

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Thursday 11 May 2006

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

CRIMES AMENDMENT (MURDER OF POLICE OFFICERS) BILL

Bill introduced and read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr PETER DEBNAM (Vaucluse—Leader of the Opposition) [10.00 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

In the past week a number of cases has caused great concern to the community and to police officers in New South Wales. The issues flow from the murder of police officers some years ago. Senior Constable Glenn McEnallay was murdered in April 2002. In the past week someone involved in Glenn's murder had his conviction for murder quashed; I do not think any of us can understand that judicial decision. It goes to the issue of joint criminal enterprise and to whether people were jointly involved in an act of murder. The community and the Opposition—Glenn McEnallay's parents certainly believe this—believe that the driver of the car involved was implicated in the murder and should have stayed in gaol for the murder of Glenn McEnallay. The issues of whether the individual should have been charged with murder and whether he should have stayed in gaol needs to be resolved.

The case highlights that a soft stance is taken in New South Wales against people who murder police officers, and it provides an opportunity again to raise the issue of what is an appropriate sentence for someone who murders a police officer. The second issue came up with a fellow called Esho, who was released from gaol yesterday after serving only five years after he was implicated in the killing of David Carty. Esho is clearly an animal; he should not be on the streets. That goes back to a legalistic debate about whether he was involved in the killing. I am of the view that he was involved, and that issue should provoke another debate in New South Wales about whether we should consider the concept of collective responsibility for people involved in a criminal act. These people should be charged with the serious offence that other people were charged with—in this case, the murder of David Carty.

We cannot fix that today but we can highlight the issue—we need to consider this seriously—of what penalty is imposed on people who murder police officers. We also need to consider how widely we should distribute the charge of murder to other people involved or implicated in the killing. This week there is an opportunity for both sides of Parliament to consider both questions. The bill I introduce today is straightforward and simple, and I will run through it in a minute. It simply states that anyone who is convicted of the murder of a police officer should get life imprisonment. That is it. It will not leave with the judiciary the discretion on sentence; it will simply say that if a jury convicts someone of murder it is compulsory that that person gets life imprisonment.

The second issue is that of collective responsibility or joint criminal enterprise. Should we simply say that all criminals involved in the activity should be charged with murder or with whatever offence it is? That issue is worthy of debate and we should pursue it. Records show that minimal sentences were imposed in cases of police officers killed during, say, the past decade. In the case of the murder of Jim Affleck, who was run down while trying to stop a car, the minimum sentence for the offender was only 12 years. In terms of violence in the State, the police annual report shows that about 1,500 physical assaults on police occur each year. That is an extraordinary number. All the police in this State know that they stand a good chance, over a number of years, of being assaulted while in the line of duty, on the job. Policing is a dangerous job, and we need to acknowledge that.

I shall list the police officers who have died in the course of duty over the past 10 years: on 30 May 1995 Inspector Paul Daley died while on duty; 8 June 1995, Senior Sergeant Wayne George died; 15 June 1995, Senior Constable Peter McGrath; 9 July 1995, Senior Constable Peter Addison; 9 July 1995, Senior Constable Robert Spears; 18 April 1997, Constable David Carty; 28 February 1998, Constable Peter Forsyth; 10 June 1998, Senior Constable Ronald McGowan; 13 July 1998, Senior Sergeant Raymond Smith; 7 January 2000, Constable Matthew Potter; 14 January 2001, Senior Constable James Affleck; 1 February 2002, Senior Probationary Officer Robert Brotherson; 3 April 2002, Constable Glenn McEnallay; 13 April 2002, Senior Constable Christopher Thornton; 3 February 2003, Constable Kylie Smith; 15 September 2003, Detective Sergeant Mark Speechley; 19 June 2004, Constable Shelley Davis; and 4 April 2005, Constable Graeme Lees. That is a list of police officers who died while on duty, some in accidents and some through illness occasioned by their responsibilities; others were murdered. The officers who were murdered were Peter Addison, Robert Spears, David Carty, Peter Forsyth, Jim Affleck and Glenn McEnallay.

I acknowledge the presence in the Speaker's Gallery of Bob and Judy McEnallay, the parents of Glenn, and John Carty, the father of David. We thank them for coming along today. This is an important issue for the community. Bob, Judy and John believe this is an important issue for all police officers in future. They realise that there is nothing we can do today that would bring back Glenn or David, or, indeed, affect the sentences applying to the people who killed them. The parents believe that something should be done for police officers in the future, and that is a point we make to every honourable member of this House. Today is an opportunity for every member to vote in support of police in the future.

If honourable members were to search their hearts and talk through the issues they would agree that the right thing to do is to draw a line in the sand and send a very strong message. The former Premier did send a strong message but, unfortunately, did not back it up. In April 2002, just after Glenn died, Premier Carr said:

I want those who murder police officers to go to gaol forever. I want those who murder police officers to go to the dingiest, darkest cell that exists in a prison system ...

Any one of us today would say that the person or people responsible for the callous murder of Glenn McEnallay should be put away for life.

The former New South Wales Premier said that in April 2002, a week after Glenn McEnallay was murdered. We should not listen to what this Government says, we should look at what it does, and that is what I will now address. The Parliamentary Secretary for police led for the Government on the Opposition's bill introduced in 2002. The Premier did not speak on the bill, the Attorney General did not speak on the bill and the Minister for Police did not speak on the bill. The Government put forward the Parliamentary Secretary to debate the bill, and he said:

The Government wants people who murder police officers to rot in prison; we have never resiled from that position.

The Government has never resiled from that stated position but it has never introduced legislation that would deliver on that promise, and that is terribly unfortunate. Today we have another opportunity to put such legislation in place. I know that Bob, Judy and John will keep fighting hard until legislation is in place to protect future police officers, as a legacy to David and Glenn. And we all ought to consider that; we should consider this bill to protect every police officer as a legacy to David and Glenn. In 1997, when introducing the Crimes Amendment (Assault of Police Officers) Bill, former Attorney General, Jeff Shaw, made a speech that is worthwhile repeating, in part. He said:

The bill is predicated upon a belief that police officers are rightfully owed a measure of protection by the community. That is so for at least two reasons.

First, police officers place themselves in positions of risk on behalf of the community. Second, an attack on a law enforcement officer strikes at the core of our system of democratic government.

Those who seek to harm the persons responsible for the enforcement of laws passed by our Parliament should be subject to special punishment.

That principle is already recognised in the Crimes Act. Section 58 of that Act imposes a higher maximum gaol penalty for the offence of common assault of a police officer than is imposed for the same offence against a civilian. Indeed, the relative maximum penalties are five years and two years respectively.

Surprisingly, and anomalously, the principle is not carried through by the Crimes Act to apply to more serious assaults that in fact inflict injury.

That was the Labor Attorney General in 1997 setting out an argument in support of the bill I have introduced today. I have quoted the former Premier, the Parliamentary Secretary for Police and the Attorney General, all from this Government, who have expressed the same sentiment as the Opposition has expressed, and indeed the same sentiment as the community and police have expressed, but they did not deliver. On 2 June 2002 the Opposition introduced this same bill. On 5 April 2002, my predecessor, John Brogden, wrote to the Premier about the death of Senior Constable Glenn McEnallay. He made the point that the Coalition would introduce the bill, and sought bipartisan support for it.

The bill was introduced in due course and it was clear that the Government would not support it, but the rhetoric continued from the Government about being tough. I make the point, again, that the Coalition bill introduced in June 2002 is exactly the same as the bill I have introduced today. It is very simple, and it contains only a few pages. It provides simply that if a person is convicted by a jury for the murder of a police officer that person will be sentenced to life imprisonment. We wanted to keep the bill very simple. When introducing the bill, my predecessor said:

... this bill will require that anybody who murders a police officer acting in the line of duty will go to gaol for life. We believe that, because of the nature of the job, police officers in New South Wales should be afforded extra protection under the law when they are on duty. When police officers are in uniform on duty or have recalled themselves to duty they put themselves forward when others step back. They put themselves in danger and do so to protect you, and me and the citizens of the State. The law should recognise that to murder a police officer is one of the most serious crimes in the State.

That is really the crux of the matter. People frequently ask me why the law should be different in the case of a police officer. My answer is that they are our agents, they are the front line, they are that thin blue line, they put themselves between physical violence and bullets, they put themselves between those bullets and us and sometimes they die. We owe it to those officers who lost their lives and to those officers who are physically assaulted every single year. Honourable members should be aware that about 1,500 assaults on police occur every year. We owe it to them to provide some further protection. The nature of the job is such that we cannot protect them on the spot other than to provide them with the best equipment, the best resources, the best numbers, but also with the best deterrent.

It is very clear that the law in New South Wales has no effective deterrent for assaulting a police officer, for killing a police officer, or indeed for carrying an illegal weapon. The Opposition makes that point continually. In New South Wales on the remote chance that a person carrying an illegal pistol is caught, he or she will be given a slap on the wrist. In fact, two years ago one young man bought a pistol and carried it illegally for the purpose of intimidating someone in a pool hall. He proceeded to do that. He was stupid, he was caught, but the court gave him a three-month sentence for carrying an illegal pistol. He appealed that sentence because he knew that no-one in New South Wales had been sentenced to anything like three months for carrying an illegal pistol. That sent a really strong message to all the thugs and criminals he knew—as Bob Inkster said, people now wear pistols like jewellery in New South Wales—and that is the problem, there is no effective deterrent.

The Opposition wants to put in place this bill as a deterrent; it provides that if someone kills a police officer that person will go to gaol for life. It has no rhetoric about rotting in dingy corners of gaol cells or anything else, as the former Premier said. It simply says that if someone kills a police officer he or she will go to gaol for life. In due course the Government responded to the Opposition bill. It introduced the Crimes Amendment (Sentencing Procedure) Amendment (Standard Minimum Sentencing) Bill 2002. The Premier and the Minister for Police did not speak to our bill. The Parliamentary Secretary, in debating the Crimes Amendment (Murder of Police Officers) Bill said:

The first standard offence in the Government's bill—which deals with the murder of a police officer—carries a standard sentence of 25 years.

It sounded tough and I remember at the time the Government ran its position very strongly in the media in September 2002. The Government tried to convince the community that it was taking a tough stand. It did not highlight—and we tried to highlight it at the time and I highlight it again—that in the back of the bill are 13 mitigating factors. The bill requires judges to take account the mitigating factors. They apply not only to murder but also to a number of other offences. The provision states:

The mitigating factors to be taken into account in determining the appropriate sentence for an offence are as follows:

The first is that the injury, emotional harm, loss or damage caused by the offence was not substantial. Clearly, in the case of murder that does not apply. The second is that the offence was not part of a planned or organised

criminal activity. That goes to the heart of the issue with the driver of the car and Glenn McEnallay. Clearly every smart defence lawyer in the world will jump on that sort of mitigating factor. The next one—think of this in the context of murdering a police officer—is that the offender was provoked by the victim. The next one is that the offender was acting under duress—what do honourable members think criminals do?

The next mitigating factor is that the offender does not have any record. That could mean that the offender has not been caught before but he or she has just murdered a police officer. The other mitigating factors are: that the offender is a person of good character; that the offender is unlikely to re-offend; that the offender has good prospects for rehabilitation; that the offender was not fully aware of the consequences of his or her actions; a plea of guilty; the degree of pre-trial disclosure by the defence; and the degree of assistance by the offender to law enforcement authorities.

There is no more serious crime in this State than killing our law enforcement agents, our police. Parliament needs to acknowledge that and reflect that in our laws. As I have said before, I do not care whether the Government supports this bill or waits a week and introduces its own bill to make life sentences compulsory. Either way, if the Government does that we will support it. In 1996 when I introduced the bill to confiscate cars of people who were terrorising communities by using their cars, the Government refused to support it and the community then took on the Government. A few months later the Government introduced its own bill and we supported it and congratulated the Government for doing that, under pressure from the community. I am happy to do that again, but I would be equally happy today, or when we next debate the bill, if the Government indicated it will support compulsory life sentences for killers of police.

I will applaud the Government if it supports that, just as I have applauded the Government when it has adopted any other provisions. As I said, in 1996 I congratulated the Government. Last week it changed the name from NSW Police to New South Wales Police Force. That followed what the Opposition did earlier in the year. We released an 11-point plan, and the Government adopted that last week. That is good. I am pleased to see the Government will adopt our good, commonsense policies. For the past two years I have spoken about the 600 police the Labor Party slashed in New South Wales. The Government reversed that a couple of months ago and says it will reinstate them. That is good; we are pleased.

I have asked the Government to change the commissioner's contract to ensure that the police commissioner actively encourages the reporting of all crime and public disorder. I am sure that in due course, in the next six months, the Government will adopt that, and I will congratulate it at that time. I have asked the Government to reduce the police ministry and the police media bureaucrats by 70 per cent and transfer those savings to front-line police to fund those police officers that were slashed. I am sure the Government will do that and I will congratulate it when it does so. I have asked the Government to change centralised local area commands back to locally led, locally based policing. When it does that we will congratulate it.

I have asked the Government to re-empower police with their arrest and search powers, with an urgent reform of the Law Enforcement (Powers and Responsibilities) Act. When the Government does that we will thank it on behalf of the community. I have asked the Government to strengthen police powers in relation to offensive language and conduct, with the aim of raising the accepted standards of public decency. I hope it does that within the next six months. I have asked it to reinstate the graffiti task force and strengthen related penalties and the powers of magistrates. It has moved some way towards doing that but it has a little way to go yet. I have asked the Government to reduce the warnings and cautions for young offenders to one, to get rid of the Labor Government's unlimited warnings and three cautions. When it does that, we will congratulate it.

I have asked the Government to urgently reform the police promotions system, which has been a cause of great concern to police for at least the past four years. We have received every promise in the world that that was going to happen but it has not been reformed as yet. I have asked the Government to reform the complaints system, which is a major problem to serving, front-line police officers, and it constrains their freedom of movement. It is a system that attempts to intimidate front-line police, a system that thugs and criminals know very well and use to handcuff police, not the offenders. I have asked the Government to strengthen the role of the Judicial Commission to make judges and magistrates more accountable to the community, and if it does that I will congratulate it.

This bill is simple. It says that if somebody is convicted of the murder of a police officer it is compulsory that that person gets a life sentence, for the term of his or her natural life. It is straightforward. It has the overwhelming support of police. It has the overwhelming support of the community. I ask honourable members to search their consciences. I know it is difficult for Government members. I know it is difficult for the

Government to support these initiatives, but I ask honourable members to think on behalf of the community and on behalf of the 14,500 police in New South Wales who want to see this line drawn in the sand. It will not bring back Glenn or David or any of those police officers who have been murdered in the past, but it will draw a line in the sand.

Parliament will be sending a message not only to the criminals and thugs who are fearless in taking on the police but also to the judiciary. It says: here is the line in the sand, we want it walked, and anybody who crosses that line in the sand should go to gaol forever. It is a simple message. Both sides of the House can support this initiative, either in this bill or in the Government's bill in a few weeks. It will send out that message very clearly. It is a topic that gets a lot of media attention. It will continue to get a lot of media attention. If we can jointly send that strong message, we will change the behaviour of these fearless thugs in New South Wales.

Over the past decade or so in New South Wales many of these young men have grown up knowing they can get away with anything. They have progressed from teenage crime, antisocial behaviour, through to assaults, intimidation, fraud, robbery, and armed robbery. Then they discovered machetes and knives and guns, and they are now fearless because they know the justice system in this State works for them, and on the remote chance that they get caught, they will get a slap over the wrist. That is the difficulty. The lack of justice in New South Wales means it is the police who are being handcuffed, not the offenders. This bill gives us a chance to send that really strong message to any offender from today, or from whatever day Parliament passes this bill, that anybody who steps over that line will go to gaol for life. I commend the bill to the House. I ask every member of this House to vote on this bill according to the sentiments of the community and the police and to support it.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Matt Brown.

PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYMENT AND MANAGEMENT (ETHANOL BLENDED FUEL) BILL

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 22 September 2005.

Mr MATT BROWN (Kiama—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.30 a.m.]: The Government opposes the Public Sector Management Amendment (Ethanol-blended Fuel) Bill introduced by the Leader of the Nationals, Andrew Stoner. This bill proposes amending the Public Sector Employment and Management Act 2002 to ensure as far as practicable that all petrol driven cars owned leased or operated by the Crown, a public sector service or State owned corporations, use fuel containing at least 10 per cent ethanol [E10], including cars as part of remuneration packages; and to require the Public Employment Office, when determining employment conditions and benefits, to ensure as far as practicable that any petrol driven car which is part of a remuneration package uses fuel with at least 10 per cent ethanol.

The private member's bill is unnecessary because of the action being taken by the Government, and it is legally unnecessary. The Government already has a clear policy position strongly supporting use of biofuels, including ethanol, in the public sector and the member's bill is unnecessary and redundant. The Government announced on 28 November that all Government vehicles would be required to use biofuels where available across the State.

The proposed amendments to the Public Sector Management Act and regulations are not required to achieve the objectives of the bill. In fact I was with the Premier at the Manildra plant at Bomaderry when he announced this policy. It is effectively being implemented by administrative directives, which have already been announced. The approach we have adopted is very similar to that adopted by the Queensland Government, which requires agencies to use E10 where possible, but this is not mandated in law and is also done administratively. Neither the Commonwealth nor any other State or Territory Government has mandated biofuels or ethanol as a fuel for government fleet vehicles. The Government has approved the Director-General of the Premier's Department issuing new guidelines to require all Government fleet managers to use E10, biodiesel, or other alternative fuels such as compressed natural gas or liquefied petroleum gas wherever practicable and cost effective.

In future, all public servants driving vehicles as part of a public sector remuneration package will be required to use E10 where practicable. In addition all public sector officials who have vehicles as part of their remuneration package will be encouraged to replace them with hybrid vehicles when they are due for replacement. This will build on the Cleaner Government Fleet policy already being implemented.

The Government is already promoting environmental initiatives in Cleaner Government Fleet management through the New South Wales Cleaner Government Fleet policy, which sets targets for hybrid vehicles and encourages the use of smaller, cleaner and less polluting vehicles, development of a fleet management plan to meet targets, improvements to the "environment performance score" of fleets, and progressive annual reduction targets of greenhouse gas emissions. The Cleaner Government Fleet policy is expected to save \$50 million on vehicle lease and fuel costs, and slash greenhouse gas emissions by 55,000 tonnes by 2008. This will be augmented by the new Government policy on the use of biofuels in the fleet.

The Government strongly supports the development of a sustainable biofuels industry in New South Wales. The Government expects to finalise a new fuels contract in the near future, which has for the first time called for tenders for biofuels such as biodiesel and ethanol. The tender, which closed on 19 October, is for a new contract to commence on 1 July 2006. We have asked the Department of State and Regional Development and the Department of Primary Industries to jointly and urgently develop a State Biofuels Development Strategy for consideration by the Government next year.

It should be noted that the policy position covers all biofuels and not just ethanol. The advice provided to Government on the environmental, air quality and health costs and benefits of the use of ethanol is mixed. Indeed the Prime Minister's 2005 taskforce on ethanol concluded that more research was required. Environmental outcomes depend on the ethanol blend, vehicle technologies and the air sheds where ethanol is used. There appears to be a small net benefit, which can be offset at times by poor weather conditions, especially in Sydney where E10 has the potential to increase ozone in summer months.

There are winners and losers in the agricultural sector from any significant expansion in ethanol production. There could be significant increases in the price of feedstock, which will benefit wheat farmers, but livestock industry organisations have expressed concern about the cost impact. One recent study suggested a mandatory 10 per cent ethanol blend on all petrol could increase grain prices by 25 per cent. Reports suggest there are regional employment benefits associated with the expanded production of ethanol. The Prime Minister's 2005 Biofuels Taskforce Report concluded that there is no case for the Government to accelerate the uptake of biofuels on energy security grounds.

Cabinet agreed to support choice for private motorists and fleet managers in the use of ethanol-blended fuels, biodiesel fuels and other alternative fuels. Cabinet also agreed that if E10 is to be introduced on a mandatory basis for non-State Government consumers then this should be done nationally by the Commonwealth Government. But the Premier's press release of 28 November 2005 went further than this and stated: "We need the Federal Government in particular to get behind this initiative and play their part and mandate 10 per cent blended ethanol in fuel petrol."

I am a strong supporter of the ethanol industry and of encouraging the use of ethanol in our fuels. I am very pleased with the Premier's announcement and look forward to the contract coming into effect for the New South Wales fleet on 1 July. I am disappointed the Federal Government is not following New South Wales' lead and that The Nationals have not been able to convince their colleagues in Canberra to take the same initiative.

Mr RUSSELL TURNER (Orange) [10.36 a.m.]: It is certainly disappointing to hear the Government say it will not support such a positive bill that will benefit not only Australians generally but farmers in particular. It will give us alternatives to our sugar and wheat, the vast majority of which is exported to volatile markets overseas. It will help us value-add those products, yet this Government is failing to give the support that is needed. It is one thing to say the Government is encouraging the use of ethanol in the government fleet, but how many cars in that fleet are running on 10 per cent blended fuel, as mine is? I have been doing so for months. I can proudly state that I have also driven a Falcon running on 80 per cent ethanol and it went along very sweetly with no effects whatever on acceleration or anything like that. I admit that to run a vehicle on 80 per cent blended fuel would require modification to the fuel lines, but no modification is required with 5 per cent or 10 per cent blended fuel.

The four manufacturers of vehicles in Australia, Ford, GMH, Toyota and Mitsubishi, have put a sticker on every vehicle petrol cap saying the vehicles are compliant. Most of the vehicles from overseas are compliant up to the 10 per cent level. I understand most of the vehicles on United States roads can run quite well on up to 80 per cent ethanol without any modification. The New South Wales Government says it is encouraging the use of ethanol, but it was found in the United States that people were rather reluctant to embrace the benefits of ethanol until its use was legislated in certain States. Once it became mandatory, the fuel companies blended it in their fuels up to 10 per cent and started to promote it. One would have thought the oil companies had introduced

the idea as they embraced it confidently and sold the benefits to consumers. In most States in the United States now people use fuel with up to 10 per cent ethanol as a matter of course.

I understand that about 30 per cent of the fuels used in the United States are ethanol-based. If the Government were strong and put legislation in place, people would enthusiastically support the use of ethanol-based fuel. Next week throughout my electorate I will distribute a brochure promoting the use of ethanol. The information brochure will tell people of the benefits and the history of ethanol back to when Henry Ford embraced it and considered it to be the fuel of the future. The T-model Ford, when first produced, ran exclusively on corn-based ethyl alcohol—or ethanol as we know it today. Henry Ford's opinion that ethyl alcohol was the fuel of the future was widely shared in the automotive industry at that time. Unfortunately, in the 1930s gasoline was becoming cheap and, in fact, was in surplus and ethanol faded into the distance. The T-model Fords motoring around Australia today could run on 100 per cent ethyl alcohol fuel.

Ethanol is not a new invention. It has been around ever since motorcars have been motoring around the world. I acknowledge the Manildra Group as Australia's largest user of wheat for industrial purposes. It has embraced the production of ethanol for many years. I proudly fill up with ethanol at Leewood Fuels, which is a distributor of ethanol-based fuels in Orange. I also acknowledge the United fuel outlets in Orange, Mudgee and Cowra which sell 10 per cent ethanol-based fuels. When I ask the proprietors of those outlets about the acceptance of ethanol by consumers, they all say that up to 70 per cent of the fuel they sell is ethanol-blended fuel. Customers are now confident of putting ethanol into their vehicles. As a bonus they save 3¢ or 4¢ a litre on the cost of fuel.

My wife drives a Volkswagen Passat. It is recommended that the vehicle use premium unleaded fuel. I can safely put ethanol-based fuel, which is a high-octane fuel with 95 to 96 per cent octane, into the Volkswagen and save up to 16¢ a litre. Ethanol-based ethanol fuel costs 3¢ or 4¢ less than unleaded fuel and usually premium unleaded fuel costs up to 10¢ a litre more. So I save up to 16¢ a litre and the car runs safely without any protest. It will take some time for the general public to have confidence in the use of ethanol. The Leader of The Nationals will introduce a bill into Parliament about ethanol-blended fuel. The Government has publicly stated it will not support the bill. The Parliament needs to show confidence in the use of ethanol. If the Government does not want to make it mandatory that fuel companies put ethanol-based fuel into all petrol, it could show confidence in the fuel by using it in government fleets, which consist of approximately 26,000 vehicles. That would be a start.

Ethanol is alcohol produced from the fermentation of sugars and starches. Crops used for ethanol production include corn, wheat, barley, potatoes, sugarcane and even fruit and vegetable waste. In Australia the most economical way to produce ethanol is by using wheat and sugarcane. In the United States, Brazil and many South American countries it is produced from sugarcane and corn. Ethanol is a sustainable and renewable product. Its use as a fuel additive has advantages for the environment, engine performance and the economy. Ethanol is the result of years of testing in Australia and in the United States where it has been used for more than 30 years. Its use is widespread throughout Europe as well.

Australia's four car manufacturers—Holden, Ford, Mitsubishi and Toyota—have reached an agreement to label all cars made in Australia from 2006 as E10-compatible. This ends concerns that a 10 per cent ethanol blend could damage engines and void new car warranties. The Federal Chamber of Automotive Industries [FCAI] states that most new and many older vehicle models can run on E10. The Chief Executive of the FCAI, Peter Sturrock, said the chamber is working with manufacturers to confirm E10 suitability for imported models. The benefits of using an E10 blend are undeniable. One benefit is cheaper fuel prices. Another vital benefit is the creation of jobs in regional areas. Wheat farmers would be able to grow crops with some surety because they would have an alternative outlet for their wheat rather than having to rely on export markets. Sugarcane producers have been through tough times in the past few years because of depressed overseas prices for their product. If they had an alternative market in Australia by turning some of their sugarcane into ethanol, they would be much more viable.

Other benefits are cleaner air and a better balance of payment figures. Every litre of ethanol we produce in Australia means a litre less of imported fuel. The production of oil in Bass Strait is decreasing every year and in the short term we are becoming more reliant on the importation of fuels. In the long term whether our vehicles can switch to gas or another alternative, time will tell. Currently, ethanol is a viable alternative to oil-based and fossil fuels, which are running out. I know there are plenty of fossil fuels left in the world and they will not run out tomorrow. But it is becoming more apparent every day that we will not again see prices at the petrol browsers of 50¢, 60¢, 70¢ or 80¢ per litre. There is an increasing demand for oil from China, India and

other third world countries. As their economies grow, they have more need for oil-based fuels. It seems that we are not going to go back to the good old days. We need to look for an alternative and be less reliant on imported fuels.

It has been said that up to one-fifth of lung cancers in the United States are caused by air pollution. The oxygen content in ethanol reduces harmful toxic exhaust emissions by 30 per cent. E10 reduces carbon monoxide by up to 30 per cent. Carcinogens, butadiene and benzene are reduced by 19 per cent and 27 per cent respectively. Ethanol is an important contributor to value adding to Australian grain and sugar through new markets and increased demand. It creates economic growth and employment in regional and rural communities. Ethanol will reduce our dependence on crude oil sourced from international markets, thereby increasing our national energy security.

If we add a mere 2 per cent ethanol to all the oil we import, Australia would reduce its balance of payments deficit by nearly \$150 million. If we all used 10 per cent ethanol the benefits would increase to \$750 million. I do not know what we have to do to convince the State Government of the benefits of ethanol. It is completely safe for the environment and for our vehicles. Ethanol use will deliver savings on imports and value-add to farm products. Yet the Government persists in simply encouraging the State fleet to use ethanol wherever possible. That is completely unsatisfactory. Once again, we call on the Government to support this bill, which will bring pluses and no minuses.

Mr GERARD MARTIN (Bathurst) [10.50 a.m.]: My contribution to the debate on the Public Sector Employment and Management Amendment (Ethanol-blended Fuel) Bill will be succinct. I must correct some of the comments of the honourable member for Orange. I recognise his passion for this cause. He has embraced the use of ethanol and researched its benefits. He could probably demonstrate how an ethanol-powered LTD performs—I suspect that one must take care when stepping on the accelerator. I drive a diesel car but I would be happy to embrace the use of ethanol fuel.

The proposition advanced by the Leader of The Nationals is pretty wishy-washy. For the past two or three years Country Labor has lobbied the State Government on the issue of ethanol fuel. We have talked to the Manildra Group and other industry players about this matter. As a result, in the next round of State government contracts the Government will mandate the use of 10 per cent ethanol-blended fuel. We should contrast that action with the inaction of the Federal Government on this issue. Last year a Senate committee initiated an inquiry into ethanol fuel use—which, together with the sale of Telstra, was one of the four pillars of principle that Barnaby Joyce said he intended to pursue in Parliament. However, when the Senate committee reported its findings Ministers from The Nationals got rolled on the issue in the Federal Cabinet. The whole sorry story appeared in black and white in the *Australian Financial Review*.

The Prime Minister has said, "We'll encourage public servants and other people to use ethanol if they can." If any government can have an impact on increased ethanol use in this country it is the Federal Government through the introduction of tax incentives and other regimes. But key Federal Cabinet Ministers from The Nationals were rolled comprehensively on mandating the use of ethanol fuel. Those opposite should recognise that fact. A couple of weeks ago I talked to Ian Kiernan at the Bathurst show. Ian is very much involved with the company that is constructing ethanol plants, the first of which I think will be located at Gunnedah. There are positive signs that a major oil company will take all that plant's production, which is great. But it is just the tip of the iceberg. The Federal Government needs to take a more responsible attitude to this issue, and State members of The Nationals must send that message to Canberra.

It is not good enough for the Prime Minister to say, "We'll ask people to use ethanol." Ministers from The Nationals were rolled comprehensively in Federal Cabinet on this issue following an exhaustive Senate inquiry to which the New South Wales Government and many others made submissions. State members of The Nationals cannot claim that the State Government is not acting on this issue, because we are. The former Premier and the relevant Minister explained what we are doing with regard to ethanol use and State tenders. The New South Wales Government is acting responsibly and introducing programs with teeth wherever we can. The allegations and criticisms that the honourable member for Orange directed at the State Government should be levelled at the Federal Government. It is not as if the Federal Government is short of a quid: it could offer some tax incentives in this very important area.

I concede that the honourable member for Orange made some good points. We are not talking about a new technology that must be researched and tested. It has been around since before Henry Ford. There is no problem with the stability of ethanol fuel and there is no question that its use will underpin agricultural

industries. Both sides of politics accept those facts. However, the Federal Government must formulate policy initiatives in this area and, unfortunately, The Nationals were comprehensively rolled on this issue in the Federal Cabinet. I ask members of The Nationals to redouble their efforts and ask John Howard and Peter Costello to come to the party, show some leadership in this area and mandate the use of ethanol fuel by the Commonwealth fleet. That would be a positive step.

Mr IAN ARMSTRONG (Lachlan) [10.55 a.m.]: If one were to leave Parliament House this morning, stroll down Martin Place to George Street and along the way ask 30 people—it would be a cosmopolitan group and a good cross-section of the public—"Is the New South Wales Government showing sufficient leadership and imagination to lead this State into the future", I suspect that about 80 per cent of them would give a negative response. This is an opportunity for the State Government to put aside its political bandwagon and lead by example. That would earn some good front-page articles and editorial comments and a favourable response from people—indeed, it would probably have a positive effect on voters. We were taught at school that leadership is leading by example. This is a great opportunity for the New South Wales Government to take the lead and mandate the use of 10 per cent ethanol-blended fuel in the State fleet.

The ministerial fleet comprises 23 cars. That is a good place to start. It could happen this afternoon or tomorrow morning. The drivers could pull into any one of a number of service stations run by BP and Caltex—some of which are supplied by the Manildra Group, which the honourable member for Orange mentioned—and fill up with that fuel. The price is right. There is no excuse for this Government's not supporting this simple but imaginative Public Sector Employment and Management Amendment (Ethanol-blended Fuel) Bill. New South Wales should take the lead on this issue.

In this debate we have talked a lot about cars, the price of fuel and fuel processing. However, the most important issue is that health benefits will accrue from the use of ethanol-blended fuel. From an urban environmental point of view, the benefits of a greater uptake of biofuels are indisputable. According to Professor Ray Kearney of the University of Sydney, there is an overall reduction in the carcinogenic and greenhouse gas emissions from both ethanol-powered passenger vehicles and larger transport vehicles. In passenger cars the use of an E10 blend greatly reduces tailpipe emissions compared with unleaded petrol. That is one health benefit. Lung cancer is one of the greatest killers in this country today, and pollution causes many other diseases. In almost every Sunday newspaper there are calls from the greenies for a reduction in greenhouse gases.

I am sure that most members of the Australian Labor Party—even the honourable member for Monaro—would support the reduction of greenhouse emissions. I know the honourable member wants that because his dad used to talk about it 15 years ago. The honourable member for Monaro probably learned about ethanol fuel when he was still in his stroller. This is a chance for him to do something about it. The honourable member should support this bill and make New South Wales a healthier place. We can take the lead on this issue.

What are the positives and negatives of ethanol fuel? The benefits of increasing ethanol production and use include the revitalisation of stressed regional and rural economies, increased investment in jobs in rural and regional Australia, more stable regional employment, an economic revival in rural and regional Australia, and value-adding to agricultural crops—and, my goodness, we need that at the moment. Competition from agricultural crops grown overseas is fierce and profit margins are very tight. The use of ethanol brings product and crop diversification for farmers, shielding them from global commodity price fluctuations and other shocks, such as increases in global fuel prices. Ethanol production will provide an alternative and stable income for growers through fixed supply agreements that will offer a guaranteed market and price for a set volume of product, a more diverse regional industry base—increased employment in the regions will mean a greater spread of population and less pressure on the major metropolitan areas—and regional infrastructure enhancement and maintenance. I think every member in this place would support those fundamental improvements.

Australia uses 20 billion litres of petrol and 15 billion litres of diesel annually, giving a total of 35 billion litres of fuel. Biofuels represent about 0.3 per cent of that amount; that is, 99.7 per cent of the fuel we use is non-biofuel. The Federal Government support program is aimed at a modest 350 million litres of biofuel—ethanol and biodiesel—production by 2010. That is 1.06 per cent of the total fuel market. When that target is reached, by 2010, 3.3 billion litres of fuel sold in Australia could contain ethanol or biodiesel if the fuel companies were willing to blend and distribute it. This is a golden opportunity for the New South Wales Government to beat the Federal Government. It should stop talking about it and get on with it. Honourable members should use biofuels in their cars. There are 26,000 government cars on New South Wales roads and

there is no reason that they cannot operate on ethanol. Thomas G. Stephens, the Group Vice President of General Motors Powertrain, spoke at the annual conference on policy and marketing of the Renewable Fuels Association on 8 February 2005. He said:

At GM, we believe in ethanol. Over the past 20 years, we've probably done more to encourage ethanol than any other manufacturer. And we plan to do more.

One example came earlier today. We announced the placement of up to 28 new E85 flex fuel Chevrolet Avalanches around the US to promote use in the coming year.

That company manufactures most of the Statesmans that the Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries drive and it is promoting ethanol blends. The people who make the cars and sell them believe in it, but honourable members opposite will not use it. I do not know why. Mr Stephens continues:

We're the world's largest powertrain organization, with 91 facilities in 14 countries...building over 40,000 engines...*a day*

All are biofuel-ethanol compliant. One of the largest manufacturers of motor vehicles is promoting the use of ethanol. Royal Dutch/Shell touted ethanol's role in achieving sustainable mobility at a national ethanol conference at Scottsdale. A report of the conference states:

During his marketing keynote address before approximately 1,000 attendees at the 10th Annual National Ethanol Conference, Royal Dutch/Shell Executive Director Downstream, Rob Routs predicted "a period of unprecedented innovation and experimentation in the provision of transport fuel" and highlighted the opportunities it provided for renewable fuels like ethanol...

Routs highlighted Shell's investment in Iogan, a firm working to commercialize cellulose ethanol. Routs stated, "We think Iogan's cellulose ethanol...offers very real environmental advantages.

That is the Labor backbench mantra; they love that environmental talk. I hate to give them a lead, but they could get a few votes out of this. Mr Routs went on to say:

I think we all accept that, in the past, those relationships—

with the oil companies—

were sometimes strained and, because of this, we did not recognise that we have common interests and opportunities to work together.

That came from Shell, which is the oldest oil company in the world and operates in 80-odd countries. Who are we to argue with the expertise of General Motors and Royal Dutch/Shell? Who are we to argue about the environmental and health benefits outlined by Professor Ray Kearney? Who are we to deny the people of Sydney, Melbourne and the rest of the State the opportunity to use ethanol? Why do members opposite think that they are smarter than the average motorist? If people want to try ethanol, let them do it. The honourable member for Orange said that he has used it successfully. As we all know, there is no proof that ethanol does anything but good. In recent years some of the large outboard motor manufacturers have acknowledged that it will cause no damage to their products.

There is probably no more fierce political market than the provision of energy. In recent years we have seen a vicious campaign on the part of oil companies discrediting ethanol. Caltex and BP have now realised that they cannot win the battle because they cannot prove their case. They know that they have no evidence that ethanol is anything but good. None of their criticisms are substantiated. We have an opportunity to take the lead by supporting this simple measure requiring the Government to use biofuels in the 26,000 cars owned by the State.

Mr STEVE WHAN (Monaro) [11.05 a.m.]: It is a pleasure to speak in this debate and to join other honourable members in extolling the work that the Government has been doing to promote the use of ethanol in New South Wales. I oppose the Opposition's Public Sector Employment and Management Amendment (Ethanol-blended Fuel) Bill because it adds nothing to the action that the Government has already taken to ensure that ethanol is used in the Government fleet through the new contracts that are being negotiated. I was entertained, as usual, by the honourable member for Lachlan; he always gives a good performance. It is amazing that The Nationals were so keen to abolish his seat. He said that people should be able to use ethanol. I agree entirely: E10 ethanol blend should be available at all service stations throughout Australia. The Federal Government should take the lead in expanding the use of biofuels.

I endorse the honourable member's comments: There is no problem using E10 fuel in modern cars. In fact, it generally has a higher octane level than standard unleaded petrol. I use it in my vehicle. I get it from two services stations—an independent operator in Queanbeyan and at Michelago on the Monaro Highway. The fuel at those services stations is generally cheaper than the fuel at other places around the Monaro electorate and I would like it to be more readily available around my electorate. I encourage the oil companies to extend its availability as soon as possible so that more people can make the choice that I have made to use E10 blended fuel. The Government is taking strong action with regard to E10 fuel. The most vigorous advocate has been the honourable member for Kiama. He has been working hard for his Bomaderry constituents by ensuring that the Government is well aware of the need to use E10 fuel in its vehicle fleet. The honourable member worked with the Hon. Tony Kelly to ensure that the Government's new fleet contracts included reference to the use of ethanol-blended fuel and he has been successful in that regard. His constituents, particularly the 100-odd people who work at the ethanol plant at Bomaderry, should be pleased with his efforts on their behalf.

This is a typical Nationals tactic in that honourable members opposite are trying to claim credit for the work the Government has already done. They are grandstanding despite the fact that their legislation does not require the use of ethanol or blended fuel; it says "as far as reasonably practical". That is no different from what is in the Government's contracts. Ethanol and biofuels are important because we are facing a massive challenge in Australia with climate change, as is the rest of the world. It disappoints me that Opposition members cannot get past this tactic by joining Labor members in talking more broadly about the enormous challenge we face with climate change. We must go even further than this. We must promote the use of hybrid vehicles and lead the world in developing things such as hydrogen fuel cells. We must push the Federal Government to spend much more money on researching those issues.

It is an absolute disgrace that Australia is not at the forefront of alternative energy development and that, instead, the Federal Government puts its money into traditional energy sources rather than, as well, developing new energy sources. The Federal Government has been in office for more than 10 years. Over that time we have seen a pittance go into climate change and we have seen our international position on climate change go from world-leading to a position where we fight a rearguard action in seeking to make sure we do not have stricter controls and emissions targets. The climate change challenge is one that is absolutely massive for Australia. Using ethanol E10 fuel is one of the ways in which we can work towards improving climate change, as well as achieving all the other benefits for our rural communities that members have referred to. It would also provide another market for many of the products of our rural communities, particularly wheat and sugar, among others, and reduce our reliance on imported fossil fuels, which must be a strong drive for any government. Climate change is a massive challenge for rural areas, particularly the region that I represent.

I am interested in the ethanol debate because, as a member of Country Labor, I want to see New South Wales farmers get another market for their product, but also because I am very concerned about climate change. The reason for that is, in part, the research about which I have spoken before in this place regarding the CSIRO's assessment of how climate change and greenhouse gas emissions will affect the Snowy Mountains in New South Wales. That research suggests that in 50 years time it is quite possible that we will not have a ski industry in New South Wales. That, of course, would be an environmental disaster, but it would also be an economic disaster for the region that I represent. The ski industry is a multimillion dollar industry for the Monaro region. The CSIRO research predicts that it is realistically possible that the tree line will move up and the snow-covered area will reduce, and that will make it extremely difficult for us to sustain the ski industry. I know that the ski resort operators are concerned about this. They are certainly working on what alternatives might be available—

Mr Andrew Stoner: I take your point, mate. Get back onto ethanol.

Mr STEVE WHAN: The Nationals want me to get back onto ethanol. One of their great difficulties is that they cannot see that the debate about ethanol and E10 fuel is part of a broader debate about climate change, which The Nationals never want to talk about. I remind the Leader of The Nationals that the honourable member for Lachlan invited me to talk about the environment and climate change, and of course I would always do as he wishes. The impact of climate change on the Snowy Mountains will be severe, and that is why Australia must take action. As part of that, the use of ethanol and the adoption of biofuels are very important. The inaction we have seen from the Federal Government on this is something that all of us should be ashamed of. The Federal Government has not moved to promote the use of ethanol-blended fuel, just as it has not moved to research alternative fuels for vehicles as well as other infrastructure in our community.

Why are we not seeing the Federal Government put more money into hydrogen fuel cells? Why are we not seeing it do more work on solar energy for electricity generation, which is also an important part of

generating the hydrogen for fuel cells? Why are we not seeing the Federal Government put more money into things such as geothermal power and the sorts of energy sources that were highlighted in Tim Flannery's book *The Weather Makers*, which I read some months ago? Those things are all very important, and they are things that we should be looking at in Australia at the moment. In the region that I represent there is growing awareness of these challenges. Indeed, I believe that if ethanol were available in more service stations around the area, we would see a very strong take-up of it. In the next couple of weeks an orthopaedic surgeon from Bega, Dr Matthew Nott, will host a public forum to speak about climate change and the challenges that Australia faces in that regard. Dr Nott also hopes to get mass activity on Tathra beach, to promote the need for cleaner fuels and cleaner sources of energy in Australia. I commend him for that; it is a terrific initiative.

This year and in future years ski resort operators will promote to their patrons the need for their activities throughout their entire life, not just when they are on the ski fields, to have less impact on the environment. So we are seeing wide adoption of the need for alternative energy sources and cleaner fuels throughout New South Wales. It is not just a "greeny" thing, as The Nationals have implied in the past. Indeed, The Nationals have an incredible reluctance to talk about climate change at any stage in the Australian debate. Climate change is an issue that country people and people throughout our community are concerned about, because it is a massive challenge and it will have massive impacts on the future of Australia.

Mr Andrew Stoner: You're just waffling.

Mr STEVE WHAN: The Leader of The Nationals thinks that speaking about climate change is waffling.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! I ask the Leader of The Nationals to refrain from interjecting.

Mr STEVE WHAN: It is an absolute disgrace that The Nationals will not face up to the importance of climate change and the impact it will have on rural New South Wales: more droughts, less snow, and all the things that are potentially devastating for rural New South Wales.

Mr Andrew Stoner: You are arguing for the bill, you dill, so just support it.

Mr STEVE WHAN: The Leader of The Nationals seems entirely unable to recognise that the debate on ethanol is part of a broader debate on alternative fuels. That simply shows to people that this bill is a stunt. It is a stunt that has been put forward not by someone who has a genuine commitment but by someone who saw the way the State was moving and that country people were concerned about these issues. Country people wanted to see ethanol adopted, and the Leader of The Nationals tried, belatedly, to think of a way of getting himself into the newspapers. He followed on from people such as the honourable member for Kiama, who have been working on this issue and promoting ethanol for a long time. That is typical of The Nationals.

I will vote against the bill because, as I said in my opening remarks, it does not mandate the use of ethanol. The Government's contracts have gone as far as, if not further than, the bill goes. The bill provides that, as far as reasonably practicable, any petrol-driven motor vehicle should use ethanol. That is what the Government is doing through its executive action; it does not require this bill. The bill is simply a stunt from a party that constantly follows on from past actions. One has only to look at the history of our parties in New South Wales to see that this is typical of The Nationals. The National Party was formed many years after Labor started representing country New South Wales. Indeed, the party was formed simply to be an anti-Labor party. So all The Nationals have done for the past 60 years or so is trail along on the coat-tails of Labor and oppose things that Labor has put forward.

Mr Andrew Stoner: Point of order: My point of order is relevance. This has absolutely nothing to do with the bill. The honourable member for Monaro is simply waffling. Does he support the bill, yes or no? I ask you to direct him to confine his remarks to the leave of the bill.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! I remind the honourable member for Monaro to keep his remarks relevant to the bill.

Mr STEVE WHAN: A large part of my contribution to this bill has been about alternative energy sources and the challenges we face with regard to greenhouse gas emissions, which The Nationals refuse to address. It is fascinating that The Nationals are so sensitive that they took a point of order when I started to

speaking about the history of their party and the way they trail along after the Labor Party, simply opposing everything it puts forward.

Mr Andrew Stoner: Point of order: The honourable member for Monaro is again straying from the leave of the bill. He has nothing to say about the bill, so he is straying into irrelevancies. I ask you to direct him to confine his comments to the leave of the bill.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! Again I remind the honourable member for Monaro to confine his remarks to the leave of the bill.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I am happy to reiterate at some length the points I have made, because climate change is a vital issue for our region and for country New South Wales. The Government is absolutely committed to the use of ethanol-blended fuel, and that is because of the efforts of Country Labor. Once again that shows that rural New South Wales is best represented by members of Country Labor in this place. That is why the Government has fought for so long to get ethanol as part of government contracts, led by people such as the Hon. Tony Kelly and the honourable member for Kiama, who has been an excellent representative of the people of Bomaderry and those who work in the ethanol plant there.

In fact, I had the great pleasure of being part of a delegation that the honourable member for Kiama led to inspect the plant, to talk to the people who are making the ethanol and to see what their plans are for the future. Of course, there are challenges that The Nationals have not talked about, such as how Australia, if it had the right leadership from the Federal Government, could gear up to produce enough ethanol to supply the full fleet. We have not heard anything about that from The Nationals because, once again, they are not willing to tackle John Howard; they are not willing to stand up for country people against their masters in Canberra. Their masters in Canberra said, "We are not going to pursue ethanol", so over The Nationals go with barely a whimper. The Government opposes the bill because it does nothing to encourage ethanol use.

Mr DONALD PAGE (Ballina—Deputy Leader of The Nationals) [11.20 a.m.]: I strongly support the Public Sector Employment and Management Amendment (Ethanol-blended Fuel) Bill. I commend the Leader of The Nationals for introducing it. The Nationals have long supported—indeed, driven—public debate regarding the use of biofuels, particularly ethanol-blended fuels. We have done this for many good reasons, including environmental and public health benefits, encouraging regional development and, of course, as a means of reducing Australia's reliance on imported fossil fuel. Annually the Government fleet—comprising around 25,000 cars and light commercial vehicles—uses approximately 110 million litres of unleaded fuel and 107 million litres of other types of fuel, including LPG.

Ethanol-blended fuel is a win for everyone: it results in cleaner air, fewer greenhouse gases and fewer respiratory illnesses; it can be a major industry for regional areas; it will reduce our reliance on fossil fuels; and it is marginally cheaper than unleaded petrol. Australia's reliance on foreign oil is evident in our increasing trade deficit, with petroleum product imports increasing from \$448 million in 2001 to \$6.3 billion in 2005—a very substantial increase. We are becoming a lot more dependent on oil imports and we have to do something about that. Obviously, ethanol is a significant way of beginning that turnaround. Transport now accounts for 15 per cent of our nation's greenhouse emissions, and those emissions have increased by 28 per cent over the past 13 years. Clearly, there is a need for renewable fuel sources such as ethanol to be embraced. That is an important issue because the CSIRO recently indicated that we could have a 2 degree Celsius increase in temperature by 2030 and an increase of up to 6 degrees Celsius by 2070, with a 0.88 metre increase in ocean levels. There are significant issues in regard to global warming. This bill is an important part of addressing some of those issues.

I went to Brazil in 1991 and 60 per cent of the vehicles were powered by 100 per cent ethanol. So the idea that somehow a 10 per cent blend is a problem is not correct. The cars can handle it and we have the capacity to produce it. Manildra is producing 90 million litres of fuel annually, but selling only about 25 million litres because of a lack of demand. There is plenty of capacity for Manildra to supply the ethanol to run the Government fleet. Other honourable members have spoken about health effects. I will quote briefly the Australian Medical Association. The association says:

There is incontrovertible evidence that the addition of ethanol to petrol and biodiesel to diesel will reduce the deficit and ill-health associated with the emissions produced in burning these fuels.

There are a lot of health reasons why we need to embrace the use of ethanol. I strongly support this bill. I commend the Leader of The Nationals for introducing it.

Mr ANDREW STONER (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [11.23 a.m.], in reply: The Public Sector Employment and Management Amendment (Ethanol-blended Fuel) Bill was introduced by The Nationals because of the Government's lack of action during 11 long years in power. The Carr-Iemma Government has stood by while a dishonest campaign has been waged against ethanol-blended fuel. This Government has allowed anti-ethanol propaganda to be proliferated throughout New South Wales, including those ubiquitous "No Ethanol" stickers on petrol bowsers at New South Wales service stations. There is no question that there are enormous benefits to the public, particularly country communities, through a greater use of ethanol-blended fuel. Those benefits are supported by various research organisations including the CSIRO, the Bureau of Transport and Regional Economics, and the Centre for Agricultural and Regional Economics.

The benefits include: a reduction in greenhouse gases; a reduction in cancer-causing pollution and consequent public health savings to the taxpayer; a reduced reliance on foreign oil producers; lower fuel prices with potentially a reduction of up to 5¢ cents a litre in the price of unleaded fuel with a 10 per cent ethanol blend—although, as the honourable member for Orange commented, premium unleaded fuel can be replaced with an ethanol-blended fuel with a saving of up to 16¢ a litre. And with fuel at record levels that is a very good reason why this Government should be doing everything it can to promote the use of ethanol. Also, of course, there are regional development benefits for farmers and for regional communities through the manufacture of ethanol in ethanol plants.

It has been criminal that while the Carr-Iemma Labor Government has spun its green credentials it has done absolutely nothing for 11 long years to promote the uptake of ethanol-blended fuel. That flies in the face of advice and support from groups such as the Service Station Association, the Australian Medical Association, the NRMA, the New South Wales Farmers Association, and overseas jurisdictions including the United States of America and Brazil. We heard contributions from three so-called Country Labor members. It was a bit of a hospital pass because they did everything they could to find reasons not to support this practical and simple bill. The reasons proffered were spurious. One reason was that no-one else had mandated it. Is that a good reason why New South Wales should not take a positive step? Absolutely not.

Another reason put forward was that guidelines had been produced. Because of the Government's track record we do not trust it with guidelines. We need to have legislation to force the Government to do something. We also heard Government members waffle on about the Federal Government, ignoring the fact that it has established an ethanol fuel target of 350 million litres by 2010. We had some good contributions from the honourable member for Orange—a true local champion—on ethanol. The honourable member for Lachlan has shown a lot of leadership on this issue. We heard a convincing contribution from the honourable member for Ballina about the indisputable benefits of biofuels. I commend the bill to the House.

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

The House divided.

Ayes, 34

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

Noes, 45

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

Question resolved in the negative.

Motion negatived.

Pursuant to sessional orders business interrupted.

COUNTRY LABOR

Mr ANDREW STONER (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [11.37 a.m.]: I move:

That this House notes that members of the Kempsey branch of the Labor Party are calling for a review of the term "Country Labor" in New South Wales because they are being mistaken for National Party representatives or just another faction of the Australian Labor Party.

This motion is about a call from members of the Kempsey branch of the Australian Labor Party [ALP] following the last State election. Clearly, they were concerned about the lack of success of the so-called Country Labor faction to the point where it was losing them votes. That concern has come from good, loyal supporters of the Labor Party in the great country town of Kempsey, and I instance Mrs Melville, who has been a loyal and hardworking member of the Labor Party for many years. Clearly, members are disillusioned with the Country Labor marketing gimmick. The origins of this once-proud party were in the bush. I refer to its genesis in the struggles of miners and shearers. The Labor Party is now a city-dominated party whose frontbench looks like the cast of *The Sopranos* and whose Cabinet has only one Minister from outside NSW—Newcastle, Sydney and Wollongong.

There are two main reasons why grassroots members of the Labor Party in country communities are so disillusioned with the current regime. First, the actions of Country Labor members do not match their words. I will refer to the voting record of the Country Labor faction on issues that are important to country people. They have never done the right thing by their country constituents and supported those important issues. They have meekly acquiesced to their city masters on a range of issues. Second, Labor Party members are disillusioned about the backroom deals done with the Independents by ALP headquarters in Sussex Street that are killing the ALP presence in country communities.

I turn first to the voting record of country Labor. We have never seen the honourable member for Tweed, one of the so-called Country Labor faction, cross the floor on issues of importance to country people. These are big men in their electorates but they are wimps in Macquarie Street. I include in that statement the honourable member for Monaro, the honourable member for Murray-Darling, the honourable member for Tweed, the honourable member for Bathurst, the Minister for Local Government, the honourable member for Kiama and the honourable member for Port Stephens. They have consistently toed the city-dominated party line in Macquarie Street.

As recently as 4 May this year they voted against debating an urgent motion relating to the sale of Snowy Hydro. On 8 March this year they voted against debating a motion opposing the rushed fire sale of

Snowy Hydro. On 1 December 2005 they voted against the Rural Communities Impacts Bill, which would have required an assessment of the impacts of the Government's policies on country communities. Only today they voted against Public Sector Employment Management Amendment (Ethanol-blended Fuel) Bill, which would have been fantastic support for country communities. Indeed, on 30 November 2005 they voted against debate on the ethanol bill being given priority. On 19 October last year Labor members voted against a priority debate about the Pacific Highway upgrade and in particular the Bonville deviation. On 22 September last year they opposed debating an urgent motion relating to the Government's purchase of Yanga Station, which is killing jobs and the local economy in the Balranald-Hay area.

On 23 June last year they voted for legislation that locked up the Brigalow Belt region and the sustainable forestry industry in the Pilliga region, which has killed jobs throughout those country communities. On 22 May last year they voted against an urgent motion about the Brigalow Forest lock-up. On 23 February last year they voted against debating the Government's rip-off on Crown land enclosure rentals. On 18 November 2004 they voted against debating an urgent motion about country police numbers, which have been slashed since the 2003 election. On 16 November 2004 they voted for the Threatened Species Amendment Bill, which has made life difficult for farmers as they try to make a living off the land. I could go on and on; I have a long list. Country Labor members voted against debating law and order in Dubbo, regional infrastructure, a review of the clubs tax, and a motion seeking retention of the Casino to Murwillumbah rail line. So they are big men in their electorates but wimps in Macquarie Street.

I could go on. Labor members voted against debating branch rail line maintenance, grain rail lines and forced local government amalgamations, yet they voted for the Native Vegetation Act and legislation that locked up forests on the North Coast. The second reason members of the Labor Party in country areas are so disillusioned with the current regime is the dirty deal that has been done by Sussex Street with the Independents. That was confirmed by the honourable member for Murray-Darling. In a debate on 9 December 2004 I said that the honourable member had written:

Dawn Fardell won the seat of Dubbo following the death of a good friend Tony McGrane. I would like to believe I had a small role in this result.

In the same debate the honourable member for Murray-Darling said:

Who had the best tactics? Labor did not stand a candidate because it knew it could not win the seat ...

We chose not to stand a candidate in Dubbo, and the tactic worked ...

Country Labor holds eight seats, which is not bad. The Independents hold four seats, which is not bad. Incidentally, for the benefit of The Nationals, counting the number of Country Labor seats requires two hands; eight plus four equals two times six, which is 12.

Clearly, Country Labor is counting the Independents as part of the Country Labor faction. However, the Country Labor vote has collapsed as a result of that strategy. In Northern Tablelands the Labor Party vote was 9.17 per cent in 1999; it was 4.74 per cent in 2003. In Port Macquarie the Labor vote was 26.97 per cent in 1999; it was 8.41 per cent in 2003.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! There is too much noise on the Government benches.

Mr ANDREW STONER: In Tamworth the Labor Party vote was 12.38 per cent in 1999; it was 11.92 per cent in 2003. Madam Acting-Speaker, can you call members opposite to order?

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): I have just done that.

Mr ANDREW STONER: In Dubbo the Labor Party vote was 20.26 per cent in 1999; it was down to 15.06 per cent in 2003 and zero in 2004. So from an average vote of 17.2 per cent in those country seats in 1999, the Labor vote had gone down to 10 per cent in 2003.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! I call the honourable member for Murray-Darling to order.

Mr ANDREW STONER: We have seen Labor's vote collapse. ALP members of those branches have been told that either they cannot stand or they must run dead. Why would they want to belong to the ALP? It is not good for democracy that Sussex Street, in its pursuit of this dirty little deal with the Independents, is treating

loyal ALP members with contempt. It is no wonder branches of the Labor Party such as Kempsey are disillusioned with this whole Country Labor gimmick. Clearly, they are disillusioned with the current regime, which is being driven by Sussex Street and the city-dominated Labor Party in Sydney. They are disillusioned that their so-called representatives are not voting for their interests.

Labor members have never once crossed the floor; they have consistently voted against measures that would have provided great benefits to country New South Wales. I have a list—I have given just a few examples—and I will circulate that list later. ALP members are also disillusioned with the Independents strategy, with local members being told, "No, you can't participate. You can never stand. If you do stand we want you to go away somewhere while the election campaign is on." These people are concerned. The Labor Party vote is diving at an alarming rate and people are dropping out. That is not good for democracy. I support the call of the Kempsey Branch of the Labor Party, and it is appropriate that the matter be debated here today.

Mr GERARD MARTIN (Bathurst) [11.46 a.m.]: As the Parliamentary leader of the Country Labor group, I have never had such a great free kick. To see why The Nationals are in decline one need only look at the calibre of their leadership. I remind honourable members that not long ago, when the honourable member for Lachlan was the Leader of the National Party, they had 20 members in the House. Talk about vote collapsing! What has happened to The Nationals? The number of members of The Nationals is down to a cricket team, and more will go. The Leader of The Nationals referred to the Independents. Labor is supposedly losing votes to the Independents. Let us look at the seats held by the Independents in this place, and perhaps my colleagues can help me in terms of who previously held those seats.

Were the seats of Port Macquarie, Tamworth, Northern Tablelands and Monaro once held by the National Party? The jewel in the crown, Dubbo, had never been held by anyone but The Nationals for 100 years. All those seats are held by Independents, and The Nationals have no chance of winning them back. In terms of Country Labor, I can understand the horror, disdain and worry of members of the Kempsey Branch of the Australian Labor Party at being mistaken for members of The Nationals. I cannot think of a greater insult politically than being compared to the current members of The Nationals. I might add that the number of Nationals has declined as they become irrelevant to people in country New South Wales. The figures for the Federal Government are the same. The Nationals in the Federal Government are a great embarrassment as they dwindle away while trying to hang on to tradition.

Everybody knows that during the development of politics in New South Wales and in this Parliament the Labor Party led from the bush. Going back to before the Second World War, the Labor Party has a great tradition of representing country people, and that continues today. We are doing that perhaps in a more formalised way in the Parliament with our Country Labor group, which is an effective lobby group. The Leader of The Nationals, among his scurrilous list of lies, talked about ethanol. This morning we voted against his wishy-washy bill. We have already done what he was proposing. We have already lobbied the Government in terms of State contracts. Contrast that with The Nationals in Canberra, where they got rolled in Cabinet. A senate inquiry recommended that ethanol be mandated—ethanol was one of the four pillars on which Barnaby Jones intended to campaign—but The Nationals were rolled in Cabinet. The Prime Minister said "No, we will encourage people to use it." That is the sort of cut and thrust one gets from The Nationals.

The Leader of The Nationals talked about cutting services. When The Nationals were last in government I lost count of how many railway lines they closed. That is how well they represented the bush and why their numbers have reduced from more than 20 to 12. The Leader of The Nationals needs to take note of this. At least 13 or 14 lines—perhaps 18—were closed. How many country hospitals went down the gurgler under The Nationals? Probably about 30. Thanks to Country Labor, five country hospitals in my electorate have been rebuilt in the seven years I have been a member of this place, and an investment of \$95 million has just been announced for work to start on Bathurst Base Hospital. The Government has rebuilt country hospital after country hospital across New South Wales and provided those wonderful multipurpose service centres.

One of our greatest supporters has been Ian Sinclair. I wonder how fervent he is about his much-faded Country Party. The new brains trust, which spends most of its time in the eastern suburbs drinking martinis with the Leader of the Opposition, got rid of the word "Country". They were The Nationals! They did not want any direct association with the country. This motion is a great embarrassment to them. I do not know how often the Leader of The Nationals wants to shoot himself in the foot, but he must be getting pretty short on toes.

The Leader of The Nationals spoke about police numbers. Four new police started in my electorate last week. Under the Government police numbers, particularly in country areas, are at record levels. All the

members opposite do is rubbish coppers. We on this side of the House support them. Police numbers have never been better. We are out there representing the people on other issues, such as electricity. The recent changes to the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme, the reduction from 200 to 100, came about following direct representation and lobbying by Country Labor of the Premier and the Minister for Health. We had been working on that for two years. The Nationals came in on the gravy train after the decision was made.

It is ridiculous for members opposite to claim that Country Labor is insignificant. The once- proud Country Party has had its numbers in this place decimated. In the other place The Nationals have been able to cobble together four members. This week Country Labor has six members in the upper House—a 50 per cent increase on the The Nationals numbers. The Nationals are going down the gurgler. Those numbers are ample evidence of the fading star of the Country Party. One of the reasons its numbers are dropping is the lack of leadership. The party jettisoned the honourable member for Lachlan, the last of the real Country Party men, for the Hon. George Souris, another eastern suburbs partygoer. Now the leader is the honourable member for Oxley.

The fortunes of The Nationals are going down and down. It is not us who elect Independents to these rural seats, it is the electorate that has deserted The Nationals. Time after time we hear personal denigration of the Independents. I am not here to defend the Independents; I do not need to because they are all capable of defending themselves. Most of the Independents I know have a great background in local government, as I have, as the honourable member for Murray-Darling has and as four or five Country Labor members have. All we hear is personal denigration by the Leader of The Nationals of those members. We know what members of The Nationals are like at muckraking and spreading sordid stories; they are past masters at it. They should judge the Independents fairly, and only on policy.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to say, on behalf of Kempsey members of the Labor Party that I agree that it would be an abominable embarrassment to be mistaken for a person from The Nationals. That would be just about the ultimate insult. In numerous urgency debates we have called on members opposite to go with us to Canberra to talk to John Howard and Peter Costello to get a fair go for country people on a range of issues. They sat there like stone-faced planks; they do not have the guts to stand up for country people.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! There is far too much noise in the Chamber. The honourable member for Bathurst is the only member with the call.

Mr GERARD MARTIN: It is outrageous of them to slander me and other Country Labor members, but we have thick hides and can take anything The Nationals dish out. Members opposite should go back and look at the statistics. They are going down the gurgler. They should explain to us why they had 20 members in this place in 1988 and now they have only 12. What hope do they have? During the Dubbo by-election a member of The Nationals, the tactical genius from Coffs Harbour, took a week off from Parliament, where he was supposed to be representing his people, and was sent to Dubbo to win back the seat for The Nationals. We all know what happened. The current member secured a healthy swing. That campaign orchestrated by The Nationals to win back one of the jewels in their Crown was an absolute failure.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! There is far too much noise in the Chamber. Hansard is having trouble hearing the honourable member for Bathurst.

Mr GERARD MARTIN: The Nationals will be condemned to dwindling numbers.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! I call the honourable member for Clarence to order.

Mr GERARD MARTIN: One only has to look at the calibre of the people entering this place representing The Nationals to know that their downward spiral, which is occurring in every Parliament in Australia and particularly in this Parliament, will continue because they are irrelevant. They do not stand up to the Liberal Party at a State or national level. They do not represent country New South Wales. We on this side of the House do, and we will continue to do so vigorously.

Mr THOMAS GEORGE (Lismore) [11.56 a.m.]: I support the motion moved by the Leader of The Nationals. It was brought about by members of the Kempsey branch of the Labor Party calling for a review of

the term "Country Labor." It is all very well for the big bear to mouth off and then disappear, but who are Country Labor? Who do they stand for? They do not stand for country people. Which way have they voted on issues such as native vegetation and ethanol? How did they vote this morning on ethanol? The honourable member for Murray-Darling did not even speak on the bill. They purport to support country people, but where were they on the Brigalow issue? Where were they on the national parks issue? They did not vote for country people. If they did, their votes were recorded in the wrong place.

What about the cross-border commission? The honourable member for Tweed is a member of Country Labor. How did he vote on the Cross-border Commission Bill, the greatest bill presented to this House in support of all members with electorates on State borders? Country Labor voted against it. What about the country town water and sewerage program? Have members of Country Labor supported that?

Mr Steve Whan: Yes, I have.

Mr THOMAS GEORGE: Yes, I know the honourable member for Monaro has, and he would need to with his ability. What has Country Labor done about the timber bridges replacement program? In the run-up to the election it will be reintroduced. It will be like the vendor duty. What has the honourable member for Tweed done for the Tweed? With all the fanfare in the world the Government has now said that it has wiped another tax. They do not say the Government introduced that tax last year and took \$60 million vendor tax in one year from the people of this State. It is a disgrace that Country Labor did not vote against the introduction of that tax.

Country Labor did not even speak in the House on the Protection of Agricultural Production (Right to Farm) Bill. Country Labor members sit in the House today, but they were not in the House for the debate on that bill. Where was Country Labor on the closure of the Casino to Murwillumbah rail line? Nowhere. The honourable member for Tweed was not even in the House on a couple of occasions the matter was debated. There is sufficient record of their stand on the Snowy Hydro scheme. Then there is rural crime and rural impact statements. Country Labor was not seen when it came to the vote on rural impact statements. They did not have to cross the floor, but they did not have to oppose it.

Mr Gerard Martin: Is this your maiden speech?

Mr THOMAS GEORGE: You ought to talk, Bundy. As to the law and order issue, Country Labor members should have a look at the regional commands in their electorates to see what has happened to police numbers in country areas. What has Country Labor done to help country people on the issues of workers compensation, occupational health and safety and WorkCover? This list goes on. They are the greatest mob of hypocrites.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! I remind the honourable member for Lismore that he should direct his remarks to the Chair, not to the members opposite.

Mr THOMAS GEORGE: I will do that, so long as the ruling is applied to both sides. If Country Labor members devoted as much energy to representing country people as they do to criticising The Nationals, their electorates would be better off. The people in country and regional areas of this State would benefit from proper representation in this House by the Country Labor members. The needs of country people are continually overlooked in this House because we have a so-called Country Labor faction representing country people. That is the greatest furphy I have heard in this House. People in country and regional New South Wales are a wake-up to them. I compliment the Leader of The Nationals for his comments on Kempsey branch members of the Labor Party.

Mr STEVE WHAN (Monaro) [12.01 p.m.]: I speak on behalf of the thousands of proud Country Labor members from rural New South Wales. They are proud because they have seen the way that Country Labor represents country New South Wales. I will put The Nationals out of their misery. The party has declined badly over the past decade or so. Under their current appalling leadership, The Nationals are down from 20 representatives in this House in 1988 to 12 at present. In the upper House there are six Country Labor members and only four Nationals. That is because they have sold out country New South Wales over and over again. Only yesterday Country Labor members raised in this place an important motion on the cost of petrol in country New South Wales, an expense that is breaking the budgets of country families. The Nationals did not even come into the Chamber to contribute to the debate. They left it to two city Liberals.

We have seen a constant record of failure from them. The Leader of The Nationals went through a list of seats that the Independents have taken over, as if he were proud of it. The Independents should be proud, but

I do not know why the Leader of The Nationals would be proud. I am a member in this place because at the last two elections there has been a 21 per cent swing in Monaro against The Nationals. The voters have rejected their do-nothing, whingeing approach to rural New South Wales. I am here because The Nationals whinged and whined but failed to deliver on Queanbeyan ambulance station, Queanbeyan hospital, Bombala hospital, the Adaminaby water supply, the Dalgety water supply and Cooma North school.

When The Nationals represented Monaro there were 30 fewer police in the local command. They closed the Cooma railway line. They failed to get secondary education in Jindabyne. They failed to upgrade Cooma TAFE and they sacked 2,000 teachers. I am here because I have delivered on all those issues. All those capital projects are happening or have already happened in Monaro since I was elected. Not only did the Government replace teachers, we employed more. We have employed more police. Country Labor is about delivering for country communities.

The Nationals have gone back into history to try to recreate their glory days. For a while they had a few representatives. As I said in an earlier debate today, they formed a long time after Labor started representing country New South Wales. Bruxner, who was their first leader, set the tone for the National party. When Labor started driving irrigation projects through New South Wales, they opposed the construction of the Burrinjuck dam. They were against the upgrade of the dam and the hydroelectric power station when McKell took it on. They were against the Soil Conservation Service. They refused packages to help farmers who went broke before the Second World War. They were not in support of that at all. No wonder they have a history of selling out and not representing country New South Wales. That attitude has carried on through the 1990s and into this century.

The Nationals have refused to back Country Labor as we have fought the Federal Government on the crippling petrol prices that are faced by people in rural New South Wales. Over and over again they have refused to back us on Telstra. They have refused to back us on so many issues where Country Labor is at the forefront. Today we saw another stunt from them where they have followed Labor on ethanol. Once again they took points of order and made silly interjections when I raised the important issue for country people of climate change. Country farmers are the people most affected by climate change. Yet that is another issue where The Nationals, the once great Country Party, have sold out their constituents.

I have talked to many former Country Party members in the Monaro electorate. A lot of them voted for me at the last election because they were so dispirited with The Nationals. They have said to me, "The National Country Party has never been the same since it lost its name." That is right. The loss of "Country" from its name was not only a great symbolic occasion, it reflected their attitude in policy and in real life, that is, shedding the country and their representation of country people. I am sure the honourable member for Tweed will talk about the failure of The Nationals to stand up for funding for the upgrade of the Pacific Highway in the recent Federal budget. The honourable member for Burrinjuck has failed over many years to lobby for the upgrade of the Barton Highway. Again, that project has been given a pittance, not enough to start work on the Barton Highway. That is another sell-out from The Nationals. It is no wonder I heard not so long ago the comment from a radio commentator in the Central West, "What is the difference between a Tarago and The Nationals? The Tarago has more seats."

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck) [12.06 p.m.]: I look forward to The Nationals resuming representation in the electorate of Monaro, following that paltry performance from the current member. This motion was first moved nearly three years ago. It is as relevant today to the people of Kempsey as it was when it was moved on 3 July 2003 because any Nationals member would be extremely offended to think that a Labor Party member was being mistaken for one of them. The Nationals are the true representatives of rural and regional New South Wales. We fight day after day in this place for a better service for country people. As has been said by the Leader of The Nationals and the honourable member for Lismore, we see time and again the paltry record on voting in this place by so-called Country Labor, which, I believe, is not really a faction of the Labor Party.

Country Labor members have voted against important legislation on native vegetation and the Brigalow belt bioregion. This morning they voted against the Public Sector Employment and Management (Ethanol-blended Fuel) Bill, which is a sensible piece of legislation that was moved by the Leader of The Nationals. The bill relates to the blending of ethanol with regular fuels. It is not only a sensible move for business and the creation of job opportunities in New South Wales, it is also relevant to the pricing of fuel. Once again we see Country Labor vote against an important issue. They have voted to increase wilderness sizes, which is a plug to get Green preferences.

On two occasions, from memory, they have voted against the important Cross-border Commission Bill, which is a vital piece of legislation for communities that border other States or the Australian Capital Territory,

as does the electorate of the honourable member for Monaro. The honourable member for Monaro has continued to vote against that bill and the establishment of a cross-border commission. His actions are hypocritical because he is not acting in accordance with the wishes of his core constituency. Two very important and significant issues affecting all country areas are the Country Town Water Supply and Sewerage Program and the Timber Bridges Replacement program, both of which have had funding stripped time and again by Country Labor and the Australian Labor Party [ALP]. Of course, the right to farm bill, a very important piece of legislation proposed by the Opposition, was rejected by honourable members opposite. Country Labor members were there, thick as thieves, with the rest of the Labor Party voting against the interests of rural and regional New South Wales.

I was interested to note the honourable member for Monaro's comments about CountryLink services. Along with members of The Nationals and members of the Country Women's Association I circulated a petition around New South Wales condemning the reduction in rail services. A huge number of services have been stripped from the Queanbeyan area by this Government and the locals are very upset with the local member and his lack of representation in this regard. I have raised in this place the need for more disability and mental services this week. We have sporting grounds that are as hard as a rock and chronic water restrictions.

The honourable member for Hornsby has raised the case of Judy Jones with me. Ms Jones lives in Thornleigh and over two weeks she witnessed about 40,000 litres of water being wasted because of a broken pipe. That is an absolute disgrace. Honourable members can imagine how many showers people in Goulburn could have had with that water. What has the Minister for Natural Resources said? Nothing. He hides this in his burrow. What has Country Labor had to say? Absolutely nothing. They know they are in the thick of it with the rest of the ALP when it comes to Sydney Water and water wastage in Sydney. The Government has failed to upgrade infrastructure in metropolitan and rural New South Wales. It has failed miserably. We have seen failure after failure statewide. David Madew, the incoming member for Monaro after the next election, has established www.savesnowhydro.com, an electronic petition. I urge everyone to sign and submit it because across New South Wales people are disgusted about Labor's laziness in selling— [*Time expired.*]

Mr NEVILLE NEWELL (Tweed—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.12 p.m.]: I join my colleagues the honourable members for Bathurst and Monaro in rejecting this motion. It is a piece of nonsense. I sympathise with the members of the Kempsey branch of the Australian Labor Party in their embarrassment at being mistaken for Nationals members. I will detail the many successes of Country Labor in this place. I ask honourable members to cast their minds back to the Roads and Traffic Authority compulsory competitive tendering process that would have decimated country councils. Country Labor took up that issue and was very successful. Country Labor also played a leading role in retaining State ownership of State Forests in contrast to what The Nationals have been able to achieve in getting the Federal Government to respond to our calls about Telstra. Everyone in the bush knows what is going happen with Telstra and how services will be downgraded. Where are The Nationals? They are invisible and have not been effective in ensuring public ownership of Telstra.

Our country constituents feel very strongly about the single-desk sales arrangement, particularly for rice. The Nationals are going along with Howard and Costello with regard to the national competition policy while this Government is fighting all the way. Where were The Nationals when we debated the Howard Government's WorkChoices industrial relations legislation in this House? Where were honourable members opposite when we debated the effect of that legislation on Cowra workers? The Nationals boycotted the vote on that issue in this place. The honourable member for Orange was not even in the House at the time.

Where were The Nationals during dairy deregulation? They joined with the Federal Government and did not stick up for the dairy industry and the consequences for that industry have been devastating. That has happened because The Nationals will not stand up to their Federal mates. Country Labor has had enormous success with decentralisation. The State Debt Recovery Office was moved to Lithgow and 200 jobs were created in the area; the Office of Co-operative Services has been moved to Bathurst; the Department of Local Government has been moved to Nowra and as a result 70 jobs have been created; the Infringement Processing Bureau has been moved to the electorate of the honourable member for Maitland; the Mineral Resources office has also been moved to Maitland; and the Firearms Registry has been moved to Murwillumbah and 70 jobs have been created in my electorate, and they are very welcome.

Probably one of our greatest wins was mentioned by the honourable member for Bathurst. I am also happy to mention it because it has a particular impact on my electorate. Along with other Country Labor members I took up the cudgels with regard to the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance

Service. My constituents who need to see specialists in Brisbane will benefit from the reduction from 200 kilometres to 100 kilometres. If anything highlights The Nationals' inadequacy, particularly on the North Coast, it is the latest Costello budget and the \$10 billion surplus. The Federal Treasurer has allocated an extra \$160 million to upgrade the Pacific Highway, but he has allocated \$800 million to upgrade the Hume Highway. That is five to one. The inadequacy of The Nationals' representations on the Pacific Highway have been picked up by many commentators.

Honourable members opposite should hang their heads in shame. Why have we missed out? Who represents the electorates along the Hume Highway? They all have Liberal Party representation. Who represents the electorates on the North Coast? The Nationals. They lost out; they were ignored. The accident and fatality rate on the Pacific Highway is twice that of the Hume Highway, but honourable members opposite could not get two bob from Costello; they got a pittance. The Nationals members were not even here to vote on the legislation dealing with country fuel prices yesterday. They could not care about the \$270 million that is going to be plucked from the country and put into Costello's pocket. That is probably part of the \$800 million that he is spending on the Hume Highway. Honourable members opposite lose out all the time because they do not have the guts to stand up to their Liberal Party masters. That is why they will always come second. [*Time expired.*]

Mr RICHARD TORBAY: I seek leave to make a contribution to this debate.

Leave not granted.

Mr RICHARD TORBAY: I ask that it be noted that the Leader of The Nationals, having attacked Independents, is gagging a right of reply.

Mr DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! Leave has been denied.

Mr ANDREW STONER (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [12.16 p.m.], in reply: I thank the honourable members for Bathurst, Monaro, Tweed, Lismore and Burrinjuck for their contributions. I know that the honourable member for Northern Tablelands wanted to contribute to this debate, but because it is about the Labor Party I did not grant him leave.

Mr Richard Torbay: Point of order: The Leader of The Nationals is misleading the House. His attack was against Independents and I seek a right of reply in that regard.

Mr DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The Leader of The Nationals is not misleading the House.

Mr ANDREW STONER: The honourable member for Bathurst gave a blathering, incoherent response, sprinkled liberally with the nastiness we have come to expect from him. He crowed about the number of Independents in the Parliament, and in so doing treated his country-based members of the Labor Party with contempt. He proved my earlier point that local members of Labor Party branches are disillusioned about the deal that has been done between Sussex Street, the headquarters of the Labor Party, and the Independents at the expense of loyal and faithful members of local branches.

The honourable member for Monaro never got anywhere near the motion, which is about the disillusionment of good, faithful Australian Labor Party branch members in country towns like Kempsey. The honourable member's contribution was just another nasty attack on The Nationals. What he must realise, both in this place and his electorate, is that country people do not want cheap political shots; they want people who are prepared to work for the good of their communities. I point out that this is the man who last week voted against stopping Labor's rushed fire sale of Snowy Hydro and who today voted against legislation which would ensure that ethanol would be taken up to a greater extent, resulting in many benefits to country communities.

The honourable member for Monaro tried to rewrite political history in commenting on his election to this place in 2003. The truth is that he got in thanks to Greens preferences. He got from the Greens candidate, a person by the name of Moore, 2,081 preferences. That is how he got into this place. It is no wonder that earlier today, in his contribution on The Nationals ethanol bill, he was blathering on about climate change.

The honourable member for Tweed failed to grasp the nettle of what this motion is about, which is the disillusionment of grassroots members of the Labor Party. The honourable member for Tweed voted against a motion seeking to retain the Casino to Murwillumbah branch line in his electorate, voted against a motion and

debates designed to review the property taxes introduced by the Labor Party, which are killing the industry in that part of the State, and also voted against a motion seeking a review of the club taxes, which were costing jobs in his electorate. It is therefore no wonder that people are disillusioned.

Once again I make the point that this motion is about the grassroots, loyal members of the Labor Party who are very disillusioned with the current regime. They are disillusioned for two reasons: first, the appalling voting record of the so-called Country Labor members in this place when it comes to representing their constituency; and second, Labor's secret deal with the Independents. The vote for the Labor Party is clearly dying in country New South Wales. In traditionally Labor seats such as the Northern Tablelands, for example, it was down to 4.74 per cent in 2003. In Dubbo, it was down to zero in 2004.

Mr Richard Torbay: Point of order: I seek to correct the record. The Nationals vote in the Northern Tablelands fell from 55 per cent to 14 per cent.

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

Mr ANDREW STONER: The fact is that the Labor Party lost the seat of South Coast in 2003. In Port Macquarie, Northern Tablelands, Tamworth and Dubbo the average Labor vote was down from more than 17 per cent in 1999 to just 10 per cent in 2003. That is a dramatic decline, and it is an appalling way to treat loyal and faithful Australian Labor Party branch members. [*Time expired.*]

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 26

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

Noes, 54

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

Question resolved in the negative.

Motion negatived.

MEALS ON WHEELS

Mr THOMAS GEORGE (Lismore) [12.32 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) acknowledges National Meals on Wheels Day;
- (2) recognises the contribution to the community of this not-for-profit organisation; and
- (3) congratulates and thanks the 35,000 volunteers in New South Wales who give their time to provide this crucial service to 20,000 aged people, people with disabilities and their carers every day.

My motion may be the last notice of motion to be debated before the Parliament is prorogued. I gave notice of this motion three years ago to celebrate National Meals on Wheels Day. I apologise if those figures are not up to date, but they were in 2003. It has taken that long for this motion to be moved and debated in this House. It acknowledges the contribution made by the wonderful Meals on Wheels volunteers. Meals on Wheels started in my home town of Casino 36 years ago. At the end of April or early May the organisation celebrated delivering its 600,000th meal in Casino. That is fantastic. Mrs Nita Tully and her late husband, Les, were volunteers for Meals on Wheels for 30 years. To celebrate delivery of the 600,000th meal by Casino Meals on Wheels, the Mayor of Richmond Valley Council, Charlie Cox, and the co-ordinator of Meals on Wheels, Annette Schneider, turned up to have lunch with Mrs Tully. A small group of community volunteers for Casino Meals on Wheels started out 36 years ago, delivering just five or six meals a day to the frail aged. These days the service provides about 50 meals a day to the town's frail aged and infirm, and has a volunteer task force of about 250 people who deliver meals on a six-week roster system. Mrs Tully said:

I never once thought when I was helping deliver the meals that I would one day be receiving them myself. But that's how things go. It's a wonderful service. I could cook for myself, but I don't have to, so I don't. It saves me from having to go shopping and I know I'm going to have a good meal every day which is always nice and hot and enjoyable.

Long-time volunteer helper Bronwyn Northam said:

It's not just those receiving the meals who benefit from the service.

Bronwyn has been a wonderful volunteer at Casino—I could go mention many others. Each and every one of us who takes part in this debate could name a lot of people. I think Mrs Tully's comments reflect the views of a lot of people who receive support through this service. She does not have to rush down to the shops to do shopping and she gets a good meal every day, which is very important to people like her—they receive a quality meal that they have not got to go to the trouble of cooking. A lot of people have their main meal in the middle of the day and can cater for themselves at morning and night. As all honourable members know, when you are on your own as a result of various circumstances it is terrible to try to cook a meal for yourself. Oftentimes you will just grab something out of the refrigerator to make up a meal.

It is important to these elderly people to have someone knocking on the door every day and saying g'day—maybe breaking up their day of solitude. People who receive the Meals on Wheels service have someone coming to see how they are, dropping off a meal and at least saying g'day. In addition to providing a meal, the volunteers are providing fellowship, friendship and a caring attitude to check that these people are all right. The Meals on Wheels service at Lismore moved to new facilities provided by funding from State, Federal and local governments. It relocated and was well supported by the Lismore Base Hospital before its planned upgrade. Lismore Meals on Wheels provides 40,000 meals to residents in Lismore, Alstonville and Nimbin each year.

The upgrade meant that the Meals on Wheels service had to relocate. Following representations by the Federal member for Page, Ian Causley, and me, with the support of the Minister for Ageing and Disability Services, the service has relocated to wonderful new premises and is now providing 40,000 meals a year. Cathie Eames, Manager and Co-ordinator of the Lismore Meals on Wheels, does a tremendous job, together with volunteers from the Casino community. Ruth Barringham is the manager and co-ordinator of Kyogle Meals on Wheels. That small but big-hearted community provides meals and support to the elderly and frail aged in country and regional areas.

In our busy lives we take for granted that our neighbours will be all right, so we do not take the time to knock on our neighbour's door and provide assistance. That was borne out recently where an elderly person was dead in a block of units in Sydney without anyone knowing for quite some time. No matter what side of politics we are on, that is not the sort of thing we should encourage, nor is it the sort of caring society that I have been

brought up in. We should reach out and help our neighbours, particularly the elderly. They should feel secure in the knowledge that people will check on them occasionally and be there if they need help. Meals on Wheels provides that additional service for these elderly people. I know that other members wish to participate in the debate so I shall leave further comments for my reply. I commend my motion to the House.

Mr KEVIN GREENE (Georges River) [12.41 p.m.]: It gives me great pleasure to support the motion moved by the honourable member for Lismore. It is not often that he, a fellow St George supporter, and I get to join forces—other than to cheer for the Dragons—but this is a great opportunity to do so. Meals on Wheels provides an outstanding service not only in my community and that of the honourable member for Lismore, but throughout New South Wales and Australia. This year we celebrate 40 years of service by the Hurstville Meals on Wheels, which is now known as Hurstville Community Food Services. Hurstville Meals on Wheels started as a Rotary project by Dr Barry Pearson when he was president of Hurstville Rotary some 40 years ago. It is most fitting that I speak about that because this year Barry Pearson is president of Hurstville Rotary and is yet again doing a magnificent job. It was his Rotary project 40 years ago.

Today Hurstville Community Food Services will serve 120 meals to the elderly in our community. They are fortunate to have the support of 86 volunteers, who give of their enthusiasm and energetic support each time they are required as part of the roster. The service is also supported by four full-time volunteer employees. I particularly mention the current co-ordinator, Nahed Soliman, who is doing a great job from all reports, filling in while the full-time co-ordinator is on maternity leave. Nahed is keeping the service running efficiently. I am pleased to report that Hurstville Community Food Services provides a great variety of meals to those who require that support. It provides hot meals each lunchtime and frozen meals that people can purchase and put aside for other times. Meals can also be put aside for the weekend because this is not merely a five-day service but a seven-day service. This means that 120 meals are served each day in the Hurstville City Council area—that is, in excess of 43,000 meals are served each year. That is a lot of work for this community organisation.

Hurstville Community Food Services provides frozen soups that can be reheated by the recipients when required. It also caters to a great variety of dietary needs and recognises various health requirements by providing appropriate meals. For example, cold meats and salads are provided for hot summer days. It also provides hot and cold finger foods. A diversity of food is important. Much as I love a baked dinner, people do not want roast lamb, roast pork or roast beef day after day. People need a variety of foods and the service provides that variety for the small amount of \$6 per day. It is able to provide this food at such a reasonable cost because of the enormous support provided by volunteers, who take the meals to the elderly in their private vehicles.

The honourable member for Lismore referred to the elderly enjoying people visiting their homes. The volunteers do more than just pop in, drop off the meal and race out. They form a relationship and connect with people. They converse with people who may not otherwise speak to people because they are housebound or do not get visitors. In addition to providing meals, the Meals on Wheels volunteers provide great fellowship. I commend the honourable member for Lismore for his comments.

I refer to the elected committee of volunteers that oversees Hurstville Community Food Services. I note that the current president is Bryan McDonald, former mayor and long-serving councillor of more than 20 years on Hurstville City Council. This year he has taken on the position of president of the group, having previously served on the committee. I commend the secretary, Bill Millwood, another well-known local community volunteer. Ian Leach, the treasurer, was president of the Hurstville Meals on Wheels for a number of years. In fact, during Ian's presidency the name was changed to Hurstville Community Food Services. Also during Ian's stewardship as president the service moved from the house it had used for many years on council land in Patrick Street, Hurstville.

Using funds it had accumulated over a number of years and a grant from the State Government, the service moved to the Peakhurst Bowling Club. It converted a disused part of that club into updated kitchens and facilities, which provided easier access for the volunteer drivers. Members of the committee include Tom Burke and Phil Edwards, who are well known for other work in the Hurstville local community. I congratulate each and every one of those involved on the committee. Virginia Field from Hurstville City Council provides a liaison role and attends committee meetings. On behalf of my constituents, I congratulate Hurstville Community Food Services on its work.

In 1978 or 1979, while I was at teachers college, I had the pleasure and privilege of volunteering to serve meals for Meals on Wheels for a couple of weeks with a friend of mine, Jeff Evans. It was part of a

community service course we were undertaking at teachers college. I will never forget the words of Mrs Croot, who was the organiser at the time. She spoke about the food service but, most importantly, the fraternity and the opportunity to meet people and provide something else in their lives. It is with great pleasure that I support the motion moved by the honourable member for Lismore.

Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [12.50 p.m.]: I support the motion moved by the honourable member for Lismore, which acknowledges Meals on Wheels and the fantastic contribution that not-for-profit organisation makes to the community. The Hornsby Meals on Wheels food service is located in the grounds of Hornsby hospital. I have great pleasure in informing the House that last year Hornsby Meals on Wheels, which has a proud record of service to the community, celebrated its fortieth anniversary. Late last year I received a letter from the Service Manager of Hornsby Meals on Wheels, Megan Hall, which stated:

This year we are celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Hornsby Meals on Wheels service. The service was initiated in 1965 by a lady councillor, Edith Parish, of Hornsby and I have been told three to five meals were delivered each day by herself and a number of helpers.

About six months later, it was realized that there was potential for wider coverage and Stan Williams, the CEO of Hornsby Hospital at the time, offered the community health services & the kitchen facilities at the hospital and it developed from there.

The senior social worker in those days was a Betty Smith, who was with the hospital for over twenty years. She advertised for volunteers and organized a roster and by 1967, there were approximately twelve volunteers delivering meals to thirty residents each day. The Meals on Wheels today have over three hundred clients in a month. This year the volunteers delivered over fifty five thousand meals contributing to the health and well being of the frail aged and disabled in the Hornsby Local Government Area.

It is a fantastic service. Megan has asked me to mention the local volunteers, who are fantastic. At the end of last year, as part of the fortieth anniversary, I had the opportunity to participate in the delivery of meals on wheels. I enjoyed travelling with the volunteer and delivering the meals. The meals are diverse and have a cultural sensitivity, for example, there are special meals for Chinese residents. The volunteer visited elderly people, who often live alone, and it was fantastic to meet many of the people who are provided with meals. In conclusion, at the special lunch held in Parramatta last year for the fortieth anniversary, Betty Smith presented a certificate for 40 years of service to Edna Cooney. Volunteering for the Hornsby Meals on Wheels for the entire 40 years is a fantastic contribution.

Mr ALAN ASHTON (East Hills) [12.53 p.m.]: I shall be brief because I appreciate that other honourable members want to speak. I congratulate the honourable member for Lismore on moving this motion. Bankstown City Council was one of the first councils to be involved in Meals on Wheels; indeed, I think the council's involvement goes back to 1962 or 1963 with volunteers delivering meals in concert with Bankstown Hospital. I can remember an elderly gentleman who lived next door when I was a kid. Although we dropped in and kept him company, the highlight of his day was the delivery of meals on wheels. It was great because it provided the company that elderly people need. I congratulate the council on its work with Meals on Wheels. Pat Pride is the manager of Bankstown council's Meals on Wheels.

My secretary's mother has delivered meals on wheels and my mother did it for a while. I think all of us know someone in the community who is actively involved in Meals on Wheels. With ageing populations, meals on wheels are even more important. The honourable member for Georges River and the honourable member for Hornsby referred to the variety of meals. The food is probably a lot better than it once was, but the meals are still delivered by the same sorts of people who volunteered 30 and 40 years ago. That is a great tradition in New South Wales and Australia.

In the past few months we have heard about the tragic deaths of elderly people who had no visitors. If meals on wheels had been delivered to them at least someone would have knocked on their door every day. Every year Bankstown council holds a celebratory day for the Meals on Wheels service—often Parliament was sitting and I was unable to attend. The mayor holds a function to thank all the volunteers. As I said, in a world where people are more disassociated Meals on Wheels is an outstanding tradition that volunteers provide in New South Wales through councils, local hospitals and other organisations.

Mr STEVE CANSDELL (Clarence) [12.55 p.m.]: I support the motion moved by the honourable member for Lismore. It is great to not only acknowledge but also congratulate and thank all the Meals on Wheels volunteers who make the meals and deliver them. The volunteers also become confidants and friends to these lonely people, many of whom live on their own. In November last year Grafton Meals on Wheels in my electorate of Clarence celebrated 40 years of providing this service. The co-ordinator, Rhonda Raven, and her offsider—she is described as her right-hand lady—Lucy Preston have a roster of about 200 volunteers who

deliver meals daily to residents in the area. One volunteer is 80-year-old Doug Hewson, who turns up almost daily—he still has his drivers licence—to deliver meals. He is a stalwart of Grafton Meals on Wheels.

Justine Lovell runs the Meals on Wheels service in Maclean and Yamba, which has more than 100 volunteers. The Meals on Wheels service at Iluka has more than 200 volunteers. Earlier the honourable member for Lismore said that Meals on Wheels in Lismore has delivered about 600,000 meals over the past 30 years. I am sure the Clarence service has delivered well over one million meals over the years. They are hungry people in the Clarence valley! On National Meals on Wheels Day in 2005 I was fortunate to deliver meals at Evans Head with some of the volunteers. It was a thrill to deliver the meals, and the elderly people who received the meals thought it was a buzz that the local member turned up with their soup, hot meal and desert, and had a chat with them.

One dear old lady at Evans Head used to always go to the local services club on pension day and play the pokies. When she became housebound the community raised funds and bought her a poker machine. She proudly showed me her own poker machine in the kitchen. She can put the money in the machine every pension day, and the money stays at home. That is shopping locally! Keep the money at home! As I said, more than 35,000 volunteers Australia wide feed 20,000 aged people with meals on wheels. The service is appreciated. We are proud to be involved with and support Meals on Wheels.

Mr RUSSELL TURNER (Orange) [12.58 p.m.]: I congratulate the honourable member for Lismore on highlighting the Meals on Wheels service. The Meals on Wheels service in New South Wales began in 1957 and started in Orange in 1963. So there is a proud record of 43 years of helping people stay in their homes by providing a nutritious meal. In Orange Meals on Wheels costs \$6 a day and consists of a main course, desert, bread and butter, juice and soup. Once a year I try to travel with volunteers to see this wonderful service for myself. I congratulate the 400 Meals on Wheels volunteers in Orange who work on a roster basis. I note that next week is Volunteers Week, so it is appropriate to debate this motion today. Those volunteers come from all sorts of community groups—schools, ladies golf clubs, bowling clubs, et cetera.

Other food services are supplied by Orange Food Services, which incorporates Meals on Wheels. Among the services it provides is a frozen meal service so that people have their meals for long weekends. There is a volunteer shopping service which picks up people in their homes who may not have transport and takes them shopping once a week. There is even a service where people can go out once a month to a restaurant of their choice. Orange has received a wonderful 43 years of service. Those services are also provided in Canowindra, Cowra, Molong and Cudal. While the volunteers only deliver within the Orange city boundary areas, meals can be picked up by other volunteers and taken to areas outside Orange to people who use the city as their service centre. Congratulations to all the volunteers. As I said, they will be recognised next week in Volunteers Week.

Mr THOMAS GEORGE (Lismore) [1.00 p.m.], in reply: I thank the honourable member for Georges River, the honourable member for Hornsby, the honourable member for East Hills, the honourable member for Clarence and the honourable member for Orange for their contributions to the debate and for their support of the motion. They all thanked the volunteers and congratulated them on the service they provide throughout the State through Meals on Wheels. If the number of meals being provided is an indication, a lot of people must be using the service.

Motion agreed to.

[Mr Acting-Speaker (Mr John Mills) left the chair at 1.01 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]

PARLIAMENT HOUSE OPEN WEEKEND

Mr SPEAKER: As we approach the ceremonial opening of Parliament in honour of the first sesquicentenary of responsible government in New South Wales, I would like to draw members' attention to the open weekend at Parliament House on 20 and 21 May. To mark the occasion of our 150th year since the first sitting of the fully elected Legislative Assembly, Parliament House will be open for tours, art exhibitions and displays of treasures from the parliamentary collections. On Saturday the Sesquicentenary Committee will hold a free seminar on writing party history and on Sunday afternoon there will be chamber music in the Chamber. Everyone is welcome.

MINISTRY

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: I advise honourable members that in the absence of the Minister for Planning, Minister for Redfern Waterloo, Minister for Science and Medical Research, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Cancer), the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Citizenship will answer questions on his behalf.

TRIBUTE TO "AUNTY" NANCY DE VRIES

Ministerial Statement

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS (Swansea—Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Citizenship) [2.22 p.m.]: It is with great regret that I inform the House of the passing of Nancy de Vries. Aunty Nancy was an inspirational leader and passionate advocate for members of the Stolen Generation. Nancy de Vries was taken from her birth mother as a 15-month-old baby. She lived in 22 places before she was 18 years old. It was a shameful 53 years before she was reunited with her mother. Nancy de Vries was the human face of past government policies of dispossession. In 1997 the New South Wales Parliament issued Australia's first apology to the Stolen Generation. Some members will recall the time Aunty Nancy addressed this Chamber, becoming the first non-elected woman since Elizabeth II to address a special sitting of State Parliament. On that day she spoke movingly about her experience as a member of the Stolen Generation and the confusion, isolation and loneliness of growing up as an Aboriginal child in a non-Aboriginal environment. Aunty Nancy documented the experiences of her childhood and separation in the book *Ten Hours in a Lifetime*. The title refers to the too few accounts of time Nancy was able to spend with her mother.

Aunty Nancy may have faced many hurdles in her lifetime, but she achieved many things. She became a nurse and community health worker and was the first Aboriginal person to graduate in nursing from the University of Western Sydney. Aunty Nancy overcame great injustice in her life and became an inspirational community leader. Her determination to find her mother and her loyalty to her roots should serve as an inspiration to all Australians. It is fitting, therefore, that the Government contributes to the funeral expenses. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs will be in contact with Aunty Nancy's family to offer assistance. I offer my profound sympathy to Ms de Vries' family, friends and admirers around the State. Her great personal strength and kindness allowed her to overcome tremendous difficulty with dignity and humility. She was an inspiration to us all.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD (Wakehurst) [2.26 p.m.]: The State Coalition joins with the Minister in expressing sorrow at the passing of Nancy de Vries. Nancy was an inspiration in Australia's reconciliation journey. Many honourable members in the Chamber will remember her coming into this Chamber in 1997 when we met in a bipartisan effort to send a message to Australia that this Parliament believes that reconciliation is the way forward. Nancy generously gave us her time, which was something she said had been taken from her in her youth.

She told us emotionally but generously that she had been removed from her mother when she was but 15 months old. I think she referred in her autobiography to the fact that she was taken as an Aboriginal child simply because she was fair. I recollect she had been living in Marrickville and later ended up in the Bidura children's home. What a journey she took. She eventually managed to attend the University of Western Sydney and obtained a degree in nursing. She then gave back to both the black and white communities as a nurse. She worked as a psychiatric nurse for more than 20 years.

Any of us who were in this Chamber on the day when Nancy spoke will remember the emotion with which she addressed the gathering, but, more important, the sentiment and emotion felt by all honourable members. This Parliament has proudly led the way on reconciliation by offering the first apology to the stolen generations. It is appropriate today that we reflect on Nancy de Vries, who was such a great ambassador for reconciliation and who wanted black and white Australia to find its way forward and grow through a profound understanding of the need for reconciliation. We thank Nancy and her family for what she contributed. Our thoughts and prayers are with them.

Mr SPEAKER: I thank both the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and the honourable member for Wakehurst for their contributions. In view of the historic significance of the contribution of Nancy de Vries to reconciliation and her address to this Chamber, I ask the members and officers to stand as a mark of respect.

Members and officers of the House stood in their places.

PETITIONS

Hornsby and Berowra Train Station Parking Facilities

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

Murwillumbah to Casino Rail Service

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

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**.

Mr Kevin Charles "Pro" Hart Art Gallery Exhibit

Petition requesting that the New South Wales Art Gallery acquire sufficient Kevin "Pro" Hart artworks to form a permanent exhibit, received from **Mr Peter Black**.

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

Petition requesting funding to ensure access to breast screening services for women aged 40 to 79 years and to reverse falling participation rates, received from **Mr Steve Cansdell**.

Kurnell Desalination Plant

Petition opposing the construction of a desalination plant at Kurnell, received from **Mr Malcolm Kerr**.

Community-based Preschools

Petitions requesting increased funding to community-based preschools to enable them to maintain parity with preschools administered by the Department of Education and Training, received from **Mr Greg Aplin, Mr Andrew Stoner** and **Mr Graham West**.

Recreational Fishing

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

CSR Quarry, Hornsby

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

Grafton Bridge

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

Inner Sydney Traffic Plan

Petition requesting an inner Sydney traffic plan that would put local traffic on local roads and through traffic on arterial roads, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Forster-Tuncurry Cycleways

Petition requesting the building of cycleways in the Forster-Tuncurry area, received from **Mr John Turner**.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

COMPULSORY LIFE SENTENCES

Mr PETER DEBNAM: My question without notice is directed to the Premier. Given that the parents of Constable David Carty and Constable Glenn McEnallay and the New South Wales Police Association all support the Coalition's policy of compulsory life sentences for murderers of police officers, will the Premier support our policy?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: The Government's position on cop killers is very clear: they should be locked up in gaol for a very long time. Our starting point is the protection of police officers, and those who commit serious offences against police officers being in gaol for a very long time indeed. That is a measure on which there is complete agreement, I am sure, on both sides of the House. However, we disagree on how that aim is best achieved. There is universal agreement that murderers of police officers and those who commit serious offences against police should be put away for a very long time indeed. Where we disagree is how we achieve that aim. What we do not want is to put in place laws that could have the perverse effect of actually leading to more acquittals of such criminals. The Coalition's proposal could see cop killers walk free.

Another matter upon which we agree is our deepest sympathy for the families of the victims of these horrendous crimes. We all share their anger, frustration and distress at the crimes that have been committed, and we all share also their frustration, if not distress, at the outcome of the two recent court cases. Importantly, we need to bear in mind that the Director of Public Prosecutions [DPP] is in the process of reviewing details of the decision of the Court of Criminal Appeal in the case involving Constable McEnallay. He is examining options for an appeal to the High Court, and I am advised that this process will be completed soon. We expect the DPP's advice to be available towards the end of this week or, at the latest, early next week. The laws proposed by the Opposition would have made no difference in the circumstances of these cases. That is another important point.

[Interruption]

What we are about—and I am sure the honourable member for Myall Lakes agrees with this—is finding practical solutions that will see cop killers sent to gaol with very long sentences. I am glad the honourable member for Myall Lakes is nodding his head in agreement.

Mr John Turner: You are verballing me by saying that I am nodding in agreement

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: I was referring to your nodding in agreement with the principle that they should go to gaol for as long as possible. Yesterday I said the Government was examining all the options available to us for securing our common goal of locking up cop killers for substantial periods of time. I can advise the House that the Minister for Police and the Attorney have been working on this very objective. The options that are under examination involve, first, codifying the common law principle of common criminal purpose so that those reasonably connected with these serious crimes are securely brought into the net; reviewing the non-parole periods for crimes committed against police; and examining the aggravated and mitigating circumstances provisions that currently apply so that criminals are properly punished for their crimes. The security of police must be paramount. The number one standard offence under the Act dealing with the murder of a police officer carries a standard minimum sentence of 25 years.

We are lucky that since these reforms were introduced in February 2003 we have not had to charge anyone with the murder of a police officer. A very real concern that must be taken into account is that mandatory sentencing could lead to acquittals. Mandatory sentences could result in juries being reluctant to find such accused guilty. The experience in the United States is that mandatory sentences shift sentencing decisions from an open court to back rooms, where lawyers do deals on charges.

[Interruption]

Do not accept the proposition from this side; accept it from one of your own. The honourable member for Wakehurst made that very point in his argument—what he described as a compelling argument—on this very issue.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for The Hills and the Minister for Energy will come to order.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: This is the honourable member for Wakehurst's critique of the proposal that was brought forward, as I understand it, four years ago. He said, "Mandatory sentences arguably remove the incentive for offenders to plead guilty." The Prime Minister, your Federal leader, has a sombre and moderate point of view on this. He has said:

As a matter of principle, I do not agree with mandatory sentencing. I agree with strong sentencing laws, but in the end I do think these matters ought to be determined by judges and magistrates.

That was on 6 April 2000.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Members of the Government will come to order.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: In an article published in the Australian Institute of Criminology Journal, Declan Roche found that judges actually took measures to nullify laws or penalties that seemed to them unjust. In the same article he said:

In the Northern Territory and Western Australia on nine occasions WA courts have avoided the mandatory sentence by issuing Conditional Release Orders.

Fewer guilty pleas and fewer convictions are the two main reasons why mandatory sentencing does not represent the answer, as noted by the honourable member for Wakehurst in his paper, and in the experience of Western Australia and the Northern Territory. Our objective is longer sentences and tougher laws to put these criminals away for as long a time as possible. We disagree on the means to achieve that objective.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: My question without notice is directed to the Premier. What is the latest information on the Government's efforts to better support people with mental illness?

Mr Daryl Maguire: What about the funding for Sunflower House? Tell us about that.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: The honourable member for Wagga Wagga is right. In August of last year I nominated mental health as a priority for the Government. As then health Minister I am proud to say I increased substantially the resources for mental health.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: You put security guards in waiting rooms while patients awaited their treatment.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: Is the Deputy Leader of the Opposition suggesting that security guards should be taken away? Is that what the Opposition's policy is?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! This is question time. There will be time to debate the issues at a later time.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: The psychiatric emergency care centres have been so successful in improving the care and the security for mental health patients in our emergency departments the Deputy Leader of the Opposition suggests that we should take the security away.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: No.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: That is what he just did. Consistent with the priorities outlined on the day of my election, I can announce to the House today—

Mr Adrian Piccoli: It was an appointment, not an election.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Murrumbidgee will come to order. The Premier has the call. The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the honourable member for Wallsend and the honourable member for East Hills will come to order.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: The majority leader, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, should not tempt me. I can advise the House and the honourable member for Heffron, and the honourable member for Bligh—because she has also taken a very strong interest in matters to do with mental health—that the Government is injecting an additional \$33 million into our mental health services in the inner city. The \$33 million will involve

three very significant and new projects. The first one is that the Government will provide \$23 million upfront for a \$40 million redevelopment of the St Vincent's Caritas unit at Darlinghurst.

Mr Peter Debnam: It rings a bell.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: Yes, it was mentioned yesterday. For the Brain and Mind Research Institute, \$6 million in funding will be provided and for mental health research at the University of New South Wales \$4 million will be provided. I place on record my appreciation of the advocacy of the honourable member for Heffron, particularly in regard to those two projects and the Caritas unit. I also congratulate the honourable member for Bligh on her very passionate advocacy of the redevelopment for Caritas. It is something she has raised in this place a number of times and she has been very consistent.

The St Vincent's Caritas unit redevelopment, as alluded to yesterday, was a commitment the Government made in response to representations the Government received. We are now in a position to kickstart the \$40 million redevelopment with a \$22 million upfront contribution from the Government. The Government has been working with St Vincent's on a proposal to construct a new building at the O'Brien site in Darlinghurst—and this should please even the honourable member for Murrumbidgee—to bring together mental health, drug and alcohol, and community services into one facility on one site. At present the services are accommodated in outdated facilities in various locations in Darlinghurst. We are going to bring them together in a state-of-the-art facility at Darlinghurst.

A redeveloped Caritas will provide the following: 27 acute mental health beds; community mental health and other non-inpatient mental health services; a clinical research unit for anxiety and depression; a 20-bed drug and alcohol facility; and a community drug and alcohol health service. Research indicates that up to 50 per cent of people with a mental illness also have substance abuse problems. This co-located facility will provide the services that St Vincent's currently provides for our inner-city population. In addition, the new six-bed psychiatric emergency care centre, opened last year at St Vincent's emergency department, will remain. The Infrastructure Co-ordination Group in my department will oversee the delivery of this landmark project.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! If the honourable member for Murrumbidgee wishes to ask the Premier a question he should seek the call and he will be given the opportunity to do so. Until he is given the call he will remain quiet.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: You need not worry, Mr Speaker, he will never seek the call when it comes to mental health services. This significant capital investment accompanies the Government's recent commitment to help create the largest medical research institute in New South Wales at St Vincent's. The St Vincent's research and biotech research project is a \$60 million capital investment, to which the New South Wales Government will contribute \$25 million.

Mr Chris Hartcher: Who tried to close St Vincent's?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: The Coalition did. To date there is no cure for diseases of the mind such as schizophrenia. Schizophrenia ranks among the top 10 causes of disability in developed countries worldwide. It is a major cause of youth suicide. Mental health research has been remarkably successful in finding better treatments. But the main game is finding the ultimate hope for families—a cure. The Government is committed to establishing new partnerships and putting money into new services to find cures. That is why today I can advise the House that \$4 million will be provided to the University of New South Wales for mental health research, and \$1.2 million will be dedicated to the schizophrenia clinical research program. This clinical research will operate in conjunction with research being undertaken by the Neuroscience Institute of Schizophrenia and Allied Disorders [NISAD].

The University of New South Wales had secured the right to establish Australia's first Professorial Chair of Schizophrenia Research in recognition of its internationally renowned neuroscience research. This chair, established by NISAD, is supported by funding from the New South Wales Government. NISAD has been a driving force in raising community awareness about schizophrenia and the need for more research. Also, an additional \$1 million in funding will be allocated towards the Black Dog Institute's mood assessment program. Black Dog originally started out as the Mood Disorders Unit attached to the Prince Henry Hospital. It was launched in 2002 and has received strong recurrent funding support from the Government, and \$500,000 has been allocated to the New South Wales Centre for Anxiety and Neuroscience for research into this highly prevalent disorder.

Many members of this House would be familiar with the work of Professor Ian Hickey and the Brain and Mind Research Institute. That is why I am extremely pleased to announce today that the Government will provide \$6 million in funding to help establish purpose-built outpatient day treatment services and research at the Brain and Mind Research Institute. The services, supported by the New South Wales Government, will focus on increased access to specialist assessment and interventions into youth mental health, age-related brain disorders and other disabling neurological disorders such as multiple sclerosis.

The Brain and Mind Research Institute is a partner of the National Mental Health Youth Foundation. Much of its research focuses on early identification and interventions for young people who are showing early signs or who are at risk of developing mental health problems or associated drug and alcohol problems. The Government looks forward to the Brain and Mind Research Institute working in close clinical collaboration with Sydney's Southwest Area Health Service. The Brain and Mind Research Institute will bring together other major neuro-imaging and research technologies so that patients of Sydney Southwest Area Health Service will have access to cutting-edge diagnostic and treatment technologies.

What makes this initiative unique is that it will bring together researchers on the brain along with practising neurologists, psychiatrists and psychologists. They will be working together and sharing expertise on these crippling diseases of the brain and mind. The Government is proud to play its role in helping some of the best minds in the world to overcome the terrible disease burden carried by people with mental illness and their families.

COURT OF CRIMINAL APPEAL MOTEKIAI TAUFACHEMA CONVICTION DECISION

Mr JOHN TURNER: My question is directed to the Attorney General. Given that the parents of murdered Constable Glenn McEnallay, who live in my electorate, support the Coalition's policy of compulsory life sentences for murderers of police officers, can the Attorney General explain how the driver of the car involved in Glenn's murder was able to escape conviction?

Mr BOB DEBUS: I would have thought that the honourable member had been in the Parliament long enough to know that that is an entirely inappropriate question. Apparently the honourable member is not aware that if I answered such a claim in any detail it may undermine the possibility of success of any later appeal the Government may institute in the High Court of Australia. As the Premier has indicated, we are now awaiting the advice of the Director of Public Prosecutions, which we expect either very late this week or very early next week, and at that moment we will be able to advance this entire matter further.

COUNTER-TERRORISM MEASURES

Mr PAUL PEARCE: My question without notice is to the Minister for Police. What action is the New South Wales Government taking to prepare for potential terrorism threats in Australia?

Mr CARL SCULLY: One of the most pressing law and order challenges facing New South Wales is terrorism. We have to be prepared to counter any threat to the safety and security of this State. The Government has made counter-terrorism a priority in the wake of tragedies such as September 11 and Bali and has significantly boosted the State's counter-terrorism capacity. This has involved close co-operation with our Federal counterparts. It is essential that we work together to prepare for the unthinkable, should it happen.

As such, we are constantly building our police tactical capacity, as well as testing it and our command systems in realistic exercises. We regularly take part in counter-terrorism activities with the Federal Government and other State governments. The latest of these exercises will be a major one on our harbour next week involving a significant terrorist scenario, which will take place over three days. Beginning on Tuesday and ending on Thursday the exercise involving NSW Police and the Australian Defence Force will test both State and national capabilities to respond to a terrorist incident.

A number of scenarios will take place during this major three-day exercise to test our preparedness. Named "Exercise Neptune's Treasure", this vital counter-terrorism exercise will be conducted at various locations on Sydney Harbour including Spectacle and Cockatoo islands near Drummoyne and Balmain, and Chowder Bay near Mosman. Residents of these areas will see an increase in activities involving NSW Police, the Australian Defence Force and emergency services personnel. They should not be alarmed. This exercise will mainly be conducted at closed sites and will not disrupt traffic or transport services. Inconvenience during these exercises will be kept to a minimum.

The Government boosted the funding of NSW Police to establish the Counter-terrorism Co-ordination Command. We allocated significant millions of dollars to enable proper equipment, bomb containment vessels and other equipment needed for counter-terrorism activities. This vital equipment will greatly assist our efforts to respond in the event of a terrorist attack. This complements the decision made by the Minister for Roads, supported by the Premier and me in respect of thermal imaging cameras and surveillance cameras being established on the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the Anzac Bridge, which is the monitoring of those two iconic structures in respect of potential terrorist attacks.

REDFERN POLICE LOCAL AREA COMMAND PROBATIONARY CONSTABLES

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Police. Given the Government's commitment after the 2004 Redfern riots that no probationary constables would be deployed to Redfern Local Area Command [LAC] due to the risks of inexperienced officers being in a dangerous environment, will any probationary constables be deployed to Redfern LAC this year and, if so, why has the Government reversed its position?

Mr CARL SCULLY: We had a fantastic day last week when 153 new probationary constables came through and the Premier and the commissioner welcomed them into the NSW Police Force. It is not the NSW Police Service, which is what the Opposition called it. We will call it the Police Force, because we will be giving a very strong message to the community under the belief that we expect them to act accordingly. In relation to Redfern, we have moved on considerably. The local member and I attended Redfern police association. Recently I went with the honourable member for Heffron—

Mr Chris Hartcher: You didn't go very well, did you? They chunked you out.

Mr CARL SCULLY: The honourable member for Gosford asked the question but he does not like the answer.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Gosford will listen to the Minister's answer in silence. The honourable member for Bathurst will come to order.

Mr CARL SCULLY: I was asked by the Redfern police association to attend and meet with them and hear their concerns about human resource issues and the need for additional police officers. I indicated to them that the Premier, commissioner and I have announced another 750 police increase to authorised strength. I have to say that cops everywhere are delighted with that commitment by the Government, which will cost about \$250 million. All the Opposition can do is promise in the never-never to do it. We are delivering on it. It is not an election commitment. They will all be out in commands well before the election. It will be done. I indicated to the Redfern police association that I expect a reasonable increase in authorised strength to reflect the fact that they do have intrinsic problems in their command, not the least of which was the riot that occurred the year before last.

I had a very good discussion with them, as we did with the honourable member for Heffron and with Kath Burns, a fantastic commander, and they are good police. I indicated to them that while we were assessing where those 750 police will be allocated—and that has to be done quietly and objectively—it will not be done with the sort of populist expectation that the Opposition would put in place if it had the job. We are going to allocate 750 police where they are most needed in terms of the priorities of NSW Police. I had indicated to them to expect an increase in authorised strength and, in the interim, the commissioner and I were able to allocate 10 of the probationary constables out of Goulburn, and not one person in that meeting—and the honourable member for Heffron and the commander were there with me—said, "I am outraged at getting 10 probationary constables".

Indeed, they welcomed it, and they acknowledged that it is an interim measure. Redfern has required close attention by the Government, my predecessor, the previous Premier, the current Premier, me and the senior command. Redfern is an area of particular difficulty. I do not need to go over all the issues that have occurred over the past couple of years, but Redfern needs more police officers—and it will be getting more police officers. On their behalf I am offended by the tone of the question. The tone of the question is that somehow they are not up to scratch—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Wakehurst to order. I call the honourable member for Gosford to order. I call the honourable member for Myall Lakes to order.

Mr CARL SCULLY: All the 153 graduates who have undertaken the training are good, fine police men and women. They are excited about their training program over the next 12 months. I want members opposite to send all of them a memorandum telling them that the Opposition does not think they are up to the job. I think they are.

COUNTRY RAIL NETWORK UPGRADE

Mr STEVE WHAN: My question without notice is addressed to the Minister for Transport. What is the latest information on the Iemma Government's country rail upgrades and related matters?

Mr JOHN WATKINS: Our country rail network is crucial to the movement of country and interstate passengers and freight across this great State of New South Wales. It drives our economy and connects communities. In the 2005-06 budget the Government directly allocated to the Rail Infrastructure Corporation [RIC] \$110 million to maintain the country regional network. That funding has allowed the RIC to undertake major planned maintenance, such as sleeper replacement, ballast cleaning, capital improvements and re-railing, as well as ongoing maintenance through regular inspections and on-the-spot repairs. Our country rail plan includes five-year infrastructure investment of more than \$800 million.

In July last year the New South Wales Government announced that it was spending an additional \$69 million over three years to upgrade and maintain the western New South Wales restricted rail lines. The Government is also committed to improving the comfort of rural rail commuters. There is a \$32 million upgrade of the CountryLink XPT carriages; the power car, the sleeper, the luggage car and the buffet car renovations will include new seats, carpets, curtains and paint, greatly improving the commuting experience for our rural customers. The Iemma Government also continues to look at methods to improve the operation of our regional rail network. I am pleased to announce that over the next three years the Government will undertake two major projects to further upgrade the country regional rail network, bringing the latest in technology to that network.

The Government will spend \$18 million over three years to remote control all signal boxes across the rural network. Currently, there are six signal boxes and eight Australian Rail Track Corporation [ARTC] interface boxes requiring the manual setting of signals and points across the network. Moving all our signal boxes to remote control will mean that all signalling in New South Wales will be undertaken either at Broadmeadow or Junee, resulting in ongoing operational efficiencies across the network. Having the latest in modern technology applied uniformly across the rural rail network will enhance the performance, safety and reliability of rural rail operations.

I am also pleased to announce that the Government will spend an additional \$14 million to introduce the train order working system. That system co-ordinates trains moving safely throughout the regional network. The new train working system uses a central computer network to safely manage the issuing of train orders or train paths to the crew. This system is already being used successfully in certain areas, including Orange to Dubbo and Orange to Parkes. The ARTC is currently implementing the technology across the entire leased network. The major investment program is in stark contrast to the no interest, no ideas, no policy position of the New South Wales Opposition when it comes to rail services.

Good old mirrors Debnam has one response: I am looking into it. So he is looking into rail expansions, light rail, bus issues but has no commitment, no plans and no ideas. Our commitment to train travel in New South Wales is real, in stark contrast to the Coalition's record when it was in office. The Coalition's track record was nothing short of a disgrace when they were in charge. The records show that in the years of the Greiner and Fahey governments there was a remarkable commitment, and that commitment was to the removal of rail lines throughout rural New South Wales. As a direct result of the Coalition Government's mismanagement, scores of country rail lines literally bit the dust.

Mr Donald Page: Point of order: You took away the Casino to Murwillumbah rail line and closed all the branch lines. You absolute hypocrite!

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The honourable member for Ballina will resume his seat. I call the honourable member for Bathurst to order.

Mr JOHN WATKINS: We know that The Nationals are worried about their connections to the Liberal Party in New South Wales, with the backstabbing, leaks and personal attacks in which the Liberal Party has been involved. The challenge of three-corner contests is coming the way of the few members of The

Nationals. Watch this space! While on the subject of rural upgrades, I received a petition from one of debonair Debnam's crew. She is currently a member of the crew but that could be about to change with the ultra-right extremist-led branch intrigue that is taking place in Sydney's north. What is happening in northern Sydney is like a Hollywood script. There is a crusade taking place in Sydney's north. If it were to be made into a movie they would get Dan Brown to write the script and it would be called "The Da Hornsby Code."

Mr Barry O'Farrell: Point of order: My point of order is relevance. Like the Minister's country trains, the Minister's statement is late. The honourable member for Hornsby was preselected unopposed.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The Minister has the call. Government members will cease interjecting.

Mr JOHN WATKINS: The honourable member for Hornsby truly has something to worry about in terms of local support if a petition I received recently is anything to go by. Recently the honourable member for Hornsby sent me a petition about increased commuter car parking in the Hornsby electorate. As Minister for Transport I take great interest in all local commuter matters that are brought to my attention. However, I was immediately saddened because the petition had only three signatures. But that is okay; surely these three strident members of the community had approached her and demanded a petition. Coincidentally, these three locals all happen to live at the honourable member for Hornsby's Mount Colah address. Strangely, all three signatories on the petition had the last name Hopwood. Also strangely, these three locals all had the same Christian names as the honourable member for Hornsby's spouse and her two children. That is a startling coincidence.

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

Mr JOHN WATKINS: I hope the honourable member for Hornsby does not have too many pets, because I am sure I will shortly be receiving correspondence from them too. Maybe then we will be receiving petitions from some of the honourable member for The Hills' imaginary friends.

Mrs Judy Hopwood: Point of order: I would like to know why the Minister's staff has time to look through all the names. The Minister should be taking notice of the thousands of other people who are crying out for parking at Hornsby and Berowra instead of wasting their time and our time right now.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member may have a point, but it is not a point of order.

Mr JOHN WATKINS: The honourable member for Hornsby does not need to send me a petition. I would be very happy to receive her comments on the Hopwood Christmas card at the end of this year. When the Liberal Party in New South Wales is headed by the Viscount for Vaocluse—

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: Previously in this House you have upheld the standing order that members be referred to by their proper titles. Class envy gets honourable members nowhere. Nothing would make Government members more happy than for everybody in New South Wales to be poor. Class envy does them no favours. Will you please draw the Minister's attention to the standing orders?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I draw the Minister's attention to the standing orders relating to members being referred to by their proper titles.

Mr JOHN WATKINS: I withdraw the comment "Viscount of Vaocluse." It is a cheap shot. When one has a Leader of the Opposition of the quality of the Baron of Bellevue Hill—

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: I am very concerned from your point of view, Mr Speaker, that the Minister would canvass your ruling so wilfully and so negligently. Members are to be referred to by their proper titles. That was your ruling and that is provided for in the standing orders. Your job is to uphold the standing orders. Class envy is very ugly.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Murrumbidgee will resume his seat. I expect all members to comply with my earlier ruling.

Mr JOHN WATKINS: I am sorry. When the Liberal Party in New South Wales—

Mr Barry O'Farrell: Point of order: I may have missed something, but you did not rule on the point of order taken by the honourable member for Murrumbidgee.

Mr SPEAKER: I did. I told the Minister that I expect all members of this House to comply with the standing orders, and the Minister apologised.

Mr JOHN WATKINS: I withdraw "Baron of Bellevue Hill". But when the Liberal Party of New South Wales is headed by someone of the quality of the Duke of Double Bay—

Mr Chris Hartcher: Point of order: This is a disgrace. Are you going to sit the idiot down? The Deputy Premier has flouted your ruling twice. Are you going to sit him down?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Again I draw the Minister's attention—

Mr JOHN WATKINS: I withdraw it.

Mr Peter Debnam: Point of order: I say on behalf of my colleagues I am not offended. I just think it is pathetic.

Mr JOHN WATKINS: I should withdraw any reference to royalty or any such thing. When the Liberal Party in New South Wales is headed by someone of the quality of—

Mr Barry O'Farrell: Point of order—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I will not hear any further points of order. I direct the Minister to continue his answer.

Mr JOHN WATKINS: It is no surprise, when they are caught out rorting a *Daily Telegraph* survey, that their backbenchers are sending in bogus petitions with only three names on them, all from the same household.

DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING GORDON ESTATE, DUBBO, REDEVELOPMENT

Mr GREG APLIN: Mr Speaker—

Mr Paul Gibson: Now to the BBC.

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

Mr GREG APLIN: The honourable member for Blacktown would know about that, having made recent visits.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Government members will come to order. The honourable member for Albury has the call.

Mr GREG APLIN: My question is directed to the Minister for Housing. Given her announcement this morning, will she advise the House how many public housing properties the Government has purchased in Dubbo and other towns in the Central West, and to which towns the Government will be forcing residents of the Gordon Estate to move?

Miss CHERIE BURTON: This is just the type of stuff we warned about this morning when we were talking on the radio to the press and the local community, that members on the other side would be talking down the community, creating hysteria and peddling their own untruths and their lack of knowledge of the issues. Already we are feeding into the discrimination and the disadvantage that is suffered by public housing tenants. The Government will not tolerate it. The honourable member for Albury was asleep this morning and did not understand the announcement. He did not wake up until 12 o'clock. I am sorry we caught him napping.

Mr Greg Aplin: Point of order: My point of order is relevance, because the community centre had no idea that this was coming.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Albury should study the standing orders.

Miss CHERIE BURTON: Instead of whingeing and carping from the sidelines and talking down country New South Wales, the Government is finding solutions. The Iemma Government is working with a good local member, the honourable member for Dubbo, and finding a solution to this problem in the Gordon Estate.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS CONSTRUCTION

Mr ALLAN SHEARAN: My question without notice is to the Minister for Education and Training. Will the Minister update the House on the construction of new schools in fast-growing areas of New South Wales?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: The honourable member for Londonderry's question goes to the heart of the Government's commitment to providing high-quality infrastructure to expanding communities in New South Wales. The Government knows that building a new school is integral to building new communities. A new school provides a focus for the wider local area to grow and develops its own identity. It really is an investment in the future. I am pleased to inform the House today of the location of three new primary schools, two new high schools, and a special school that will be built in the latest phase of our program:

The locations of these new schools are: a primary school at Elderslie in south-west Sydney; a primary school at Tullimbar Village in Shellharbour; a primary school at Hoxton Park South in south-west Sydney; a new high school at Rouse Hill in north-west Sydney; a new high school to be built to replace Kelso High School, which was tragically destroyed in a fire in 2005; and, in line with the Government's strong commitment to providing the best education for all students, the Halinda School in the Londonderry electorate, which will relocate to brand new facilities, purpose-built for the students' needs.

These new schools are in addition to four new schools that were announced over the past year. It brings the total number of schools the Government has provided under this program to 19. Planning is already well under way for the state-of-the-art schools in these fast-growing communities. Our investment in building and operating these schools is \$177.5 million. That is an outstanding investment in schools infrastructure in our State. We are investing in the future of New South Wales. This investment comes on top of the \$3.15 billion the Government has committed since 1995 to build and upgrade school and TAFE facilities. The Government has built or replaced 105 schools since 1995. It is anticipated that the schools will be built under the second round of our public-private partnerships program and will be progressively completed by 2009. The Government's record on building schools in partnership with the private sector is impressive. We have already successfully delivered nine schools in the first round of the project. Those schools were built and will operate for a 30-year period at a total cost of \$133 million.

Mr Wayne Merton: Point of order: I congratulate the Minister, but when are we going to get the new toilets at Crestwood Public School?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The honourable member for Baulkham Hills will resume his seat. He will have an opportunity to raise that matter at another time.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: With the latest addition of schools, there will be 19 new and replacement schools in operation by 2009 provided under this program. I note for the information of honourable members, particularly the honourable member for Baulkham Hills, that this Government has built or replaced 105 schools. When the Coalition was in government it closed 79 schools and opened 69—a net loss of 10 schools. This Government is committed to opening new schools and supporting growing communities. I have been pleased to officially open some of the new schools. When I visit the schools I can see the outstanding community support for the projects. For example, John Edmondson High School has developed strong relationships between the founding staff, students and parents in a short period of time. The community decided to dedicate the school to the first Australian awarded the Victoria Cross in World War 11, John Edmondson. It is a fitting tribute to John Edmondson and a great demonstration of how public education brings people together.

As a result of this program, school communities have been very supportive of their new facilities. There is a great deal of satisfaction among principals, staff and students and staff; they are very pleased with their new schools. The new primary school at Ashtonfield and the replacement Halinda Special School will be the first schools to be delivered under the second round of projects and are expected to be operational in 2007. I know how much the families in those communities are looking forward to their new schools. Together with the honourable member for Londonderry, I had the pleasure of spending the morning at Halinda Special School. The Halinda school delivers educational programs for students with special needs in the Mount Druitt area.

I take this opportunity to congratulate the principal and staff at Halinda Special School. They do a fantastic job for students who often have challenging behaviour. They provide a wonderful program for students in the Mount Druitt area. The school community has outgrown its school and the new state-of-the-art facility

will include 16 classrooms, a library, a special programs room, a hydrotherapy pool and a specially landscaped sensory garden. There is no group of students more deserving of a state-of-the-art school than the students who attend Halinda Special School. The school's environmentally sustainable state-of-the-art design reduces energy consumption through technologies that increase natural light, ventilation and insulation. It will be a wonderful facility for the students and staff of Halinda Special School.

Last year I announced the building of a new Years 7 to 12 school at Kelso and the development of a college model curriculum for students in Years 11 and 12 at Bathurst High and Kelso High schools. A devastating fire destroyed Kelso High School, but after the fire the local community reached consensus about the model for a new school. That school will also be delivered under the program that I have announced today. Designers will develop the concept plan in consultation with the local community. The plan will reflect the latest facility standards for secondary schools. Again, the community at Kelso is looking forward to its new school. There is great community spirit. The staff and students have done a wonderful job of pulling together while they have been in demountable school accommodation. We will deliver this essential infrastructure as quickly as possible. This latest round of new schools will provide school communities with excellent facilities, which is fitting for the world-class education system that New South Wales public schools provide for our students.

DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING GORDON ESTATE, DUBBO, REDEVELOPMENT

Mrs DAWN FARDELL: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Housing. What is the Government doing to fix the problems on the Gordon Estate in west Dubbo? How will the Government work with the community to find a solution?

Miss CHERIE BURTON: I want to place on record the Government's recognition of the hard work of the honourable member for Dubbo in her local community, particularly on this issue. I am pleased to inform the House that today I visited Dubbo to announce a new direction in the delivery of public housing. As members would be aware, the problems on the Gordon Estate are very complex and have been emerging over the past 20 years. Extensive vandalism and the destruction of Department of Housing properties have been the cause of great community concern. The cost of maintaining properties on the estate is 300 per cent higher than the cost of maintenance on any other estate in western New South Wales. Since 1995, 46 properties on the estate have been destroyed by fire.

The Government is in touch with the community's concerns. Today I can inform the House that the Iemma Government will redevelop the Gordon Estate. The staged redevelopment will take place over three years, with all 278 Department of Housing properties to be sold. To assure the honourable member for Dubbo that the community will be consulted every step of the way, I have met with the local council, local police and local Aboriginal leaders and I have personally written to all tenants on the estate. A series of community information barbecues will start tomorrow, giving the community a chance to informally talk to front-line staff about the impact the development will have on them. There will be monthly newsletters and regular information sessions. A special 1800 number is being set up to deal with tenants' questions. Our specialist rehousing team will start meeting with tenants immediately. I want to assure the honourable member for Dubbo and the community, which we did today when we were at Dubbo—

Mr Andrew Stoner: Point of order: The point of order relates to relevance. Thus far, the Minister's answer has not covered the vital issue of where these tenants are going. Where is she sending the tenants?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of The Nationals will stop second-guessing the Minister for Housing. The Minister has the call.

Miss CHERIE BURTON: The Leader of The Nationals may want to reconsider his urgent motion. While he was catnapping on the couch in his office, we were in Dubbo delivering a comprehensive plan. He should catch up. Any tenants who are rehoused in the Dubbo area will have a good tenancy record and will be found appropriate housing in an area appropriate to their needs and the needs of the community. As I have said before, the Government will not tolerate public housing tenants who do not respect the homes they live in. People who live in public housing should take responsibility for the future of their communities.

Mr Andrew Stoner: You just send them somewhere else.

Miss CHERIE BURTON: The Leader of The Nationals should listen, rather than try to score cheap political points.

Mr Andrew Stoner: Why don't you answer the question? Where are they going? Where are you sending them?

Miss CHERIE BURTON: The Leader of The Nationals is being racist and discriminatory towards disadvantaged families. He should listen to the answer. The Government will provide support services where necessary to tenants.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Bathurst will cease calling out.

Miss CHERIE BURTON: However, if tenants do not take up those services and continue to destroy public property and harass their community, they will have no place in public housing anywhere. It is as simple as that. This redevelopment represents an opportunity to move forward and to solve the problems that have plagued the Gordon estate and the wider Dubbo community over the past 20 years. We look forward to continuing our work with the local member and local families to build a stronger community in Dubbo.

INDUSTRIAL WATER RECYCLING PLANT

Mr BARRY COLLIER: I direct my question to the Minister for Water Utilities. Will the Minister inform the House about efforts to secure greater commitment by industry to use recycled water?

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: I thank the honourable member for attending the meeting at Kurnell this morning at which the New South Wales Government announced it would invest \$5.18 million in a large-scale industrial water recycling plant at Kurnell. This is a vitally important project. The plant will save six million litres of precious drinking water each day by diverting millions of litres of sewage effluent to local industry. Funding for the project is being provided through the New South Wales Government's Water Savings Fund. It will retrofit the Caltex and Continental Carbon plants at Kurnell so that they can utilise the recycled water produced by the plant. This project has significant environmental benefits. It means that six million litres of sewage effluent will no longer be pumped out to sea. Instead it will be diverted back to good industrial use. The recycling plant will be privately operated and will divert sewage effluent from the Cronulla sewerage treatment works to industries. The recycling plant will produce recycled water that is cheaper than drinking water.

As I said, this morning the honourable member for Miranda and I visited Caltex to talk with industry representatives and community members about the initiative. I congratulate the companies for their commitment, which will help save millions of litres of water that will be available for use by the residents of Sydney. This project is a fantastic example of how the New South Wales Government's Water Savings Fund is stimulating industry investment in innovative water saving initiatives. It demonstrates that the Government is investing in water projects that encourage private sector recycling. By having large industrial water users working with the Government, we are ensuring the future of our precious drinking water supplies.

Since Monday the Iemma Government has released an updated 2006 Metropolitan Water Plan, which is the springboard for a raft of recycling projects such as the Western Sydney Recycling Initiative. It has also released plans to open Sydney Water and Hunter Water's monopolies to competition to build an environment that will give new private sector companies the chance to offer choice to customers for recycled water and wastewater services. Today the Government has demonstrated how it is working with industry to help save millions of litres of precious drinking water in Sydney. As I said to the House yesterday, this State is leading the nation in water reform. Our efforts in recycling alone will deliver 70 billion litres of recycled water by 2015.

REDFERN POLICE LOCAL AREA COMMAND PROBATIONARY CONSTABLES

Mr CARL SCULLY: I have a response to a question asked by the honourable member for Gosford. An internal police review late last year recommended that probationary constables be returned to Redfern. The commissioner accepted that advice in light of the enhanced stability of the situation in Redfern and the increased levels of senior officers there to mentor the new constables. Three probationaries joined the Redfern command in December 2005, followed by a further significant increase in May. All probationaries undertake local Aboriginal cultural awareness training in their first week, followed by ongoing training throughout their stay in Redfern. They undertake on-the-job training with experienced field training officers. Thanks to the moratorium on probationaries the Government implemented, there is now, in Superintendent Burn's words, "a wealth of experience" available to train and mentor the new arrivals. Superintendent Burn says that the arrival of the probationaries has been good for the command, bringing with them a new vitality and enthusiasm. She is very happy with the present arrangements.

Questions without notice concluded.

MARRIAGE OF MR SPEAKER

Mr WAYNE MERTON: It is my privilege and great pleasure to congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your wedding to Ann Moran on Saturday. I know that everyone wishes you a great day and many years of happiness.

Mr SPEAKER: Thank you, the privilege is all mine.

SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT**Motion by Mr Carl Scully agreed to:**

That this House at its rising this day do adjourn until Monday 22 May 2006 at 2.15 p.m.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**Bill: Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders****Motion by Mr Carl Scully agreed to:**

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to permit the introduction, immediately prior to the commencement of private members' statements, of the Pharmacy Practice Bill, up to and including the Minister's second reading speech.

HORNSBY AND BEROWRA TRAIN STATION PARKING FACILITIES**Personal Explanation**

Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD: by leave: The Minister for Transport has cast aspersions on my reputation, suggesting that I falsified petitions presented to this House. The names on the petitions are those of members of my family, who are entitled, as is every citizen of the New South Wales, including the thousands who have signed the petitions, to complain about the appalling state of transport in New South Wales.

CONSIDERATION OF URGENT MOTIONS**Federal Budget**

Mr PETER BLACK (Murray-Darling) [3.36 p.m.]: This matter is urgent because once again this disgusting rump of a schizophrenic rabble that was once the great Country Party has demonstrated just how ineffectual it is with respect to the Federal budget.

Mrs Judy Hopwood: Point of order: My point of order relates to the honourable member for Murray-Darling's use of the word "schizophrenic". In addition, next week is Schizophrenia Awareness Week. He made a totally inappropriate comment.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I suggest that the honourable member for Murray Darling select his words more carefully.

Mr PETER BLACK: I have nothing but regard for the event to which the honourable member referred. However, The Nationals are schizophrenic. It has six members on the North Coast and six out in the bush. That is what they have been reduced to. This matter is urgent because—

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

Mr PETER BLACK: The Federal Treasurer, Peter Costello, is going to Broken Hill next Monday and we need to work out the questions we should be asking him about the recent Federal budget. This matter is urgent because, once again, John Cobb has failed the bush miserably in representing the electorate of Parkes. He is a Minister—albeit a junior Minister—but he has had no influence whatsoever on his Liberal masters. This matter is urgent because the Federal budget did not address country fuel.

What an exhibition we witnessed this morning by the Leader of The Nationals and his Whip. They are fixated on what Country Labor is doing. They have done extensive research about what Country Labor is up to,

but we cannot return the favour because there is nothing to talk about—The Nationals have done nothing! There was nothing on The Nationals web page about country fuel prices. This matter is urgent because we could not find anything on the web site about the lack of road funding in the west or increased road funding for the shires. This matter is urgent because a meeting of Ministers for Local Government and directors from the States and Territories will be held in Sydney on 26 May to discuss the fact that remote and regional shires across Australia are being bled to death.

This motion is urgent because this lot opposite have failed to convince the Federal Liberal Party that Roads to Recovery funding should not finish in three years but, rather, will have to be enhanced. This motion is urgent because once again the Federal budget did not address adequate bridge funding in the form of infrastructure and did nothing to address the skills shortage. This lot opposite have not said one word about the skills shortages in the mining industry. Metallurgists and managing directors of mining companies have to be sourced from South Africa because the Federal budget did not address re-establishing organisations such as the WS and LB Robinson College to train our own mining engineers and other mining industry staff.

The motion is urgent because this lot opposite said nothing to convince their Federal counterparts about the shortage of dentists in regional and rural New South Wales. They said nothing whatsoever about addressing the shortage of nurses, doctors, and all the other people who properly and proudly deal with issues associated with schizophrenia in rural and regional New South Wales. The Federal budget did not address making available adequate nurse training. I have been checking up once again on the genetically modified goat that the honourable member for Murrumbidgee has referred to, but I find that not even that was mentioned in the Federal budget. This lot opposite have attacked us on drought funding at the State level. What an absolute joke! A few bob has been provided for the drought support workers but there is nothing in the Federal budget for exceptional circumstances assistance. There is nothing to address the real needs of our towns— [*Time expired.*]

Department of Housing Gordon Estate, Dubbo, Redevelopment

Mr ANDREW STONER (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [3.41 p.m.]: My motion refers to an urgent matter requiring debate today because we have had an announcement by the Government in relation to the Gordon Estate at Dubbo. A lot of people are very concerned about this announcement. Indeed, there has been a relative panic in towns surrounding Dubbo, such as Narromine, Parkes, Forbes and Peak Hill, and in other parts of the city of Dubbo. People are worried that families with problems are being forcibly moved into their neighbourhood. I tried to get the Minister for Housing to address the issue today, but she refused. That sense of panic and fear is there in Dubbo as we speak. It is therefore important that this motion be given priority.

In the view of the Nationals-Liberal Coalition, this Government has today embarked upon one of the most ill-considered policy disasters of all time. My motion should be given priority because the people of the Gordon Estate do not want to be hidden; they want to be helped. Instead, they are getting social engineering by this arrogant, Sydney-centric, out-of-touch Labor Government. The Government does not want to fix problems; it simply wants to fix headlines.

Mr Peter Black: Point of order: We have heard the subject but now we are hearing the argument. The Leader of The Nationals is once again demonstrating that—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I have not heard sufficient from the Leader of The Nationals to rule on the point of order. What the Leader of The Nationals has said so far is in order.

Mr ANDREW STONER: In recent times we have seen riots in Dubbo. In January this year gangs of juveniles attacked police and destroyed properties. Those riots were a manifestation of social issues that have been simmering in Dubbo for decades. These very real issues need to be fixed. The fundamental issues are crime, juvenile delinquency, drug and alcohol abuse, and chronic unemployment. These are issues that this State Labor Government has simply failed to address. Instead of locking up the drug dealers, fixing the Young Offenders Act to discourage repeat juvenile crime, and assisting people to gain employment through programs like the Aboriginal Employment Strategy—

Mrs Dawn Fardell: Point of order: My point of order is relevance. This situation not only occurs in Dubbo but is rife in areas such as Kempsey and Orange—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. This debate has now developed into a discussion on the substance of the motion rather than the reasons it should have priority. I remind the Leader of The Nationals

that he must address the reasons his motion should have priority. Members should not take points of order during the priority debate and then start to debate the substance of the motion.

Mr ANDREW STONER: The motion should be given priority because we want those fundamental problems dealt with, not simply shifted. We want police numbers in Dubbo restored, because they are 14 down in the Orana Local Area Command. The Minister for Housing, instead of breaking the cycle of poverty and crime, is embarking—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of The Nationals is now debating the substance of his motion rather than establishing priority. He must establish why his motion should be given priority; he should not debate the substance of the motion.

Mr ANDREW STONER: The Nationals are listening to the concerns of communities throughout the Central West and the Western Plains, who are saying they are worried about the impacts of this policy. Today the Minister for Housing refused to give any assurances regarding where these tenants will be forcibly repatriated. That is why the motion should be debated today. My motion should be given priority because people are saying that this is simply social engineering; it is simply shifting the problem. People do not want the problem shifted next to them. Recently people in Orange, including Aboriginal people, have said, "We don't want people shifted, with their problems, into our neighbourhood." That is an absolutely fair comment from those people. This motion should be debated today because people right across the Central West and the Western Plains are rightly concerned about this issue. We need debate on this issue because we have, obviously, a flawed policy, a quick fix: shift those people out, break up the estate and shift the problems elsewhere. Why does the Government not deal with the real issues of crime and unemployment? [*Time expired.*]

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

The House divided.

Ayes, 50

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

Noes, 33

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

Question resolved in the affirmative.

FEDERAL BUDGET**Urgent Motion**

Mr PETER BLACK (Murray-Darling) [3.55 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) condemns the Federal Treasurer for ignoring rural New South Wales in his 2006-07 budget; and
- (2) notes the continuing failure of the New South Wales Nationals to stand up for rural families and businesses and get any support from their Federal colleagues.

On Tuesday night when the Federal Treasurer delivered his Budget Speech, which contained more than 4,000 words, he did not use the word "regional" once. I will read into *Hansard* an article in today's *Barrier Daily Truth* because I think it says it all. I remind the House that the Federal Treasurer is going to Broken Hill next Monday. We should be able to ask him whether he can explain the continuing very high cost of our fuel, the lack of road funding, and why the Federal Government totally ignores regional and rural New South Wales. The article states:

The Federal Government had done more for Broken Hill in one budget than the State Member had in eight years, Member for Parkes, John Cobb, said yesterday. Mr Cobb said Tuesday's budget delivered for rural NSW, and bristled at comments by his State counterpart, Peter Black and NSW Regional Development Minister, David Campbell.

Mr Campbell said despite a \$14.8 billion surplus, the Federal Government had ignored the needs of the bush.

That is, in fact, the state of the matter. In western New South Wales there are massive troubles in numerous areas that involve our shires and our basic social and economic fabric. Honourable members know that regional and rural New South Wales is losing population. Notwithstanding that, the Federal Government fails to address any of the causes of that loss of population. Indeed, it fails to address any of the real and relevant infrastructure needs of our shires, in particular. I again draw the attention of the House to the round table conference on the financial sustainability of rural and remote councils, which will be held in Sydney on 26 May. The New South Wales Minister for Local Government will attend, as will the Ministers from Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia. The directors-general of the other States and Territories will attend, as will the president of the Australian Local Government Association.

The topic undoubtedly will be the failure of the Federal budget to address the needs of rural and remote Australia, of which all of us in this Chamber should take note. The skills shortage in western New South Wales and in regional and rural Australia continues unabated. I referred earlier to skills shortages in the mining industry. The metallurgists in BeMax come from Stellenbosch University in South Africa, as does the managing director of Premier Mines. I am not necessarily saying that is wrong. However, it is incredible. Until the former Federal member for Wagga Wagga Wal Fife arrived and made the decision to close down the WS and LB Robinson College in Broken Hill, Australia was a highly reputable and well-known exporter of skilled labour in the mining industry.

We have produced mining engineers and geologists of great repute throughout Australia. If one goes back to the last \$100 paper note one will see Mawson on the back with cross-sections of Broken Hill and the Flinders Ranges. We have produced experts in the mining industry, but this great nation is now being compelled to import people to work in the mining industry because the Nationals, who have been reduced from 20 seats in 1988 to 12 today—six on the North Coast, six out in the bush, with no relationship between the two branches—have failed to ensure that the general skills shortage in Australia is being addressed.

We hear regularly of skills shortages in nursing. I have yet to obtain final figures for New South Wales but, unbelievably, the Opposition does not seem to have an interest in that. Last year 3,500 people who applied to do nursing were refused because of lack of funding. The Government has undertaken a massive recruitment campaign to encourage Higher School Certificate students to apply for nursing places at universities such as Sturt University at Wagga Wagga but the positions were not funded. New South Wales is the leading State of Australia but nursing positions at Bourke are being filled by area-need nurses from Zimbabwe, a country which could ill afford to lose any nurse. A similar situation exists with respect to doctors, because we do not train enough doctors to fill the vacant positions in rural and regional Australia.

The Nationals have failed to stand up to the people of regional New South Wales. They are sell-out merchants. The State Nationals have had no influence on their Federal counterparts with respect to the budget

that has just been handed down because it contains a paucity of funding for positions in the two areas I have named, that is, the mining industry and nursing. Another disgraceful state of affairs is that it is now almost impossible to get trained dentists. A major section of the Shires Association has called upon the Federal Government to introduce area-need dentists for New South Wales in addition to doctors and nurses. The University of Sydney, my old sandstone university, is the only university to train dentists. It has not been adequately funded, could not access the usual number of dentists, and now one-third of students are full fee paying students, that is, overseas trainee dentists.

Perhaps we have spoken a little too much about fuel in this place in recent times, but the reasons we have spoken about it so much remain valid. People in regional New South Wales are bleeding to death. Members opposite have not said one word about the fact that people in Australia pay three times more for fuel than do people in the United States of America. That is a disgrace. The Liberal Party talk about parity with world prices and the price of a barrel of fuel or the price of crude oil. I am not referring to that because I accept that, as most of us do, but I do not accept the failure of The Nationals, State or Federal, to address the huge gap in fuel prices between the bush and Sydney.

Last week we had a debate in this place—and it was again mentioned yesterday—that the difference in fuel between Sydney and the other side of the Blue Mountains is regularly 10¢ and 12¢ a litre. The people of Sydney complain about the high price of fuel. One can imagine what people in the bush say about the high price of fuel. I referred earlier to roads funding. The Federal Government is about to spend \$800 million on the Hume Highway. I do not think the Hume Highway is that bad. A couple of shekels have been spent on the Pacific Highway but there is nothing for the Barrier Highway, the Silver City Highway or any of the roads out west. We have heard all the promises about the Roads to Recovery Program.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: They are State roads.

Mr PETER BLACK: The honourable member for Murrumbidgee says they are State roads. The offer for the Roads to Recovery program was for the Silver City Highway. We chose to spend it on local roads with the roads reference group.

[*Interruption*]

The honourable member for Murrumbidgee interjects again. He should go back to his genetically modified goat. It has not been doubled. It has been extended and, as the budget states, it will cut out in three years time. Roads to Recovery funding has not been enhanced when report after report states that our shires are in desperate need. [*Time expired.*]

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI (Murrumbidgee) [4.05 p.m.]: I move:

That the motion be amended by leaving out all words after "That" with a view to inserting instead:

"this House supports the announcement by the Federal Government to double Roads to Recovery funds for councils in western New South Wales, particularly to the Hay shire and Deniliquin shire."

Most Australians would have regarded the budget on Tuesday night as a very good budget, and not only for people in country New South Wales. I acknowledge that the Federal Government had the opportunity to announce tax cuts because of our growing economy and the increase in commodity exports due to the strength of the Chinese economy and other world economies. That has been Australia's good fortune. We are pleased that the Commonwealth Government was financially able to make significant tax cuts. The fact that 80 per cent of Australians now pay tax at a rate of 30 per cent or less is a step in the right direction. I hope that Australia's present prosperity continues for a long time and that the tax rates may even drop further. In addition to the tax cuts, which were offered to everyone, including those in rural New South Wales, increases were made to family allowances and family assistance so the young families will have greater opportunities to save and to improve their standard of living. All in all, the Federal budget was a responsible budget, which most people would have appreciated.

The commitments to country New South Wales and Australia were significant. The honourable member for Murray-Darling was wrong when he said that the Federal Government has not delivered on infrastructure, particularly for local councils. It has done that, not only in this budget but also in previous budgets. One of the great calls by local government was for road funding. Indeed, a few years ago, John Anderson, on behalf of the Australian Government, announced the Roads to Recovery Program, which was widely welcomed by councils across Australia—even those in the electorate of Murray-Darling.

Initially the program was to run for a period of four years. It was then was extended for a further four years. Indeed, in three years time I hope the newly elected Coalition Government will extend it further. I will be one of those lobbying the Federal Government to do that. Members opposite do not have to take my word. I could be accused of being party political when I congratulate the Federal Government on its budget. But do not believe me! Believe what is written in today's *Land*. An article in today's *Land*, with the headline "Road-rail leg up for farmers—and The Nationals", stated:

And for The Nationals it has delivered in spades ...

Late last year Nationals leaders, Mark Vaile, set out to deliver tax cuts and infrastructure spending—the party's electorates are characterised by low incomes and long distance travel—and on both counts he has delivered.

They are not my words; they come from the *Land*, a totally objective newspaper that I am sure most honourable members read it.

Mr Peter Black: Dear oh dear!

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: The honourable member for Murray-Darling says that it is a biased newspaper. The honourable member may not believe in the integrity of the *Land* but I certainly do. It has given The Nationals a belting when we have deserved it, and it delivers accolades when we deserve them. The article further stated:

The Budget gives a \$2.3 billion lift to road and rail infrastructure, with most going to highways, but also an extra \$300m for local roads, improving the delivery of rural products to export markets.

The string of reforms to taxation will benefit three of the Nationals' key demographics: farmers, small business and coastal retirees.

Honourable members should remember that they are not my words; they come from the *Land*. The article further stated:

Changes to the capital gains tax laws reduce the cost burden facing young farmers taking over the family business; abolition of the superannuation benefits tax has been highly praised by retirees, and an increase to the asset test threshold will make it easier for farmers to access a pension and stay on the land in old age.

And the improvement in the depreciation rate ... is critical to many farming operations in terms of investment in new equipment ...

National Farmers Federal (NFF) officials said the Budget had delivered on its three priorities: sustainability, infrastructure and taxation relief for rural Australia.

"I can say positively that we've had movement on all three areas," NFF president Peter Corish said.

The Federal budget will be endorsed by Coalition members, but it has received an independent endorsement by the *Land*, which is a terrific newspaper that reports honestly. In this case the *Land* has reported honestly on the impacts of the Federal budget on people in rural New South Wales. Let us get a little more specific. The honourable member for Murray-Darling referred to Roads to Recovery funding. I am sorry that the honourable member for Murray-Darling continues to refer to the mayor of Deniliquin as a genetically modified goat. I assume that is who he is referring to.

Mr Peter Black: Point of order: I have never made that assertion. That is unparliamentary conduct. That is an outrageous assertion that is absolutely not true.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marianne Saliba): Order! There is no point of order. The honourable member for Murrumbidgee has the call.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: The mayor of Deniliquin is a terrific bloke. The honourable member for Murray-Darling has not explained who or what the genetically modified goat is that he keeps referring to. I am simply asking for an explanation. It is outrageous. In terms of the councils in south-western New South Wales, Carrathool Shire Council will receive an additional \$910,000 in Roads to Recovery funding. That means a great shire is getting an extra \$1 million in road funding as a result of the Federal budget. How can the honourable member for Murray-Darling say that the Federal budget does not deliver for country New South Wales? Hay is a great shire with a great community and lots of country roads that cover a large area. Hay Shire Council will get an extra \$312,000 in Roads to Recovery funding. How can anybody say that the Federal budget presented on Tuesday did not deliver for the people in country New South Wales? Those are just two examples of councils

that will have their Roads to Recovery funding doubled this year. I may be wrong but I believe that every rural council in New South Wales, including Deniliquin shire, has had its Roads to Recovery funding doubled.

Pursuant to sessional orders business interrupted and motion lapsed.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of Motions

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marianne Saliba): Order! It being 4.15 p.m. the House will now deal with General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices).

General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) given.

PRINTING OF PAPERS

Motion, by leave, by Mr Paul McLeay agreed to:

That the following papers be printed:

Report of the New South Wales Cancer Council for the period 1 July 2004–30 September 2005
Half Yearly Report of Landcom for the period 1 July 2005 to 31 December 2005
Half Yearly Report of RailCorp for the six months ended 31 December 2005
Half Yearly Report of the Rail Infrastructure Corporation for the six months ended 31 December 2005
Report of the State Emergency Management Committee for the year ended 30 June 2005
Report of the State Rescue Board for the year ended 30 June 2005
Report of the New South Wales Rural Assistance Authority for the year ended 30 June 2005
Half Yearly Report of Waste Recycling and Processing Corporation (trading as WSN Environmental Solutions) for the period ended 31 December 2005
Half Yearly Report of Country Energy for the period ended 31 December 2005
Half Yearly Report of Delta Electricity for the period ended 31 December 2005
Half Yearly Report of Eraring Energy for the period ended 31 December 2005
Half Yearly Report of EnergyAustralia for the period ended 31 December 2005
Half Yearly Report of the Hunter Water Corporation for the period ended 31 December 2005
Half Yearly Report of Integral Energy for the period ended 31 December 2005
Half Yearly Report of Macquarie Generation for the period ended 31 December 2005
Half Yearly Report Sydney Water for the period ended 31 December 2005
Half Yearly Report TransGrid for the period ended 31 December 2005
Report of the Youth Advisory Council for 2005

PHARMACY PRACTICE BILL

Bill introduced and read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr PAUL McLEAY (Heathcote—Parliamentary Secretary), on behalf of Ms Carmel Tebbutt [4.19 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I have pleasure in introducing the Pharmacy Practice Bill, which will protect the health and safety of the public of New South Wales by updating and enhancing the effective regulation of pharmacy practice. The bill will replace the Pharmacy Act 1964. The legislation contains more robust professional regulation similar to recent improvements to the regulatory systems for other health professionals, such as medical practitioners and dentists. The pharmacy profession, and the business of pharmacy, is highly regulated at a Federal level. State governments register pharmacists and set standards for pharmacies. The Federal Government controls the overall number and location of pharmacies via the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

In recognition of this national dimension to the regulation of pharmacy the Council of Australian Governments agreed to conduct a joint national review of pharmacy legislation and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme provisions of the National Health Act. The Council of Australian Governments accepted the final report of the review and referred it to each State for implementation in August 2002. Since that time the New South Wales Department of Health has been engaged in extensive consultation with all relevant stakeholders in the health and pharmacy sectors. I particularly place on the record the Government's thanks for the contributions of

the Pharmacy Guild and the members, registrar and staff of the New South Wales Pharmacy Board who have given of their time and practical expertise to ensure that the bill that I have presented today is administratively rigorous. The Pharmacy Guild has played a role in strongly advocating for pharmacy businesses continuing to be owned and managed by professional and accountable pharmacists.

I turn now to the provisions of the bill and provide an explanation of their operation. Honourable members will be aware that pharmacy businesses and pharmacists enjoy a privileged and protected position within the community. The primary rationale for that privileged position is the important role of pharmacy in the integrated community health care system. Professional pharmacists are a vital link in the chain of effective health care delivery and are gatekeepers to public access to important drugs and medications. Honourable members will be aware of the potentially disastrous consequences that can arise from inadequately supervised access to medications, most notably drug dependence and adverse reactions to individual drugs or drug combinations. We must ensure that pharmacy practice remains committed to the delivery of professional high-quality health care.

The Government is vitally concerned that pharmacy continues to be in a position to serve as a shopfront source of health care services, information and advice. This role includes pharmacy's contribution to delivering methadone and buprenorphine treatments to drug-dependent people under the New South Wales Opioid Treatment Program. Consistent with the Government's support for pharmacist owned and controlled pharmacies, part 3 division 2 of the bill contains detailed provisions concerning the ownership of pharmacies. Clause 25 (1) of the bill provides that only registered pharmacists, partnerships of registered pharmacists or corporations made up exclusively of registered pharmacists may hold pecuniary interests in pharmacy businesses.

However, honourable members will note clause 25 (2), which provides that a non-pharmacist may have a pecuniary interest in prescribed circumstances. A provision to the same effect exists in the current Pharmacy Act and is designed to address circumstances such as where a community is in need of pharmacy services but is unable to attract a pharmacist prepared to invest the capital to establish a pharmacy business. In those circumstances regulations could be made authorising an organisation such as a local government authority or an Aboriginal health service to hold a pecuniary interest in a pharmacy business. I emphasise that in these circumstances a registered pharmacist would be in charge of the pharmacy at all times and all professional pharmacy services would have to be undertaken by a registered pharmacist.

Concerns have been raised with the Minister and me that the regulation-making power is too broad and that the potential exists for a future government to make regulations allowing generally for non-pharmacy corporations such as supermarket chains to own and operate pharmacy businesses. I place on the record the Government's view that any such action would be contrary to one of the philosophical underpinnings of the bill: that pharmacies should be owned and operated by pharmacists. The Government reiterates its assurances to the pharmacy profession that the regulation-making powers would not be used in the aforementioned way.

On the subject of supermarkets I draw honourable members' attention to clause 1 (8) (b) of schedule 2 to the bill. That clause provides that the Pharmacy Board may not approve pharmacy premises that are co-located with a supermarket. The Federal Minister for Health has recently approved new pharmacy location rules for the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme via a determination under section 99L of the National Health Act. Amongst other things, those rules have the effect of preventing the co-location of supermarkets and pharmacies in the same fashion as that proposed by the bill.

That brings me to clause 26, which provides an exception from the ownership restrictions for certain friendly societies. As honourable members will be aware, a friendly society is a mutual organisation that exists for the purpose of providing benefits to its members and does not seek to generate profits for the purposes of paying dividends. In the case of friendly society pharmacies any surplus funds that the business generates are returned to members via lower prices for products in the pharmacy. I am advised that five friendly societies are operating a total of eight pharmacies in New South Wales.

Clause 26 (1) provides that a friendly society may apply to the Minister for approval to own a pharmacy business. Before granting that approval the Minister must be satisfied that all the profits arising from the business will be returned to members by way of benefits and that the operation of the pharmacy is in the interests of the members of the friendly society, the public or both. Subclauses (5), (6) and (7) of clause 26 operate to provide that existing friendly society pharmacies may continue to operate without being required to obtain further approval.

There is a lengthy history of friendly society pharmacies in New South Wales. Such businesses were established at a time prior to the introduction of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and, as not-for-profit

entities, they were able to supply important medications and pharmacy service at an affordable cost, thereby delivering an extremely important service to their members and the community as a whole. While the existence of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme now renders some of the original rationale for the existence of friendly society pharmacies worthless, the Government is firmly of the view that friendly society pharmacies continue to play an important role in the overall scheme of community pharmacy.

Clause 27 of the bill provides further exemption from the ownership restrictions for those corporations that owned pharmacy businesses prior to 5 October 1990. I am advised that there are eight such grandfathered pharmacy businesses in New South Wales. While these businesses are a historical exception, it is appropriate that existing interests and entitlements be preserved subject to the same conditions under which they currently operate. I emphasise that no additional corporate owners can be created and that this category is limited to the eight corporations currently in the market.

Discussion of friendly society pharmacies and the grandfathered corporate pharmacies leads me to part 11 of the bill. Part 11 is a set of standard provisions that expressly prohibits employers directing or inciting their employee pharmacists to engage in unsatisfactory professional conduct or professional misconduct. Equivalent provisions are found in the Medical Practice Act 1992, the Dental Practice Act 2001 and the Optometrists Act 2002. While these provisions have limited application to pharmacy because of the ownership restrictions in the bill, they are relevant in those restricted circumstances where a friendly society or corporation conducts a pharmacy business subject to the exemptions in clauses 26 and 27 of the bill.

The provisions create an offence with significant monetary penalties. The provisions also allow the Director General of Health to prohibit a person who has been found guilty of an offence under part 11 from operating a business that provides pharmacy services. I emphasise that part 11 of the bill does not provide an additional mechanism for a non-pharmacist to obtain a pecuniary interest in a pharmacy business.

Honourable members will recall that other health professional registration Acts introduced and passed in recent years have included template provisions in respect of the registration of practitioners; disciplinary and complaints handling structures, including mechanisms to manage impaired practitioners; notification of a range of criminal matters by both courts and registered practitioners; and administrative matters. These standard provisions have been included in the Pharmacy Practice Bill. First I turn to specific provisions of the bill that concern the registration and regulation of pharmacists. To ensure that the welfare of patients is the paramount consideration in administering the Act, clause 3 of the bill states that the objective of the legislation is to protect the health and safety of the public in relation to the practice of pharmacy including by providing mechanisms to ensure that pharmacists are fit to practise. The bill will achieve this objective through a number of initiatives.

The first of these initiatives is to provide that the board may refuse to register a person, or register him or her subject to conditions where it is not satisfied that he or she is competent to practise. For the first time it will be an explicit requirement that all applicants for registration must be competent to practise. Clause 9 of the bill defines competence to practise pharmacy as the possession of sufficient physical capacity, mental capacity and skill to practise pharmacy as well as the possession of sufficient communication skills, including an adequate command of the English language. As part of the requirement for competence, clause 16 of the bill provides that the Pharmacy Board is to have the power to conduct an inquiry into a person's competence. If, following an inquiry, the board is not satisfied as to a person's competence, it will be able to grant registration subject to conditions or refuse registration. The second initiative within the bill to ensure that pharmacists maintain their competence is the introduction of a more robust process for the annual renewal of registration. This process will require each practitioner to submit an annual declaration to the board when seeking to renew registration.

Clause 31 of the bill provides that these declarations will include, amongst other things, criminal convictions and findings, the refusal by another jurisdiction to register the pharmacist, the details of any suspension or cancellation of registration or the imposition of conditions in another jurisdiction or by another health registration board in New South Wales, significant physical or mental illness that is likely to affect a pharmacist's ability to practise, and continuing professional education activities. These provisions are standard across health professional registration Acts passed in recent years. However, noting the role of pharmacists in regulating the community's access to medications and benefits under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, the bill also requires pharmacists to report the details of any conviction or finding for an offence connected with the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. In addition to pharmacists being required to provide the board with an annual declaration detailing any criminal findings, clauses 32 and 33 of the bill also provide for the board to be notified about pharmacists who are the subject of criminal findings.

The third significant initiative is part 4 of the bill, which introduces a new disciplinary system, similar to the model applying to a number of other health professions. Clauses 36 and 37 provide for a two-tier definition of misconduct. The adoption of the two-tier definition, which includes both unsatisfactory professional conduct and professional misconduct, will allow the range of complaints to be dealt with in the most appropriate manner. Specific to the Pharmacy Practice Bill, the definition of unsatisfactory professional conduct in clause 37 (1) includes matters relating to the excessive or inappropriate supply of precursor drugs. This recognises the privileged position of pharmacists in relation to possession and supply of scheduled medications containing precursor drugs, such as pseudoephedrine, that can be diverted to the illicit drug market. Any pharmacist who engages in this type of conduct and profits from this pernicious trade has breached the public's trust and should be held to account by his or her profession and, where appropriate, removed from the profession's ranks.

The bill provides for the establishment of a Pharmacy Tribunal to consider complaints of professional misconduct. The tribunal is to be chaired by a legal practitioner with at least seven years experience and is to include two pharmacists and a consumer selected by the board. The tribunal will hear serious complaints about pharmacists and the board will, where appropriate, conduct inquiries into complaints that are less serious. Like a number of other registration Acts, the bill proposes the establishment of a Pharmacy Care Assessment Committee. The committee can be used by the board as an expeditious and expert mechanism to inquire into those complaints about pharmacy services that the Health Care Complaints Commission does not propose to investigate. The complaints will generally be those at the lower end of the spectrum of seriousness.

The committee is to investigate complaints and make recommendations to the board for their resolution. Included as part of the committee's investigatory powers will be the power to order skills testing. Skills testing will assist the board in dealing with complaints about professional standards and in ensuring that pharmacists maintain appropriate standards. Should the committee during its investigations reach the view that a complaint raises an issue of unsatisfactory professional conduct or professional misconduct that requires referral for a disciplinary inquiry, the board will be obliged to follow this recommendation. In such cases the board will either conduct an inquiry into the complaint or, for more serious matters, refer the complaint to the tribunal for a hearing.

Honourable members will be aware of the role of the Health Care Complaints Commission in investigating complaints about health service providers and undertaking disciplinary action. I emphasise that under the new disciplinary provisions the role of the Health Care Complaints Commission will continue to play an important role in the investigation and prosecution of complaints. As part of the board's powers to protect the public, it will be able to impose conditions on a pharmacist's registration or suspend that registration where it is necessary to do so to protect the life or the physical or mental health of any person. Equivalent emergency provisions exist in other health professional registration Acts. Part 5 of the bill proposes a system for the board to manage impaired pharmacists. Part 5 is modelled on impairment provisions in the Medical Practice Act, which have operated successfully for a number of years.

Pharmacists whose ability to practise is impaired by factors such as physical or mental illness or drug and alcohol abuse can be managed and assisted before those problems develop to the point where members of the public are placed at risk. Following the impairment process, the board will be able to place conditions on a pharmacist's registration or suspend that registration where it is satisfied that the pharmacist has agreed. Where the pharmacist does not agree to the recommendations of an impaired registrants panel, the board will be able to lodge a complaint about the pharmacist to be dealt with by the tribunal or at a board inquiry. Similar to other health professional registration Acts, the bill includes comprehensive appeal mechanisms to ensure that there are appropriate checks and balances in the disciplinary system. The bill is aimed at ensuring that the public can continue to expect the highest standards of competence and conduct from the profession. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mrs Judy Hopwood.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ENFIELD INTERMODAL TERMINAL

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE (Strathfield) [4.38 p.m.]: I wish to bring to the urgent attention of the House once again a matter of great importance. It concerns the latest proposal by the Sydney Ports Authority to establish an intermodal facility at the former marshalling yards site at Enfield. I wish to highlight my complete opposition to the current proposal by the Sydney Ports Authority. While the proposed site for the Enfield

Intermodal is not within the boundaries of my electorate of Strathfield—it is in the neighbouring electorate of Bankstown—I believe it will impact on my constituents, whom I have a duty to represent. As it stands, this proposal will involve more than 1,150 semitrailers, B-doubles and light trucks on the road each day and night by 2016; 300,000 shipping container units per year plus warehousing, distribution and container storage; and a noisy transport centre that will operate in the centre of a residential area 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

We do not want all of Port Botany's containers going into our community. I understand the important role Sydney plays as a major global city and central hub for commerce, industry and tourism. I further acknowledge that demands upon our infrastructure and transport will be significantly increased as a result of our expanding city. However, despite my understanding of these issues, my first and foremost concern is for my electorate and the constituents I represent—and it always will be. My constituents are fervently opposed to the current proposal for the Intermodal. I speak in this Chamber to represent and echo their sentiments, loudly and clearly. The residents of the surrounding communities do not want our wonderfully unique and diverse inner west home turned into an industrial thoroughfare.

The residents of surrounding suburbs will all be affected by this proposal and deserve careful consideration. New South Wales needs an efficient, reliable and sustainable infrastructure in order to effectively transport both imports and exports. I strongly believe that our rail system should provide this and I completely support the New South Wales Government in its aim to increase the rail mode share of container movement. This initiative will help to reduce air pollution and take trucks off our roads, which will mean less road wear and tear and safer transport conditions for all.

I acknowledge that to achieve this goal we need to have appropriately located and strategically placed intermodal facilities to meet Sydney's growing needs. However, the proposal by Sydney Ports Authority for Enfield in its current form is not a suitable solution. When the previous proposal was brought forward, I spoke out and advocated my opposition to it. I am doing the same again because I do not believe this is the right proposal. The economic benefits do not outweigh the costs that we will endure. The previous proposal was rejected thanks to strong and informed community opposition and an independent report undertaken by Milton Morris, AO, which I initiated when I was Mayor of Strathfield Municipal Council. In his independent report, Mr Morris outlined the stark and obvious problems with the presented proposal. His report concluded that Enfield is only a relatively short distance from Port Botany—18 kilometres—but still a considerable distance from the major manufacturing centres of Western and south-western Sydney, it is closely surrounded on the west and north by residential streets, and it has become increasingly distant from major additions to the metropolitan road network—the M5 East and the Western Sydney Orbital. Mr Morris's findings further stated:

The major growth in manufacturing, warehousing, and transportation industries has been and is in Western and South Western Sydney. This suggests that while there is a level of demand for containers in the mid west surrounding the Enfield site, the bulk of growth in demand will be from much further west. This raises for me the question of why it would be sensible from either a financial or logistics perspective to move containers such a short distance from the Port and then distribute by truck.

Why indeed? I believe these findings speak for themselves and highlight some important issues within the last proposal by Sydney Ports Authority that have not yet been addressed in its latest proposal. The proposal in its current form is not acceptable! It cannot be denied that the current proposal presents ramifications for local residents and hundreds of surrounding community members. To ignore my constituents' concerns and to highlight only the economic benefits this proposal will provide would be an abominable disregard of my elected duty. I am here as a representative of my local constituents and I fully intend to advocate their major concerns.

The latest intermodal facility proposal by the Sydney Ports Authority will adversely affect local residents and surrounding communities. I urge the House to consider the potential impacts of this current proposal. Although I understand the need for increased infrastructure to facilitate Sydney's transport and trade, I strongly and passionately believe that the current proposal is flawed. Therefore, I put forth my complete opposition. The Bankstown council's submission states that the council is supportive in principle of the rationale behind the proposal. However, the submission also expresses concerns about potential environmental impacts that may arise, particularly due to traffic noise and dust. I am also concerned that the traffic leaving the site may be directed to the Strathfield side of the site. I commend this issue for the House's urgent consideration.

LAND TAX

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI (Murrumbidgee) [4.43 p.m.]: I raise the issue of land tax and the huge increases that have been imposed on investors across New South Wales. I am not talking about multi-millionaire investors or listed property trusts. I am sure they are paying their fair share of land tax. The people who have my

sympathy are the hardworking people who have saved a few dollars in real estate only to find themselves burdened to the point of total frustration by land tax and the huge increases in property values determined by the Department of Lands, which have consequently caused their land tax burden to soar.

Ironically, councils, which base much of their rate revenue on land valuations, have been subjected to a cap on rate increases. However, the Office of State Revenue, which administers land tax, is not subject to any such cap. It can go flat out and raise as much revenue as it wants from land tax. It is deplorable to see the way in which small investors have been cruelled by land tax. I have a letter from a Griffith constituent. I will not mention the constituent's name because he provides some financial details. He complains about the unbelievable increases in land tax and poignantly states that he thinks this State Government has a mob of dishonest thieves working for it.

That indicates the level of anger and frustration being felt about land tax. My constituent provided me with a copy of a rate assessment he received for a property he owns in Wagga Wagga. I am not talking about high-rise, Sydney central business district buildings. The property is a country town retail venue. In the 2005 tax year my constituent was charged \$2,032. That was the year during which the Government said there would be no land tax threshold. The Government started feeling the heat about the land tax and it had to scrap its stupid policy of abandoning the threshold and reinstated it. However, my constituent ended up paying more—\$2,140. He cannot believe that, particularly after all the statements made by the Premier and others about abolishing the threshold and reducing the land tax take.

The most unbelievable increases relate to properties that he owns in Wagga Wagga and Albury in partnership with others. In 2004 they paid no land tax, in 2005 they paid \$1,846, and in 2006 they paid a staggering \$5,359.80. In the space of two years the amount has gone from nothing to almost \$5,500 in land tax. That is a blow to their investment and, therefore, a blow to their tenants. Retailers must pass on their costs to their customers. I am not sure what the shops sell, but they are involved in retailing and their costs must be passed on. All honourable members can cite examples of constituents facing increasing land tax on residential properties and residential investments and how much has been passed on, or will soon be passed on, to tenants. Land tax is an issue for the rich, but it is also an issue for people who have worked very hard and done what governments have urged them to do. They have saved for their future and retirement and invested money and provided accommodation and retail facilities for people who want to rent. However, this Government is increasing their costs and turning people off investing in real estate.

HERCEPTIN BREAST CANCER THERAPY

Ms ANGELA D'AMORE (Drummoyne) [4.48 p.m.]: I wish to raise the important issue of the life-saving breast cancer drug Herceptin. Herceptin is a targeted breast cancer therapy currently approved for use in Australia in the treatment of women with advanced breast cancer who are HER-2 positive. HER-2 positive means these women have a particular protein called "HER-2", which tells breast cancer cells how to grow. Approximately 20 per cent to 25 per cent of women diagnosed with breast cancer each year have HER-2 positive breast cancer, which is a more aggressive form of the disease. Herceptin works by attaching itself to these HER-2 proteins on the cancer cells to stop their growth and multiplication, potentially saving the lives of thousands of women. In May 2005 preliminary data was released from three international trials showing Herceptin significantly decreases the risk of breast cancer recurring in women with HER-2 positive early breast cancer. This has the potential to be a treatment option for approximately 2,000 of the women diagnosed with early breast cancer in Australia each year.

We do not know how to stop breast cancer, so what we are mostly concerned about is that women diagnosed with breast cancer can gain access to the very best treatment to give them every opportunity to survive a breast cancer diagnosis. In 2001 the Breast Cancer Network Australia successfully led a national campaign to ensure that Herceptin was available free to women with advanced breast cancer. However, unfortunately, women with early breast cancer are denied this therapy in 2006. The latest evidence published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* indicates that Herceptin also has a real benefit for a group of HER-2-positive women with early breast cancer. On balance, the latest findings from the HER-2 trial in the *New England Journal of Medicine* bring good news to women with early breast cancer. The new data shows a real benefit of the drug for this group of women, in that something can now be offered to potentially reduce their risk of breast cancer coming back.

On Saturday 6 May I met one of my local residents, Barbara Bailey from Russell Lea, at Five Dock shops. I commend her for bringing this issue to my attention. Barbara asked for my support on this very

important issue, which I am more than happy to put on record this evening. Barbara Bailey is a 52-year-old schoolteacher who was diagnosed with breast cancer in March this year after a routine check-up, which she has had annually since she was 39 years of age. Her breast cancer had not yet manifested itself in a lump. Barbara Bailey is the main breadwinner in her family and has accessed her long service leave after 30 years in the teaching profession to undergo breast cancer treatment over the next 12 months. She is a mother, her son is getting married this year, and she looks forward to one day being a grandmother.

Barbara also looks forward to returning to her job as a schoolteacher. She, like many women diagnosed with breast cancer, deserves this option. Barbara Bailey was told that the treatment that will give her the best chance of survival comes at great financial cost. As well as undergoing chemotherapy and radiotherapy, Barbara Bailey is required to take the life-saving drug Herceptin, which currently costs \$60,000 for one year's treatment. Why does it cost so much? The drug is listed under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme [PBS] but only for women who are in the late stages of breast cancer, despite the Therapeutic Goods Administration having last month approved Herceptin for use in patients in the early stages of breast cancer. This was following clinical trials and research that showed the drug cut the death rate from breast cancer by 40 per cent. The problem is that it may be months, or even years, before the drug is added to the PBS for women who require it.

This could all be fixed by the Federal Government fast-tracking funding for this breast cancer drug. Given that the Federal Treasurer has announced a \$13 billion surplus this week, one would think the Federal Government would have the foresight to prioritise this drug on the PBS immediately. It is imperative that Australia does not have a system whereby only wealthy families can access the best treatment and care for breast cancer. That is currently the case for more than 2,000 women each year diagnosed with HER-2-positive breast cancer. I continually hear stories from women in my electorate who are mortgaging their homes, and asking for money from family and friends, so they can afford this \$60,000 a year treatment to simply survive. This situation simply is not fair and cannot be allowed to continue, certainly not in an advanced country like Australia.

No woman should have to face this news and also have to deal with the burden of finding \$60,000 a year for this life-saving treatment. It is essential that approval for funding through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme be fast-tracked. But women and their families become desperate before the Federal Government intervenes. The normal approval process takes up to two years, but the Federal Government can fast-track the process. I would like to acknowledge the wonderful work of all the clinicians in my electorate. In particular, I would like to thank the hundreds of women who have signed petitions circulated in Drummoyne calling on the Federal Government to prioritise listing the drug under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. I thank all the residents who have brought this matter to my attention. They know the issue is close to my heart, having lost my mother to breast cancer at the age of 14. There is a 40 per cent survival rate if women have access to this drug in the early stages of their breast cancer. It is a condition that we have not found a cure for, and that is why I call on the Federal Government to immediately place this drug on the PBS for women in early stages of breast cancer.

Ms ALISON MEGARRITY (Menai—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.53 p.m.]: I thank the honourable member for Drummoyne for bringing this important issue to the House's attention. It is nothing short of absurd that one would have to wait until the late stages of the disease to receive this drug. The early detection and treatment of cancer is so critical. I join the honourable member and, I hope, every other member of this House in calling on the Federal Government to review the situation so this treatment can be made available for women who are in the early stages of breast cancer. As the honourable member pointed out, women diagnosed with breast cancer have already been put under the incredible stress of the diagnosis and their having to then face the financial burden of treatment is far too much to ask of any person. I commend the honourable member for bringing the matter to the House's attention. It is something that I am sure many members were unaware of prior to today.

MILTON CANCER OUTPATIENTS APPEAL COMMITTEE

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK (South Coast) [4.54 p.m.]: I wish to pay special tribute to the efforts of the Milton Cancer Outpatients Appeal Committee with respect to its hard work over a number of years. The cancer outpatients appeal was set up in November 2003 to raise funds to build a community cancer services centre adjacent to Milton-Ulladulla Hospital. The centre will progressively provide chemotherapy, consulting rooms for use by visiting specialists and palliative care specialists, psychosocial support services, lymphoedema treatment and prosthesis fitting, a cancer information library, a fully equipped kitchen, and a function-meeting room for use by cancer support groups and by exercise, relaxation, educational and wellbeing classes and groups.

The committee has worked enormously hard over the last three years to raise funds for the facility I have described, holding a host of functions selling raffle tickets—you name it, they have done it—to provide a service to cancer sufferers in the Milton-Ulladulla area and to avoid the situation that now occurs whereby cancer outpatients have to travel to Nowra for their daily chemotherapy treatment or even, in some cases, to Wollongong. For cancer sufferers this is an intolerable situation as Nowra can be more than an hour's drive away, depending on where one lives in the southern Shoalhaven, and Wollongong can be two hour's drive away.

For that reason this wonderful committee was formed in 2003 and has raised almost \$400,000 towards this vital project. More than 60 community groups, clubs, schools and individuals have organised events and raised funds to support the appeal, and local businesses have consistently backed the community's efforts with donations. Unfortunately, the last three years have not been an easy path to travel, but the committee has now submitted a development application, signed a licence to occupy the proposed site, and established an account at a local Bendigo Bank branch, which has offered a 12-month term deposit interest rate with access to the funds when needed and no penalties or bank charges. The bank is now ready to look at a longer-term support program for the centre, so that depositing the money in the local community banks works to the benefit of the community in general.

The committee, under the guidance and leadership of Dee Carrington, has overcome a number of difficulties, but it seems that problems still exist with regard to access to the community funds the committee has raised and a lack of co-operation by the South East Illawarra Health Service, which originally established an account into which the funds were deposited. I understand that an amount of approximately \$325,000 remains in an area health service bank account and that the service refuses to give back the money to the committee, which will be in charge of the project and responsible for the payment of accounts. The committee will have a licence to build on the site, it will issue and adjudicate the tender, it will take all the risks associated with the development and construction, and it will hire the builder and project manager. The committee will do everything concerned with building this facility.

On three occasions I have written to the area health service to request that the community funds be returned to the community from which the money was raised. Only last Monday I received a response that due to legal reasons the area health service cannot return the community's money. The committee has received legal advice that there is no reason why the area health service cannot give the money back to the community so community members can deposit it in their own bank accounts. I understand they have struck some special deals with the Bendigo Bank. Understandably, committee members are astonished that the area health service refuses to return the money, and fear that the money has been spent elsewhere. They fear that the money has been spent in another hospital, either in Sydney or elsewhere, perhaps on bandages or thermometers. The community is now demanding the return of the \$325,000 they have taken three years to raise, and will not rest until their funds are secured in their own accounts.

In the future I will relay in full the story of the relationship with the area health service over the last three years. Suffice it to say that the tale is one of a lack of co-operation resulting in disillusionment and disappointment with the Government and the area health service. I call on the Minister for Health to intervene in this matter and direct his bureaucrats to give the money raised by the Milton cancer outpatients appeal directly to the community from which the money came. On behalf of the committee I plead for a greater level of assistance and co-operation from the Government in the future. I have reams of correspondence from this committee. It is a very sorry saga. But all the while, the committee has continued to raise funds for this much-needed facility. The committee is not sitting back and waiting for the Government to provide the funds; committee members are raising the funds themselves. They are well heeled, well resourced, intelligent, and well organised, but to have their money withheld is simply a travesty of justice.

Ms ALISON MEGARRITY (Menai—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.59 p.m.]: I join the honourable member for South Coast in commending the efforts of the committee, assisted by various groups, in supporting cancer sufferers in her area. I urge her to forward a copy of the most recent correspondence from the area health service to the Minister for Health. I will raise the matter with the Minister, but I think it would assist him if he received a copy of that correspondence directly from the honourable member for South Coast.

GAMMA HYDROXYBUTYRATE

Mr MICHAEL DALEY (Maroubra) [4.59 p.m.]: Earlier this year a young person in my electorate—whom I will not name out of respect for that person's family—became the eleventh victim in Australia of a worrying new trend: the use, primarily by young people, of a drug called gamma hydroxybutyrate

[GHB]. Despite the best efforts of the Commonwealth and State governments to detect and stamp out this drug, young people in Australia have still found a way to obtain and use it. As I will explain in a moment, the nature of the drug makes it very difficult to detect.

Gamma hydroxybutyrate is a powerful, rapidly acting central nervous system depressant. It was first synthesised in the 1920s and was under development as an anaesthetic agent in the 1960s. GHB is produced naturally by the body in small amounts but its physiological function is unclear. GHB has had a mixed history. It was sold in health food stores as a performance-enhancing drug, particularly in the United States in body building formulas, until it was banned in 1990. It has some anaesthetic uses but it is not popular among anaesthetists because of its side effects. It is abused because of its ability to produce euphoric and hallucinogenic states, and for its alleged function as a growth hormone that releases agents to stimulate muscle growth.

As a synthetic drug, GHB is produced in clandestine laboratories with no guarantee of quality or purity, and that is one of the worrying aspects. Its chemistry makes it less predictable and more difficult to diagnose. GHB can be manufactured with inexpensive ingredients and by using recipes obtained from the Internet. It is usually taken orally and is sold as a light-coloured powder that easily dissolves in liquids or as a pure liquid packaged in vials or small bottles. In its liquid form—this is the extremely worrying capability of the drug—it is clear, odourless, tasteless and almost undetectable when mixed in a drink. It cannot, therefore, be detected by sniffer dogs, and for some this is an added attraction. For others it makes a useful emerging date-rape drug. I am told it has now replaced Rohypnol as the most rapidly emerging date-rape drug in the United States.

GHB is typically consumed by the capful or teaspoonful at a cost of only \$5 to \$10 per dose. Its affordability makes it a real worry for young people who are impecunious. The average dose is one to five grams, and it takes effect in 15 to 30 minutes. However, in stronger doses two to four grams might induce a coma requiring intubation to wake the user. When mixed with alcohol, which unfortunately is often the case, the depressant effects of GHB are enhanced. This can lead to respiratory depression, unconsciousness, coma and overdose. A major concern is that this drug has a very small threshold for overdose. I quote from the weekend edition of the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 22 April, as I could not put it better myself:

The game of chance is in your ability to measure out a safe dose, in the number of doses you take, and in whether you mix it with other drugs or alcohol. These variables determine whether you will experience euphoria or die trying.

It is a shocker! As I said, there have been 11 deaths in Australia attributable to GHB. Although comprehensive statistics on its use in Australia are not readily available, the University of Michigan's Monitoring the Future Survey questionnaire of 2,000 school students revealed that for school students between years 10 and 12 the incidence of students using GHB was just under 2 per cent. That is an extraordinary amount of young people in America who take this drug. In the 2004 National Drug Household Survey, 1 per cent of people reported having used the drug. Do the mathematics! However, it is not just the number of people who are using GHB that is extraordinary; it is the overdose rate. A 2003 study by the Australian National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre found that half of all GHB users in the sample had overdosed at least once—"overdosed" constitutes being unconscious and unable to be woken. Despite the efforts of parents, teachers, educators and law enforcers, young people still find this drug and they still wish to experiment—as young people do. They should not experiment with GHB.

DRAFT FAR NORTH COAST REGIONAL STRATEGY

Mr DONALD PAGE (Ballina—Deputy Leader of The Nationals) [5.04 p.m.]: The New South Wales Minister for Planning recently unveiled the Draft Far North Coast Regional Strategy, which encompasses the Ballina electorate. Whilst I support the concept of a far North Coast regional strategy and welcome its arrival, the draft strategy has serious shortcomings. It lacks substance and detail, and the region's infrastructure needs are not addressed. The majority of the vital component plans included in the working draft that added more detail and local content to the strategy have been omitted from the final draft. The draft strategy does little to address the needs of the region's villages, which in so many ways are what give the far North Coast its character. In a rapidly growing region such as the far North Coast it is imperative that we have proper detailed systems and strategies in place to successfully plan for the future of such a diverse and unique area.

Development of the Far North Coast Regional Strategy has been under way for several years. The aim of the strategy is to provide for the projected housing, employment and environmental needs of the region's population over the next 25 years. The New South Wales Government worked with local community members and planning institutions during the development of the draft strategy. Its release was seen as a positive step

towards ensuring the continuation of the far North Coast as a diverse and unique area. However, the draft strategy we have been presented with is a far cry from what was expected of this document. First, the region's infrastructure needs—such as water and sewerage—have been ignored. How can we plan for the future of the region without incorporating integral infrastructure needs into that plan? This reflects the New South Wales Labor Government's lack of an integrated plan for the far North Coast and a failure to co-ordinate a whole-of-government approach to this issue, which is important when planning for the future.

It is interesting to note that the former director general of the New South Wales Department of Planning has publicly criticised this State's planning system, while at the same time lauding the Queensland Government's South-east Regional Plan. The plan for south-east Queensland is detailed and addresses the infrastructure needs of the region. We need more detail in the Far North Coast Regional Strategy. We need an outline of infrastructure needs such as road and rail to connect the two regions. Secondly, the draft strategy does not include the locally prepared component plans included in the working draft prepared for the Minister. The omitted component plans included the Infrastructure Investment Plan, the Employment and Economic Plan, the Biodiversity Plan, the Water and Energy Conservation Plan, and the Coastline and Waterway Conservation Plan.

These plans added substance and detail to the strategy, and presented practical target figures in areas such as unemployment, labour force participation rate, and water and energy usage. These plans are vitally important to the implementation of the draft strategy, yet they are nowhere to be seen. While the draft regional strategy identifies the far North Coast as a region of villages, it fails to adequately detail how to successfully nurture that concept. Villages allow residents to live in a rural setting, providing for basic infrastructure and a sense of community, whilst also protecting prime agricultural land. The development of villages, in conjunction with well-planned growth in the region's major centres, allows for a choice of lifestyle, with minimal negative impact on social cohesiveness within these centres.

In order for a village to function effectively, there are several baseline services and infrastructure needs. They include a community meeting place, postal services, a basic grocery store, a transport network, open space, a water supply, a waste management system, electricity and telecommunications. Yet the draft strategy fails to address infrastructure needs, which are integral to the functioning of a village. How can we provide for the future of our villages if the most basic infrastructure needs are not accounted for? I am not alone in raising my concerns about the shortcomings of this draft strategy. It has been widely criticised by a range of community members and groups. Following the release of the draft document, a coalition of far North Coast business people, developers, conservation groups and environmentalists placed a public letter to the New South Wales planning Minister in the local newspaper, the *Northern Star*, highlighting the inadequacies of the draft strategy. I was a signatory.

More recently, more than 160 coastal, residential and environmental groups combined to publicise their concerns about coastal regional strategies including the Draft Far North Coast Regional Strategy. Individuals and groups with differing ideologies have come together to recognise the weaknesses of this draft regional strategy. As I mentioned earlier, I support the concept of a Draft Far North Coast Regional Strategy. However, in its current form, the draft regional strategy lacks the substance and detail needed to adequately plan for the future of this region. Public submissions on the Draft Far North Coast Regional Strategy closed yesterday, 10 May. I strongly urge the Minister for Planning to thoroughly address the issues raised in those submissions and to work to create a regional strategy that provides the necessary guidance to ensure the far North Coast prospers into the future while still retaining its diversity and unique character.

SCHOOL SECURITY FENCING

Mr ALAN ASHTON (East Hills) [5.09 p.m.]: Tonight I again raise the need for security fencing at Panania Public School and Padstow Park Public School. I am pleased that the honourable member for Menai is at the table because she has given support with respect to requirements for Padstow Park Public School. On 14 May 2003 I wrote to then Minister Refshauge demanding that Panania Public School receive security fencing. On 26 May 2003 the Minister replied to that letter. In June 2003 I faxed Minister Refshauge about the breach of security reports I had received from the school. On 1 July 2003 I received a reply stating that a risk assessment would take place. On 7 August 2003 I receive further correspondence from the Minister stating that following the risk assessment no security event would be provided. I was not happy. On 26 August 2003 I wrote to Minister Refshauge requesting answers on how prioritisation is determined. In September 2003 I received a response to that correspondence. Some months went by and I again wrote in April 2004 stating that the school security unit measures were not working and that a security fence was required immediately. The Minister replied in May 2004.

I wrote to the then Minister, Minister Carmel Tebbutt, stating in large type that if something went wrong at the school she was not to blame me because I had warned her. In November last year I wrote to the Minister for Housing, the Premier, the Minister for Education and Training, and the Minister for Police. I organised a public meeting with Dave Darcy, the local superintendent for Bankstown, to consider a security fence for Panania Public School because of criminal activity. Honourable members would be aware of the drive-by shootings that have occurred in the area—most unpleasant next to a school. I have some attachment to the school because my father helped to build it in the 1950s and I attended it. As a result of the meetings, the superintendent has been good enough to visit and we have written some further letters to the Minister. I only hope that, given the amount of information sent to the department and the Minister, we must be close to getting the fence. I understand that once one school is given a security fence every school will want one, but surely some schools have more priority than others. We should all admit that.

In late 2002 I first wrote to the Minister requesting a security fence for Padstow Park Public School. In April 2003 I again wrote to the Minister. In 2004 the principal, Steve Cooper, and the parents and citizens association wrote about the same issue. I attended a meeting of the parents and citizens association early last year and gave certain assurances that I would continue to take up the matter. I also gave advice on how important it was for the school to report every instance of a beer bottle being thrown into the school, every syringe found or rubbish dumped. Honourable members must tell their schools to note everything that happens—fortunately most of them do—and to then forward the information to the security directorate.

I have been fortunate enough to have the assistance of Ike Ellis, a former police commander at Bankstown and now an officer of the security unit at Blacktown, who recently inspected both schools. I hope that as a result of my inquiries and correspondence, and that of the parents and citizens associations, the principals, the community, with the assistance of the Department of Housing, the Department of Education and Training and the local police, eventually these schools will receive a security fence. Although it is costly to erect these new beaut, green diplomat fences around schools, they massively reduce costs and are worth their weight in gold. They are extremely cost effective because they reduce vandalism. Once again, I urge the Minister to consider my request.

CHILDHOOD FOOD ALLERGIES

Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [5.14 p.m.]: This afternoon I speak on the anaphylaxis seminar that I attended last night, which was organised by Anaphylaxis Australia, entitled "Managing Anaphylaxis in Childcare and School". It was appropriate that this seminar was held in Food Allergy Awareness Week, which is this week. The seminar was addressed by Dr John Ruhno, a leading allergist and immunologist practising at the Children's Hospital, Westmead, and at the Royal North Shore Hospital; Dr Susanne Benjamin, medical advisor, clinical policy with NSW Health; Dr Mark Yates, a psychiatrist who has a child with anaphylaxis; and Maria Said, National President of Anaphylaxis Australia Inc. The seminar was well attended by local residents. Developing anaphylaxis awareness through education, research and support is essential to assist and enhance what is being done in schools and other areas to prevent allergic reactions and manage them respectively, should they occur.

It is imperative that we make life safer for everyone who has severe allergies by giving a focus to food allergies this week. Anaphylaxis Australia is the only national patient support organisation for those with severe allergies. Last night it prepared an in-depth look at managing anaphylaxis in child care and school environments, providing up-to-the-minute data and advice. To know what to do when an emergency arises—in this case a severe allergic reaction called anaphylaxis—and to have confidence to save a life thus affected is a wonderful gift to the community. After the seminar last night everyone was better prepared to handle what lay ahead if anyone were faced with an anaphylactic episode. As a registered nurse with many years experience and having worked in accident and emergency, I have received patients who were in a state of anaphylaxis, which is a medical emergency. Immediate actions are required to turn around a sequence of events that can, and too often does, lead to tragedy. There is no more alarming situation than watching anyone—particularly a child—rapidly react to indigestion or exposure to an irritant to such an extent as to be in danger of dying because of it.

Witnessing a patient experiencing anaphylaxis can be very frightening, especially if one is not trained in dealing with the symptoms. Severe allergic reactions usually begin within minutes of exposure and can progress rapidly. They have systemic effects, which can be multiple, and include the skin, the breathing and the cardiac system. Early signs and symptoms include itching and tingling in the mouth, hives and, in the case of more serious reactions, vomiting, facial swelling, breathing problems, fainting and loss of consciousness. Apart from the alarm of an observer when this is occurring, the affected person is extremely fearful, often having feelings of impending death.

While life-threatening anaphylaxis is rare, treatment is the key to survival. Therefore, it is important that parents and carers of children at risk are educated about the problem, know how to prevent it and are trained to provide correct first aid if a reaction occurs. It is vital that students, teachers and parents are educated about the consequences of severe allergic reaction to certain foods, such as nuts, and to other irritants, such as insect bites. The seminar was particularly important because a survey has found that two-thirds of schools have a child who suffers from food allergies—an enormous number. It is estimated that one in 20 children has a transient allergy to food. By contrast, one in 100 adults has food allergies of variable severity and around one in 250 people of all ages is susceptible to serious allergic reactions to an insect sting. The annual incidence of anaphylactic reactions is about 30 in 100,000 persons, with individuals with asthma, eczema or hay fever at greater risk of anaphylaxis.

Another sobering fact is that anaphylaxis occurs in approximately one in 200 school age children and one in six episodes occur at school, where children spend more than one-third of their waking hours. Anaphylaxis is a severe form of allergy; it affects all ages and kills 10 to 20 Australians yearly. Death is likely to occur most in the young adults, those allergic to nuts and those with asthma. Published studies indicate that new cases of anaphylaxis arise at a rate of one case per 500 people a year. Those at the seminar last night emphasised that the use of the EpiPen needs to be widely demonstrated and encouraged. The New South Wales Government has done a lot of work but it must put its money where its mouth is and not sidestep the need to support further improvements. It should not blame the Federal Government for any lack of action but, instead, should assist Anaphylaxis Australia and other related organisations to make life safer for all who suffer from severe allergy. It is imperative that such action is taken immediately.

PEATS ELECTORATE HEALTH SERVICES

Ms MARIE ANDREWS (Peats) [5.19 p.m.]: Today I inform honourable members of the massive investment by the State Government in improving the delivery of health services within the Peats electorate. Last Friday, 4 May, I accompanied the Minister for Health, the Hon. John Hatzistergos, on a visit to the intensive care unit of Gosford Hospital, which is located in Peats but services residents throughout the Central Coast. There we met with the unit's director, Dr Tony McDonogh, and inspected one of six new ventilators that had only recently come into operation. In addition, Gosford Hospital has taken delivery of a new fluoroscopy unit, a new ultrasound unit for the birthing unit and additional lifters for the rehabilitation ward.

This new equipment cost in the vicinity of \$1 million, and is in addition to the record \$10.9 billion health budget announced last year. The allocation forms part of the ongoing commitment to Central Coast residents by the Iemma Government in ensuring that Gosford Hospital has world-class medical equipment. It is extremely disappointing then that the Federal Government does not share that commitment. The New South Wales Minister for Health and I have made consistent calls on Tony Abbott to issue a Medicare licence for the magnetic resonance imaging [MRI] machine at Gosford Hospital. This \$2.8 million machine is currently being underutilised because the Federal Government has failed repeatedly to issue the Medicare licence.

Mr Milton Orkopoulos: Disgrace!

Ms MARIE ANDREWS: It is a disgrace. Recently, the Federal Government allocated licences to two private hospitals on Sydney's North Shore. What an outright snub that was to the residents of the Central Coast! Fortunately for the Central Coast, the Iemma Government has provided funding of \$1.9 million since the installation of the machine in 2004 to enable it to be used in the treatment of inpatients. Without State Government funding, that state-of-the-art machine would be lying idle in one of the State's major hospitals. Again, I make a passionate plea to Tony Abbott to issue the Medicare licence without delay. The Federal Government has just announced a budget surplus of approximately \$11 billion. It is pathetic that a portion of that massive surplus has not been allocated to providing a Medicare licence for Gosford Hospital's MRI machine.

In recent years Gosford Hospital has been undergoing a major redevelopment, costing in the vicinity of \$126 million. Work commenced under the Carr Government and is being continued by the Iemma Government. Some of the achievements to date are new medical wards, a cancer care centre, a dialysis unit, 10 operating theatres, an emergency department and an outpatients clinic. Construction has now begun on the new paediatric unit and perioperative suite. This is an \$8.7 million project. It is interesting to note that the children's ward at Gosford Hospital is one of the busiest paediatric units in the State. The new unit will include a four-bed observation unit to monitor the most seriously ill children; better facilities for parents to stay beside their child; and an adolescent lounge where patients can mix, have time away from their bed, and play and watch television.

The new perioperative suite will be located alongside the new operating theatres. It will bring together all surgery-related services, thus making better use of theatre facilities and reducing reliance on inpatient beds.

Throughout the massive redevelopment of Gosford Hospital, the dedicated staff have continued to provide the very best in patient care, often under trying circumstances. I am pleased to inform the House that Woy Woy now has a \$750,000 dental clinic. This facility is saving hundreds of Woy Woy peninsula residents the necessity of travelling to Gosford for treatment through the public system. The allocation of \$2 million to the local area health service for additional elective surgery to be carried out at Gosford Hospital and Wyong Hospital is making a big difference in reducing waiting lists. Figures recently released for Gosford Hospital show that the number of patients waiting more than 12 months for elective surgery has been reduced by 71.8 per cent, from 730 patients in March 2005 to 206 in March 2006. Other encouraging figures recently announced show that the total surgical waiting list for Gosford Hospital has been reduced by 16.6 per cent, from 2,924 patients in March 2005 to 2,440 in March 2006.

It is important to note that this reduction has been achieved despite the fact that the emergency department is getting busier. In March 2006 there were 4,051 attendances to Gosford emergency department—an increase of 6.6 per cent on the same period last year. While these results are encouraging, the Iemma Government recognises that there is still more work to be done. The Government is working to further reduce emergency department waiting times and elective surgery waiting lists. In the area of ambulance services, four new probationary ambulance officers have come into the Peats electorate. These new officers have been stationed at Ettalong Beach and Point Clare. It must be said that the dedicated and hardworking staff working in all areas of health services deserve much credit for the many achievements I have mentioned above. I pay tribute to all of them today. [*Time expired.*]

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS (Swansea—Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Citizenship) [5.24 p.m.]: I congratulate the honourable member for Peats on drawing the attention of honourable members to the work and investment of the Iemma Labor Government on the Central Coast, especially the impact it has had on residents in her electorate. I add my protest to the dilatory behaviour on the part of the Federal Minister for Health and Ageing in failing to approve a Medicare licence for a magnetic resonance imaging [MRI] machine that cost a few million dollars. It is not a drop in the ocean; it is a significant investment by the Government in a machine that will have an impact on detecting cancers in people. Yet the Federal Government is delaying the Medicare licence. It is a shame that the two Federal members on the Central Coast are both Liberals.

The Federal member for Dobell, Ken Ticehurst, and the Federal member for Robertson, Jim Lloyd, must be condemned for not pushing the Minister for Health and Ageing to grant a Medicare licence for the MRI machine at Gosford Hospital. I indicate to honourable members that the people of the Hunter region are waiting for Minister Abbott to issue a licence for a machine that is valuable in the treatment of cancer. Until the Minister issues that licence, we will not be able to use the machine to its full potential, which is a great shame. That simply shows where the Federal Government's priorities lie: it issues licences for private machines on the North Shore but it will not work for the Hunter and the Central Coast, notwithstanding its two Federal members on the Central Coast.

DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING GORDON ESTATE, DUBBO, REDEVELOPMENT

Mr RUSSELL TURNER (Orange) [5.26 p.m.]: I and many others are concerned about an issue raised in the House earlier today—the future of public housing in the central west of New South Wales. I refer to the statement today by the Minister for Housing. In a press release headed "Minister announces new direction for the Gordon Estate" the Minister said:

The delivery of social housing in Dubbo took a new direction today with the announcement of the redevelopment of the Gordon Estate.

The honourable member for Dubbo, who I understand attended the announcement in Dubbo this morning, also issued a press release. Among other things, the honourable member said:

Independent Dubbo MP Dawn Fardell has received an undertaking from the NSW Housing Minister that no reliable tenants will be disadvantaged by the withdrawal of a public housing presence in the Gordon Estate.

Mrs Fardell said the Minister Cherie Burton had also agreed to:

· A prohibition on disruptive tenants taking up alternative public housing within Dubbo ...

That raises concern about the relocation of those disruptive tenants. One assumes that they will be relocated to somewhere in the central west, including Orange and Dubbo. However, there is no indication of where they will go. The Minister has given an assurance that disruptive tenants will be evicted. Evicting tenants is a long process, and I look forward to the first eviction taking place. I acknowledge that the State Government has a responsibility to house those who need public housing in New South Wales, but that responsibility only goes so far. I wonder what the Minister intends to do with those tenants that her department has the courage to evict.

I raised this issue in February and I was criticised by members of this House. I was the subject of a censure motion in the upper House that was passed with the support of Labor members there. It did not go anywhere, and I did not expect it to go anywhere. At the time I made the statement that anyone who knows me would know that I was not making racist comments; I was raising concerns, personal concerns and the concerns of people in my electorate. Following those announcements and the statement in February I received a lot of support from people in public housing in Orange and elsewhere and from people who own their own homes in areas that are principally public housing areas.

Since that statement in February we have had a public meeting in Orange, and a number of consultative committees have been formed. They are now starting to look at the progress they are making in restoring the quality of life in those areas. A number of people said to me that until six or eight months ago, when those people started to move to Orange from further out west, life was fairly good in public housing. The Department of Housing was looking after them reasonably well and they enjoyed living in that area. In the past six or eight months life had become hell for a lot of those public housing tenants and private owners who lived in that area. They are now fearful that they will get another wave of people from the Gordon Estate who will disrupt their lifestyle.

There has been no indication from the Minister or the honourable member for Dubbo as to where those disruptive tenants will go. We are not talking about a handful of homes; we are talking about 250 homes. We are talking about the removal of 250 families. Some of the good tenants, as they call them, will go into Dubbo, but, unfortunately, the majority of those tenants have come to the attention of either the police or the Department of Housing. Again I call on the Government to tell me where those disruptive tenants will be transferred.

Miss CHERIE BURTON (Kogarah—Minister for Housing, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Mental Health)) [5.31 p.m.]: I would like to put a couple of things straight for the record. There is a detailed proposal. Over the next three years we will work with the community to fix the problems of the Gordon Estate. It has become impossible to remain there because there are disruptive families that do not get on. However, 80 per cent of our tenants are very good tenants and they will be housed appropriately, either in the Dubbo area or in an area of their choice, an area where they feel they would like to be settled. Negotiation and community consultation will occur over a three-year period. There has been so much trouble on the Gordon Estate because these disruptive families do not get on. It is unique to this estate. We want to separate those families, to make sure they are intensively case managed, and to give them an opportunity to correct their behaviour. If they do not, we have a zero tolerance policy, and I have instructed the department to seek the eviction of anyone who causes a problem either in their own home or in the community.

I repeat to the honourable member for Orange that there will not be an influx of disruptive families to Orange. We need to talk to the local community. There is a stepped process to fix this problem. It cannot be left the way it is; it needs to be fixed and we are taking action to fix it. It is easy to score cheap political points. It is easy for the honourable member to claim all the disruptive families will be moved to Orange. That is not the case. It is a three-year process and we will work through it. I wish the honourable member for Orange would listen. He is not a very effective local member. He has been very lazy over the past few years and has done nothing. This is a good opportunity for him to score some cheap political points by exploiting socially disadvantaged people. As the Minister for Housing, there is no way I am going to relocate the problem. I am going to fix it.

ARABIC HERITAGE LEAGUE IN AUSTRALIA TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY

Mrs BARBARA PERRY (Auburn) [5.33 p.m.]: I draw honourable members' attention to an event I attended last Sunday, 7 May. It was my pleasure to represent the Premier of New South Wales at the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Arabic Heritage League in Australia and the presentation of the International Khalil Gibran Award. Many people, including His Excellency Tammam Suleiman, the Ambassador of the Syrian Arab Republic, and Mr Michael Hatton, the Federal member for Blaxland, attended the function. It was a wonderful celebration of the achievements of the Arabic Heritage League and the contribution it has made to the social and

cultural richness of our society. I commend Mr Kamel El-Murr, President of the Arabic Heritage League, Mr Emile Chidiac and his wife, Shireen, executive members of the committee, for their hardworking dedication in organising the event, and my friend Ellie Nasif, who has been a member of the league since its inception 25 years ago. I applaud them for their ongoing commitment to our community.

The night was a wonderful display of creative arts and Arab culture, from poetry readings in Arabic and English to singing and dancing. It was enjoyable to witness our community coming together. The function was a time to recognise the efforts of three people in the Australian and Arabic community who have achieved a great deal in their field and in their service to our community. The International Khalil Gibran Award is a prestigious commendation for contribution to our community through the arts and science. It was named in honour of the great Khalil Gibran, a poet and artist, a man who was passionate about the exploration and expression of our creative minds. In his celebrated work, *The Prophet*, Gibran wrote:

If he is indeed wise he does not bid you enter the house of wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind.

That is so appropriate. Wisdom is not a tangible object that can be passed from one person to another. It is something that is gained from within. The awards are about acknowledging those in our community who, by their example, stimulate others to think and create. The awards recognise excellence irrespective of the background of the achievers, highlighting the importance of working together and reinforcing the notion that we all need to play a part in the development of our community. The growth of knowledge and creativity inspires belief in self, which is such a vital part of the individual. That is so important in this day in age when our society is bombarded by images of what we ought to be. This ideology promotes identity, being comfortable with our individuality and being confident to express our thoughts and feelings to the world.

The Arabic Heritage League is a community group that carries on this ideology by nurturing the individual and promoting self-confidence. The league has spent 25 years enriching and strengthening our community. It is an organisation of volunteers fuelled by a dedication to the life of the mind and does not always receive acknowledgement for its contribution to our community. This year's recipients of the Khalil Gibran International Award were Bishop Kevin Manning, Catholic Bishop of Parramatta; Ms Nadia Jammal, *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist and author from my electorate and Dr Kamal Sabbagh, from the American University of Beirut. All have become significant members of their respective communities.

Bishop Manning has played a key role in building dialogue between religions and cultures through the power of thought. His words and writings speak of peace, communication and conciliation. Nadia Jamal has used her ability with the written word to bring information and truth to our community. Through journalism and as an author of a book on growing up as a Muslim woman in Australia, Nadia has worked hard to reduce myths and misunderstanding in our community. Dr Kamal Sabbagh has a great talent for music. He has used his gift to enrich the lives of others and develop a greater appreciation of music and its ability to connect with all people from all backgrounds. Of course, music transcends all barriers, be they cultural, religious, gender or other barriers. Dr Sabbagh is of Syrian background but currently resides in Paris.

Those three individuals personify what it is to share themselves and their gifts with others and, indeed, as active members of our society. What great leaders they are for our community. What a great legacy they create for our children. Their recognition challenges and encourages us to explore the thresholds of our own minds. I feel privileged to have shared in this anniversary to celebrate 25 years of dedication by the Arabic Heritage League in Australia, preserving the best of Arab culture and sharing that with the wider community. It is with pleasure that I honour in his House today the Arabic Heritage League in Australia and its 25 years of service to our community. I wish it continued success for the future.

NORSKE SKOG PAPER MILL UPGRADE

Mr GREG APLIN (Albury) [5.38 p.m.]: Sixteen years ago I joined other members of my Rotary Club in planting trees on a hillside reserve off the Olympic Way just to the north of Albury. I often visit that site because of the incredible view across the paper mill and the Hume Highway to the green fields and housing developments of Table Top and Thurgoona, to the Charles Sturt University campus and beyond to Lake Hume and the soaring Victorian Alps, which are snow covered after last week's cold snap. For me this view represents everything about the benefits of country living: the wonderful environment; the efficient and modern industry which employs people, sustains families and supplies essential product; the national road and rail transport corridor; the attractive housing areas; the Hume Dam with the Murray River supplying the lifeblood to farmers, industry and towns; and the lifestyle presented by the water, the mountains and the snow. I display a panoramic photograph of this scene in my parliamentary office to remind colleagues of the many benefits of regional location and to impress upon them the huge contribution of regional industry.

On this occasion I refer to the Norske Skog newsprint mill, which was commissioned in 1981 and has just completed a \$130 million upgrade, making the whole plant an almost \$1 billion investment. It has undergone several changes of ownership in the past 25 years and was acquired by the Norwegian company Norske Skog Industrier ASA in July 2000. Norske Skog is the world's largest manufacturer of newsprint and the world's most globalised newsprint manufacturer, with 19 wholly owned mills in 14 countries on four continents. The company has three paper mills in Australasia: at Tasman in New Zealand, Boyer in Tasmania and Albury in New South Wales. The Albury mill is a single paper machine site, and the \$130 million upgrade has increased its production capacity by 20 per cent to 265,000 tonnes per annum. At full capacity, it will produce 1,600 metres of nine-metre wide newsprint a minute. The upgrade will have a positive effect on the nation's balance of trade, removing the need to import 50,000 tonnes of newsprint a year and allowing the site to produce 39 per cent of the nation's annual newsprint consumption.

The upgrade at Albury represents the single largest investment by Norske Skog within the group in 2005-2006 and reflects the company's ongoing commitment to the Albury site. The mill is a significant presence in the Albury-Wodonga community and injects much of its annual operating budget into the regional economy through acquisition of labour, raw materials, energy and services. It has a permanent work force of around 250 employees but also has a significant flow-on effect to regional employment in areas such as transportation, forestry, wastepaper collection, site services, maintenance and engineering. Raw fibre for newsprint production is sourced from publicly and privately owned radiata pine plantations in southern New South Wales and north-east Victoria. The logs processed are thinnings, once regarded as a waste product resulting from forest management practices. Sawmill residues from the expanding sawmill industry in the region supplement the annual pine log intake.

I have visited the Norske Skog mill on several occasions and have been highly impressed by the progressive approach to industry sustainability. It is home to the only newsprint de-inking plant in Australia. This plant was constructed at a cost of \$110 million in the 1990s and every year it removes 160,000 tonnes of old newspapers and magazines from the waste stream for processing back into quality newsprint. This process gives the Albury mill's product a recycled fibre content of up to 40 per cent. Members will be pleased to know that Australia now boasts the highest recycling rate for newspapers and magazines in the world at 74.4 per cent, and the latest industry agreement commits to lifting this rate to 76 per cent by 2010. A similar approach applies to water usage, with water being recycled up to twenty times. A large portion of the water is treated to a potable standard for return to the Murray River, while water used in papermaking is treated and then used for irrigation pasture.

The ink removed from paper for recycling is transformed into a fertiliser sludge, which is distributed to local farms. Like many other regional industries, Norske Skog Albury plays a valuable role as a good corporate citizen, actively supporting its community through a range of sponsorship activities to encourage youth participation and achievement in the areas of education, art, sport and community events. Some of these activities include the region's major community event, the Albury-Wodonga Festival of Sport and a range of environmental initiatives, including the Rotary Murray-Darling School of Freshwater Research and the nationally acclaimed Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre at Burrumbuttock. For the ongoing successful operation of industries such as Norske Skog Albury, it is critical that we have clear and consistent government policy in the areas of energy, water, transport, infrastructure and plantation resources. New investment should always be encouraged but, equally, there should be strong support for established large businesses in regional areas. I congratulate the management of Norske Skog on displaying confidence in the future of the Albury region.

PARRAMATTA JUSTICE PRECINCT

Ms TANYA GADIEL (Parramatta) [5.43 p.m.]: I would like to update the House on an important project that is currently under way in Parramatta, that is, the \$230 million Justice Precinct located on the corner of George, O'Connell and Marsden streets. When completed, this precinct will house six children's courts, eight trial courts, a Parole Board hearing room and 20,000 square metres of office space to accommodate the Attorney General's Department, the Office of the Protective Commissioner, the Office of the Public Guardian and Legal Aid. In addition, there will be a community health centre and other community services located in the refurbished Jeffrey House.

It makes perfect sense to build this magnificent Justice Precinct in Parramatta. Our city has strong historical ties to law and order that date back more than 200 years. Parramatta played a vital role in the development of New South Wales as a penal colony in the early days of European settlement. It became the

colony's main town, with Sydney then regarded as less important. Convicts began constructing George Street in Parramatta in 1790. They used wattle branches and mud to build tiny huts on either side of the road. The huts became their homes until the 1810s, when free settlers and emancipated convicts began moving in. So gentrification is nothing new. A significant part of Parramatta's history was literally unearthed by this Justice Precinct project. During the digging process a number of valuable artefacts, such as clay bowls, coins and buttons, were uncovered. Many of these items will be on display in the precinct, giving visitors an insight into the day-to-day lives of our early European settlers.

There will also be some historical evidence at Parramatta that will be left untouched, at least for now. When the Parramatta site was earmarked for development, it was identified that fragile evidence of the convicts' huts and the colonial tent hospital could still exist beneath the ground on the corner of George and O'Connell streets. It is unlikely there is much left of the building's actual structures, but experts believe there would be important gastronomic evidence to be gathered. For example, remains of bones and food scraps could help explain what people ate in those days. Why not dig up the area now? After extensive consultation, it was decided that these remains would be extremely delicate and difficult to study and preserve with today's technology. A protective shield has been placed over this sensitive area to ensure the construction of the justice precinct does not disturb any valuable historical evidence.

The Parramatta Justice Precinct will not only be a boon for the legal fraternity; the whole community stands to benefit from this project. It is known as the PJP, but I like to think of it as the "people's precinct". The development of the precinct opens up around 100 metres of the Parramatta River foreshore that was previously closed to the public. Residents will be able to wander down the steps of the new promenade and take a leisurely stroll by the water. The area will be fully landscaped with lots of shady trees. It sounds quite romantic, and I imagine the foreshore will be the site of one or two marriage proposals. If locals do decide to get hitched, they will not have to travel far for the ceremony. The New South Wales Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages will have a shopfront within the Parramatta Justice Precinct. The office will conduct civil marriage services in an elegant custom-built room that can accommodate up to 24 guests. After the service, the newlyweds will be able to have photos taken in an adjoining garden at the site. I am assured the marriage room will be busy. Demand for registry weddings has almost doubled from 1,700 to 3,000 per year in the past five years.

The quality of life is constantly improving in Parramatta and with projects such as the Justice Precinct it is little wonder Sydney's second largest central business district is booming. I am delighted to be a part of a Government that has invested so heavily in Western Sydney, particularly in Parramatta. Our city is very proudly the home of the new headquarters of the New South Wales Police Force. Recently we also became the transport hub of Western Sydney with the opening of the \$105 million bus-rail interchange. Both these pieces of infrastructure were delivered on time and on budget. I look forward to that occurring again with the Justice Precinct project. I take this opportunity to thank all those involved with the project. I see them busily working every day as I drive past. It will be a facility we will be very proud of.

MR N. C. PARSONS HOME AND CONTENTS INSURANCE POLICY CHARGES

Mr WAYNE MERTON (Baulkham Hills) [5.48 p.m.]: I wish to raise a constituent's concerns about the delay in receiving an answer from the Premier in response to my representations on his behalf. On 27 January this year I received a letter from Mr N. C. Parsons of Castle Hill expressing his concern about an increase in charges relating to the renewal of his house and contents insurance. Mr Parsons requested that I take up this matter with the Premier on his behalf. On the same day that I received Mr Parson's correspondence, I made representations to the Premier on his behalf. On the yearly renewal notice for his house and contents insurance policy from Comminsure, my constituent noticed what he considers to be an extraordinary increase in both the fire service levy and government stamp duty compared with the previous year's renewal costs. Mr Parsons indicated that when he approached the Commonwealth Bank in relation to his concerns, he was informed that the amounts shown against these two items are provided direct from the relevant government department and the bank has no control over the figures quoted.

According to the figures provided by Mr Parsons, the charge for the fire service levy for the period 1 February 2005 to 1 February 2006 was \$63.46. However, the charge for the period 1 February 2006 to 1 February 2007 was \$88.00. That is an increase of some 35 per cent. He thought that was bad enough, but when he looked at the figure showing for the stamp duty, he was completely staggered. For the period 1 February 2005 to 1 February 2006, the stamp duty was \$28.42. However, for the period from 1 February 2006 to 1 February 2007, the figure had increased to \$57.11, an increase of about 100 per cent. I believe that Mr Parsons is entitled to an explanation of the reasons for such increases, he is entitled to know how the amount charged for the fire service levy is calculated, and he is entitled to know how the amount charged for the stamp duty is calculated.

It has now been nearly four months since my representations on Mr Parson's behalf, and I call upon the Premier to ensure that a response is forwarded urgently. It is an indictment of this Government. I know that many people are concerned about the taxes increases imposed by the Iemma Government. During most of this week people have been talking about this Government's \$700 million tax grab. Mr Parsons is one of many people affected by this high-taxing Government. In fact, we have the highest-taxing State Government in Australia. I ask the Premier to examine the situation so that I can respond to my constituent.

BUDGEWOI GIRL GUIDES

Mr PAUL CRITTENDEN (Wyong) [5.53 p.m.]: On the evening of Monday 9 May it was my very pleasant duty to attend the annual general meeting of the Budgewoi Girl Guides at the Guide Hall at Buff Point. The new committee chairperson is Justine Sorger, who is the group leader. The secretary is Carol Castle and the Treasurer is Sue Waldron. One of the difficult aspects of the night was acknowledging the departure of two longstanding members of the group. Joy Foster is retiring after 18 years with the group. She has occupied almost every position, from unit helper to secretary-treasurer and president. Joy has long been involved in guiding. In fact, she was Queen's Guide and her name is proudly displayed at the Guide Hall at Wyong. I see it every time I go there.

Tric Lavin has been involved with the Budgewoi Girl Guides for 13 years. I did not realise until Monday night that she spent 21 years in the greater Parramatta area involved in guiding and was the region commissioner. She has spent 34 years in total in guiding and will now join the Trefoye Guild. We wish her all the very best. She is affectionately known as "Mother Hen". Mrs Ella Pepper-Edwards is the new District Leader. She is the mother of the new chairperson and current group leader, Justine Sorger, who has held that position for three years. Sue Carr is the region leader and, having held that position for five years, will step down in June this year. She has been associated with guiding or more than 25 years. She has given great dedication to guiding in the Wyong shire even though she lives in the southern part of the Central Coast. Madam Acting Speaker, I think she lives in your electorate of Peats.

At a time when it is difficult to attract volunteers to groups such as the Girl Guides, it was good to witness Mrs Dianne Kuschert being recognised for her 20 years of involvement in the movement. Jenny Roberts' 25 years in guiding was also recognised. She started with the movement in Victoria and moved on to Queensland before moving to Budgewoi in 1987. It is very important to recognise the efforts of those who keep the guiding movement in the area running. Up to 34 girls are involved in the Budgewoi group.

The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, who is at the table, and the Federal member for Shortland, Jill Hall, tendered their apologies. Although it was a very pleasant evening, it was sad to see Tric Lavin and Joy Foster leaving. Joy Brown, who had been involved with the Budgewoi Girl Guides for many years and who left two years ago because of ill health, attended the event. A highlight of the evening was her renewed acquaintance with Joy Foster. The Baden-Powell presentation was something of an extravaganza. A thematic approach was adopted, and I am sure Tric Lavin and Joy Foster would encourage each recipient to develop the theme. It was certainly a pleasant experience to attend that presentation and to acknowledge the tremendous effort and the work done, not only at the presentation but also in the lead-up to it. I wish Tric well. I know she will get involved in other activities in the area. Joy is involved with the parents and citizens association at North Lakes High, and she and her husband Peter have been actively involved in the Toukley Swimming Club, known as the "Sharks", for many years.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS (Swansea—Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Citizenship) [5.58 p.m.]: I congratulate the honourable member for Wyong on paying tribute to the Budgewoi Girl Guides local heroes, Joy Foster and Tric Lavin. As he said, unfortunately I could not attend because I was in Sydney attending to ministerial duties. I know Tric Lavin and Joy Foster well. Tric lives in my electorate and her 34 years in guiding is indicative of her strong commitment to that movement. I congratulate her on her work. I am sure there is a maxim along the lines: Once a volunteer, always a volunteer. Tric has many other interests and concerns that will occupy her in her remaining active years. Joy Foster has spent 18 years with the group and, as the honourable member for Wyong said, she and her husband are very involved with North Lakes High School at San Remo. I thank the honourable member for Wyong for once again raising the Budgewoi Girl Guides and bringing to the House's attention the wonderful work of Tric Lavin and Joy Foster over their many years of volunteering and leadership in the Girl Guides movement, whether in Parramatta or Budgewoi.

HAWKESBURY ELECTORATE SCOUT MOVEMENT

Mr STEVEN PRINGLE (Hawkesbury) [6.00 p.m.]: Since the foundation of the scout movement by Lord Robert Baden-Powell in England in 1907 and in Australia in 1908, scouts have contributed greatly to the

development of this country's youth. They have developed skills and attitudes that have a timeless relevance, such as bushcraft, leadership, teamwork, self-reliance, mateship, outdoor pursuits, and many more. Over the last few years, however, the scout movement, like every other facet of society, has had to cope with change in young people's interests and occupations. Young people now have technology such as playstations, mobile phones, DVDs and the Internet at their fingertips, sometimes preventing them from being active and taking part in outdoor activities and in their community.

With our increasingly busy lifestyles, there has not always been time for involvement in scouts, so in some areas it has been difficult for the scout movement to attract leaders and children alike. As a member of the Parliamentary Baden-Powell Guild and a strong supporter of the Scout Association of Australia, I am delighted that the downturn seems to have at last been arrested and that scouts are alive and well in the Hawkesbury electorate.

Last weekend I attended the annual general meeting of the 1st Dural Scouts and the presentation of three Grey Wolf Awards at 1st Hawkesbury Scouts based at Windsor. 1st Dural had a particularly successful year, with an active committee, committed leaders, and a growing involvement from young people. The group now comprises a Joey mob for 6 to 8-year-olds with 16 children involved, a cub section with a dozen children, and a scout section with 22 members. Plans are under way to establish a venturer section for 14- to 17-year-olds. All contain a good mix of boys and girls.

The children were fortunate to have a full program of activities over the last 12 months. The program included campfires, craft work, ice skating, a scout jamborette, visits to the wave pool and the Acadia Rural Fire Service, a group family camp, abseiling, canoeing, leadership training, hiking, badge work, and many other activities. Seven scouts and two leaders attended the jamboree at Elmore, in Victoria, and two scouts achieved their coveted Green Cord Award.

1st Dural Scouts are fortunate to have terrific parental support. I commend the committee, which comprises Chairman Roy Tribe, Secretary Michelle Hookham, Treasurer Michael Bains, and committee members Kevin Hurley, David Stockman, Chris Croese and Jan Tribe. I particularly commend the group's leaders—Warren Payne, who has been a longstanding stalwart, Michael Massingham, Carol Robinson, David Colvin, Dave Bousfield, Pauline Corrigan, David Salmon, Peter Korompay, Warwick Mills, Simon Edwards, Giselle Bicket, Shane Davies and Shannon Micallef. They all make a terrific team and I commend them.

1st Hawkesbury Scouts held a picnic and presentation day on the banks of the Hawkesbury River at Ebenezer, adjacent to Australia's oldest operating church. For the last two years the group has held a stand at the Hawkesbury Show, which is the third-largest show in New South Wales, and this has generated plenty of interest and members, some of whom were officially inducted on Sunday. Three cubs—Rebecca Sandmarsh, Nicholas Cowley and Ryan Gerhart—achieved the Grey Wolf Award, the pinnacle achievement of cub scouts.

The Grey Wolf Award involves an extensive 12-month program through which cub scouts achieve awards, show leadership within their group, and participate in their community. The requirements include obtaining the gold boomerang badge; participating in a minimum of four outdoor activities, including a camp; using a map to plan and lead a bushwalk of at least two hours with a leader and fellow cubscouts; attending two pack council sessions; completing four level 2 achievement badges and one special interest badge; and developing and presenting a resource for the pack on the cub's understanding of the jungle books. As part of the award the cubs led hikes to famous Blue Mountains National Park icons Red Hands Cave, Govett's Leap and Pulpit Rock.

As always, the culinary skills of the cubs and their parents were on display and there was certainly no room for dinner. In the coming days and months the group will take part in a breakfast, undertake a historical badge—and there is no better place than Windsor to do this—attend an annual church service, and make gifts for Mother's Day. I commend Phyllis McAlpine, Pam Cassidy and their team, including group president Steven Shoebridge and group leader Gordon West. I congratulate the scout movement in the Hawkesbury electorate on its extensive contribution to our community, and I look forward to many more years of supporting this important entity.

NEW ENGLAND FREIGHT RAIL INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr RICHARD TORBAY (Northern Tablelands) [6.05 p.m.]: I am pleased that the focus is back on freight rail, with more funding for infrastructure announced in this week's Federal budget, an increased interest

in intermodal transport from large companies, and a renewed enthusiasm across regional communities to have their rail networks upgraded. In my region, the Greiner Government's closure of the rail line between Armidale and Wallangarra had an extremely negative impact in terms of loss of local jobs and valued services. Fortunately the line still exists. We have fought off attempts to remove infrastructure from the disused line.

The present Government, to its credit, not long ago funded a rail bridge just north of Armidale, which kept the line open. A number of studies have been completed, plans have been put forward, and the community has never wavered in its determination to see this valuable resource revitalised to meet the growing needs of the region's primary producers, forestry and manufacturing industries, and retailers. Recently I met with the Mayor of the Glen Innes Severn Shire Council, Councillor Steve Toms, and the chair of the council's transport committee, Richard Rowe, on this issue. They presented me with a copy of their submission to the Federal Government's north-south rail corridor study on behalf of the New England local government group. Glen Innes Severn Shire Council prepared the submission, which was jointly funded by member councils Armidale, Dumaresq, Uralla, Walcha, Guyra, Inverell and Tenterfield, and the New England Weed Authority.

This week members of the Glen Innes Severn Transport Committee met in Canberra with the consultants undertaking the corridor study and the Federal Transport Minister, Warren Truss. During the visit Glen Innes Development Board representatives also put the New England local government case to Senator Bill Heffernan, the chair of the Senate transport committee. The submission presents a persuasive case for the new rail corridor to Brisbane to use the existing rail route through the New England from Werris Creek to Armidale and Wallangarra. It argues that this has significant advantages over the alternative route being considered, through Narrabri and Moree. The honourable member for Tamworth has been a strong supporter of this proposal, Walcha being in his electorate.

In a nutshell, the New England route is 200 kilometres shorter and it has no flood plain to cover. The Government owns the land, and the infrastructure is already in place. Obviously there is work to be done, but that is a pretty good start. The Moree option would require a new rail line to be built from where the present line ends at Boggabilla, in New South Wales, to connect it with the east-west Queensland line between Dirranbandi and Warwick. Acquiring valuable farming land to build this new line across the black soil flood plains is an expensive and challenging option. While the New England local government submission advocates New England as the preferred route, it supports the continuation of the existing Moree line as part of a rail network for the transport of bulk freight such as grain and coal.

The New England line is an existing rail easement, the land is already reserved, and the earthworks have already been constructed. The route is the most direct between the north-south anchor points of Werris Creek and Warwick. It is flood free, and it does not have the need for major bridge crossings or elevation of the line against flood prone land. The route is primarily through rural land and is an existing easement. The environmental impacts of developing the New England rail line are considered to be low as it is an existing rail corridor and the major ground disturbance has already occurred in the establishment of the line.

The exploration and development of coalmines in the New England north-west keeps growing. A significant proposal is being developed for a coalmine at Ashford, 56 kilometres north of Inverell, which is expected to produce up to 1.5 million tonnes of coal per year. Getting this coal to port will be a significant issue. The best option would be to truck the coal to Deepwater or Glen Innes. The reopening of the New England rail line would allow the development of an intermodal freight handling facility at Glen Innes, which is ideally located at the cross-roads of the New England and Gwydir highways.

Freight moving out of the New England north-west region includes grain, coal, cotton, wool, timber, processed beef and lamb, poultry, fruit, vegetables, stock feeds, milled products, hay, olives and wine. Freight moving into the region includes stock feed, fertiliser, seed chemicals, agricultural implements, fuel, oil, motor vehicles and retail products. As well as freight there is also increasing interest in passenger rail for tourism, a growing industry in the inland regions. I welcome the renewed investment in rail infrastructure and I call on the Government and the State Minister to show the Federal colleague they support this proposal when they discuss it with him.

PRESCHOOL FUNDING

Mr PETER DRAPER (Tamworth) [6.09 p.m.]: Tonight I bring to the attention of the House how a 17-year freeze in funding has created a very worrying situation for community preschools across the electorate of Tamworth and, indeed, right across the State. Preschools in every local community spanning my area of the

State are experiencing the same challenges—they are struggling to maintain basic service delivery because of the refusal of successive State governments to increase funding since 1989. This crisis recently sparked a string of public protests and rallies across the north-west, which were attended by concerned parents and staff from not only Tamworth but also the smaller towns in the area.

The depth of the funding crisis was impressed upon me during a visit to the Kootingal and District Preschool on 17 March, where I was taken on a tour through the school by director Michelle Cherniayeff. This centre, which operates at the rear of the War Memorial Hall in Kootingal, is considered potentially able to provide services for up to 100 children from the communities of Kootingal, Moonbi, Tintunhull, Limbri, Moore Creek, Attunga, Walcha, Dungowan and Nemingha. However, in reality, the number of children for which this preschool can safely cater is restricted to 67 per week. This is because it simply does not have the capacity to accommodate any more children due to a lack of space and insufficient funding to source essential staff and equipment.

This brings me to the point that is of most concern. This preschool received only \$63,703, including GST, from the Department of Community Services [DOCS] last financial year, instead of an estimated \$100,000, which Ms Cherniayeff states is needed to operate the centre effectively. Part of this shortfall is created by continual increases in insurance, which rose by another \$1,500 last year alone, putting extra strain on the preschool's limited financial resources. This situation has become so desperate that staff and parents regularly donate their own funds to purchase essential items such as furniture, pens and toys, as resource allocation is not available in the preschool's budget.

The number of enrolments at Kootingal has risen every year, from the initial 23 children in 1997 to the current 67 in 2006. The waiting list in place at the preschool caters for enrolments up to 2008 and there are currently nine children on that list. I share the concerns of staff that the facilities, amenities and equipment are inadequate. They are in desperate need of attention, and increased funding would seem to be the only solution. Parents with children in New South Wales preschools pay the highest fees in Australia, but this State also has the lowest participation rate. Parents can expect to pay anything from \$15 to \$30 per child per day in New South Wales, while those in Queensland and the Northern Territory pay only \$5 to \$10.

The Werris Creek Preschool is suffering a downturn in numbers, with low employment levels in the town resulting in few parents able to afford the daily fee. Preschool director Julia Cameron said while the preschool charges \$17 a day per child, many families simply cannot afford to pay that rate each day. As a result, they charge a lower fee, with the difference subsidised by the DOCS affordability scheme. However, that funding rarely goes far enough. As participation rates decrease, the preschool has been forced to consider reducing its operating times from five to four days per week. Mrs Cameron said this would be a last resort as they would then face the possibility of having their funding reduced further. This preschool is already struggling to meet its daily demands within the current budget, yet recently had to install a children's bathing facility and refrigerator at a cost of \$2,500 to meet the Children's Services Regulations 2004. This was undertaken without any additional Government funding. They also face the possibility of having to replace flooring of an outside play area at a cost of \$20,000 to \$30,000.

The situation is similarly concerning at Nundle Preschool, but due to very strong community support the centre continues to operate. The Nundle Country Women's Association recently undertook a \$100,000 loan to upgrade the building, while the community and school staff raise around \$3,000 every year to keep the facility going. Nundle Preschool director Gae Sipple is one of two permanent part-time staff who care for the centre's 15 children two days per week. Mrs Sipple said the preschool's wages expense is \$634 per week, offset by DOCS funding of \$411, which has not increased since 1989. The maximum permissible school fees revenue is \$264 per week, and from this amount a mere \$41 is left to maintain an operational budget for the school, which includes costs such as telephone, general administration and consumables. Insurance costs \$55 per week. This clearly inadequate budget leaves no money to train staff or replace expensive equipment. The facility relies on parents and generous members of the local community.

I welcome the formation of a Government task force to investigate preschool services across the State, but I urge the task force to complete its inquiry quickly. The findings will be obvious in my opinion: no organisation can continue to deliver services over a prolonged period without increased funding to cover escalating costs. Later this week a number of preschools from the electorate will present me with hundreds of petitions from preschool staff and parents demanding the Government increase funding. With the upcoming budget the State Government has an opportunity to provide much-needed relief for preschools. This is a vitally important sector that looks after our most important asset—our children. I call on the Minister to resolve the funding shortfall as a matter of urgency.

PITTWATER ELECTORATE INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

Mr ALEX McTAGGART (Pittwater) [6.14 p.m.]: Yet again I raise the issue of infrastructure funding, or the lack of it, in Pittwater. Where do I start? The list is almost endless and goes back 20 years: Mona Vale Road, Wakehurst Parkway, Pittwater Road, Mona Vale Hospital, water and sewerage for Scotland Island, Church Point car park, Pittwater Park car park in Palm Beach, police stations, ambulance stations, to name a few. These are issues involving State funding that have not been addressed. Also, we must remind the people of Pittwater that it is the Liberal Party that has held the seat for the past 30 years. Here are some examples of how well they lobbied for Pittwater. For six years the people of Pittwater endeavoured to have Mona Vale Hospital chosen as the site for the major hospital on the northern beaches. The former member for Pittwater and the members for Wakehurst, Davidson and Manly signed an accord committing all four local members to an agreement that the major hospital be located at the southern end, thus condemning Mona Vale to a complementary role. At the February 2005 upper House inquiry into the operations of Mona Vale Hospital, the former member for Pittwater, in response to a question from Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans, said:

Let me be very clear. If you build a new hospital at Dee Why that is the end of Mona Vale Hospital. I do not know how the Government can sustain an argument that they can pour hundreds of millions of dollars into Dee Why and pretend to keep Mona Vale open. It is 10 minutes away by vehicle.

That same argument obviously applies to Frenchs Forest. Later in the inquiry, when the former member for Pittwater was asked if he was "supporting Mona Vale as your main hospital for the northern beaches if there is only going to be one level 5 hospital", his response was, "No, not necessarily." So, he failed to support Mona Vale, thereby again condemning it to a complementary role. At a meeting held in February this year at Mona Vale Community Hall, the Opposition's spokesperson on Health also refused to support Mona Vale as the major hospital, again condemning it to a complementary role.

As a last ditch attempt to keep a major hospital in Pittwater, I supported Pittwater Council's proposal to locate the major hospital at Warriewood. This was a genuine attempt to maintain a major health facility in the geographic centre of the northern beaches. It was also an attempt to keep jobs, investment and top-level health care in Pittwater and also to reduce the travel time of the people who live north of Mona Vale, that is, Newport, Avalon and Palm Beach. I was howled down at that meeting by the Liberals.

I will now talk about roads. Here is an example of the sort of lobbying for road funding that the honourable member for Wakehurst and the Liberals do on behalf of the Pittwater community. Several years ago there was a tragic accident on the Deep Creek Bridge on Wakehurst Parkway. Seeking to capitalise on that tragic accident, the honourable member for Wakehurst wrote to Pittwater Council and me, requesting that Pittwater Council pay for half of the widening of the Deep Creek Bridge, with Warringah Council to pay the other half. What sort of local member, knowing full well that the bridge and the road are the responsibility of the Roads and Traffic Authority, would call on the local council to fund a State responsibility? Even worse, the bridge is not even in the Pittwater local government area [LGA] but in Warringah. So the honourable member for Wakehurst, having failed to convince the State Government to fund necessary road improvements, told the council that it should provide the road improvements in another council LGA.

For years successive Labor governments have ignored the needs of Pittwater. The state of Pittwater's infrastructure is a sad indictment of that, but it is also a sad indictment of the lobbying ability of the Liberal Party, which has held the seat for the last 30 years. In 2005 Pittwater Council, identifying a significant backlog of infrastructure needs in Pittwater, took the option of a new seven-year 5 per cent environmental infrastructure levy to pay for the backlog of infrastructure. Once again, because the Liberal Party could not persuade the Labor Government to provide the infrastructure, the community had to do it themselves.

As a matter of interest, Warringah Council, in a municipality which comprises the bulk of the electorate of the honourable member for Wakehurst and part of mine, has a 6 per cent environmental levy and a 2.9 per cent sports field levy, and has recently announced a 5 per cent infrastructure levy. That is a total of 13.9 per cent additional levies on rates because the Liberal Party could not support their residents. That is once again a sad indictment of the Liberal Party's inability to persuade the Labor Government to fund infrastructure development.

Yesterday the honourable member for Wakehurst made scurrilous allegations that I used the debate on the Appropriation (Budget Variations) Bill to attack the former member for Pittwater. He said that I had abused parliamentary privilege to launch a frenzied attack on the former member and that I had put the boot in while John was down. He said that I referred spitefully to the funding secured for the Wakehurst Parkway by the former member. These are vicious, baseless allegations. I did not make any attack on the former member, let

alone the frenzied one referred to by the honourable member for Wakehurst. I merely took the opportunity in the debate to point out that there was a backlog of infrastructure issues in Pittwater and that the Liberal Party had failed to convince the Government to deliver on them. Indeed, in the May 2006 edition of *Pittwater Life* magazine— [*Time expired.*]

Private members' statements noted.

The House adjourned at 6.19 p.m. until Monday 22 May 2006 at 2.15 p.m.
