter from an elderly constituent who moved to my electorate; she was suffering from what she described as the effects of the petrochemical smog that smothered her once- serene community. At a point when her health declined severely she was forced to decide between staying where she was and risking ongoing health problems that would gradually worsen or moving to a region where the air quality did not pose such a problem and clear blue skies and fresh air were the norm. Thankfully, she chose the electorate of Dubbo, where all of those conditions are met. Her letter, while glowing in compliments for newly enforced smoking laws, raised wider issues about the use of modern chemicals and those unable to stand up against them.

Those afflicted with multiple chemical sensitivity [MCS] have conditions that may range from nothing more than a mild allergic reaction to more severe reactions, where complications are such that they are unable to leave their homes. These people simply cannot tolerate contact with chemicals or the outside world at all. The case of the boy in the bubble might be a fascinating story for some, but for others it has become the reality of everyday life. Granted these are more extreme cases, but my constituent argues that it is time even milder forms of the condition were more widely recognised. Although not deemed to be a pressing health concern in some circles, MCS is generating intense interest overseas. The costs to the public health purse are growing. Enough interest has been shown in many countries to prompt the enlisting of small armies of professors and scientists to examine treatments and to investigate the nature of the condition. Another priority of those studies is to examine why the condition is becoming more prevalent.

My constituent's reactions to the chemical environment are such that they limit what many of us consider to be normal activities. For my constituent supermarket aisles prove to be very dangerous and sickening places. A particularly unique challenge is navigating the laundry aisle, where all manner of chemicals are present. Anyone who has experienced a sudden reaction to inhaling a cleaner or powder can imagine how difficult it is for those with this condition when the very act of breathing is threatened. My constituent tells me that she takes days to recover after an experience like that. Most commonly she suffers from nausea and dizziness. Even coming into contact with things such as plastic shopping bags, perfumes or deodorants can have a devastating effect on her health.

That prompts many questions about our modern environment and all the chemicals we use nowadays. The first concern for my constituent is that the message gets out that there are residents of this State suffering in relative silence. In 1954 serious concerns first emerged about the use of some chemicals in the household. My constituent is concerned that far too many types of fragrances now on the market use petrochemicals as a base. Like some scientists, she remains concerned that the danger of allergic or other reactions to these substances is under-rated and that longer term effects may yet develop. If we knew then what we know now, how much difference would there have been to the lives of thousands of Australians robbed of loved ones through the shattering illnesses caused by asbestos? We should remember that there was a time when asbestos was a common building material and no-one thought too hard about the danger. The same can be said for the use of lead in paint; we have learned lessons from that as well.

The year 1954 was also the first year that a concise description was given of the condition that we now know as MCS. Early research uncovered many warning signs. It was thought that the liver and the nervous and immune systems were most at risk. Scientists also determined that a person's metabolism could be affected by reactions to household chemicals. Since then governments around the world have continued to investigate the impacts of this condition, both on the public health system and the community. In the United States of America MCS has been described as an epidemic. Between 1995 and 1996, 6 per cent of Californian residents were diagnosed with MCS. They had conditions that prevented them from enjoying a normal life. Sadly, such figures are lacking for Australia.

I also cite the experience in Canada, where historic environmental illness legislation was passed in 2000 to protect those who suffer from MCS and chronic fatigue syndrome. Support groups and health care organisations welcomed official recognition of those conditions and, in turn, that spurred on renewed interest in study and research to meet the needs of an increasing population diagnosed with the conditions. My constituent points out that Australia has been a little slow off the blocks. We have various workplace safety laws that recognise the hazards of being in close proximity to certain chemicals. Research would not only help unlock some of the mystery; it would also go some way towards making victims feel not so isolated.

The building codes in many American States stipulate the use of only certain chemicals and ban others. If you have ever walked into a building and been suddenly afflicted with watery, stinging eyes, breathlessness or nausea, felt sleepy, suffered migraines, sore throats and sinus problems, aching muscles and joints, or had your skin come up in a sudden blotchy rash, depending on your circumstances there is a good chance you have had a reaction to the chemical environment around you. All my constituent asks is that members of this House recognise this growing public health problem and give it some thought. Actions taken now to address these concerns may end up saving governments many hundreds of thousands of dollars in the future.

MID NORTH COAST PRECIOUS METALS EXPLORATION LICENCE

Mr ROBERT OAKESHOTT (Port Macquarie) [6.05 p.m.]: I express significant concern about an exploration licence application that was advertised in a paper that is read quite regularly by some coastal dwellers of the mid North Coast. I refer to page 18 of the *Land* newspaper, where there appeared an application for an exploration licence covering 177 square kilometres from Port Macquarie to Laurieton for group one precious metals, which include gold, platinum and the like. It covers a substantial area of important private residential land as well as key environmental land, our unbuilt environment. It is also quite worrying that it covers two beaches, at Bonny Hills and south of Dunbogan. This should cause a great deal of concern to people on the mid North Coast. We have already started receiving calls from residents.

The *Land* is not a widely read newspaper on the coast but the word is starting to travel around and is causing concern. There are two reasons for that. The first relates to the process itself. Having spoken already to various local government authorities I have found they have not been made aware of this exploration licence application, which is now on exhibition. The local media has certainly not been made aware of it. In fact representatives of one newspaper I spoke to made further inquiries and were told that the application had been advertised in their paper. They have looked through the newspaper's files in the last couple of days and have been unable to find it. It looks as though they have not been included in the process. Key agencies such as National Parks and Wildlife, which is a significant stakeholder in the area covered by the application, have not been made aware that there is the potential for the issue of this licence.

From a process point of view there are substantial issues at stake. An area containing roughly 50,000 people has had an exploration licence dropped on it. It is also quite outrageous that an area that has doubled in population in the last decade and is expected to do so again in the next decade, and which is a tourist and lifestyle location with high residential growth, may be covered by an exploration licence for gold and other precious metals. It reminds many locals of a previous application about five years ago by Jervois Mining, which was looking for scandium. That caused a great deal of concern because people were affected if the company went onto private land and the whole community was affected if the company went onto the unbuilt environment and public lands. Whichever way this exploration licence is dealt with, it will have a major impact on the communities of the mid North Coast.

Anchor Resources Pty Ltd, or Icon Resources as it has been known since 14 March when it became a public company, is able to go onto private land to within 200 to 300 metres of a residence. That will potentially have an impact on many rural dwellers in the significant area covered by the application. Unlike the previous controversial exploration licence on the mid North Coast held by Jervois Mining, this application includes two significant beach areas. That indicates there will be drilling and testing on some of our precious beach dunes. I strongly oppose this exploration licence and the way it has been forced upon the mid North Coast community. I urge the Minister for Primary Industries to consult the mid North Coast communities urgently and put some minds at ease.

Private members' statements noted.

[Madam Acting-Speaker (Ms Marie Andrews) left the chair at 6.10 p.m. The House resumed at 7.30 p.m.]

ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT AMENDMENT (RESERVED LAND ACQUISITION) BILL

Bill introduced and read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr FRANK SARTOR (Rockdale—Minister for Planning, Minister for Redfern Waterloo, Minister for Science and Medical Research, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Cancer)) [7.32 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

This bill aligns provisions for owner-initiated acquisition requests under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 with the owner-initiated acquisition provisions of the Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991. Currently, where land has been reserved for use exclusively for a public purpose, there are two conflicting procedures which landowners can use to require the relevant authority to acquire the land. The acquisition provisions in an environmental planning instrument made under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 provide for acquisition on demand. In contrast, the Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991 requires a landowner to demonstrate hardship as a result of a delay in acquisition of the land reserved to require an acquisition.

The Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991 also provides that the relevant acquiring authority may use its best endeavours to remove the planning reservation, rather than acquiring the land. The bill ensures that all future owner-initiated acquisition requests will be dealt with under the provisions of the Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991. It also provides an opportunity for agencies and councils to review reservations prior to acquisition, and rezone lands reserved for public purposes where the land is no longer needed. This will ensure prudent expenditure of government funds to acquire land in priority programs for development for public purposes.

I will now address the elements of the bill. Schedule 1 amends the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 to provide that the procedure for the acquisition of land reserved for use exclusively for a public purpose under that Act is the owner-initiated acquisition request procedure in the Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991. This means that when an owner of land reserved for public purposes under an environmental planning instrument requests the acquiring authority to purchase the land, the landowner must be able to demonstrate hardship in order to force the acquisition to occur.

Where the authority determines on review that the land is no longer required, the authority will be able to initiate the rezoning process. This will prevent landowners from requiring authorities to acquire land, still identified in environmental planning instruments, that is no longer required for public purposes. An example of this is the 1998 case of the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] and Greenfield Mountains Pty Ltd on the Pacific Highway at Yelgun. The land was originally required for a road, and reserved under a local environmental plan [LEP]. A decision was taken to change the alignment of the road reserve, and the original reservation was no longer required. Despite this, the landowner applied to the RTA to compel the acquisition of the original reservation under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979.

The owner insisted on the compulsory process and the matter went to hearing. As a result, the RTA was forced to spend public moneys acquiring land it no longer required, as well as paying court costs for the hearing. Under the bill, an acquisition clause in an environmental planning instrument will not impose an obligation on an authority of the State to acquire land that is no longer required. An obligation will only be imposed as required by division 3 of part 2 of the Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991.

The bill also includes a consequential amendment to the Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991 to omit section 28. This section currently provides that the Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991 does not affect any obligation of an authority of the State to acquire land as referred to in section 27 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979, but gives a choice for such an acquisition to be effected by compulsory process under the Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991. To prevent opportunistic acquisition demands, the commencement date of the proposed Act will be the date on which notice was given in Parliament for leave to introduce a bill for an Act.

Allied to this bill is a proposal for a new State environment planning policy [SEPP] for public reserved lands, to be enacted where sites are identified as no longer required for a public purpose. The purpose of the public reserved lands SEPP is to provide a way to give landowners certainty over the land use ability of their property if it is no longer required for public acquisition. The SEPP would also incorporate a provision for scheduling additional sites as needed.

The recent changes to the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 require all local councils to review their local environmental plans within a two-year to five-year period. As part of this process all public authorities with reserved land in a local environmental plan will be required to also review their need to retain land reserved for a public purpose. The new LEPs will include an acquisition clause reflecting the provisions of the bill. When reviewing the zoning of land currently zoned for a public purpose and identified as no longer required for a public purpose, consideration will be given to rezoning the land having regard to the adjoining zones and reflecting the objectives of the LEP. In the period before changes are made to LEPs that currently

reserve land for a public purpose, these legislative amendments would prevail over any contrary acquisition clause provision in existing planning instruments.

The bill will also require an amendment to the acquisition clauses of the draft standard local environmental plan template. The Department of Planning will issue planning circulars as directives to councils to make the public aware of the changes to the legislation. I am advised that the bill has the support of the Local Government and Shires Associations, as local governments are often forced into needless land acquisitions as a result of the existing parallel systems. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Thomas George.

CRIMES AMENDMENT (ORGANISED CAR AND BOAT THEFT) BILL

Bill introduced and read a first time.

Second Reading

Ms ALISON MEGARRITY (Menai—Parliamentary Secretary) [7.39 p.m.], on behalf of Mr Bob Debus: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Government is pleased to introduce the Crimes Amendment (Organised Car and Boat Theft) Bill, which amends the Crimes Act 1900 to create several new offences targeted at the practice of car and boat rebirthing. The most serious of the new offences, carrying 14 years imprisonment, is facilitating an organised car or boat rebirthing activity. The bill will also extend existing theft-related offences of taking motor vehicles so that they cover taking boats as well. The Government has a longstanding commitment to assist police in cracking down on car and boat rebirthing. It is estimated that rebirthing activities cost New South Wales \$100 million annually. In 2005, 8,600 stolen cars were suspected of being stolen for rebirthing purposes.

The term "rebirthing" covers a range of illegal activities that have one thing in common: to allow a stolen vehicle, or a vehicle that has parts that have been stolen, to be passed off and registered as a legitimate vehicle. Organised car thieves and their accomplices perform a wide range of activities in order to rebirth vehicles. Just one example is where a rebirthing syndicate steals a car, strips some parts off it and then dumps or burns the chassis. The chassis is recovered by police and its details are taken off the stolen car list. The insurance company writes off the chassis and sells it at auction.

The original thieves will then buy the chassis on the open market at auction, which makes them the lawful owners of the car. They then add back to the chassis the parts they stripped off it. They re-register or sell the car, pretending that they innocently bought the chassis and fixed it up with legitimately bought spare parts. They may even have bogus receipts drawn up for the spare parts they stripped from the stolen car. That is just one example of the many different and ingenious ways in which criminal syndicates steal motor vehicles and boats and manipulate their registered identities so they can be re-registered and sold to unsuspecting buyers.

There are many costs of rebirthing to the community. Firstly, rebirthing means that the stolen vehicle will not be recovered, in contrast to joyriding-style car theft, when the vehicle is usually recovered. This results in the true owners being deprived of their cars permanently, and higher insurance premiums for us all. In addition, if a rebirthed car that has been on sold is subsequently identified, seized and taken back to its true owner, the honest buyer who paid the market price for the car may be left with nothing.

Secondly, rebirthing is dangerous. It may involve serious physical alterations to the car, such as grafting the front end of one car to the back end of another. This creates a structural flaw that in an accident could mean that the car disintegrates with its innocent new owners inside. Thirdly, because rebirthing is potentially lucrative, it entices young people to become involved with organised criminal gangs. It can corrupt legitimate tradespeople who work with vehicles, because rebirthing gangs actively seek to recruit professionals working in the motor vehicle repair, wrecking, sale, and registration industries. These people can provide the paperwork to give the rebirthers' illegal activities the veneer of legitimacy.

These new offences provide a deterrence against being involved in rebirthing and send a clear message to those thinking of being involved in rebirthing activities that the punishment will far outweigh any illegal

benefits. Even though rebirthers may commit a range of existing offences, the law is not currently structured to deal effectively with the methods that rebirthing gangs use. The bill addresses the challenge of creating an offence that covers all behaviour that constitutes rebirthing. It imposes strict penalties for rebirthing and closes any loopholes in the criminal law that rebirthers might try to exploit.

The major innovation of the bill is to create an offence of knowingly facilitating an organised car or boat rebirthing activity, which carries a maximum penalty of 14 years imprisonment. In addition, the bill creates a number of other offences that target dishonest behaviour that forms a part of rebirthing activities. These new offences are related to interfering with identification information, for example compliance plates that are used in the registration of vehicles; dishonestly possessing vehicles or parts of vehicles when the identification information on that vehicle or part has been altered; and possessing unattached vehicle identification plates that are designed to be attached to a vehicle.

These secondary offences still offer appropriately harsh penalties—five years or seven years imprisonment per offence—and it is expected that they may be used when a person is found engaging in dishonest behaviour with vehicle identification information but the police cannot prove that the person is involved in a rebirthing syndicate. The offences created by the bill generally apply to vessels also, reflecting the fact that vessels are a valuable means of transportation and are also the target of rebirthers.

I turn now to the detail of the bill. Items [1] to [3] of schedule 1 to the bill delete an outdated definition of "vessel" from the Crimes Act. Items [4] and [7] of schedule 1 move the offence that was previously called "car stealing" from section 154AA of the Crimes Act so that it appears in the new subsection of the Crimes Act dealing with motor vehicle and vessel theft. The offence will now be under section 154F of the Crimes Act. The offence is also amended to provide that it is committed by a person who steals a vessel. "Vessel" is defined as a vessel within the meaning of the Marine Safety Act 1998.

Items [5] and [6] of schedule 1 extend the offence that was previously known as "carjacking, contrary to section 154C of the Crimes Act" so that the offence is also committed when the offender takes a vessel by force or when an occupant is on board. That offence has been re-named appropriately. Item [7] of schedule 1 inserts a new subsection in the Crimes Act entitled "Offences relating to theft of motor vehicles and vessels". That new subsection contains all the new rebirthing-related offences.

New section 154G of the Crimes Act creates the offence of knowingly facilitating organised car or boat rebirthing activities. For the purpose of the offence, a car or boat rebirthing activity involves any of the following: stealing a car or boat or receiving a stolen car or boat; interfering with a part from a car or boat with the intention of either disguising its identity or concealing the fact that it is stolen; putting stolen parts on a car or boat; registering a car or boat that is either stolen or has stolen parts attached to it; or supplying or offering to supply a stolen car or boat. For the purpose of the offence, the car or boat rebirthing is carried out on an "organised basis" if it is done in a way that indicates it is done on more than one occasion, involves more than one person, and is done for profit or gain.

For the purpose of the offence, the word "facilitates" is defined broadly to include anything that assists in the car or boat rebirthing activity being carried out, including providing the premises in which the activity is carried out. The offence has been specifically designed to be relevant to Australian crime networks. The definition of the term "organised basis" has been constructed to reflect the reality of car rebirthing in Australia. Organised crime in Australia is not generally run like a mafia-style hierarchy, controlled by an absolute ruler, with a fixed structure like a company. More commonly in Australia rebirthing is committed as part of a more fluid, entrepreneurial kind of organised crime, built around networks of contacts.

The rebirthers' method of operation is compartmentalised. A person who makes a false vehicle identification number [VIN] plate, for example, may have no involvement in the re-registration process and may not even know the people who will present the car for fraudulent re-registration. New section 154G (5) makes it clear that it does not matter whether the activity is carried out under the direction of any particular person or whether the same people were always involved in the rebirthing. It does not even matter that the accused did not know any of the other participants in the rebirthing ring. If the person has knowingly participated in a car or boat rebirthing activity, also knowing that the activity as a whole is carried out on an organised basis, the person is guilty of the offence created by new section 154G and is liable to 14 years imprisonment.

New section 154H creates new offences that are related to interference or other dishonest dealings with a unique identifier of a vehicle. A unique identifier means any numbers, letters or symbols marked on a vehicle

or part, or stored electronically in the vehicle or part, for the primary purpose of allowing the vehicle or part to be distinguished from all others or allowing a vehicle batch to be identified. Most obviously, a unique identifier will include a number plate, a compliance plate and a vehicle identification number. However, other things are unique identifiers as well—for example, part numbers that may be etched into vehicle parts by the manufacturer and electronic identification information stored in a modern car's computer. Unique identifiers are not on the car for a mechanical or aesthetic purpose: their primary purpose is to help identify the vehicle.

New section 154H establishes the following offences relating to unique identifiers: the offence of dishonestly interfering with or copying a unique identifier; the offence of possessing a motor vehicle or part with the intention of dishonestly interfering with or copying a unique identifier; the offence of dishonestly making a unique identifier or purported unique identifier; and the offence of knowingly inducing another person to accept any information attached to a vehicle or part as a genuine unique identifier for the vehicle or part, when it is not. Each of these offences carries a maximum penalty of seven years imprisonment. New section 154I introduces the offence of dishonestly having possession of a motor vehicle or part that has a unique identifier that has been interfered with. This offence carries a maximum penalty of five years imprisonment.

The offences under new sections 154G, 154H and 154I apply to vessels and their parts in exactly the same way that they apply to motor vehicles. New section 154J introduces the offence of having, without reasonable excuse, a vehicle identification plate [VIN] detached from a vehicle. This offence is particularly intended to target persons who improperly remove VIN plates or compliance plates from vehicles. Those plates are only valid for the vehicle they are attached to, and should only be removed by those having authority to do so. Removing them, or possessing fabricated or altered plates that are unattached to a vehicle, and so can be added to a stolen vehicle when one becomes available, is a crucial step in rebirthing; it is highly unlikely there will be a legitimate reason for an owner or vehicle repairer to remove these plates. Hence the offence is one of strict liability, requiring the defendant to prove a reasonable excuse for having a plate detached from a vehicle. This offence carries a maximum penalty of five years' imprisonment.

Items [8], [9] and [10] of schedule 1 amend the offence of receiving stolen goods contrary to section 188 of the Crimes Act. The amendments provide that the elevated maximum penalty of 12 years imprisonment that applies to receiving motor vehicles or motor vehicle parts also applies to receiving vessels and their parts. Items [11] to [14] of schedule 1 amend the offence of being unlawfully in possession of property—commonly known as goods in custody—contrary to section 527C of the Crimes Act. The amendments provide that the elevated maximum penalty of one year imprisonment that applies to offences under the section involving motor vehicles or motor vehicle parts also apply to unlawful dealings with vessels and their parts. The bill represents an important part of the Government's anti-gang strategy. The specifically targeted offences that it creates will give police added power in their crackdown against car rebirthing gangs and those who work for them. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Thomas George.

COURTS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Bill introduced and read a first time.

Second Reading

Ms ALISON MEGARRITY (Menai—Parliamentary Secretary) [7.52 p.m.], on behalf of Mr Bob Debus: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

This bill makes miscellaneous amendments to courts-related legislation, and is part of the Attorney General's regular legislative review and monitoring program. Schedule 1 will amend the Civil Procedure Act 2005. Clause 18 of the Civil Procedure Regulation 2005 provided that proceedings in the Local Court and District Court were taken to have been dismissed if there was no progress after 12 months. Clause 18 has been repealed because it is operated more widely than intended, and because it was unnecessary as the Local Court and District Court could use Uniform Civil Procedure Rule 12.9 to dismiss proceedings where there was no progress. As a small number of cases may have been affected by clause 18, the bill will insert a new part 3 in schedule 6 of the Act to provide that clause 18 is to be taken as never having been made and that any proceeding that was dismissed under the clause may be continued accordingly.

Schedule 2 to the bill makes a number of amendments to the Criminal Procedure Act 1986. First, it amends the Act to prevent professional costs from being awarded to the prosecution where a person who has received a penalty notice elects to have the matter dealt with by the court and lodges a written plea of guilty within the required time frame. In 1998 the Government introduced reforms to enable defendants in summary criminal proceedings to inform the court of their plea in writing. A key objective of those reforms was to streamline procedures by reducing time-consuming, costly and unnecessary appearances before the court.

The Government is aware of a number of cases where people who received penalty notices and lodged a written plea of guilty with the court had costs awarded against them in their absence. Those costs amounted to hundreds of dollars. The Government is concerned that the imposition of costs in those circumstances is likely to undermine the effectiveness of the objective of the 1998 reforms.

The Criminal Procedure Act will be amended to change the date for lodgement of written pleas from five to seven working days prior to the first date on which a person is required to attend court. The Criminal Procedure Act will be amended to provide that costs orders may be made only against the prosecution in summary criminal proceedings in the Supreme Court and other higher courts where proceedings were brought or conducted in an improper manner. This will align the situation in the Supreme Court and other higher courts to that which currently exists in the Local Court.

The Act will be amended to provide that the Supreme Court and other higher courts may make costs orders against a party in summary criminal proceedings, on an adjournment, due to unreasonable conduct or delays. Once again this will align the situation in the Supreme Court and other higher courts to that which currently exists in the Local Court. Schedule 3 will amend the Crown Prosecutors Act 1986 to specifically enable Crown Prosecutors to exercise their functions on a part-time basis by arrangement with the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Schedule 4 amends the District Court Act 1973 to give a right of appeal to the Supreme Court against interlocutory orders of the Judicial Registrar of the District Court. Currently, only judgments or final orders of the Judicial Registrar may be appealed. Given that interlocutory orders of the Judicial Registrar may affect a party's substantive legal rights, it is appropriate that there be an avenue for appeal against such orders.

Schedule 5 amends the Judges Pensions Act 1953 to enable judges' pensions to be paid fortnightly instead of monthly. This will create efficiencies by enabling all pensions and salaries paid through the Attorney General's Department's payroll system to be processed at the same time. Schedule 6 amends the Land and Environment Court Act 1979 to enable commissioners of the court to make costs orders with the concurrence of any judge of the Court. Currently the concurrence of the Chief Judge is required and this results in inconvenience and delay if the Chief Judge is away, and creates potential conflicts of interest where the Chief Judge has had a connection with individuals or corporations that are litigants in the court. Schedule 7 amends section 353 (3) of the Legal Profession Act 2004 to make an amendment consequential to the amendment made by Schedule 2 [9].

Schedule 8 amends the Local Courts Act 1982 to increase the age to which acting magistrates may be appointed from 72 to 75. This will make the age limit for acting magistrates in the Local Courts the same as that for acting judges in other courts. Schedule 9 amends the Public Defenders Act 1995 to specifically enable public defenders to exercise their functions on a part-time basis by arrangement with the Senior Public Defender. Schedule 10 amends the Public Trustee Act 1913 to enable the Public Trustee to receive funds from the Supreme Court, the District Court, the Local Court and the Dust Diseases Tribunal, which has been paid into court, for investment in the Public Trustee's common fund.

The Civil Procedure Act and Rules, which apply to the Local Court, the District Court, the Supreme Court and the Dust Diseases Tribunal, provide for the payment of funds by registrars into the Public Trustee's common fund. However, the Public Trustee Act currently only allows the Public Trustee to receive funds for payment into the common fund from the Supreme Court. A consequential amendment is needed to enable the Public Trustee to receive funds from all courts and tribunals covered by the Civil Procedure Act and Rules. These amendments will improve the efficiency and operation of the courts. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Thomas George.

WORKERS COMPENSATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Bill introduced and read a first time.

Second Reading

Ms ALISON MEGARRITY (Menai—Parliamentary Secretary) [7.59 p.m.], on behalf of Mr John Watkins: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Workers Compensation Legislation Amendment Bill 2006 continues the Government's program of reform to our workers compensation system. The Government has been amending workers compensation progressively, with the most recent legislation in 2005 effecting reforms to dispute resolution procedures, clarifying outworker and labour hire deemed worker provisions and making the premium compliance and audit system fairer. This program of reform is bringing dividends for employees and employers in New South Wales. We have been able to boost benefits to the most seriously injured, slash the deficit, and cut premiums. The overall aim of these reforms has been to build a scheme that is fair, affordable and efficient. In line with these aims the Government has been reforming how employers' premiums are calculated. Our aim is to ensure that those who incur costs against the scheme pay their fair share.

The bill proposes amendments in two areas to meet this objective. First, the bill introduces a new scheme for grouping employers for premium assessment purposes. However, let me make it clear that this is about making the workers compensation scheme fairer and it is not about increasing premiums on employers. It is intended that the impact of these grouping changes will be revenue neutral to the workers compensation fund. Second, the bill requires New South Wales employers who become Comcare licensees to contribute to the WorkCover Authority Fund. This will ensure that they meet their proportionate obligations to fund WorkCover's responsibilities under the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2000. A further minor amendment is made to the way the excess amount payable by an employer is set. The amendment will permit the excess to be prescribed in the insurance premiums order rather than in the regulations.

In September 2002, two special advisers appointed by the Government, Ms Penny Le Couteur and Dr Neil Warren, issued a report on the degree of employer compliance with workers compensation and payroll tax obligations. The consultants noted that by splitting companies into separate and distinct entities to reduce wages in each company, employers are able to be insulated legally from their claims experience. The report stated that grouping of related employers is essential for economic neutrality in the treatment of different businesses under the payroll tax and workers compensation legislation. These consultants recommended that companies having common ownership and control should be grouped together for workers compensation purposes to reduce compliance costs and to prevent artificial splitting of activities and unfair reduction in premiums. The Government's initial response has been to generally accept this recommendation.

Schedule 2 to the Workers Compensation Legislation Amendment Act 2002 included provisions for grouping of employers for workers compensation purposes. A group of employers in those provisions is defined with reference to a group as defined in the Taxation Administration Act 1996 for the purposes of payroll tax. However, the provisions proposed in 2002 were not commenced because discussions with employers prior to implementation revealed some possible problems in requiring grouped employers to be insured under a single policy. In addition, there were possible adverse impacts on some charities and on small businesses that were exempt from payroll tax.

Grouping of related businesses for workers compensation purposes was then considered in the New South Wales Workers Compensation Premium Review Discussion Paper issued in March 2005. As a result of extensive consultation arising from that discussion paper, the bill now introduces a revised proposal for grouping employers. One of the guiding objectives of the review was to ensure that implementation of the reforms does not change the level of premium collected for the scheme. For workers compensation purposes the essential features of the revised proposal are: group employers are limited to groups with combined wages exceeding \$600,000 per annum, the same threshold as specified for pay-roll tax purposes; charities and other not-for-profit organisations may apply for an exemption from grouping if their businesses are not in direct competition with profit-oriented businesses; and group employers will no longer be required to have a common policy, but their separate workers compensation policies must have a common renewal date and be with the same scheme agent.

Groups will include related trusts, partnership and corporations. If a group employer fails to pay an amount due under the Act, for example for premium or for penalty premium, all members of a group will be liable jointly and severally for those payments. The bill enables an employer to apply to WorkCover for an exclusion determination under proposed section 175E on the grounds set out in proposed section 175F. WorkCover will develop and publish guidance material to assist employers who may be entitled to seek an exclusion and as to the criteria that will be taken into account in considering applications. Where an employer is a charity or not-for-profit organisation that conducts a business that is not in direct competition with a commercial operation, the charity will be able to apply to WorkCover for a determination that it is not a member of a group in respect of the totality of its business covered by a particular workers compensation insurance policy.

Any increase in premium that may accrue to a group as a whole resulting from the grouping provisions will be limited in the Insurance Premiums Order. In the first year the increase will not exceed 25 per cent of the premiums that would have been payable by an employer had the employer not been grouped. This cap will extend to 50 per cent in the second year and 75 per cent in the third year. However, this cap does not apply to increases in premium that result from other factors such as increased wages or increased claims experience. The insurance premiums order to be made for 2006-07 also will impose a common sizing factor based on the combined basic tariff premium of all group members. The order will stipulate that caps on the maximum experience adjusted premiums for small and medium employers will apply to group members collectively rather than to individual group members.

In a further step to prevent avoidance, the insurance premiums order to apply from 30 June 2006 will permit the costs of claims for group members cancelling or not renewing policies to be allocated proportionally between remaining group members for experience premium calculation purposes. The bill also contains additional provisions to permit WorkCover to inspect records and contains an amendment that permits disclosure by WorkCover of information to the Chief Commissioner of State Revenue. This matches a power in the Taxation Administration Act 1996 for the Chief Commissioner of State Revenue to disclose information to WorkCover.

I would like to use an example to illustrate how a company may benefit from these improved grouping arrangements. A lift services group of three companies is engaged in manufacturing and servicing lifts. Once their policies renew on 31 December 2006 the overall group premium will be \$452,804.66 as opposed to a total premium of \$473,175 if the grouping calculation had not been used. This group benefits from grouping because they have a better than average claims experience relative to the industry they operate in, and the common "S" factor used under the grouping provisions provides a greater discount to their group tariff premium. This example demonstrates the importance of introducing these new grouping provisions. The revised proposals contained in this bill appropriately address the concerns raised about the practical implementation of grouping of employers for workers compensation purposes. The bill also repeals the redundant uncommenced provisions inserted by the 2002 amendments.

Item 2 of schedule 1 to the bill proposes a minor amendment to section 160 of the Workers Compensation Act 1987. Currently, section 160 states that the excess amount to be paid by an employer to an insurer in respect of each weekly compensation claim is \$500 or such other amount as may be prescribed in the regulations. The change proposed is to enable the excess amount to be set in the insurance premiums order instead of in the regulations. As the insurance premiums order is reviewed each year, this will provide a simpler and more direct means of setting the amount of excess.

I turn now to the provisions in schedule 2 to the bill concerning contributions by Comcare licensees. Schedule 2 to the bill requires New South Wales employers who become Comcare licensees to make a contribution to the WorkCover Authority Fund. This ensures that they meet their proportionate obligations to fund WorkCover's responsibilities under New South Wales occupational health and safety laws. The WorkCover Authority Fund is supported by the collection of a contribution from licensed insurers and self-insurers. The contribution is calculated under section 39 of the Workplace Injury Management and Workers Compensation Act 1998.

WorkCover expends approximately 60 per cent of the fund each year on the enforcement of New South Wales occupational health and safety laws. Most employers pay the contribution indirectly. A licensed insurer pays a contribution to the fund based on the total premium income received by the licensed insurer. Employers who are self-insurers pay their contributions based on the deemed premium income that they receive. Deemed premium income is the amount of premium that a self-insurer would have been liable to pay a licensed insurer if

the self-insurer had held a policy of insurance issued by a licensed insurer. Part 8 of the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988 permits employers who carry on business in competition with current or former Commonwealth authorities to seek the issue of a licence from Comcare—the Commonwealth workers compensation scheme. Several employers have been declared eligible by Comcare to obtain such licences, and at least one large employer has been issued with a Comcare licence. An employer that becomes a Comcare licensee ceases to be required to hold a policy of workers compensation insurance, or to be a self-insurer, under the Workers Compensation Act 1987.

However, employers who become Comcare licensees remain subject to the New South Wales Occupational Health and Safety Act 2000. Under the Workplace Injury Management and Workers Compensation Act 1998 in its current form, there is no mechanism to collect a contribution from such employers to assist in the funding of the enforcement of New South Wales occupational health and safety laws. Honourable members will appreciate that this situation is inequitable, as it requires remaining employers in the New South Wales workers compensation system to bear the occupational health and safety enforcement costs for these Comcare licensees. The new contribution for Comcare licensees who remain subject to the New South Wales occupational health and safety laws is a fair, reasonable and transparent method of ensuring that all employers who remain subject to New South Wales occupational health and safety laws pay their fair share. The bill continues the program of reform and improvement to the workers compensation scheme, in the interests of workers, employers and the broader community. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Thomas George.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Private members' statements, by leave, taken forthwith.

MR PETER ATTWILL PROPERTY REMEDIATION

Mr ANDREW FRASER (Coffs Harbour) [8.12 p.m.]: I speak on behalf of Mr Peter Attwill, a constituent of mine. I put on the record a letter dated 15 October 2004 signed by the Minister for the Environment, Bob Debus, and received by Mr Attwill, which states:

Dear Mr And Mrs Attwill,

I write following my meeting of 22 September 2004 with Mr Andrew Fraser to discuss recent developments regarding the remediation of your property at 5 Martin Street, Coramba.

The Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) advises me that a remediation action plan has been developed with the assistance of funds from the Environmental Trust's *Contaminated Land Management Program (Innocent Owners Scheme)*.

I am pleased to inform you that the Environmental Trust met on 9 September 2004 and has given in-principle approval for the allocation of further funds to carry out the remediation plan.

DEC can now proceed to obtain tender quotes for the remediation work and will then assist you in your formal application to the Trust for the funds.

I understand that DEC's Project Officer, Mr Andrew Helms, has recently discussed this matter with you. Should you require any additional information please contact Mr Helms.

What the Minister said in the letter is correct. The contamination of Mr Attwill's block arose because a service station in Coramba had a leaking fuel tank. Through geological processes the leak ran through the rock down onto Mr Attwill's land and people noticed a strong smell of petrol in the area. Eventually it was traced. Mr Attwill contacted the Environment Protection Authority [EPA] and Coffs Harbour City Council. On 27 May 2002, 4 July 2002 and 20 December 2002 Coffs Harbour City Council wrote to residents in the Coramba area telling them that their water supply had been affected, that benzene had been detected in the Orara River, and that council was working with the EPA, New South Wales Health and the Department of Land and Water Conservation in relation to the contamination. Since 2004 Mr Attwill has been trying to get on with his life. He has a young family. One of his children would love to have a horse, but on a block of land that size he cannot have it.

Since October 2004 Mr Attwill has been in contact with his solicitor on many occasions to try to have the matter resolved. He decided he would have to remortgage his house to obtain funds to pay for the legal fees he was racking up. When he went into the bank to remortgage his property, the bank checked the details and a red flag popped up to indicate that it was a contaminated site. That means the site is unsaleable. The bank will

not loan him any more money, which means that he cannot pay for his legal fees. Despite promises by the Minister for the Environment, absolutely nothing has been done to remediate the site. The plan put forward way back in 2004 has three levels of remediation. One would cost between \$190,000 and \$215,000, one would cost between \$330,000 and \$370,000 and one would cost between \$510,000 and \$550,000. This man is basically an innocent bystander. He cannot get the Government, the Minister or anyone else to compensate him or clean up his site.

They have declared that Mr Attwill's site is the only site that is contaminated, but if you look at the geological studies it is only his block that has been tested. The rock runs under dozens of other properties down towards the Coramba Hotel. It runs west down into Thrower Avenue onto property and in behind a school property and other properties, yet they have never been tested. The EPA is asking us to believe that only one site is contaminated and that site is leaking into the Orara River, which provides water to Coffs Harbour, Grafton and the Clarence Valley. Nothing is being done. Tonight I call on the Minister for the Environment to purchase the property. This man needs to get on with his life. His family needs to get on with their lives. They can spend the money, which probably is equivalent to the remediation costs, to purchase the property, remediate the site, then on sell it. It simply is not good enough for the Minister, with whom I met privately and who acknowledged this in his correspondence of 15 October 2004, to sit on his hands and do nothing. He was empathetic when I met with him. He was empathetic when he wrote to Mr and Mrs Attwill, but nothing has happened. It is high time for me to demand, on behalf of Mr Attwill and the other residents of Coramba, that the Government purchase this land so that those people get on with their lives.

ASHFIELD CABINET MEETING

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE (Strathfield) [8.17 p.m.]: I draw the attention of the House to the recent visit by the Premier, the Hon. Morris Iemma, and the Cabinet to Ashfield. It was a great privilege and an honour to welcome the Cabinet to Ashfield and to the electorate of Strathfield in the Inner West. I quote from the late Swedish Prime Minister, Olof Palme, as its sentiment is applicable to the people of the Inner West and perhaps to the State, if not to the country:

For us democracy is a question of human dignity. And human dignity is political freedom, the right to freely express opinion and the right to be allowed to criticise and form opinions. Human dignity is the right to health, work, education and social welfare. Human dignity is the right and the practical possibility to shape the future with others. These rights, the rise of democracy, are not reserved for a select group within society, they are the rights of all the people.

This is a Government that believes in democracy. This is a Government that is listening and responding to the people of New South Wales. The Labor Party is a party of the people. In coming to the Inner West the Cabinet have seen, felt and learned the priorities, the needs and the aspirations of our vibrant community. Ashfield and the Inner West as a whole are areas rich in history, but with an important role to play in the growth of our city and the development of this great State of ours. Today Ashfield is one of the most ethnically diverse areas in Australia, with more than half of its residents born overseas. Indeed, in the 2003 census 22 per cent of those in the Ashfield local government area were born in China, mainly from Shanghai. This is evidenced by the preponderance of Chinese businesses located along the main artery of Liverpool Road.

Overall, in the Strathfield electorate nearly 50 per cent of people were born overseas, mostly from across Asia, with considerable Chinese and Korean populations but also with significant and wonderful Sri Lankan, Indian, Russian, Italian and Greek communities. The colour, vibrancy, and many ethnic traditions and celebrations adds immensely to our cultural make-up, while the entrepreneurial spirit, which I see in so many people who come to settle in our country, plays such an important role in developing our local economy.

The Strathfield electorate is a modern snapshot of our unique and special country—of our heritage and our culture, which have been shaped both by immigration from across the globe and by indigenous Australians. It is a testament to the success of Australian multiculturalism that people have come to our country from around the world and are proud to live in a cohesive and inclusive society, which is yet complex and diverse in character, race, language, religion, and culture. Our society celebrates the individuality that makes us unique as human beings, but embraces the many human values that we all share.

The Inner West Cabinet meeting was a historic opportunity for councils, local community groups, associations, and individuals to come together to meet and discuss with Government Ministers issues that are of concern. I am delighted that I have had the opportunity to engage the electorate with some of the Ministers to discuss issues that were important—such as our active voluntary sector. For example, to name but one, I was able to highlight the tremendous work done by Josephite Community Aid, which I visited with the Minister for

Gaming and Racing, and Minister for the Central Coast, the Hon. Grant McBride, earlier on the day of the Cabinet meeting. In addition, I also attended meetings with the Minister for Local Government, the Hon. Kerry Hickey, and the councils in my electorate to discuss issues and provide solutions for local government.

I was also able to acquaint some members of Cabinet with our fabulous educational establishments, of which there are over 30 in my electorate. Indeed, last Monday I visited the Strathfield Girls High School with the Minister for Education and Training, the Hon. Carmel Tebbutt, to announce further improvements to that great school. Strathfield Girls High School, Burwood Girls High School and the Ashfield Boys High School are just some of the schools that are benefiting from major infrastructure investment by our Government. But, more importantly, the schools continue to produce excellent results for our wonderful students. The commitment to education and to investment in our children certainly has been felt and appreciated by parents in my electorate.

People throughout the Inner West also have benefited from our Government's investment in health, transport infrastructure, roads, and sporting facilities. Examples include the new Croydon Health Centre and the recent Capital Assistance Program [CAP] grants for sporting facilities and parks. Much has been achieved, but I know that by working together we will have much more to deliver. The Minister for Transport is aware of my continued interest in the seven stations in my electorate, and most specifically the upgrading of Burwood railway station. It is with great pleasure that I can announce that \$750,000 has been earmarked for the first stage of the Burwood station easy access upgrade to make that station more accessible for frail and elderly people, people with disabilities and families with children. The Minister made the announcement while he was visiting the area to attend the Inner West Cabinet meeting. While he was at the station, he met local people, the stationmaster and staff.

As the occasion of the Inner West Cabinet meeting is so important, I thought it was appropriate to outline the issues that are important to the Strathfield electorate. The Inner West Cabinet meeting touched on the issues I have outlined and other important issues. It was a great success for the Strathfield electorate and the Inner West. I commend the New South Wales Government for listening and responding to the people of this State.

Ms ALISON MEGARRITY (Menai—Parliamentary Secretary) [8.22 p.m.]: I commend the statements made by the honourable member for Strathfield to the House. Her electorate is indeed a diverse and vibrant place. Her constituents are indeed fortunate to have such a dynamic and energetic local member. I am sure her community benefited greatly from meeting members of Cabinet. I look forward to hearing more about the Strathfield electorate in future private member's statements.

LIFESTART SCHOOL AGE SERVICES PROGRAM FUNDING

Mr MICHAEL RICHARDSON (The Hills) [8.23 p.m.]: Tonight I speak on behalf of my constituents Brad and Sharron Dewhurst, their son Joshua, and dozens of families like them who depend on Lifestart's school-age services program to give their children a start in life. Lifestart, as members may be aware, is a privately run service that helps kids with disabilities to learn the life skills that are essential to being a fully functioning, productive member of society. The program, which began as a co-operative venture at the Macquarie University 10 years ago, teaches children who perhaps have learning difficulties or autism how to relate to other people, how to cross the road, how to play—all the things that other children, as the Dewhursts say, "just do". Josh has Down syndrome, and had to be taught to crawl, to walk, and to talk. Other kids do these things naturally. Josh has had to be shown every little step to take with everything he does. Josh's Dad told me:

Other kids knew they couldn't walk away from school in the middle of the day to go to the park, they knew that they shouldn't hit their younger sister just because she is screaming uncontrollably. Other kids had sufficient social skills to start a conversation and maintain a friendship, to engage themselves with and without toys; they could play basketball after school and their Mothers could just watch; they could get themselves dressed, write their name, their spelling words, remember important events up at the school so they could remind their parents, and they could even go to the toilet.

Josh has difficulty with all these things. Lifestart has helped Josh with all these activities. It has provided the Dewhursts with ideas to improve Josh's fine and gross motor skills. It has been an invaluable help at the local school with his behaviour and academic work, and a constant source of encouragement. It is only with the help of Lifestart that Josh has achieved as much as he has, and is the happy and confident little boy—he is now aged 9 years—that he is. As honourable members can see there are real benefits from the Lifestart program, which offers a way for kids with disabilities to integrate into the normal classroom and learn the social skills they will need to get a job later in life.

Lifestart needs \$4,600 per child in government support to fund the school-age services program. Unfortunately, all the money that was provided this year from the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care for this program has gone to Lifestart's inner west and eastern suburbs branches, not to the north, despite the fact that the service started in northern Sydney and 50 families need and use the school-age program in Dee Why, Narrabeena, Collaroy Plateau, Narrabeen, Avalon, Manly, Wheeler Heights, Terry Hills, Killarney Heights, Northbridge, Turrumurra, St Ives, Eastwood, North Ryde, Denistone, Ryde and Hornsby, and, in The Hills district, in North Rocks, Dural, Arcadia, Pennant Hills, Cherrybrook and West Pennant Hills. I understand there is funding for early intervention, but none in northern Sydney for the important post-school program that helps socialise these kids for the future.

One mum wrote to me saying, "Lifestart's school-age services support our kids' inclusion in community activities, like cubs, ballet classes, swimming and soccer clubs". These are all things that those of us who are blessed with normal children take for granted, but they are almost impossible for special needs children to participate in without special training. This particular mother goes on to say:

Without Lifestart, it will be difficult for many of these kids to get the help they need to become independent, as far as they are able. It will be harder to live fulfilling and happy lives as members of the wider community. The children will suffer: so will their parents and brothers and sisters. Their teachers, classmates and team mates will lose the opportunity to accept and learn from these special children.

Thanks to Lifestart, Josh Dewhurst is playing soccer and basketball, learning swimming, learning how to catch a bus by himself. He will be able to form meaningful friendships, get and keep a job, earn money, go to the movies, eat out, and have a girlfriend. These are not extravagant requests. Josh's parents just want him to have the same chances at life as every other child.

On what basis has the department taken the decision to fund the inner west and eastern suburbs school-age programs, but not northern Sydney? Is it because, as one parent suggests, the northern region is too affluent? If so, I would like the Deputy Premier, who represents the electorate where the service started, to stand in this place and say so. Or is it because most of the northern region is in Liberal hands? If so, this is the ugliest example of discrimination on political grounds I have seen in the 11 long years of this Government. The mums and dads of kids who use the service are not wealthy. They already pay significant fees to Lifestart and fundraise for the service. But the service needs that additional \$4,600 per child per annum to keep going. I ask the Minister to reconsider his decision not to fund the school-age program in the northern region. There are some very vulnerable and precious little children who depend on his doing so.

HUNTER REGION AGED CARE SERVICES

Mr MATTHEW MORRIS (Charlestown) [8.28 p.m.]: Tonight I draw to the attention of the House issues centring on the ageing of the population in the Hunter and the consequential need for aged care services, particularly aged care beds. Given the history of the Hunter and the amenities and facilities that are available in the region, many people have chosen to reside in the district as part of their retirement strategies. It is interesting that the Hunter region's population is ageing faster than is the general population in New South Wales. According to the 2001 census, the population in the Hunter was 527,513, or approximately 8.28 per cent of the State's population.

Approximately 6 per cent of people who live in the Hunter have settled in the Lake Macquarie-Newcastle local government area. Within that group approximately 161,000 people are aged 50 plus, which represents about 30.5 per cent of the total Hunter population. Clearly, the Hunter has an ageing population issue. It is incumbent upon governments at State and Federal level to take steps to ensure that facilities and services for older people are in place to meet their particular needs. I also make the point that in the Hunter there are a little over 10,000 more females than there are males who are aged 50 plus. A shift to a higher proportion of females as to males in the Hunter population begins to occur in the 60 to 69 year age group, and then steadily increases in the older ages cohorts.

Interestingly, recent media reports have highlighted that the Hunter is almost 400 aged care beds short of demand. The Hunter region has one of the State's longest waiting lists for aged care places, with waiting times varying dramatically depending on the part of the Hunter in which a person resides. Surveys historically have shown there is a 50-week waiting period for the allocation of a bed. That is 20 weeks more than the State average, which is fairly disappointing given that aged care facilities are important to all of us at some stage, regardless of whether we need them today. Some members are closer to needing them than I, but certainly down the track we will all have that need. We all want to have members of the community looked after in the later years of their lives. That is fair and reasonable and individuals should expect that.

Looking at the Hunter's population in the years to come, clearly there will be a significant increase. It is about 600,000 today. It is anticipated that will grow steadily and even the Hunter Strategy refers to an additional 150,000 people in the Hunter in the next 25 years. We will push towards 750,000 to 800,000 people in the Hunter region, which clearly will bring an even greater demand for aged care facilities. There are approximately 56 nursing homes and hostels in the Hunter: 15 are located around Lake Macquarie, 15 around Maitland, Singleton, Scone and Cessnock, 11 in Mayfield, Waratah and Warabrook, and the remaining 15 are spread throughout Newcastle's suburbs.

The key providers of aged care facilities in the Hunter are Catholic Care for the Aged, Anglican Care, and Hunter Retirement Living, which is directed by the Uniting Church. They are very good operators and providers but they are reliant on Federal Government assistance to provide aged care beds for our older community. There is also the capital cost of constructing facilities. They also consistently have trouble with licensing when negotiating with the Federal Government for additional beds and funds. The New South Wales Government has been proactive in trying to address this issue within its capacity by providing transitional beds in many public hospitals. It recognises that individuals need to be accommodated in public hospitals until nursing home beds are available. This is a pressing issue. We all need to lobby the Federal Government to ensure additional beds are provided. I encourage members to become active on the issue.

MRS PATRICIA PEARCE TRAIN TRAVEL

Mr RUSSELL TURNER (Orange) [8.33 p.m.]: I speak tonight principally to quote from a letter I have received from Mrs Patricia Pearce of Canowindra. The letter is addressed to Rail Infrastructure Corporation Customer Services, Haymarket. The reason for the letter is trackwork on 12 March this year and it is entitled "A Nightmare Trip Sydney to Cudal". It states:

Dear Fran McPherson

I arrived at York Street in a Government bus from Mosman. I was early to connect with my train travelling from Sydney to Lithgow and Countrylink coach to the Central West.

I walked from the bus with my suitcase and another soft bag. I noticed a sign indicating trains at the York Street train entrance. I took the lift down to the train platforms only to find out there were no trains to Central Station, only buses.

I then had to drag my bag and soft bag up to the entrance which indicated trains. I spoke to a man and suggested the railway put a notice where the yellow sign indicated trains and an arrow. He showed me a sign on a pole facing the train entrance high up which would not be seen. I had walked straight from the Government bus to the train station and I did not even look towards York Street.

I alighted the bus and was advised it would stop at Town Hall and Central. To my dismay it stopped at Railway Square, Broadway. I was not sure if the tunnels connected with the country platforms so stopped two kind gentlemen. They told me I would have to drag my bag to the Country Platforms. It was after 1 p.m. a very hot day and I am in my sixties. I then dragged my bag up the incline and very hot and bothered arrived at the country train entrance.

I was annoyed by the effort and thought I would tell the Station Manager. He said the buses are going to Eddy Avenue. I told him where they dropped me and he was amazed. Another employee told me not to travel in the week-end (trackwork). I told him he may not have a job the way the public were treated and they would seek other ways of travelling.

The Station Manager agreed with me I should write a letter of complaint. I then went to the indicator. I intended to travel in the Mountain train to Lithgow leaving at 2.18 p.m. A man at the information window told me after consulting his revised timetable (trackwork) it was necessary for me to depart in a train leaving Central at 2.06 p.m.

The 2.06 p.m. departed from Platform 13 and was an all stations to Blacktown. I had to travel to Blacktown and change from whatever platform I came in on and scurry to No. 6 Platform. Still dragging my bag, etc., the railway announcement was blaring out the Lithgow train would depart in 2 minutes.

We were all rushing down to the platform and the train was already packed. One carriage could not be used as it had yellow stickers on it telling the public the doors would not work! I entered an already packed carriage and there is little provision for bags, but managed to squeeze my suitcase between a seat and the back partition. I managed to sit down in the only available seat, someone kindly went upstairs to save me from standing.

We had a pleasant trip to Lithgow and people were remarking that for once the air conditioning was working. At Lithgow I joined a Countrylink coach that was full and had a pleasant journey to Cudal. For once the trip was only ten or more minutes late.

What a trip home, I hope the Railway is proud of the way they treat the public. Does anyone care? I hope older people and frailer travellers can endure the treatment. We pay to travel on this transport and should have some service as well. There was no way I had been told there was trackwork being accomplished that week-end. The railway employees told me it was well advertised in Sydney and over the radio. Unfortunately we live in the country and are not informed at all of the trackwork even when you buy a ticket. Fortunately my husband rang me to let me know to leave early and allow for the changed timetable.

Please look into these matters and let me know the outcome! I am a very dissatisfied customer!

Yours sincerely,
Patricia Pearce.

ILLAWARRA ON-SITE BEST PRACTICE SEMINAR

Ms NOREEN HAY (Wollongong) [8.37 p.m.]: I recently had the honour of representing the Minister for Small Business, David Campbell, in opening the inaugural Illawarra on-site best practice seminar. These on-site seminars are organised for the New South Wales Government by the Department of State and Regional Development. This seminar was held at BlueScope Steel in Port Kembla. Training across the board is extremely important, particularly in an area such as Wollongong, which I represent. The essential thing about these seminars, which offer additional training and assistance, is that they give businesses the opportunity to grow. Businesses that grow, develop and do well invariably employ more people. Anything the New South Wales Government can do to help business, particularly in Wollongong, assists those businesses to get over any obstacles they may face and improves employment opportunities for the people of the Illawarra.

The intention of these seminars is to give business owners and executives a chance to see modern technologies and management practice in action. There is no better place to do so than at the remarkable and diverse workplace available at BlueScope Steel, which is located in the heart of my electorate of Wollongong. Although this was the first on-site seminar the Department of State and Regional Development has held in the Illawarra, it has offered technology programs for small business at centres around the State for almost 20 years. In the past 18 months the University of Wollongong and the Department of State and Regional Development organised two well-received best practice seminars in Wollongong. The first looked at adopting e-commerce for small to medium-size enterprises and the second dealt with supply chain management for small to medium-size enterprises. On the day a substantial number of participants clearly were keen to network and participate. It was a delight to be at that training centre and to see so many enterprises attempting to gain assistance and training.

The launch of this on-site best practice seminar built on successes that had been achieved in the past. Mr Ross Pearce, the convener of the event, was very impressive. I had a lengthy discussion with him and found him to be vibrant, enthusiastic and keen. I had the strong feeling that his enthusiasm could not help but rub off onto those who were participating. Mr Ross Pearce, who manages the Innovative Technology Network innovation cluster, outlined the many benefits of these seminars to participants—a job he told me that he has done now for more than seven years. Ross helped to manage a site visits program for last year's Western Sydney Manufacturing Week, and I am hoping there will be a Wollongong manufacturing week in the near future.

Ross informed me also that he would do another five site visits during this year's Manufacturing Week, which begins in May. Feedback from people who took part in last year's Innovative Technology Network innovation cluster event in June was positive indeed. Nearly 85 per cent of participants found those on-site seminars important or very important as part of their learning process and about 80 per cent felt comfortable interacting with the group. If what happened at BlueScope was anything to go by, they were interacting well. It was clear to see participants valued what they learned from organisations dissimilar to their own.

All participants at the best practice seminar want their businesses to be innovative and competitive, so networking and the exchange of ideas and experiences were strongly encouraged. I commend BlueScope Steel for its willingness to share its knowledge and experience with its key executives who successfully implemented best practice when addressing seminar participants. I am confident that the seminar increased a self-belief among attendees to adopt new technology and innovation. Planning is under way for a second on-site seminar at Port Kembla port as part of Innovation Week, again in my electorate. I congratulate all those involved.

CHATSWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOL CAPITAL WORKS FUNDING

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN (Willoughby) [8.42 p.m.]: Mr Deputy-Speaker, it is good to have you back in the chair. Tonight I wish to raise an issue relating to Chatswood Public School. I hope that the Minister for Education and Training listens to what I am about to say because, unfortunately, for far too long she has not been listening to the Chatswood Public School community and for far too long Chatswood Public School has not received the injection of capital works funding it needs to ensure that it continues the wonderful work it is doing in the community. Only last week I met with the head of the Chatswood Primary School Parents and Citizens Association and other parents, who presented me with a number of letters to give to the Minister. They used form letters that have been written by many parents who feel strongly about the need to improve facilities at the school. I would like to place on the record the contents of one of those letters, which states:

Dear Minister

I am a parent at Chatswood Public School. The School offers wonderful music and sports programs, and it demonstrates a number of benefits of the public education system. Our buildings are now over 120 years old, and it is time for major capital works to help bring the School's facilities up to the standard other schools in the area already enjoy.

Our classrooms are too small, and there are not enough of them. We know from a Department of Education and Training Facilities Review, conducted in 2003, that our classrooms, library, storage and administrative facilities are well below standard.

Minister, we urgently need to bring our facilities up to par, and we need your support to schedule major capital works for our School as soon as possible.

A number of parents are concerned about the shrinking of our playgrounds to accommodate more demountables, the pressure on existing inadequate facilities such as our library and toilets, and worst of all, no hope of a timeframe for correcting these deficiencies in sight.

As new enrolments flood into the School from residential developments around the Chatswood interchange, our children are bearing the increasing and already significant pressure on our facilities and staff.

We have a great multicultural School, with a proud history and record of achievements academically and musically. With the right support we can continue to demonstrate the strengths of the public education system.

As a parent at the School, I ask you to place Chatswood Public School at the top of your priority list for 2006 Capital Works funding, and help us maintain our current high education standards in an area of rapid population growth and development.

I support the comments and concerns expressed by parents at that school. The school has an outstanding team of teachers led by an outstanding principal, Mr Tim Dodds. The school is linked to the local community and students participate in many local community organisations. It is pleasing to note that in the lower North Shore area, where the school is located, 68 per cent of pupils are from a non-English speaking background. The school is aware of the wonderful diversity that exists. In fact, the newsletters produced by the school are in many different languages, including Mandarin. This is but one example of the way the school reflects the strong and diverse nature of the community.

The school has a strong relationship with many key community leaders and organisations. I hope that the Minister for Education and Training is listening tonight because I will again endeavour to present those letters to her. I have made many representations to her on behalf of the community. The Chatswood Public School parents and citizens organisation asked me to pass on to her a wonderful book published by the school entitled *Chatswood Public School 1883-2003—The Continuing Story*. This publication is but one example of the wonderful work that the school community does, be it the teachers, the principal or the parents, to support the activities of students.

I always get a great sense of satisfaction when I visit Chatswood Public School. All the concerts that students put on for the community and all the activities that they undertake are excellent. If the Minister for Education and Training and the Government were serious about their support for public education they would put their money where their mouths are and support the need for additional buildings at that school. Chatswood is bursting at the seams. The Government is imposing extra high-rise on the Chatswood community but it will not support associated infrastructure such as ensuring that the school can cope with the additional number of students it will receive in the next few years and beyond. I again place on the record the concerns of parents. This is a fantastic school and we want to keep it that way. We want to ensure that the facilities at the school increase to cope with demand. I want the Minister to respond formally and to advise the House whether she is able to provide this much-needed capital works funding for the school.

WYONG HOSPITAL CHILDREN'S UNIT

Mr PAUL CRITTENDEN (Wyong) [8.47 p.m.]: Tonight it is my very pleasant duty to advise the House that on 13 March the Minister for Health, the Hon. John Hatzistergos, announced that Wyong Hospital was to receive a new \$2 million children's unit. Perhaps one of the hardest things I have ever done as a State member of Parliament was talk to the mother of a child who had died of meningococcal infection. That lady was very reasonable in the circumstances and, despite efforts to politicise the issue by my political opponents, simply wanted to make sure that other children would not be exposed to the same risk, or the risk would at least be lessened, in the future. The Minister's announcement goes a long way to achieving that aim. Of course, this new unit is not the perfect antidote to, or panacea for, every childhood illness. In the past 12 months my daughter developed a rash and I was not sure whether it was meningococcal infection. However, the new unit will provide reassurance to parents in the area. That is important in the fast-growing electorate of Wyong, which I represent in this place, where the demographics are such that there are many elderly people and young children.

To be honest, this development exceeds my best expectations. I had hoped to get a paediatric specialist and a registrar for the hospital. But the Government has gone much further and provided a four-bed paediatric ambulatory care unit. In addition to the four short-stay beds, the \$2-million unit will offer support for emergency patients, short-stay paediatric care, an outreach service providing home care follow-up, a paediatric outpatient clinic, and support for maternity services, including neonatal resuscitation. The new unit will care for children

aged from four weeks to 16 years and will employ the equivalent of 17 full-time staff, including two paediatric specialists, one paediatric registrar, a nurse unit manager, five specialist nursing staff, and support from allied health staff, including a physiotherapist and a social worker.

A great thing about my electorate is that we have a terrific mental health outreach team which offers great services. I am sure that the new paediatric outreach service will be equally beneficial to the community and meet specific needs. Children may still have to be transferred to Gosford for treatment but that outreach service can be accessed if needed. We must also recognise that if a child presents with a serious condition that will be best treated at Westmead Children's Hospital or Prince of Wales Children's Hospital that child will be airlifted immediately out of Wyong Hospital. I make that clear. In all cases the Government and NSW Health seek to give children the best medical attention that an advanced country such as Australia can provide. That is why children will continue to be transferred from the area if they require specialist care in Sydney. However, the employment locally of two paediatricians and a paediatric registrar is a monumental leap forward.

There has been much debate in the Wyong community in recent times about organisational arrangements at Wyong Hospital. This announcement is proof positive that the Government takes seriously people's health care needs. I will not be distracted from ensuring that my constituents get the best health care possible. I do not intend to fight some war about bureaucracy because that is a political distraction. I am concerned that people's health care needs, including and especially those of children, are met. Much of the new money comes from enhancement funding as a result of streamlining the health bureaucracy. I congratulate the Minister for Health and the Iemma Government, Dr Stephen Christley from the area health service and Mr Ken Cahill, who have demonstrated that they have Wyong's best interests at heart. They kept me informed about the project after I made initial representations, and it was good to work together to achieve a great result.

Mr TONY STEWART (Bankstown—Parliamentary Secretary) [8.52 p.m.]: I commend the honourable member for Wyong for working tenaciously to deliver health services to his electorate. He has done that successfully for many years. Tonight he related to the House a success story regarding the provision of additional paediatric care in his electorate. But I assure the House that the honourable member underestimates his input into that service delivery. While we commend the Minister for Health, the Hon. John Hatzistergos, for responding to community need, we recognise the honourable member's vigorous representations on behalf of his electorate. The honourable member for Wyong has been extremely responsive to his electorate and dedicated to delivering services to his constituents. The new unit at Wyong Hospital is a credit to him.

Private members' statements noted.

The House adjourned at 8.54 p.m. until Wednesday 29 March 2006 at 10.00 a.m.
