

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Thursday 21 June 2007

The Speaker (The Hon. George Richard Torbay) took the chair at 10.00 a.m.

The Speaker read the Prayer and acknowledgement of country.

RURAL COMMUNITIES IMPACTS BILL 2007

Agreement in Principle

Debate resumed from 31 May 2007.

Mr CRAIG BAUMANN: (Port Stephens) [10.00 a.m.]: I support the Rural Communities Impacts Bill 2007. This bill is about considering the impacts of parliamentary and bureaucratic decisions on the residents of communities in rural New South Wales. New South Wales has 93 electorates with equal voter numbers. More than half of these are rural electorates outside the Newcastle, Sydney and Wollongong coastal belt. The electorate of Port Stephens is 1,010 square kilometres and includes the urban areas of Mayfield and Warabrook and communities such as Raymond Terrace, Hawks Nest, Tea Gardens, Tomaree, Tilligerry and Medowie. They are small towns surrounded by farmlands, water catchments—including the water reservoir for the lower Hunter and Central Coast—national parks and defence lands, supporting Australia's most important base, RAAF Williamtown.

From my electorate office in the Newcastle electorate it is 55 kilometres to Nelson Bay and 80 kilometres to Tea Gardens with no State government-funded public transport. The only public transport in the electorate is in Mayfield, and the major election issue in Mayfield was this Government's cancellation of direct bus services between Mayfield and the John Hunter Hospital without community consultation. Elderly residents without personal transport were being told to find other ways to get to treatment and visit ill friends and relatives. I am sure the action of this Government drove at least 34 of them to change their vote to support me.

I was elected to Port Stephens Council in 1987 and served as mayor in 1994 and again in 2004. It is like riding a bike: you never forget, or so I thought. Unfortunately, by 2004 this Government had finetuned the art of bush bashing. In 2002, the then Minister for Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources introduced State Environmental Planning Policy 71, or the Coastal Policy. This gave the Minister's department the authority to collect fees for and assess any major development within one kilometre of a tidal waterway from the local government area of Port Stephens to the Queensland border. The excuse given at the time was that councils could not manage development in sensitive areas. The result of this legislation is a planning disaster and further disenfranchisement of local government.

Shoal Bay is probably the most idyllic harbour-side beach in Australia. Councillors of all colours and persuasions had always respected and worked to an 8-metre height limit for properties opposite the beach. The department approved a motel on this road with a height of somewhere between 12 and 13.5 metres. There was no community consultation and minimal council consultation—Sydney bureaucrats ignoring a local policy that had stood for years. Twelve metres might not seem much when one's office is on the thirtieth floor of a Sydney skyscraper, but to the people of Shoal Bay this development was an eyesore and a reflection of how poorly the Government considered their opinion.

The council took the Minister to the Land and Environment Court and lost, and to rub salt into the wounds the department made it a condition that council had to enforce the provisions. The staff of council who are paid by the ratepayers of Port Stephens were told to spend time looking after approvals of the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources. State Environmental Planning Policy 71 has turned out to be a planning disaster and I invite members to talk to any of the mayors along the North Coast about it.

The Minister for Planning has now introduced clause 3A approvals, which affect all of us in New South Wales, although I have found that the Minister, to his credit, seems to consult councils affected by clause 3A applications. It should, however, be understood that all councils in New South Wales are underfunded; they simply do not have the staff available to carry out free planning assessments, and by that I mean assess development applications that have been lodged with and had fees paid to the Department of Planning.

This Government introduced police local area commands. On the surface, modern communications and a computer in every police car sounds okay, and I am sure they can work well in Sydney. However, the bulk of Port Stephens falls under the Lower Hunter local area command, which is based in Maitland and covers 8,000 square kilometres—Wollombi, Nerong, Fingal Bay and north to Hawks Nest-Tea Gardens. It is a huge area. On paper, this local area command is enforcing the law on behalf of about 200,000 people 24 hours a day, seven days a week, but in reality they are driving across a region three times bigger than the greater Sydney Metropolitan area. A rural communities impact statement on policing in a regional area like Port Stephens would result in very different boundaries for these local area commands.

Karuah is a small coastal village in Port Stephens and once bustled with activity, as it was situated on the old Pacific Highway, the main artery of the New South Wales tourist belt. In 2004, then Premier Bob Carr opened the new Pacific Highway route—the bypass—and after only a few short years the impact has been dramatic: Karuah resembles a ghost town, as local businesses have closed due to a lack of traffic, and the Government's only interest was the token visit by a Minister during the election campaign to offer funding for a study into the viability of a new boat ramp.

A rural communities impact statement would have indicated to the Government the adverse effects of the bypass and planning could have been conducted indicating a need for more tourism infrastructure investment. I pay tribute to the people of Karuah, who have worked hard to lobby the Government and council for increased public funds to maintain their way of life, but they receive very little support in kind from this State Government. My colleague the member for Bega indicated that had a rural communities impact study been conducted on the Bateman's Bay marine park, it would have shown a net financial loss to his community of more than \$30 million. Due to the swift pace with which marine park legislation was enacted and implemented in my electorate, no such study was ever conducted. The marine park remains a grab for Greens preferences with no consideration for the broader community that it affects. I am sure members are aware that there must be more consultation with people in rural communities. I encourage all members to support this bill.

Mr PETER DRAPER (Tamworth) [10.10 a.m.]: I support the Rural Communities Impacts Bill 2007, which makes a great deal of sense. We, as legislators, should be considering the impact on our communities of every piece of legislation that we pass and we must ensure that it does not have any adverse effect on country people. The Government states continually that it conducts its own version of impact statements. I think country people would view that claim with a deal of justified scepticism. We need only to look at decisions made in the last Parliament to disprove that theory. How much research goes into the Government's rural impact statements that, I might say, are the result of a promise made in 1994 by Bob Carr to address the concerns of country people?

This legislation, which is well drafted, is good legislation. I supported similar legislation when it was introduced in this House. In my opinion, good decision making requires good research. In that respect the Government has failed country people. Where were the impact statements prior to the deregulation of the dairy industry? What impacts were determined prior to the establishment of the Scientific Committee on environmental issues? Incidentally, the Scientific Committee is still not accountable to this Parliament but it makes unaccountable decisions in isolation that significantly affect the viability of our farmers. What impacts did the Government consider when closing railway grain lines or the Casino to Murwillumbah rail line?

Who determined that the vendor duty tax would not detrimentally affect country people? Who decided that a savage increase in poker machine tax would not impact on country communities? Look at the impact on many small communities following the Brigalow South Bioregion lockup. While people in Gunnedah have been significant beneficiaries of that decision, the impact on smaller timber-dependent communities has been devastating. No consideration was given to any impact that might occur as a result of the native vegetation legislation or the Threatened Species Act. Both have hurt our farming communities, yet ongoing moves towards the city-dominated green agenda continue.

Despite massive flooding in the Hunter and Central Coast regions the district around Tamworth is still facing a water crisis. Irrigators in the Peel, Cockburn and Namoi systems have faced many years with reduced or zero water allocations, yet the Government is still forcing farmers to pay fixed water charges for a resource that they are unable to access. Who determined the impact of this impost on irrigators who have heavily invested in infrastructure? Irrigators are unable to access the water they need to make a living, yet they are still topping up the Government's coffers.

Was an impact statement carried out before the forced amalgamation of country councils? Since the amalgamation of health services some good things have happened, including the establishment of the cardio

catheterisation unit in Tamworth, but other things have happened that have cost local jobs and reduced local skills. Were these impacts considered? What about the impacts of separating land and water values on rural councils? How many farming families have been devastated by water sharing plans and are yet to receive compensation? Unfortunately, the Government does not have a mortgage on failing to consider the impacts of legislation on its constituents.

The same things could be said of the Federal Parliament. Have we seen rural community impact statements with regard to Telstra? That legislation was passed, with the support of the New South Wales Coalition, and people in country communities are witnessing Telstra shedding many jobs that will not be replaced. As a result, people in the Tamworth operation are facing a very bleak future, but no impact statement took into account their plight before the legislation was passed, despite widespread opposition from country people. We are now witnessing a bidding war between both sides of the Federal sphere on the provision of broadband services. It seems inevitable that country people will once again be disadvantaged compared to those living in major cities.

It is important to consider and support the impact of legislation on rural communities. The same could be said for industrial relations. Many positions are being driven by blind ideology; they are not being driven by measuring the impact of legislation—which this bill purports to do—and that is why I support it. In my local area we have witnessed the dumping down and withdrawal of resources provided to Soil Services. The Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] was removed from the area and relocated to the coast. Before the last election the Opposition made much about decentralising government departments to country areas if it won government. Perhaps the first thing it should do is decentralise its Sydney head office. Those jobs would be better placed in a country community and would have a positive impact on such an area.

Several speakers referred to why rural communities impact statements were a good idea or were not a good idea. I cannot understand why any government, community leader or legislator would not want to measure the impact of legislation before making a decision about whether or not to support it or oppose it. It can only result in improved decision-making, better policy and better legislation. From my perspective it is logical to support good research, good consultation and good outcomes rather than passing legislation without providing an opportunity to consult appropriate communities and consider the impacts it might have on them. Governments should consider the impacts of their legislation. This bill would result in just such an outcome. I commend it to the House.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS (Murray-Darling) [10.15 p.m.]: I support the Rural Communities Impacts Bill 2007 and compliment the Leader of the Nationals on introducing it and the former Premier, Bob Carr, on his foresight in proposing it. It is difficult to understand why anyone would oppose this bill. Last Thursday I sat in this Chamber and witnessed the performance of the member for Monaro when he put forward his arguments. I am told that the member for Monaro is a member of Country Labor, if there is such a thing. However, what he said had nothing at all to do with the country. The member for Monaro demonstrated that he does not represent the interests of country people.

The member for Monaro retained his seat only because of the actions of Kay Hull, the Federal member of The Nationals, who had the guts to stand up and talk about the sale of Snowy Hydro and then cross the floor when a vote was taken in relation to that issue. The member for Monaro should erect a shrine in his home to honour Kay Hull, one of the greatest members of The Nationals. When the member for Monaro was put to the test and he had to stand up for country New South Wales by speaking against the proposed sale of Snowy Hydro, he did not have the heart or the guts to do so. The other day the member for Monaro—

Mr Joseph Tripodi: Point of order: If the member wants to launch into a personal attack against another member of Parliament he has to do that by way of substantive motion. We heard nothing but silence from Opposition members when the Federal Government privatised Telstra.

The SPEAKER: Order! I have heard enough. The member for Murray-Darling has made some passing references to certain matters. I urge him to make his contribution relevant to the bill.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS: Last Thursday we sat in this Chamber—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Bathurst will remain silent.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS: I have an open mind. I want to hear arguments against this bill. Why does the member for Monaro oppose this bill? He did not tell us why he opposed it; all he did was rubbish the

contribution of another member to this debate. The member for Monaro put forward no argument about why members should support this bill. Last week I referred to a decision by this Government to close Yanga Station and to turn it into a national park. No consideration was given to the impact that it might have on the Balranald community. The Balranald community relied on Yanga Station as a source of income but, all of a sudden, the Government decided to purchase it and turn it into a national park.

A person in business might say, "We will turn the area into a national park and then mop up afterwards." This Government does not do that and it does not mop up afterwards. It says to the community, "We are going to create a national park." A shearer will lose 30 per cent of his business because the Government locked up this area. People relied on Yanga Station as a source of income. Jobs are not easy to get in Balranald but the economy of that community has been impacted on severely because of this Government's decision to create a national park. I am not opposed to national parks but I am opposed to the way in which this Government does business. The Government should have consulted the community to establish just how much it relied on Yanga Station for its income. It might then have considered an alternative proposal.

The Government's answer is that Yanga will be a new tourist attraction. Although Mungo National Park can be accessed from Balranald, during the term that this Government has been in office it has discussed sealing that access road but still has not done so. This illustrates the Government's inability to help this community derive an income from an alternative source. Immediately 15 people will be in the unemployment queue because of the Government's decision. We merely ask that prior to a decision being made, the Government consult the community and consider the impact the decision will have on the community. People are not opposed to change, merely the process the Government applies to rural communities when it seeks to change their environments. Government makes decisions without any consultation with communities and those communities are then left with the fallout decisions, which creates unemployment and migration. We need to retain people in the bush and if the Government cannot supplement those incomes, that becomes an issue.

The overview of the bill is very simple. The object is to require Ministers to consider the likely impact of certain legislations and other Government proposals on rural communities. It is a social obligation of governments to do that. Government members purport to represent the interests of country people. They have received their instructions from upstairs; they had been told to make sure that this bill does not pass through this House. Their Sydney-centric mates are giving them the orders. Government members do not represent the interests of country people.

Mrs DAWN FARDELL (Dubbo) [10.22 a.m.]: I commend the Rural Communities Impacts Bill 2007. During the past two weeks, members have been given opportunities to have a conscience vote and I believe there should also be a conscience vote on this bill, as many Government members will support country members of Parliament. In 1996 Bob Carr introduced a similar bill, which was discussed at Cabinet level but unfortunately was not successful. The Leader of The Nationals attempted over the past few years in 2004 up until 2006 to have further bills passed but these were defeated. The bill provided for rural communities impact statements to be prepared in relation to any future proposed bills, statutory rules, environmental planning instruments or decisions. We all know that what happens in Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong is entirely different to what is needed in rural and regional New South Wales. Because of the logistical difference, transport and health costs are more complex than those in the Sydney metropolitan areas.

Impact statements are needed to find out the details of costs that are likely to be placed on businesses in rural communities in order for them to comply with the relevant legislation and decisions, and the examination of the likely impact of those costs on development and employment in rural communities. It will provide a model of the likely impact on the rural community that would occur or remain five years after the legislation or decision is made, and an examination of the likely impact on the social structures and wellbeing of rural communities. It will also provide for an examination of the likely impact of the proposed legislation or decision on the availability of public transport, health services, education facilities, policing, courts, government advisory services and infrastructure provision, and examination of the natural environment, having regard for the need to balance economic and social wellbeing with environmental sustainability. A typical example is that the native vegetation laws have adversely affected a group of residents in Nyngan.

With respect to transport services, a motor neurone sufferer in Forbes is now facing considerable costs and I have met brick walls from State and Federal governments in seeking assistance for him because he is only allowed one financial high priority payment each year. He has put his children first and has given that payment to his children. We must consider the tyranny of distance because this constituent has to travel to Sydney to receive treatment. Country people are suffering the effects of drought, which does not affect city people in the

same way. Nobody has taken up the gambit and run with the crop replanting grants, about which I spoke recently, as well as payroll tax.

This week in my private member's statement I spoke about workers compensation on the Midpro Engineering firm in Forbes that was hit by a figure plucked out of the air by GIO, which the Minister halved on representation. This should not be allowed. I refer also to cost shifting to local government. It is difficult to attract professional staff to rural communities. These communities also suffer from a shortage of doctors and dental professionals. Doctors are willing to relocate to regional areas but if their spouses are professionals, they are often unable to find a position. The Narromine Medical Centre fitted out the surgery for a dentist at its own cost and the council owns the equipment. The dentist can come and go as he or she pleases but why should they have to do that? I take my hat off to them.

Doctors at the Binnaway Medical Centre have a problem with paying an increase in the rent. There are two sides to the story but why should these residents be threatened with the loss of their doctor? Because of a recent fire lit by young vandals the Government has kindly allowed doctors to go temporarily to the Forbes-Maclean wing of the hospital. However, the Government is having trouble keeping the doctors in town because until the position is certain Forbes is concerned about acquisition of land off the Department of Health. The Government should remove that concern from local government. It should work with local government.

The suggestion by the member for Northern Tablelands of a rural task force will have significant impact. I look forward to strong representation and attendance of rural gatherings throughout the community by all rural and regional members of Parliament in this House, no matter what their political persuasion. I look forward to city members of Parliament listening to the views of rural people in the same way that I listened to debate on the medical injecting centre at Kings Cross. I expect our city cousins to attend those meetings to see what is affecting rural and regional New South Wales. I commend this bill to the House.

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES (Barwon) [10.27 a.m.]: I support the Rural Communities Impacts Bill 2007. I congratulate the Leader of The Nationals on introducing the bill yet again. As the member for Dubbo stated, I look forward to support from all country members for this bill, without fear or favour. On behalf of my comrade from Broken Hill, I note that between us the member for Murray-Darling and I represent geographically 61 per cent of the State. I look forward to working with many of the people from Murray-Darling and the current member. The people now have decent representation in The Nationals member, John Williams, who will stick up for his constituents. I sympathised with them under the previous regime because I received numerous requests leading up to the election because they were sick of being buck-passed. His constituency can now look forward to representation without fear or favour. The issues he raised with respect to the rural communities impacts will not go unnoticed.

This bill is about benchmarking, improvement, good decision-making and business and, as Sam Kekovich would say, it makes sense. If the supposed Country Labor members who are in the Chamber do not understand that comment I am happy to explain it to them later. I became politically active a couple of years ago when some natural resource adjustments began to impact on my region. The State Government stepped in to address groundwater over-allocations in the Namoi Valley. Until then nobody had a problem with over-allocation; growers had been dealing with it for years, and indeed had made voluntary cutbacks. At the time I chaired a regional area consultative group. While cutbacks of up to 87 per cent were imminent in certain zones of the valley, a so-called socioeconomic study undertaken by the State Government covered only both sides of an A4 piece of paper—in fact, it was not that extensive.

The Government's analysis of cutbacks across the valley stated that a few million dollars in net production would be lost, a few jobs would go, and the community would suffer a little in the interim but would then move on. The local community, industry, all local government entities, and the Federal Government expressed concern. The Federal Government sought to draw up some kind of compensation package in conjunction with the State. The State Government has not just a constitutional but a moral obligation to devise adjustment and compensation packages in such circumstances.

A group of us produced a socioeconomic study, which was one of the most comprehensive studies—if not the most comprehensive one—of a country valley catchment in Australia, let alone New South Wales. It continues to set the benchmark for the rest of the State. The study showed that the Government's proposed water adjustments, in conjunction with industry, would contribute to a net loss of \$40 million annually, that at least 75 farmers would go out of business—most of them irrigators—and that the loss of employment in the valley would be well in excess of 200 direct jobs. That was a far cry from the so-called "socioeconomic study" conducted by the State Government.

I am always concerned when I hear Ministers and other Labor members say they will walk side by side with the people of New South Wales. They might walk beside them but they will have their hands in the people's pockets and they will carry the keys to lock the gates. We must challenge that mentality. The State Government does not understand or empathise with rural New South Wales. It believes country communities have no future. That was clearly evident in the State Government's proposal. The local community and the Federal Government had to drag the State Government kicking, biting and scratching to the table, and the resulting compensation package was less than satisfactory. This is an ongoing problem.

At the time a number of other natural resource issues were evolving that were driven very much by ideological minority groups. I am amazed that we have legislation for threatened species but no legislation for threatened communities. The Rural Communities Impacts Bill deals with the threat to rural communities. The number of civil disobedience groups in New South Wales, such as the Regional Community Survival Group based in Nyngan, is growing not just in the country but in urban areas. The State Government has traded off vast tracts of central western New South Wales without conducting impact studies on broadscale clearing and its effect on invasive native scrub. It is a disgrace. Labor simply took instructions from its Greens mates and traded off the land. It is a "lock it up and leave it" mentality.

Labor has abandoned country people, and that is unacceptable. It inspires me to be an advocate for the people of rural New South Wales, and we will go down fighting. My neighbour the member for Murray-Darling and I will continue to represent our constituents without fear or favour. Perhaps the State Government will stump it up a little later and support the bill. I challenge members opposite to step up to the plate, stump up some courage, and vote for this sensible legislation that will support rural people.

The final act of bastardry during the Carr reign was the announcement of the Brigalow Belt South bioregion. No impact study was conducted. The Government simply said, "Let's get in there and make a mess and we'll mop it up later." But that has not happened; the Government never mops up. I hope the member for Murray-Darling, other Coalition members and I will be able to enlighten our friends on the other side of the Chamber about how they might swing the mop. Today Baradine has an unemployment rate of between 35 per cent and 40 per cent. Gwabegar has probably 95 per cent or higher unemployment. Many communities in the region have been affected adversely. The Government's decision has had a serious impact on a large area of New South Wales, and that is unacceptable. The Government's "lock it up and leave it" mentality is betraying the people of country New South Wales. We will continue to see civil disobedience in response to unacceptable policy, unacceptable benchmarking and unacceptable outcomes for rural people in New South Wales.

How the Government works with the people of New South Wales is fundamental. The Nationals and I are committed to working with people. We will work side by side with our country constituents. We will support rural groups and we will achieve acceptable outcomes. If we have to force our friends in the State Government to come to the party kicking, biting and scratching, we will do that in order to get a good result. We will see where those opposite stand on the issues that affect country New South Wales. Following the war—

Mr Gerard Martin: Which war?

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES: The last great war. The member for Bathurst probably does not know this. City and country people in Australia used to have a strong cultural connection. Unfortunately, for demographic and other reasons, that connection has diminished and that is probably underpinning the lack of understanding and empathy on the part of decision makers. The cultural connectedness we used to have in this State and in this country is diminishing. Our city decision makers and city dwellers no longer empathise with country people. Conversely, country people believe it is quite a privilege to be connected with their city cousins. At this point the traffic is one way.

Let me illustrate that point. Two weeks ago I caught a taxi from Parliament House to the airport. I often exchange ideas with taxi drivers: it gives me a good sense of what city people are thinking. The taxi driver, who knew that Parliament had been sitting, said, "So, you're in Parliament". I replied, "Yes." He then asked where I was from and I told him I come from Moree and represent the electorate of Barwon. He responded, "I'm a member of the Labor Party; in fact, I belong to one of the local branches connected with the Premier. We're doing it for country people. We know all about the city and the country. I know Moree well." So I said, "Good on you. Where is Moree?" And he replied, "It's near Wagga, isn't it?" I said, "Mate, you've got it in one." They are the sorts of problems we are dealing with. There is a cultural divide in this State and our challenge is to rebuild that missing connectedness.

That connectedness is missing from the taxi driver, from the Labor Party branches and from the bureaucracy all the way up to the decision makers, to the Ministers—right to the top. They are the things country people have to put up with, and that is the platform on which members on the Government side were re-elected. It is a disgrace. We will do what we have to do. We will help to educate our taxi drivers. That driver now knows that Moree is not near Wagga Wagga. He might even think that Moree is in the seat of Monaro. That would be a good thing for Monaro. We would add a level of intelligence and commitment if we were based in Monaro. We will work on that.

Again I congratulate the Leader of The Nationals on reintroducing this bill. It is about good business. It is about doing business for the bush. It will create good, healthy and robust discussion about who are the best people to represent rural New South Wales. The member for Murray-Darling and I represent 60 per cent of the State and we will take on these issues for country people. I attended the Isolated Children's and Parents Association annual conference in Walgett this year. It is an outstanding group. Its president, Sue Gordon, said:

Our busyness has been exacerbated by this prolonged drought, the extra work it creates, the extra responsibilities, the extra decisions that need to be made in our personal lives. Rural and remote New South Wales is weary. It is tired and it is angry. It is fed up with fighting for even the most basic of services. It is fed up with being treated like second-class citizens. It is fed up with being dictated to from Macquarie Towers and the bureaucracies that support it. It is fed up with policies created whilst overlooking Sydney Harbour that have no practical use or thought given to its impact on rural and remote communities. It seems the obstacles are just too great ...

It is a disgrace that someone of that standing has to make that statement about this Government. We are committed to doing something about it. I challenge all members who represent rural and country communities to support this bill.

Mr GERARD MARTIN (Bathurst) [10.42 a.m.]: Members of The Nationals are still coming from the same gene pool. We just heard from the member for Barwon rhetoric and glib words but nothing that went to the nub of anything. He talked about educating people. If he wants to educate people about doing the right thing, he might speak to his constituents who allegedly bulldozed 750 hectares of wetlands.

Perhaps we should start with a history lesson for members on the other side. When the Coalition was last in government—and at least one member sitting there now was here then—it closed 14 country rail lines. The member for Barwon might ask members of the previous Government where the impact studies were then. Did that Government consult with those communities when it unilaterally closed 14 country railway lines? No, it did not. When it closed schools all around the State and sacked 2,500 schoolteachers, that had an impact on country areas. Where were the rural impact statements then? Where was the consultation? We can wind back the clock to the same old arguments. From 1988 to 1995 the Coalition devastated country New South Wales.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! Members of the Opposition were allowed considerable latitude during this debate. It is only fair that members of the Government should receive the same concession.

Mr GERARD MARTIN: One statistic that demonstrates where members of The Nationals stand in the eyes of their constituents is that in the late 1980s the National Party had 20-something members in this House. They do not have that many now. Country people have voted with their feet and dispatched them. I am trying to work out what party the member for Tweed belongs to. During the last election campaign the word "Nationals" did not appear anywhere on his advertising banners. He was a Coalition candidate—the only Coalition candidate in New South Wales.

Mr Steve Whan: No, no.

Mr GERARD MARTIN: Of course, our friend who got a whipping by the member for Monaro was also a Coalition candidate. So there were two of them. We have heard rhetoric and hypocrisy from the other side. Members opposite should turn back the clock and look at their record. As I said, they closed 14 country railway lines. They closed schools everywhere, they sacked teachers, and they decimated the Department of Community Services and sacked hundreds of caseworkers. It has been said that there is no consideration of the impact of decisions the Government makes. I know, through the Cabinet process, that there certainly is. As a member who represents one of the oldest electorates—Bathurst has existed since 1856 approximately—I wonder about this rhetoric that nothing is happening in country areas. My electorate received \$190 million from Tuesday's budget. We are in the process of completing a \$180 million base hospital in Bathurst, and in the eight years I have represented the electorate every hospital in my electorate has been rebuilt, redeveloped as a multipurpose service, or otherwise improved.

Mr Thomas George: Thanks to the Federal Government.

Mr GERARD MARTIN: Not at all. Certainly it is a joint initiative but the decisions about hospitals are made by this Government. Bathurst now enjoys great water service with the Chifley Dam. It was doubled in size a few years ago; this Government gave \$15 million to the Bathurst council to do that. There is an endless list. I consider myself to be a hardworking member but I do not consider myself to be the most brilliant member of this House. So, if I can get those sorts of results—

Mr John Williams: Point of order: We want some relevance. We want to know why the member opposes this bill.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! That is not a point of order. The member for Bathurst may continue.

Mr GERARD MARTIN: The member for Murray-Darling is a pretty slow learner. I do not know what he did before he came here.

Mr Kevin Humphries: Speak to the bill.

Mr GERARD MARTIN: The bill is about impacts on country people and I am pointing to the impact of the neglect by members of the Coalition when they were in government. Members opposite are telling us, as they did during the last campaign, that the Opposition will solve all the problems of the world. When the Coalition was in office before, The Nationals were subservient—as they are in the Federal sphere—to the Liberal Party and that is why they were not able to have any impact on the decisions of Greiner, Metherell and so on. That is why The Nationals sat back and let country railway lines be closed willy-nilly and country hospitals decimated.

The 3 per cent productivity cuts that Peter Collins introduced to country hospitals slashed the guts out of country hospitals everywhere. Where were The Nationals then? They were missing in action. Someone was going to give us a history lesson on war. The Nationals were missing in action. When the pressure was on they were never there. Opposition members do not like Government members talking about what happens in Canberra, but some decisions made in Canberra impact on our electorates. Take the hypocrisy this week of the Prime Minister on broadband—

Mr Thomas George: Point of order: I draw attention to Standing Order 129 and the fact that we are discussing the Rural Communities Impacts Bill 2007, and I ask that the member for Bathurst keep his remarks relevant to the bill.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! I allowed the member for Barwon a wide ambit when he spoke. The member for Bathurst is now focusing his remarks on the bill.

Mr GERARD MARTIN: I was referring to the hypocrisy of the Prime Minister and the impact his broadband proposal will have on country communities. We know how important it is to country areas. Look at what the New South Wales Government has done on this issue in recent years. The contract was signed with Soul to deliver broadband services that will come right through my area and connect all government services. That is a very ambitious project. The Government has provided Internet services to our schools—not a zac from the Commonwealth, entirely funded by the State Government. Opposition members need a history lesson. Have a look at what the Prime Minister has put on the table this week.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murray-Darling has already contributed to the debate. I ask him to listen in silence to the member for Bathurst, whose remarks are relevant to the bill.

Mr GERARD MARTIN: On the subject of helping country communities with broadband, the Prime Minister has allowed Elders and his Nationals mates to basically duplicate services down the coast, although the service will go inland and pick up a few key marginal seats held by the Liberal and Nationals parties in Queensland. Basically, that proposal will duplicate services that Telstra is providing down the coast yet give country New South Wales a second-rate system that uses unproven technology. Is that what Coalition members of this House regard as leadership? If The Nationals were truly worried about impacts on community communities they would be in Canberra attacking John Howard about his proposal. But they are not. They sit by while the country gets a second-class system.

If they wanted to do something about impacts on fruit growers in country areas they would support this Government on biosecurity issues, such as fire blight in apples coming in from New Zealand. They all sat in their places like deaf-mutes when Country Labor raised the issue in this House. They were not the slightest bit interested. Because biosecurity has been privatised by the Federal Government they say, "Hands off quarantine" and assert that this State has no responsibility for quarantine. That is the sort of leadership we have from them! They talk on a bill like this as if they are the salvation of country New South Wales. But we have had nothing but rhetoric from them. I reflect on what has happened over the past eight years and the many things that have been done that affect my community. All of those initiatives have helped community communities. I spoke about health, education, and the relocation of government jobs from Sydney. An \$11 million State office block has been built in my electorate, along with the relocation of 200 public servants from the State Debt Recovery Office.

Mr Kevin Humphries: All ivory towers. That's what we need in the bush! Fantastic!

Mr GERARD MARTIN: So they don't want jobs relocated from the city to the bush! Is that what the member for Barwon is saying? That underlies the hypocrisy of members opposite.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! I ask the member for Barwon to extend the same courtesies to the member for Bathurst as were extended to him when he spoke.

Mr GERARD MARTIN: As one other member said in this debate, The Nationals might think about relocating from Carrington Street—I think they are still there—in the good part of the city. Why don't they relocate their head office to the country? Country Labor has a number of regional offices. Why do The Nationals not stump up and do the same thing? No, what we have from the other side is rank hypocrisy. A good story is always worth repeating—although the member for Wakehurst would not be aware of it. The record of the National Party, when the Coalition was last in government, is one of not having the guts to do anything they have spoken about today. The Nationals were compliant with the Liberal Party and allowed the devastation of rail, education and health services throughout the country. I note that The Nationals have sent in the lightweights on this debate; none of the heavyweights of The Nationals have come in. I do not use the term heavyweights literally! The member for Murray-Darling and I would probably be in the heavyweight division.

Mr Thomas George: Are you saying you're a heavyweight?

Mr GERARD MARTIN: Well, about 115 kilograms, which probably puts me in the heavyweight class. The Nationals have let the new kids off the lead, given them a list or rhetoric from The Nationals training kit for candidates, and they have rolled it out here. The Opposition spoke about the impact of structural adjustment packages. They should talk to Peter Costello about putting his hand in the pockets of the people who are getting that money. What happened with dairy deregulation? The people were taxed 30 per cent to 40 per cent or perhaps even more of what they got from that package. It is the same with water issues. Where do The Nationals stand on that? They are not interested at all, even though Peter Costello has his hand in the pockets of industry participants.

Mr Kevin Humphries: Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129 and relevance. What the member for Bathurst is saying is not correct, it is not factual and it is misleading.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! That is not a point of order under Standing Order 129. There is no point of order.

Mr GERARD MARTIN: The member for Barwon should read Standing Order 129. If he wants to take a point of order he should take it under the right standing order. Nothing we have heard from the Opposition indicates that The Nationals have regained their heart or have any concern for country communities. They are almost welded to the Opposition benches; they are pretty comfortable there. Nothing that has come from the new Nationals members suggests a reinvigoration of their party. Their leader is about to toddle off to Canberra, leaving The Nationals leaderless. I hardly think the Deputy Leader of The Nationals is foreman material. So the prospects of The Nationals dominating in this House at any time in the near future are not good. I leave it at that.

Mr DONALD PAGE (Ballina) [10.56 a.m.]: In view of the time, I will make a very brief contribution to the debate. This is the second time the Leader of The Nationals has introduced the Rural Communities Impacts Bill, and I commend him for that. I made a detailed speech in November 2005 in support of the bill, so I do not propose to go over the detail again. Though the member for Bathurst went on with a lot of rhetoric he did not tell us why he will oppose the bill. By making the allegations that he did about the previous Coalition

government—which I do not accept for one moment—in my view he indicates that he is supportive of the bill. Why? Because the bill provides an opportunity—no matter who is in government, whether the Coalition or Labor—to ensure that decisions made that affect country people will be properly considered before they are implemented.

The bill provides for transparency and accountability, regardless of who is in government. It is all very well for the member for Bathurst to say that the Coalition did this and that, and the Labor Party did something else, but the reality is that this is good legislation regardless of who is in government. His whole speech, even though he did not realise it at the time, really was in support of this bill. We have never had a stronger need for legislation like this. This State has the most Sydney-centric government in its history.

This Government has slashed country town water and sewerage funding in half; cut the heart out of the Department of Agriculture by getting rid of 33 per cent of the staff; cut rail services, including the Casino to Murwillumbah line; failed to invest in country infrastructure, particularly the Alstonville bypass; closed half of the business enterprise centres across the State; and unmercifully pursued the timber industry, costing about 800 jobs, while each year we continue to import more than \$400 million worth of rainforest timber from places like Borneo and Indonesia. There is no sense in that. The impact that has had on country New South Wales may have been forgotten by some, but not by those directly affected. Premier Carr said in August 1996 in a press release:

Any major changes proposed by government departments in rural New South Wales will be subject to a rural communities impact statement.

So the former Premier said in a media release in August 1996 that there should be a rural communities impact statement every time Cabinet makes an important decision that could impact upon economic, social or environmental issues affecting rural communities. In the short time available to me I want to reinforce the importance of this legislation and commend the Leader of The Nationals for introducing it. I commend also the member for Murray-Darling and the member for Barwon for their excellent contributions to the debate. This legislation means better informed and more transparent decisions. The principle of looking at the impact of decisions before they are made is fundamentally sound, regardless of who is in government. I strongly support this legislation.

Pursuant to resolution business interrupted and set down as an order of the day for a future day.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Suspension of Standing Orders: Bills

Motion by Mr John Aquilina agreed to:

That standing orders be suspended to permit, at this sitting, following the speeches of the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of The Nationals on the Appropriation Bill 2007 and cognate bills:

- (1) the passage through all remaining stages, with the question "That these bills be now agreed to in principle" being put forthwith, without consideration in detail of the bills; and
- (2) a member, immediately following the passage of the Appropriation Bill 2007 and cognate bills, to move the motion "That this House take note of the budget estimates and related papers for 2007-08."

APPROPRIATION BILL 2007

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL 2007

APPROPRIATION (SPECIAL OFFICES) BILL 2007

PAYROLL TAX BILL 2007

STATE REVENUE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (BUDGET) BILL 2007

Agreement in Principle

Debate resumed from 19 June 2007.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai—Leader of the Opposition) [11.01 a.m.]: If Labor promises were nuggets, the State's road network would be paved in gold. For 12 years much has been promised, yet little

delivered. Remarkably, there seems to be an air of amnesia surrounding Labor's latest budget, a failure to judge Michael Costa's words against Labor's performance in office. We need to review its performance before pinning hope on what is said in the Budget Speech, a glossy brochure or a staged media event. The State's history reveals why caution should be applied to the promises made in this budget. I talk about a party that was elected to office on the untruths of scrapping road tolls, halving hospital waiting lists and ending politically motivated, taxpayer-funded advertisements. The Government reneged on the removal of tolls, it only ever sought to reduce hospital waiting lists before elections and it spent \$90 million in advertising over 10 months leading up to the last State election—a spend that exceeded the annual media buy of Coke and McDonalds combined.

That pattern has continued throughout Labor's term. The discredited Action for Public Transport, which was produced before the 1999 election, offered struggling motorists and commuters across this city every conceivable improvement to our transport systems. However, it alerted the public to the fact that no amount of effort will ever be spared by Labor in the interests of self-promotion or re-election and highlighted the hollowness of Labor's grand commitments. It was a neglect of the basics and a corruption of the very concept of responsible government, which left few if any areas unscathed. Water Plan 21 was supposed to secure Sydney's water supply for a generation; the State's road toll was to be halved; a public transport smart card was promised for the Sydney Olympics; and solemn promises were made not to close any country rail lines and to deliver the Pacific Highway as a divided dual carriageway. Each time hopes were raised before being shattered as sought-after improvements failed to be delivered.

Even the budget process was not spared Labor's deceit of delivery. Forecasts and announcements were made, as they were made last Tuesday, that failed to eventuate in part or at all. Only five years ago another budget was delivered promising a massive infrastructure spend. Labor's spin machine coined the phrase "Bob the Builder" to try to sell that budget to the residents of New South Wales. This week's Labor budget confirms its utter failure of delivering on its forebear. The much-promoted Parramatta to Chatswood rail link will end up running only half the distance and, when completed, will have cost almost twice as much as originally forecast. It is an example of two great Labor faults: a serial failure to deliver on what was promised, and an inability to deliver major infrastructure projects on time or on budget.

Morris Iemma and Michael Costa are inextricably linked to the 12 dark, deceitful years of the State Labor Government. That is why Sydney is getting a desalination plant. The Labor Government made a rushed pre-election decision to press ahead with the \$1.9 billion facility before the Premier's own precondition for go ahead had been reached. For Labor, this facility was all about securing votes, not water. Labor's innate cynicism is the real reason Sydney's train timetable was overhauled, with a loss of carriages and services. The changes were not focused on the needs of commuters; they were about fiddling "on-time" running figures in the lead-up to another election. Commuters' interests, like the wider public interest, always run last to Labor's political interests. It is the reason the GST argument is trotted out. While I share a desire for a better GST carve up, and I will continue to argue for it, I reject Labor's politicking on the matter.

Labor is not about finding a solution; it is about providing more excuses to shift the blame for its failure of delivery. The Premier's refusal to confront other Labor Premiers on the issue or even to secure agreement for a better deal from Kevin Rudd proves the point. Not only has its approach failed to fix the problems confronting New South Wales, it has utterly disenchanted the electorate. Politics is not meant to be like this. It should be about doing what is right and tackling the issues the State will confront today and in the future. It should be about providing people an opportunity to flourish, to develop their potential, to pursue their interests, and to engage in enterprise and further the community's progress. Yet, under Labor, doing what is right is about factions and not the future, it is about political fortune and not how the public fares.

The twin themes that run through every budget are promises and delivery. That is why Labor's record cannot be ignored. One year ago the forecast was for deficit and the promise of tighter budgetary controls. One year later we have a welcome return to surplus, but more evidence of a continuing lack of budgetary discipline. Last year Labor was only too willing to blame the Federal Government for its forecast deficit. This year it refuses to give any credit to national economic conditions for the budget turnaround. This budget finally seeks to address the crises affecting the State's infrastructure and services. But those crises owe their existence to 12 years of Labor inaction or poor budgetary management. I welcome the Government's focus, albeit belatedly, on these matters, but I condemn its creation of them.

The public has every right to expect improvement in State services and infrastructure. But they have an even greater right this time to demand delivery. Despite claims of a turnaround, we face the same high taxes of \$2,535 for every man, woman and child in the State, the same inability to control expenditure—with average

year-on-year increases in expenditure of 7.6 per cent—and the same aversion to doing the hard work, which was also missing from earlier budgets. The budget highlights the missed opportunities of Labor's period in office. Once again, revenue received has exceeded forecasts by an additional \$2.3 billion. All the windfalls Labor has received since 1995 total a staggering \$15.7 billion. That \$15.7 billion could and should have been used over those years to renew State infrastructure. That figure is higher than our total State sector net debt last year. Instead, all of those windfalls, and more, have been spent.

Now we are in a situation where our infrastructure crises are so bad, Labor is forced to spend money and is racking up significant debt. Total State sector net debt will more than double in four years from approximately \$19.3 billion to \$39.3 billion at 30 June 2011. In the general government sector the net debt burden will increase by over 550 per cent between June 2005 and June 2011, as will the accompanying interest bill, which increases by \$530 million over the same period. While the Treasurer calls it "responsible debt", it fails to meet the fiscal targets set for prudent debt in Labor's own two-year old Fiscal Responsibility Act. I agree that debt can be responsible and a prudent level of debt is healthy. But the State's families, farmers and small business owners usually bank savings during the good times to ensure resources are available during the bad. Labor has done the opposite.

A hallmark of all budgets delivered by the State Labor Government is the inability to keep expenses under control. Last year expenses increased by 8.2 per cent, which was above the forecast figure of 5.7 per cent. Next year they claim it will be just 1.3 per cent. Given expenditure increases over the past four years have averaged 6.5 per cent, it is understandably an unbelievable claim. It is a spending promise built on a fiction that Labor will be able to negotiate lower pay rises for public servants when existing pay agreements run out. While the budget allows for wage cost increases of 2.5 per cent per annum with additional increases tied to productivity, it also reveals the likely increase in wages across the economy will be 3.5 per cent over the medium term. For the past 10 years the annualised growth rate of New South Wales public sector wages has been 4.2 per cent. No wonder John Robertson said he did not "think it was serious" for the Government to be putting its wages prediction into the budget.

The one promise in this budget guaranteed to be kept is the promise of an increased taxation burden. Over the next four years total tax revenue will increase by 22.2 per cent. Nothing this budget does changes the fact this is a high-taxing State Labor Government or that record tax revenues are the one part of the budget turnaround for which Labor can truly claim all the credit. Meanwhile, Michael Costa's usual sleight of hand continues. While claiming land tax relief of 0.1 per cent, he predicts the same amount of land tax will be collected in 2007-08 as was forecast for 2006-07. Equally, while spruiking payroll tax changes, revenue from payroll tax will increase by \$391 million in 2007-08, and by a massive 28.5 per cent between 2006-07 and 2010-11. A dozen years of missed opportunities has meant no meaningful or significant tax reforms have been undertaken.

Even the welcome pledge finally to allocate funds to repair the State's infrastructure crises raises questions. Budget papers reveal that Labor has underspent its own capital expenditure budget for the past three years in a row. This year the combined underspend on infrastructure capital and maintenance was \$449 million—a sum big enough to build an extra 19 high schools or 25 police stations. It is another reminder of the crises created, the finances mismanaged, the opportunities lost when Labor repeatedly puts its own political interests, and not public interest, at the centre of State Government. It explains the Cross City Tunnel deal fiasco and the decision to pay \$25 million to defer road changes associated with the Lane Cove Tunnel.

However, one of its really unfortunate consequences is that the people have learned to be cynical about this Government. This is an environment that my colleagues and I are prepared to tackle. We want to restore hope to the residents of New South Wales; we want to return leadership to our State. It is time for a grand vision; it is time for a shared vision with the people of New South Wales to rebuild this State. Today I announce that the Liberals and The Nationals in government will establish a State Infrastructure Fund. It will be specifically charged with the task of revitalising and rebuilding critical State assets. The fund will be established through the realisation of certain State assets that would otherwise be exposed to a loss of value, a loss of returns. It will offer opportunity to convert assets of low priority to assets of high priority. It will also offer the opportunity for part or whole of genuine surpluses to be allocated to the task of rebuilding the State through the fund.

Our fellow residents have every right to expect their State resources to be used to best effect in the vital areas of education, transport, health, energy and water. They have every right to expect moneys allocated for rebuilding and revitalisation projects will actually be spent on those projects. People doing business in New

South Wales rightfully expect nothing less. Individuals and families living in New South Wales must have nothing less. After 12 years of this State Labor Government, this is a critical and vital mission on behalf of today's residents and the generations to follow. We must end Labor's policy of deceitful non-delivery and return the State to genuine responsible government.

The Coalition will establish trust with the community; promises made will be delivered. In restoring honesty to the relationship between government and residents, certainty is essential. A Coalition government will require by law moneys allocated to the State Infrastructure Fund to be spent on the purposes intended. It will not allow money to be siphoned from the fund for Labor-style political purposes—the sort of exercise that has left people seething following the cynical abandonment of its Spit Bridge proposals. To cement this bond of faith, the special legislation establishing the fund will provide for an independent board to oversight its operation. In addition, the Auditor-General will be tasked to report annually to Parliament that moneys have been spent as intended. Transparency will be the centrepiece of the fund's operations. This fund will be an ongoing, enduring legacy for our State's future generations. It will ensure we leave a better New South Wales to those who follow.

I turn to an example of how an asset can be transformed for the betterment of the people of this State. At the outset let me make it clear: the conversion of assets will be done only when it is demonstrably in the interests of the people of New South Wales and where imperatives such as risk or diminishing returns require. There is such a need and opportunity within a small component of the energy sector. I remind the House the delivery of electricity to New South Wales households involves, firstly, the generation of the power; transmission of the power along what industry insiders commonly call "poles and wires"; and the selling, or retailing, of the power. Each step is currently owned and managed either by state-owned corporations or by privately owned corporations.

The Coalition envisages that the only part of that chain which the community would want considered for conversion to the State Infrastructure Fund is the retailing component. The urgency arises because the people of New South Wales have already lost value from that asset since 2002 when the State Labor Government allowed private retailers to approach and sign up electricity customers of the State-owned corporations, EnergyAustralia, Integral Energy and Country Energy. In the metropolitan area alone an estimated 20 per cent of electricity customers have taken up offers and moved their contracts to buy electricity from private corporations, including AGL and Origin Energy. The success of these private companies in obtaining and retaining customers demonstrates broad satisfaction by those who have chosen these retailers. As the Coalition parties believe competition is the ultimate positive for consumers, this transfer is on the one hand welcomed. On the other hand it is concerning because of the loss of asset value, without return, for the people of New South Wales.

On the basis of the recent sale by the Beattie Labor Government in Queensland, the loss already sustained by New South Wales residents through the transfer of that 20 per cent of customers could be more than \$700 million. Off the back of the Beattie decision, it has been estimated that this State's retail electricity businesses could realise as much as \$4 billion to benefit the people of New South Wales. The benefits of transfer of these moneys to the proposed State Infrastructure Fund will be considerable. It amounts to \$4 billion that the Coalition will invest on behalf of the people of New South Wales. Every cent would be available to ensure the renewal and growth of essential public assets.

I stress again: the sale of the retail electricity business does not involve any sale of those State assets responsible for the generation, transmission and distribution of electricity. Nor does it include maintenance and repair, which will continue to be carried out by the non-retail component of the State-owned energy corporations. Nothing the Coalition is proposing will change current pricing arrangements. The existing pricing framework, established and agreed by the State Government, will continue. The Queensland model has shown how these funds can be unleashed for investment in other critical assets while also protecting workers' employment and entitlements.

Despite the Premier's claims to be getting on with the job of fixing the State's problems, in this area he has simply established an inquiry. The State's critical asset and service needs cannot afford the continued prevarication, the inaction and the gross financial irresponsibility of this State Labor Government. There are big challenges, and rightfully big expectations, from the residents of New South Wales for assets and services. For my colleagues and I, there can be no more critical area of public responsibility than our duty of care to our future generations. The role of public schools in honouring this duty is paramount and at the forefront of the Coalition's commitment to establish the State Infrastructure Fund. The Coalition members in this place share the

community's concern at the failure of this State Labor Government to address the fundamental needs of the renewal of capital infrastructure and the maintenance of our schools.

In addition to the usual annual capital budgetary provision for education, a Coalition Government would immediately commit \$2 billion from the State Infrastructure Fund for the renewal of the State's public schools. Our obligation to future generations demands no less. The program will help guarantee the future success and progress of this State into the decades and century ahead. The public school system is the foundation upon which this State has prospered and grown since Henry Parkes introduced his Public Instruction Act in 1880 and the State's first Liberal Premier, Joseph Carruthers, made public education free in 1906.

Whilst we cannot underestimate the contribution to our future generations given by the State's valued teachers, experts including Professor Tony Vinson also highlight the significance of our school's physical conditions to learning outcomes. A recent survey by the State's primary school principals confirms what most school communities already know: after 12 years of Labor too many of our public schools buildings are in poor condition. The reports of leaking roofs, sewage overflows, concrete cancer, subsidence and the like attest to the problems faced by school communities across the State.

Empty Labor promises will no longer be tolerated. Hardworking teachers and our future generations expect and are entitled to better. To ensure a bond of trust is re-established between school communities and government, I renew the Coalition's commitment to legislate for a publicly accessible asset register that will list all of the State's public education assets, their condition and a time frame for renewal or repair. This will allow a clear focus in the use of the State Infrastructure Fund and allow every citizen in New South Wales to know the details of their education assets and how their government is managing them. This approach offers a stark contrast to the lack of transparency or any publicly understood criteria involved in the annual allocation of capital or maintenance funding under Labor.

In the twenty-first century New South Wales residents, New South Wales students and New South Wales teachers should not, and will not, accept less than first-class conditions in our public schools. A Liberal-Nationals government is committed to ensuring public schools are modern and welcoming. Fifty-year-old science labs, libraries, staff rooms and toilet blocks that do not meet today's standards are not acceptable. In investing funds, the Coalition will apply ecologically sustainable principles and ensure the latest technology is available for our future generations. Our vision is to ensure no public school community has to make do with second-rate physical assets.

The Coalition's commitment to the establishment of the State Infrastructure Fund is founded in our belief that our generation has an obligation to hand on to our children and the generations to come greater opportunities, a better environment and a sustainable future. A modern, first-class public education system will be critical to achieving this vision—a vision the Coalition will deliver through the sale of a diminishing retail electricity asset and by reinvesting the proceeds in our greatest assets: our children and our future generations.

This budget was a chance for the Government to face up to the challenges of tomorrow, but it missed the opportunity. It did no more than give just a passing nod to the problems of yesterday—the problems it has converted, through its neglect, into the crises of today. What the budget gives us is only more schemes without direction, record spending without the certainty of results, and promises without hope or substance. In short, it is just another budget of Labor spin. And the spinner-in-chief is revealed as a sort of Rumpelstiltskin in reverse—as the Brothers Grimm described him, a man who claimed he could spin straw into gold. Instead, we are faced with the latest in a line of budgets that takes the golden future of New South Wales and spins it into straw. Labor's record of massive spending with scarce results makes one bet a sure thing. When all the money is spread around and spent—and when we have so little to show for it—we will be in no position to say, "That's gold!" With all the Labor spin in the world, all we will have left is the straw.

Mr ANDREW STONER (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [11.21 p.m.]: Budgets are the vehicles by which governments implement their vision. They are the mechanisms through which governments drive progress. They are the tools that governments use to improve the livelihood of the people they represent. And it follows that central to a well-structured, well-crafted budget are vision and leadership. What the Lemna Labor Government delivered on Tuesday was not a budget. It lacked direction. It lacked vision. And, at its very core, it lacked leadership. In the absence of these ingredients, the papers tabled were nothing more than a compilation of numbers—something we would expect of a chief financial officer, or as an attachment to an annual report.

Although, in the light of the unrealistic assumptions—like 2.5 per cent wage growth—that underpin its central conclusions, I have my reservations whether this document would meet private sector accounting

standards. But New South Wales is not a listed company, and the people of New South Wales are not shareholders. They are stakeholders in a democracy that is charged with the responsibility of delivering services and infrastructure, and that ultimately determines their quality of life. They deserved and expected much better from their elected Government.

In my budget reply this morning I wish to make three critical points. Firstly, it is no achievement to acquire record revenues in times of unprecedented national economic prosperity. Secondly, given this prosperity, the challenge for the State Labor Government is to ensure that taxpayers' dollars are spent wisely. Thirdly, and most importantly, New South Wales cannot improve its position through better services and infrastructure without strong leadership. If there is one message I wish to leave with the House this morning, it is this: New South Wales will never regain its status as the premier State until Morris Iemma starts acting like a Premier—until he starts taking decisions that are bigger than the electoral prospects of the Labor Party, and bigger than the unions. We simply cannot reposition ourselves as the number one State until Morris Iemma starts taking decisions that are in the best interests of the entire State of New South Wales.

The first point I wish to make is that it is not difficult to collect record revenues in times of prosperity. And there is no doubt this is true of the Carr-Iemma Labor Government. Over the past decade it has doubled its revenues, from \$22 billion in 1996 to an estimated \$44 billion this year. That is a staggering statistic when one considers that the consumer price index over the same period hovers around 2.5 per cent per annum. The main reason for this explosion in revenue is the strength of the national economy—as a result of the strong and decisive leadership of the Howard-Vaile Federal Coalition Government. Australia is experiencing almost a perfect storm of prosperity. Unemployment is at a 32-year low, driven down by trade and taxation reforms. Inflation has been kept in check as a result of labour market reforms—reforms that have been opposed by Labor every step of the way.

I want to take this opportunity to dismiss the Government's claim that New South Wales is not in a position to benefit as much as other Australian States from the national growth in mining and finance. I remind the House that more than 21 per cent of the Australian mining industry is employed in New South Wales, and 20 per cent of the total sector wages and salaries are paid to New South Welshmen and women. We are a resource-rich State.

With regard to finance, more than half of the companies in the S&P 50 are headquartered in Sydney, as are five of the largest domestic banks and most of the regional offices of global investment banks. There is no doubt that New South Wales is well positioned to benefit from the growth in mining and finance. More broadly, given factors entirely outside the Premier's control, as a result of circumstance and history New South Wales is well positioned to reap the windfall rewards of Australia's prosperity. While the Premier had minimal influence over the conditions that rendered him this record budget revenue, he does control the way in which it is spent. And I remind the Premier: It is not difficult to write cheques, but it is difficult to write them wisely.

I started this speech by reminding this House that the New South Wales Government is not a corporation. The benchmark of a government's success must be the standard of services and infrastructure it delivers—services such as education, health and policing, and infrastructure such as schools, hospitals and roads—services and infrastructure that make a material difference to the quality of everyday lives. My concern is that over the past decade we have witnessed a doubling of budget revenues but there has not been a commensurate improvement in services and infrastructure.

With regard to Health, for example, in March this year 11,000 more people were on hospital surgery waiting lists than when Labor took office in 1995. The recent population health survey found that people from regional and rural New South Wales had greater difficulty accessing health services than their city counterparts. The survey also found that in every country region dental health was a serious issue of concern. With regard to Roads, commuters are spending more of their time in traffic, and it is estimated congestion in our cities will increase by 40 per cent by 2020.

Last year the Auditor-General found that New South Wales is rebuilding its roads at a rate less than half its long-term target, and that one-third of our road network was built in the 1960s or earlier. Is it any surprise that in the past year 449 people died on our roads, the majority in country areas? With regard to Education, it seems that poor infrastructure is adversely affecting our children's potential. At year 3 New South Wales students perform above the national average in terms of the three major disciplines: reading, writing and numeracy. But by year 7 the system has failed them, and they are performing below the national average in these disciplines.

If the Premier took time to talk to the people on the street, he would find they are less interested in the inputs of government than the outputs. People's focus is not on the police department budget but on whether their children are safe. They are less interested in the financial mechanisms by which we fund infrastructure than knowing roads are up to scratch. An additional \$500 million dollars for education has little resonance if parents know their daughter is learning in sub-standard classrooms or their son is being bullied in the schoolyard. It is of little concern if the health budget now stands at \$12.5 billion if people with decaying teeth face a five-year wait for treatment or if country mothers are forced to travel hours to deliver their baby, far from the support of their family, because a maternity service has been closed.

I reiterate my point that it is not difficult to write cheques, but it is difficult to write them wisely. My concern is that for a decade the Carr-Iemma Labor Government has poured increasing amounts of taxpayers' dollars into the bureaucracy. Budget revenues have doubled since 1996 but basic standards are not improving. Over the past ten years every sector of the economy has undergone economic reform and every industry has been required to enhance its productivity to retain its competitiveness and improve its output, except our public sector bureaucracies. Evidence of this is the Iemma Government's refusal to support the Coalition's legislation to establish an asset register for the Department of Education. This is basic business practice that will enhance accountability and efficiency. It would prevent the recent absurd situation when local police were forced to intervene in a dispute between two local country schools over a demountable classroom when there were 15 surplus demountable classrooms at Belmont High School. In fact, it is astounding to think that a department with more than \$17 billion in assets has not already rectified the situation.

I believe it is a symbolic issue that cuts to the core of the Iemma Labor Government. The Government lacks the experience, expertise and ability to manage effectively, and this is highlighted by the fact that over the past year expenses grew at 8.2 per cent, a far cry from the budgeted increase of 5.7 per cent. On Tuesday the Premier promised more money for education, and on behalf of parents and teachers, I issue this warning to him: It is fiscally irresponsible to continue to throw money at a bureaucracy that at its core is broken, a bureaucracy that under Labor has become highly politicised and remote from the communities it is supposed to serve.

Today the Liberal-Nationals Coalition announced that it would allocate an additional \$2 billion to schools. That equates to an equivalent of close to an additional \$1 million for every New South Wales public school. And importantly, I can assure the House that under a Coalition Government additional dollars will not simply be handed over to the Labor mate who now runs the Department of Education and Training to be absorbed by an unrestrained and uncontained bureaucracy. It will be accompanied by serious and fundamental reform that will streamline the process of administration, introduce a new standard of fiscal discipline, ensure that taxpayers' funds are not lost in the ether but make it intact past the school gate, and deliver the type of accountability that taxpayers deserve and expect.

The final point I make is about leadership. Inherent to a successful budget is strong leadership: a willingness to make the right decisions, even in the face of criticism. This morning the Liberal-Nationals Coalition announces its alternative budget, the centrepiece of which is a State Infrastructure Fund, to kick-start a wave of investment into education, health, transport, water, infrastructure and roads. The fund will be backed by the proceeds of the sale of retail electricity. I have no doubt it will precipitate a wave of commentary and opinion pieces in the tabloids about whether we have made ourselves a political target, and speculation among pundits about whether it is the right time in the election cycle for bold initiatives.

But let me say this quite clearly: when the Coalition shadow Cabinet considers issues that fundamentally affect the future of our great State, our actions will not be influenced by considerations of politics or media spin. The only question we debate, and the only question we seek an answer to, is: what is the right thing to do for the people of New South Wales? The Government has a responsibility to invest its limited dollars in the areas that render the best social returns. Increasingly, retail electricity does not meet this criterion. The retail sector is essentially that part of the electricity chain that people contact for connections, disconnections and billing purposes. What is to be sold to fund essential infrastructure is effectively the customer lists; it does not include any physical assets such as poles, wires and substations.

Since the introduction of competition into the retail electricity market in 2002 State-owned corporations have steadily lost market share. This means that State-owned assets, which belong to the people of New South Wales, have lost and continue to lose value. The right thing to do for New South Wales is to exercise the value of these assets now and reinvest the proceeds in alternative assets such as education, water and roads and iconic projects like the Bells Line Expressway proposal, which has the potential to open up the Central West. Such projects will render higher social returns and reposition New South Wales as the premier State, provided we can do so while properly safeguarding those people who may be adversely affected, such as workers in the industry.

This is obviously an issue close to my heart, as a job lost in a country town has an impact, not just on the individual or his or her family but upon the entire community which suffers from the loss of income. Under our proposal workers will be afforded a right of return guarantee and protection of conditions, benefits and entitlements. Retail electricity customers also need to be remembered. Through competition it is highly likely they will enjoy better prices and services.

Change is never easy, but that does not mean we should not embrace it. On the contrary, this change is a better way forward for New South Wales. The robust and constructive debate that took place among the Coalition ranks stands in stark contrast to the processes of the Iemma Labor Government. Over the past two years we have seen the rise and rise of the Pygmalion premiership—a premiership that is not vested in one individual, but is rather a construct of political polling, advertising and savvy media manipulation. Like a modern day incarnation of Professor Higgins and Colonel Pickering, the Labor Party power brokers, Mark Arbib and Mike Kaiser, picked the metaphorical flower girl from the streets of Covent Garden in the form of the unassuming, retiring and mediocre Minister, Morris Iemma. The Labor Party invested in him with elocution lessons and an image transformation in a desperate bid to transform him into something he is not—a leader.

That much has been repeatedly demonstrated through his actions: his decision to pursue a desalination plant when his Government knows that recycling is the right way forward; his failure to visit the drought-ravaged regions west of the divide during their time of need; his decision to allow Mark Arbib to influence appointments to his ministry; his disappearance after the election, leaving his Government wandering; his decision, in the face of a budget surplus, to remove funds from non-government schools—a decision that is grounded in union and Labor ideology and has nothing to do with financial constraints; and even in this budget, his decision not to deliver projects in seats that the Labor Party did not win, such as a trade school in the Tweed, the Balranald hospital in Murray-Darling and the Tomaree community hospital in Port Stephens—this from a Premier who should govern for the entire State.

Leadership cannot be taught, and regardless of how many image consultants tramp through Morris Iemma's door, regardless of the speech training he receives, whether he has the appropriate necktie to suit the occasion, or whether he masters the trick of over-emphasising key words, no-one can make Morris Iemma a leader. At the end of the day a spokesperson can deliver a speech, a fashion guru can dress for any occasion, but only true leaders will make the right decisions regardless of the criticism they might face. I tender the guess that whether it be in relation to constructing this budget or making the decision to build a desalination plant, whether it be the best way to handle climate change or the future direction for education, the one question Premier Morris Iemma never put to his ministry is this: What is the right thing to do for the people of New South Wales, regardless of media reaction, the Opposition's response or the state of the political polls?

Let me end where I began. Ross Perot famously once said inventories can be managed, but people must be led. The document the Premier tabled on Tuesday was a document to manage inventories. It contained no vision, no solutions to the real challenges facing our State, no bold direction about the way forward. In essence it is more of the same when New South Wales needs anything but more of the same. What more can we expect from a party that has elected to its helm not a leader, but a collage of ideas contrived by the minds of Sussex Street, political apparatchiks who are more interested in the future of their careers within the Labor Party machine than driving forward change and progress in New South Wales?

Question—That these bills be now agreed to in principle—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

Bills agreed to in principle.

Passing of the Bills

Bills declared passed and transmitted to the Legislative Council with a message seeking its concurrence in the bills.

BUDGET ESTIMATES AND RELATED PAPERS

Financial Year 2007-08

Mr JOHN AQUILINA (Riverstone—Leader of the House) [11.41 a.m.]: I move:

That this House take note of the budget estimates and related papers for 2007-08.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Daryl Maguire and set down as an order of the day for a future day.

LABOR ELECTION VICTORY

PORT KEMBLA IMPORT BERTH

Debate resumed from 7 June 2007.

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK (South Coast) [11.42 a.m.]: I make a number of observations about the motion moved by the member for Wollongong. I do have not sufficient time to respond to everything that is taking place in the Illawarra but I will attempt to do so. I shall deal with each paragraph in the motion. The first paragraph seeks to congratulate the Government on the outstanding result in the 2007 election. We all congratulate the Government. Indeed, we congratulate each other. However, it would have been more gracious for the member for Wollongong to congratulate all members on being elected, no matter what their political persuasion—Labor, Liberal, Greens, the Christian Democratic Party or Shooters Party. It was a little ungracious for her to move a motion congratulating herself and her own members. In fact, it is bordering on being un-Australian to move that kind of a motion. That is not what we do in Australia. We congratulate each other, no matter what our political persuasion. I am a bit disappointed in the member for Wollongong. She is usually more gracious than that. She is usually a little more modest, although she has a lot to be modest about.

The second paragraph of the motion acknowledges the ongoing dedication and hard work of Government members that resulted in the fourth straight Labor victory. I turn to the hard work of members in the Illawarra region, and the hard work that resulted in so much being achieved in the Illawarra and South Coast on matters such as public transport. Let us look at their hard work to stop rail cuts. Did they once stand up to defend the rail system in this place? Not once in this place did they support their constituents on public transport. What have they done about the lack of toilet carriages on the Illawarra-South Coast rail service? People are genuinely concerned about this issue. On one occasion a person had to be medicated because passengers have to travel from the South Coast to Sydney, which is a 3½ hour journey—and sometimes longer if there are delays—without toilet facilities. Have members representing the Illawarra spoken about that in this House? Not once have they spoken about problems with the public transport system.

How hard have they campaigned for police numbers in the Illawarra? Before the last election they could find another 650 people to train and send them out into the electorates but in the four years before the election the Wollongong command was down 20 officers and the Lake Illawarra command, the second busiest in the State, was down 28 officers. That is a total of 48 fewer officers than the numbers announced in 2003, in two very busy, high crime areas. Did members opposite stand up and support their police? Not once did they support their police in this place. In fact, they still do not do so. A couple of schools in the area have been thrown some dollars in the budget, but members opposite have not spoken about the school maintenance backlog. They have not stood up for their individual schools in this place, nor have they worked hard to achieve anything for their own electorates. I have not heard them or seen them, and I am not aware of any correspondence. In fact, schools in their electorates continue to be as neglected as every other school throughout the State. Members in the Illawarra have not worked hard for their electorates.

The member for Wollongong believes she has worked very hard on the Port Kembla issue, and she has tried to condemn the Opposition for its public statements. I turn to some of the public statements on the Port Kembla issue made yesterday in the *Illawarra Mercury*. A friend of the member for Wollongong, Arthur Rorris, from the South Coast Trades and Labour Council, stated in respect of the budget,:

There is no funding for a feasibility study into the completion of the Maldon Dombarton link, or for any other alternative routes to Sydney.

There needs to be greater future planning that allows us to make full use of the expanded port, and these issues of transport infrastructure are important ones that need to be addressed.

Ms Noreen Hay: Did you write this?

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK: No, that is a direct quote from Arthur Rorris, a close personal friend of the member of Wollongong. It states there has been inadequate infrastructure planning and no discussion about the Maldon-Dombarton link. The Government has had 12 years to bring that project back on line, but it has not taken the time to even consider a feasibility study on it. It has lapsed because the Government will not address

infrastructure issues. The budget blow-outs and delays in projects in the Illawarra reflect not hard work but laziness on the part of Illawarra members and an incapacity to fight for projects in their area. The redevelopment of Port Kembla is vital to the area. It has been held back by the Iemma Labor Government's incompetence. The balloon loop access project has been deferred by a year from 2007 to 2008 and the \$4 million allocated for 2006-2007 will not be spent. Where will that money go? Where was the fight for that project to remain on schedule?

Meanwhile, the cost of the inner harbour development has blown out from \$86 million to \$97.2 million, costing the taxpayers of this State an extra \$11.2 million. Where were the Government members when that was occurring? The Port Kembla redevelopment is essential to employment and growth in the region, but a number of aspects of the project have been delayed or suffered enormous cost blow-outs. There was a blow-out of \$29 million on another infrastructure project, the northern distributor. Labor's infrastructure mismanagement is costing taxpayers millions.

The member for Wollongong took great pride in announcing the Wollongong Psychiatric Emergency Care Centre. Work on the centre, which was supposed to commence in 2006, still has not started. She has allowed that project to sit there with nothing taking place. Where is the hard work? Where is the effort? She is just sitting there, saying very little. The Helensburgh Public School upgrade was due in 2009 but has been delayed until 2010. Corrimal police station, previously slated for delivery in 2007, has been delayed a year and is not expected to be completed until 2008. Did the member for Wollongong mention those projects last week or at any other time in this place? No. She and her Government colleagues have allowed these projects to blow out and to be delayed.

I cannot forget my friend the member for Kiama, who, before the election, promised that there would be an upgrade of Kiama police station. This was quite a controversial issue in the lead-up to the State election. The Opposition promised we would upgrade that police station to a 24-hour police presence but the Government promised a refurbishment. Where was that in the State budget? Nowhere. That election promise did not even appear. The member for Kiama is not even in the Chamber. He should have been fighting hard for that to be included in the budget.

Mr Kerry Hickey: He is out there doing his job.

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK: He is not doing his job.

Mr Robert Coombs: He is delivering great things for housing.

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK: Oh, he is a Minister! The blockheads on the Government side say that he is a Minister, so that allows him to be lazy and to neglect his electorate. That is what he has done. There has been no upgrade of the Kiama police station.

Mr Thomas George: Look out, here he comes.

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK: He may be on his way, but I have my doubts that he will be racing down here and working hard to represent Kiama. I do not think he will be seen in Kiama for some time. I reiterate that I oppose this un-Australian motion. [*Time expired.*]

Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO (Penrith) [11.52 a.m.]: The result of the State election in the seat of Penrith reflected two sentiments in the local community. The first was a belief that Morris Iemma was the man who would deliver on his commitments, improve services for local families, and strongly oppose John Howard's radical industrial relations changes. The second was a complete rejection of the New South Wales Opposition with its grab-bag of unfunded promises and its plans to sack 20,000 hardworking public service workers while handing over industrial relations powers to the Commonwealth Government. During the campaign I doorknocked thousands of homes, from the units on Bringelly Street, Kingswood, to the homes with very long and steep driveways of Blaxland, Glenbrook and Lapstone. I stood at railway stations, construction sites, local parks, shopping centres and schools throughout the electorate.

Mr Thomas George: I hope you wore a hard hat.

Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO: Of course. The families kept telling me one thing: Deliver on your promises if you are elected. This week the Iemma Government began meeting its commitments to the people of

Penrith and the lower Blue Mountains. On Monday I stood alongside Luke Priddis and Craig Gower of the Penrith Panthers—we did not mention the last 30 seconds of the Roosters match on Saturday night—to announce \$5 million in funding for upgrades to CUA Stadium. The record New South Wales budget, which was announced on Tuesday in this place, began delivering on our election commitments: money for upgrades at Emu Plains railway station, a trade school at Jamison High School, planning money for the \$80 million upgrades to Nepean hospital, funding for significant improvements to Penrith Selective High School of \$5 million, traffic lights at the dangerous intersection of Mulgoa and Jamison roads, and \$3.1 million for new public housing and upgrades to existing housing stock—courtesy of the Minister for Housing! The Iemma Government is delivering on our promises—all fully funded, fully costed promises—that will improve services for local families.

Compare that with the unfunded promises of the current Leader of the Opposition, who at the time of the election was shadow Treasurer, totalling tens of billions of dollars. In the end, out of desperation in the dying days of the campaign, he had to take a hit for his besieged leader by releasing one of the most ridiculous election costings ever delivered by a shadow Treasurer. The only saving grace was that he declined to don his Speedos and do it on the sands of Bondi Beach. That was the rock that finally burst the bows of Debnam's sinking ship. Therefore, it is not surprising that the electorate of Penrith rejected the New South Wales Coalition at the polling booths. Put simply, the local families just could not trust it to deliver its promises.

Sadly, the New South Wales Opposition learnt nothing from its disastrous 2003 campaign. Members on this side will remember that was the campaign during which the Coalition threatened to sack 700 Department of Community Services [DOCS] caseworkers in a desperate attempt to pay for its promises. At the 2007 election the Opposition targeted the electorate of Penrith, but it could not make a connection with local families. That was best highlighted when the former Leader of the Opposition staged a media event with an ordinary Penrith family. The problem was that the ordinary Penrith family owned several investment properties. Those people were highlighted as ordinary mum and dad investors but they were the owners of not one property, not two, three, four, five, six, seven or eight properties. I think the figure was nine. It might have been seven in New South Wales and a couple in Queensland. However, they were owners of many properties.

Then there was the Nepean hospital press conference, where Mr Debnam was drowned out by hospital staff questioning his industrial relations policies. When he was trying to explain his election policies and promises one gentleman remarked, "You must be Houdini!" The families of Penrith saw the in-fighting going on in the New South Wales Liberal Party. That was close to them. They saw what happened to a good man, Mr Steve Pringle, the former member for Hawkesbury, who was speared by his own party, and decided that Peter Debnam was too much of a risk to lead New South Wales. I am proud to serve as a member of the Iemma Government, a Government that is committed to getting on with the job of improving services for families in this State. Better services for families was the key message of the 2007 election, and that is what local families expect from the Iemma Government. I look forward to working hard to ensure that the Government lives up to its promises, and as the member for Penrith I look forward to delivering for my local community.

Ms PRU GOWARD (Goulburn) [11.57 a.m.]: I oppose the motion, which is in three parts, and I support my colleague the member for South Coast. Of course we do not congratulate the Government on its outstanding result. It is a disgraceful result and in large part the result of amazing spending on advertising. There has not been hard work by Government members unless one counts the hard work of government advertising. In my electorate there is gross neglect of our public facilities—our schools and our hospitals. I thought the Government was supposed to govern for the whole of New South Wales, but apparently that does not extend to regional New South Wales. The seat of Goulburn has rundown schools, children in overcrowded classrooms, hospitals that are disgraceful, waiting lists that continue to blow out and a disgraceful public transport system, particularly our train system.

There is no shortsightedness on our part as to the redevelopment of Port Kembla. There is, as there should be with government initiatives, proper concern about the unanswered questions and the long-term viability of the project. We want the best for New South Wales and that means the decentralisation of Sydney and the regional development of New South Wales. Port Kembla is a crucial part of that proposal. But questions have to be answered—questions that the Government has not even raised let alone answered. The Maldon-Dumbarton rail link and the upgrade of the Princes Highway should be part of the redevelopment of Port Kembla, if it is to make any economic sense. They are two obvious examples of questions that have not been asked, let alone answered.

There is no point investing hundreds of millions of dollars in the redevelopment of Port Kembla if it sits like a white elephant because of a problem with shipping goods out of Port Kembla. The proposed rail link

to Moss Vale, which is in my electorate, is a wonderful opportunity for the people of Goulburn. The business community of the Southern Highlands and the Wingecarribee Shire Council have invested considerable time and effort in developing the concept of Moss Vale as an inland port. They have finally received Federal Government funding to get this project underway—no thanks to the very lazy Labor Iemma Government. But what is the point of redeveloping Moss Vale if the State Government cannot commit to an upgrade of the railway line from Port Kembla to Moss Vale?

Ms Noreen Hay: It was your lot that cancelled it.

Ms PRU GOWARD: No, that is not true. There is no point redeveloping Port Kembla as a car facility if the inland port, which is one of the mooted second points in the redevelopment, is not provided with sufficient quality rail services to make the movement of cars from Port Kembla to Moss Vale viable and sensible. The Government does not explain how cars will be moved to Port Kembla without damage due to poor, run-down rail stock. The automotive industry has grave concerns about the redevelopment of Port Kembla and the Moss Vale inland port because of the Government's failure to commit to the upgrade of the rail link between Port Kembla and Moss Vale.

The Government cannot undertake economic redevelopment and decentralisation just by putting money into Port Kembla, because it is a seat that Labor needs to win, without considering the redevelopment as part of an integrated solution that requires an integrated response. That is the real failure of the Government. It picks issues one at a time and it picks seats one at a time without looking at the bigger picture and seeing the need for an integrated response. The redevelopment of Port Kembla, in particular, enables the Government to duck the real scandal, that is, the selling off of Sydney Harbour for real estate and land tax revenue. The real scandal is that the Government is seeking to sell off one of the largest and most fortuitous natural harbours and ports in the world for the sake of a few tax dollars.

Mr STEVE WHAN (Monaro—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.02 p.m.]: I support the motion and congratulate the member for Wollongong and other Labor members in the Illawarra who have done a fine job representing their electorates, as Labor members do, and delivering results. I take the opportunity the motion affords me to express my gratitude to the people of the Monaro electorate for the faith they have shown in me to continue to deliver for them over the next four years as, I believe, I successfully did over the first four years I represented them.

The election results in the electorate of Monaro were very pleasing. There was a swing to the Labor Party, and we ended up with a 6.3 per cent margin. Just three elections ago it was a safe seat for The Nationals, who held it by a 16 per cent margin. The results in the last election were a tremendous turnaround and show that people in this State will not put up with The Nationals taking seats for granted and not delivering. They whinge and whine and make excuses, but they do not deliver. When Labor was elected in Monaro, the electorate saw delivery on commitments. I am very grateful for the electors' support in endorsing the work I have done in the Monaro electorate.

I will refer to some of the areas. Cooma was a tremendous result and reflected the fact that we were delivering initiatives such as an extension to the jail and upgrades to the TAFE college. Labor and I won the Cooma booths for the first time in many years. Labor also won the Bombala booth. I am very grateful to the people of Bombala who put their faith in me. We are delivering a brand new hospital in Bombala. The people in that area can see Labor delivering, after so many years of excuses from the Opposition. During the election campaign the people of Bombala rejected The Nationals and their efforts to criticise various Government initiatives. They rejected the press release put out by The Nationals candidate, in which he claimed that the Government had not approved a development application for a softwood mill. In fact, it had been approved a year before. The people said that if he did not know what was going on they would not vote for him.

Queanbeyan again was a terrific endorsement of the Government's program to build a new hospital and State government office block and to continue to deliver better services, such as a new trade school at Queanbeyan High School. Those projects are underway and funded in the budget. The Queanbeyan people rejected The Nationals. In television advertisements, letterbox drops and phone calls to houses The Nationals said that no new hospital was being built. The Queanbeyan people saw the construction work that was being carried out on the hospital site. They scratched their heads and wondered whether The Nationals had bothered to have a look.

They rejected The Nationals negative campaigning about no solution to Lanyon Drive traffic problems. In fact, that project had already been announced. The people in Cooma and Queanbeyan rejected the recorded

phone call messages from the former National Party member of Parliament who did a John Howard-style recorded message saying, "Don't vote for Steve Whan because he voted with Sydney Labor to sell Snowy Hydro." They knew that was an outright lie. They knew my position all along had been in opposition to the sale of Snowy Hydro. In fact, many people came up to me in the street and asked why The Nationals would say that when it was not true.

The people in the electorate rejected the negative campaigning of The Nationals and decided instead to endorse the delivery of services by the Iemma Labor Government. I am very pleased that they did. It goes to show what good Country Labor representation can do for an electorate. The Nationals have gone from a 16 per cent margin in their favour three elections ago to a 6.3 per cent margin against them. That is because the electorate is smarter than The Nationals give them credit for. We keep seeing their negativity in this place and we saw it again today in the Leader of The Nationals' reply to the Budget Speech. His speech consisted of 15 minutes of negativity and the last five minutes of personal abuse of the Premier. That is why the people rejected them at the last election and why they have shown their faith in Labor members, who will deliver for areas like Monaro and the Illawarra. The members who represent the Illawarra continue to deliver for their electorates. That is why they are increasing their margins.

Mr WAYNE MERTON (Baulkham Hills) [12.07 p.m.]: Here it is Thursday morning and the third-eleven cheer squad is out in force, led by the member for Monaro. He is always good for a laugh. I applaud his enthusiasm, but that is where it ends. What would the member for Wollongong do if she were not bashing up the Howard Government? She would be lost without the Howard Government.

Ms Noreen Hay: We would flourish with \$3 billion in GST.

Mr WAYNE MERTON: They would flourish! Keep going! Unemployment is at its lowest level in 30 years. Interest rates under the Howard Government have been 7 per cent; under Hawke and Keating they were 13.5 per cent, Noreen. Do you want to hear more?

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarrity): Order! I remind members to direct their comments through the Chair.

Mr WAYNE MERTON: Your Government would be on the financial rocks but for the Howard Government. If the member prays when she goes to bed—and she should—she should say a special prayer for John Howard. But for John Howard, this Government would be in liquidation; it would out of business. Members opposite should not forget that.

Let us get back to the substance of this ingratiating, self-praising motion that one would expect from the third eleven. They congratulate the Government on the outstanding result in the March 2007 election. Members opposite might think it was an outstanding result, but the reality is that the Government lost seats. Do you know what, Noreen? Next time when the people speak, with a swing of a little over 4 per cent, you are out of business. Members opposite will be over here and, if this House is lucky, you will not be one of the members sitting on this bench.

Ms Tanya Gadiel: Point of order: I wonder whether the member is aware that that swing would have to be about 30 per cent.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarrity): Order! There is no point of order. However, I take this opportunity to remind the member that he should refer to members by their correct title.

Mr WAYNE MERTON: Point well taken, and I accept it. The motion amounts to self-praise at its worst. Let us have some substance in this debate, because there has been none from the other side. The Opposition proposes an amendment. I move:

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

this House:

- (1) acknowledges that self-praise is no recommendation and totally un-Australian.
- (2) condemns the State Labor Government for its record of 12 years of broken election and budget promises.

This Government has left a legacy of broken promises and shattered ideals. Members opposite think they have done well. I will relate what happened in the Baulkham Hills area the day after the Northwest Transitway was opened and just two weeks before the election. It was supposed to be the big boost to get Baulkham Hills into the Labor fold. On the first day people turned up at the old Baulkham Hills post office to catch a bus. They could not get a bus, Noreen, because there was a queue of 200 people. There was a long queue because the Government had diverted about 50 per cent of the buses to the Northwest Transitway, where they travel up and down with only three or four passengers. People are going to Baulkham Hills every morning to be confronted by queues of 70, 80 or 100 people while buses travel almost empty up and down the transitway. Kids even play games guessing how many people will be on a bus and the kid who predicts "one" normally wins. This Government has left a legacy— *[Time expired.]*

Ms NOREEN HAY (Wollongong—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.13 p.m.], in reply: Confusion continues to reign in the New South Wales Opposition. The member for South Coast again talked about lazy members. I am the member for Wollongong and I assure members that wherever I go in the region I never see her. I did not intend to respond to the member for South Coast's personal attacks. She is far more taken with my accent than with my being a hardworking, equal Australian. Members opposite keep talking about the Maldon-Dumbarton railway. A Coalition Government cancelled that project. If the New South Wales Opposition had its way, there would be no expansion of the port facilities at Port Kembla and we would not have to worry about the—

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarrity): Order! I remind members that Hansard needs to hear the contribution of the Parliamentary Secretary.

Ms NOREEN HAY: We would not have to worry about the rail and road infrastructure at Port Kembla if members of the Opposition had their way, because there would be no expansion and no car imports. That observation is based on their own leader's statements. Members of the Opposition have a cheek talking about Port Kembla. We heard not one word out of them when their leaders spoke about cancelling the expansion of the harbour. The Government has committed \$140 million for infrastructure projects, but we have heard not one word out of members opposite. I recognise the efforts of the member for Penrith and the member for Monaro. These dedicated, hardworking members have proven themselves with their outstanding results in being returned as members of the Iemma Government.

How dare the member for South Coast criticise the funding allocated to mental health. That is unheard of. This Government has committed \$1 billion a year to improve mental health services, but the member—being picky, negative, whinge, whinge, as usual—cannot congratulate it. Members of the Opposition talk about schools. If they had won government they would have sacked 29,000 public servants. We heard not one word from the member for South Coast about that. Members of the Opposition made a huge number of unfunded promises during the election campaign; they promised anything if they thought it might win them government, but they were not able to find the funding. They were going to sack 29,000 front-line workers.

Mr Daryl Maguire: Point of order: I ask you to direct the Parliamentary Secretary to tell the truth in this House. She is misleading the House; she is deliberately misconstruing in her reply. I ask you to ask her to reply professionally to the matter raised rather than introduce new material.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarrity): Order! There is no point of order.

Ms NOREEN HAY: Members of the Opposition have just corrected me: it was 20,000 workers they were going to sack. The member for Goulburn talked about her wonderful electorate.

Mr John Williams: Point of order: The Parliamentary Secretary is misleading the House. The Opposition was not going to sack 20,000 public servants.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarrity): Order! There is no point of order.

Ms NOREEN HAY: The member for Goulburn again talked about the Maldon-Dumbarton railway project, which her own party cancelled. Members opposite said nothing when their leaders announced before the election that they would cancel the expansion of Port Kembla. We are now hearing criticism about dry-dock proposals and all the rest of it. What a joke! The member for Goulburn would do well to travel around her electorate and learn where everything is. She failed to win the seat of Epping but she does represent the seat of Goulburn.

Mr Steve Whan: It was her second choice.

Ms NOREEN HAY: As the member for Monaro said, it was her second choice. She should get around her electorate and find out what the people want. I have no qualms about congratulating the Iemma Government. Its Ministers and members work hard. The people of New South Wales know what would have happened to this State if they had elected the mob opposite, who refuse to stand up to their mates in Canberra on behalf of New South Wales. They refuse to represent the people of New South Wales with regard to the \$3 billion GST rip-off from this State.

Question—That the words stand—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 48

Mr Amery	Mr Harris	Mr Pearce
Ms Andrews	Ms Hay	Mrs Perry
Mr Aquilina	Mr Hickey	Mr Rees
Mr Brown	Ms Hornery	Mr Sartor
Ms Burney	Ms Judge	Mr Shearan
Ms Burton	Ms Keneally	Mr Stewart
Mr Campbell	Mr Khoshaba	Ms Tebbutt
Mr Collier	Mr Koperberg	Mr Terenzini
Mr Coombs	Mr Lynch	Mr Tripodi
Mr Corrigan	Mr McBride	Mr Watkins
Mr Costa	Dr McDonald	Mr West
Mr Daley	Ms McKay	Mr Whan
Ms D'Amore	Mr McLeay	
Ms Firth	Ms McMahon	
Ms Gadiel	Ms Meagher	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Gibson	Mr Morris	Mr Ashton
Mr Greene	Mrs Paluzzano	Mr Martin

Noes, 37

Mr Aplin	Mr Hazzard	Mr Roberts
Mr Baird	Ms Hodgkinson	Mrs Skinner
Mr Baumann	Mrs Hopwood	Mr Smith
Ms Berejikian	Mr Humphries	Mr Souris
Mr Cansdell	Mr Kerr	Mr Stokes
Mr Constance	Mr Merton	Mr J. H. Turner
Mr Debnam	Mr Oakeshott	Mr R. W. Turner
Mr Draper	Mr O'Dea	Mr J. D. Williams
Mrs Fardell	Mr Page	Mr R. C. Williams
Mr Fraser	Mr Piccoli	
Ms Goward	Mr Piper	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mrs Hancock	Mr Provest	Mr George
Mr Hartcher	Mr Richardson	Mr Maguire

Pair

Mr Borger

Mr O'Farrell

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment negatived.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

OUT-OF-HOME CARE SERVICES

Ms TANYA GADIEL (Parramatta—Parliamentary Secretary) [11.28 a.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) welcomes the Minister for Community Services' recent announcement of the call for expressions of interest in providing out-of-home care services in the Parramatta electorate and across the State;
- (2) commends the Government for its record investment of \$617 million to expand these essential services for children who cannot live at home; and
- (3) condemns the Opposition for its failure to support the Government's commitment to vulnerable children.

I welcome the recent announcement by our new Minister for Community Services, Kevin Greene, on the \$617 million package to overhaul the care system for children who cannot live at home. Under the new system, non-government organisations providing foster care and other services will be funded through five-year agreements, ensuring children who cannot live at home receive the services and support they need. As Minister Greene has said before, these children have not had an easy time. The new system will ensure that organisations responsible for managing services for children who cannot live at home have a reliable source of income, so they can plan ahead to meet the needs of these children. This major funding boost will increase investment in out-of-home-care to \$310 million a year by 2009-10—up from \$172 million a year prior to the reform package. This overhaul is part of the Lemma Government's \$1.2 billion reform of the Department of Community Services.

The agreements will provide long-term stable funding so non-government agencies can give children in care better access to the education, counselling, health services and specialist therapy they need to catch up with their peers. Expressions of interest have been called from non-government organisations with expertise in providing care for children unable to live at home. This process will also throw open the door to any organisations that want to enter the out-of-home-care system for the first time. The funding boost will address also the increasing demand for foster care. More than ever we need to plan for the future so we can continue to provide a safe haven for children in need. There are currently more than 10,000 children in care and that number is expected to increase to around 12,000 by 2010-11.

Increasing community awareness about the need to bring up kids in stable, functioning homes and the need for greater confidence in the child protection system is seeing more children in need of out-of-home care. That is why we are also investing \$260 million in early intervention programs to work with families to prevent the escalation of problems that can result in children being forced to leave home. Improvements are already underway to better support foster carers by increasing care allowances, providing better training for foster carers, creating specialist intensive support services, and employing an additional 300 out-of-home care caseworkers. I am pleased to see that there will be a series of information sessions held around the State to help people understand the new system.

When the Coalition was last in government it slashed more than 1,000 positions, disbanded three police child mistreatment teams and closed 23 field offices around the State. The Coalition delivered its community services policy just two days before the 2003 election—under cover of the media obsession with the Iraq war—and that policy was to cut \$700 million from the budget and slash 675 caseworkers from the system. The Coalition's only policy going into the 2007 election was to cut 20,000 jobs from the public service—a policy that would have decimated our child protection system. In a \$27 billion spending spree the Coalition offered not a single cent for child protection—not one policy and not one idea to make life better for kids who are abused and neglected or at risk of harm. The New South Wales Coalition stands condemned for that.

This Government recognises that children have a right to grow up in a safe and nurturing environment. In some cases, such as the death of a child's parents or their incapacitation, this becomes impossible and an alternative home is sought for the child, whether with relatives or other appropriate carers. Also, tragically, some parents are unable to provide the kind of home that a child can remain safe within. Through its Helpline, the Department of Community Services receives upwards of 240,000 child protection reports every year. Most of these come from mandatory reporters—professionals who are legally required to notify when they think a child is being harmed or is at risk of being harmed—and some of them come from members of the community.

The most prevalent reasons for making a child protection report include exposure to domestic violence, neglect, physical abuse or risk of harm, and parental substance abuse. In the most severe cases, the Department of Community Services will recommend that a child be removed from a home either temporarily or

permanently. When a child is placed into out-of-home care, it may be that the child's care plan aims to restore the child to his or her parents, and in some cases the care order may last until that child reaches adulthood. There are several types of out-of-home care, including statutory care, supported care and voluntary care arrangements. In some of these arrangements, the Minister, the Director General of the Department of Community Services or another person may be allocated parental responsibility by the Children's Court. As I mentioned, there are currently more than 10,500 children in some type of out-of-home care in New South Wales. That is why the 2007-08 budget allocates \$453.1 million solely for out-of-home care.

We are a Government with a heart; we support our children. I congratulate the Minister for Community Services on his support of these children and on his hard work. I also congratulate the former Minister for Community Services on her identification of the need for out-of-home care. I congratulate both the former Minister and the current Minister on their strong commitment to ensuring that we look after these children.

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck) [12.36 p.m.]: I move:

That the motion be amended by leaving out paragraph (3) with a view to inserting instead:

- (3) congratulates the Opposition for its dedication to the support of vulnerable children.

Paragraph (3) of the motion moved by the member for Parramatta is quite untrue. The New South Wales Coalition has strongly supported the need for improvement of the services provided by the Department of Community Services and has rallied for improvement of those services. The department provides what may be called a graduated approach to helping families and supporting and protecting children. Out-of-home care is a last resort. We all recognise that in many circumstances the best place for a child is with at least one of its natural parents.

The other functions of the Department of Community Services are strengthening communities, early intervention to keep children out of a child protection situation, and investigation of reports of child protection issues. Each of these functions is geared towards keeping children safe and supporting them with their families. In the 12 months prior to September 2006 the Department of Community Services received more than 190,000 reports of child protection issues. Sadly, in some cases the department has to make the very significant decision that some children simply cannot stay with one or both parents. In that case, the child has to be removed from the dangerous situation, with the case being decided by the courts hopefully as expeditiously as possible.

Each month about 10,000 kids in New South Wales receive out-of-home care. The reasons for taking the drastic step of removing a child from its parents may vary. For example, some children may have experienced significant harm or be at risk of abuse within their homes. Sadly—let us face it—some people just should not be parents. Some families may be unable to care for children because of illness, drug or alcohol abuse, domestic violence or poverty. I have met with the Director General of the Department of Community Services, with many other people who provide foster care for these children and with peak bodies that represent those carers. Of the children who are placed in out-of-home care, about half are cared for by another member of their family and about 40 per cent are placed in foster care. The remainder are looked after through a mix of residential care, supported accommodation or supported independent living.

Being a foster carer is very difficult. Children who are taken into the out-of-home care system are frequently significantly traumatised by the events that led them to that situation in the first place. They could be withdrawn, malnourished, confused or depressed, anxious, fearful; they might be untrusting, angry, moody, rebellious, injured in mind and/or body. They deserve and they need help, but they often provide a considerable challenge to the people who take on their care. I cannot speak highly enough of the work that foster carers undertake. They deserve our support and the support that can be given to them. I had a discussion with the member for Wakehurst this morning. I was pleased to learn that in December 2002 there was a decision to invest some funds into a greatly needed program by the Department of Community Services following all those exposures by the Opposition of the incompetence of the then director general, Carmel Niland, and the then Minister, Faye Lo Po'.

The \$617 million mentioned in this motion was part of that package. The reform package was set to run for a five-year period from 2002-03 through to 2007-08. In his 2006 annual report the current Director General of the Department of Community Services announced that with the completion of three years of the program about half of these resources have been allocated. I welcome the opportunity that this motion provides to again put on record the Coalition's support for measures to restructure the Department of Community Services, particularly the increased support for out-of-home care. I note that in this place on 6 May 2003 the then shadow

Minister for Community Services, the member for Wakehurst, strongly supported reform of the Department of Community Services when he stated:

We would ensure that a complete review of DoCS occurred immediately after the election in the form of a royal commission and that we would commit whatever funding that inquiry determined necessary.

On 30 April this year the new Minister for Community Services put out a media release announcing the first step on the \$617 million path to overhaul the care system for children who cannot live at home. The Minister said that this first step is part of the \$1.2 billion reform of the Department of Community Services. If this is the first step, what has the State Government been doing for the last four years since the package was first announced? In typical Labor fashion, the Government is trying to spin a new news story by rehashing an announcement that was made in December 2002, has been made every year since and is dressing it up as a first step!

In the areas where it really counts, we have yet to see real benefits on the ground after four years of this so-called restructuring. Foster care groups are very concerned that they are not represented on the ministerial advisory committee. A range of community sector organisations are represented on this committee, but none that directly represent issues of concern to carers and the children and young people in their care. The work of the ministerial advisory council would be significantly enhanced if carers were directly involved in its deliberations. If this had been the case significant public concern about new legislation, such as occurred during the sections 148 and 149 amendments of the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act could have been dealt with when the legislation was being drafted. I say to the Minister that this important additional reform should be introduced allowing for out-of-home carers to have a representative sitting on the ministerial advisory council.

One issue raised with me relates to difficulties foster carers have in accessing services such as speech therapy and public dental. I cite the case of a grandmother and foster carer in Cowra who contacted my office last week after being unable to obtain public dental treatment for her ward, who had been in pain for the previous three weeks. The situation has now been solved by my office and treatment obtained, but should a child in foster care have to suffer dental pain for three weeks before getting treatment? As I said earlier, despite the large amount of money allocated over the past four years, we still have to see major improvements on the ground.

A major part of the final stages of the reform package is the call for expressions of interest for the provision of out-of-home care services across New South Wales. Under this program the care contracts will be for a five-year period with the option of having these contracts extended for a further two years. This will provide care organisations with more surety of funding than in the past. I urge the Minister to ensure that the new contracts will allow organisations to provide more help for children who need special services such as counselling, speech pathology, catch-up tutoring, dentistry and behavioural therapy.

It is important that these extra services are provided to help children in out-of-home care to minimise developmental differences with their peers and to reach their full potential. However, the call for expressions of interest does have somewhat of a downside. Foster care groups have expressed concern that while the call for expressions of interest was made at the end of April, they have only until the end of July to get their proposals in to the department. That is a very short period of time. It has been described to me that interested organisations have to madly work on their forecasts for budgeting requirements five years into the future in a very short period of time. I suggest that the Minister consider extending the submission period to allow a more considered submission by these organisations.

Foster carers definitely need our continued and improved support. During recent discussions industry representatives informed me of several concerns they have about the current practices within the Department of Community Services about the support they receive. They expressed concerns that the current policy of partnership care arrangements between the department and foster carers is little more than window-dressing. A major concern expressed to me is that calls to the Department of Community Services from foster carers are rarely returned because of severe understaffing within the department. This is all too common. At the moment the department does not even meet standard international benchmarks for the provision of services.

I believe we have a much greater need for early intervention than picking up the pieces later on in life because 90 per cent of kids referred to the department for level one are still not investigated. There is a real need for a vast increase in the numbers of caseworkers in New South Wales. I note that the Foster Carer Resource Guide and the Department of Community Services website both recognise the need for foster carers to have a

support person present during case planning meetings. Foster carers have told me that there are occasions when a carer does not feel capable or confident enough to raise issues with the department without the presence of a support person. However, I have been informed that senior departmental staff directed that carers not be permitted to have a support person present during case conferences. Why? What could possibly be the justification for that? It flies directly in the face of existing policy and is a matter that I bring to the Minister's attention as needing to be addressed immediately. Is it some attempt at intimidation by the department? Reasons must be given.

Foster carers, people willing to take on what is a significant responsibility, need continuing and enhanced support. The latest annual report of the Department of Community Services shows that the number of children and young people in out-of-home care has risen steadily from 10,337 in June 2004 to 10,623 in June 2006. The rate of children and young people in out-of-home care has also increased from 6.5 per cent in 2004 to 6.7 per cent. Governments of both political persuasions before 2002 do not have much to be proud of in relation to the handling of child protection issues. However, I reiterate that the Coalition and I strongly support measures designed to improve out-of-home care. We support the magnificent carers who make this important care possible. [*Time expired.*]

Mr BARRY COLLIER (Miranda—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.46 p.m.]: I am pleased to speak to the motion. I commend the Government for its record investment of \$617 million to expand the essential services for children who cannot live at home. The Opposition has said how much it supports foster carers and the work they do. I was pleased and privileged to nominate a lady in my electorate, Mrs Mary Rinoldi, OAM, for the inaugural Woman of the Year Award in 2005. She and her husband, Bob, have fostered more than 70 children. I was delighted when the former Minister for Women, Sandra Nori, announced that award. I know Mary and Bob well and they are still continuing in that role.

One of the important features of the Government's policy is that it is refocusing on efforts to keep brothers and sisters together in foster care, where possible. Research shows that children adapt more easily to care when they are placed with their brothers and sisters. Children going into care need stability, support and the best possible placement with a family. That is why the Department of Community Services has developed a new policy to help front-line child protection workers place brothers and sisters with the same foster family. The placement of siblings in out-of-home care policy includes a renewed commitment to keep siblings together in foster care; guidelines detailing when it is not appropriate to place siblings together; guidelines for placing children under two in foster care with siblings; provision for sibling contact when they are not placed together in foster care; and placement for Aboriginal siblings and those from non-English speaking backgrounds. It can be a great comfort for brothers and sisters to be able to stay together in a stable home environment during what is for many, if not all, a confusing time in their young lives.

While placing siblings together may not always be possible for the best solution, this new policy gives front-line caseworkers the guidelines to help them make the best decisions. The policy is helping caseworkers strike a balance between the needs of individual children and the needs for brothers and sisters to stay together. These decisions are often complicated and difficult to make but the best interests of the children involved are always the top priority. The more foster carers available, of course, the more likely they are to be able to keep brothers and sisters together. Foster care, like parenting, can be very challenging. I take this opportunity to state that any person who feels he or she can take into his or her home members of one family or who is interested in finding out more information should contact the Department of Community Services. Anybody can apply to be a foster carer. I encourage interested people to do so.

Opposition members have told us today how important foster care is, and that they support foster carers and the hard work that they do. However, as the member for Parramatta said, prior to the election the Coalition announced that it would cut \$700 million and 675 caseworkers out of the system. Not one cent was allocated to child protection, despite the fact that the Department of Community Services receives approximately 240,000 child protection reports every year, many of them from mandatory reporters. The Opposition cannot have it both ways. It cannot say, "We support child protection, we support foster carers and we support the Department of Community Services and all the hard work they do" but then cut funding.

The Opposition either supports the system or it does not. The way to support the system is to come up with a policy that provides funding, and that is what the Opposition does not do. Opposition members complain and harp, but they will not give the department any money. That is the Opposition's problem: no policy, no programs, no commitment, no funding. It is all feel good stuff, but it has no commitment to the foster carers and the kids in need of protection. When the Coalition was last in government it slashed more than 1,000 positions,

disbanded three police child protection mistreatment teams and closed 23 field offices around the State. This Government has a different policy. We support our foster carers. We support keeping brothers and sisters together. We support the new policy announced by the Minister for Community Services. I support the motion.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE (Bega) [12.51 p.m.]: This is a serious debate. We are talking about vulnerable children in our community. I speak today because of a story that appeared on Channel 9's *A Current Affair* program last night. The story involved the Department of Community Services and a child with a disability. A young mother came forward and expressed on national television the hardship and the difficulties she faced with the Department of Community Services and with the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care. It is fine for the Government to preach about its wonderful performance and to throw huge figures around. The member for Miranda threw a bunch of bizarre numbers around in relation to Opposition policy. Ultimately, the big test is how government service delivery is occurring at a grassroots level. This is about children.

I saw a young mother on television last night talking about her difficulties—she was considering suicide and she had had difficulties approaching government departments, who sent her from one department to the next. She was struggling to cope with her five-year-old child who has a range of disabilities. She is not able to cope. For her to approach the Department of Community Services and be treated in that way is an absolute disgrace. It is appalling, it is inhumane, it is cruel. Today the Government is crowing about how good it is. That is not on—it is not on for this family, and it is not on for the myriad of families who struggle to cope. Surprisingly, at the end of the television segment, the department issued a press release saying that, suddenly, the Government will start to provide respite.

Mr Barry Collier: Point of order: The member for Bega should be brought back to the motion. He is straying a long way from it. He is talking about a television show he saw last night.

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

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: This is about the Department of Community Services. The member for Miranda should look at the report. The advice and support the department gave this family was appalling. It was put in the too hard basket because the child had a disability. If the Government's approach is that the department should not be involved in any shape or form with children with a disability, I would like to hear it from the member for Miranda and the member for Parramatta. That situation was on show last night. Today Government members have spoken about millions of dollars that have been spent, but they should look at how families in these circumstances have been treated. At the end of the television segment the department issued a press release saying that a caseworker will be with the family on Friday to start to resolve this issue. It should not have taken a television story to get the Government to act.

Therein lies the way in which the Iemma Government continues to provide human services in the State. To get the attention of the Department of Community Services and the Department of Disability, Ageing and Home Care, you have to declare your child homeless or at risk by leaving the child outside a police station, an emergency department or a group home facility. That is how people get action from this Government. It is a bit rich for the member for Miranda to crow about how wonderful the Government is when it should be judged on how services are being provided on the ground. The Government should listen to what these families who are in crisis are saying. This Government is built on spin, not on substance.

Ms TANYA GADIEL (Parramatta—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.56 p.m.], in reply: I thank the members who participated in this debate: the member for Burrinjuck, the Parliamentary Secretary and member for Miranda, and the member for Bega. I have not one doubt in my mind about the compassion of the member for Burrinjuck for children who are in this position. I thank her for her contribution to the debate. She pointed specifically to a family in need in Cowra. That is why the Government has these sorts of reforms in place and why it is allocating this amount of money. The Government has recognised these issues and knows that more needs to be done for the safety of children. This is a difficult and emotional area. When we talk about children who are vulnerable and in need of protection, it is right that we come to this place in a sombre way and express what we believe needs to be done.

The amendment moved by the member for Burrinjuck is unacceptable to me. No-one will be surprised about that. What is at the core of this issue is that the Government has a program in place. There is a budget for this program and we are seeking to make improvements. While I appreciate that the member for Bega is compassionate about this issue, he failed to address the issue: the Opposition did not allocate anything, not a

cent, for child protection during the recent election campaign. That is an absolute disgrace. There is no point in Opposition members crying crocodile tears and trading in human misery when they went to the election with absolutely no policy and no plans to assist children in need. We talked about the Coalition's policy at the 2003 election.

Mr John Williams: More history.

Ms TANYA GADIEL: Sometimes history is important. They cry crocodile tears, but when they were in Government they slashed 1,000 positions, disbanded three police child mistreatment teams and closed 23 field offices around the State. They delivered their policy two days before the 2003 election, under the cloak of the Iraq war, a policy that would have cut \$700 million from the budget and slashed 675 caseworkers from the system. They went to the 2007 election with a plan to cut 20,000 jobs and a policy that would have decimated our child protection system. In a \$27 billion spending spree, they offered not a single cent for child protection. The amendment is unacceptable.

Question—That the words stand—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 48

Mr Amery	Ms Hay	Mr Pearce
Ms Andrews	Mr Hickey	Mrs Perry
Mr Aquilina	Ms Hornery	Mr Rees
Mr Brown	Ms Judge	Mr Sartor
Ms Burney	Ms Keneally	Mr Shearan
Ms Burton	Mr Khoshaba	Mr Stewart
Mr Campbell	Mr Koperberg	Ms Tebbutt
Mr Collier	Mr Lynch	Mr Terenzini
Mr Coombs	Mr McBride	Mr Tripodi
Mr Corrigan	Dr McDonald	Mr Watkins
Mr Costa	Ms McKay	Mr West
Mr Daley	Mr McLeay	Mr Whan
Ms D'Amore	Ms McMahon	
Ms Firth	Ms Meagher	
Ms Gadiel	Ms Megarritty	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Greene	Mr Morris	Mr Ashton
Mr Harris	Mrs Paluzzano	Mr Martin

Noes, 34

Mr Aplin	Mr Hartcher	Mr Richardson
Mr Baird	Mr Hazzard	Mr Roberts
Mr Baumann	Mrs Hopwood	Mrs Skinner
Ms Berejikian	Mr Humphries	Mr Smith
Mr Cansdell	Mr Kerr	Mr Stokes
Mr Constance	Mr Merton	Mr J. H. Turner
Mr Debnam	Mr Oakeshott	Mr J. D. Williams
Mr Draper	Mr O'Dea	Mr R. C. Williams
Mrs Fardell	Mr Page	
Mr Fraser	Mr Piccoli	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Goward	Mr Piper	Mr Maguire
Mrs Hancock	Mr Provost	Mr R. W. Turner

Pair

Mr Borger

Ms Hodgkinson

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment negatived.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 49

Mr Amery	Ms Hay	Mrs Paluzzano
Ms Andrews	Mr Hickey	Mr Pearce
Mr Aquilina	Ms Hornery	Mrs Perry
Mr Brown	Ms Judge	Mr Rees
Ms Burney	Ms Keneally	Mr Sartor
Ms Burton	Mr Khoshaba	Mr Shearan
Mr Campbell	Mr Koperberg	Mr Stewart
Mr Collier	Mr Lynch	Ms Tebbutt
Mr Coombs	Mr McBride	Mr Terenzini
Mr Corrigan	Dr McDonald	Mr Tripodi
Mr Costa	Ms McKay	Mr Watkins
Mr Daley	Mr McLeay	Mr West
Ms D'Amore	Ms McMahon	Mr Whan
Ms Firth	Ms Meagher	
Ms Gadiel	Ms Megarrity	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Greene	Ms Moore	Mr Ashton
Mr Harris	Mr Morris	Mr Martin

Noes, 34

Mr Aplin	Mr Hartcher	Mr Richardson
Mr Baird	Mr Hazzard	Mr Roberts
Mr Baumann	Mrs Hopwood	Mrs Skinner
Ms Berejiklian	Mr Humphries	Mr Smith
Mr Cansdell	Mr Kerr	Mr Stokes
Mr Constance	Mr Merton	Mr J. H. Turner
Mr Debnam	Mr Oakeshott	Mr J. D. Williams
Mr Draper	Mr O'Dea	Mr R. C. Williams
Mrs Fardell	Mr Page	
Mr Fraser	Mr Piccoli	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Goward	Mr Piper	Mr Maguire
Mrs Hancock	Mr Provest	Mr R. W. Turner

Pair

Mr Borger

Ms Hodgkinson

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

[Assistant-Speaker (Mr Thomas George) left the chair at 1.12 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]

SYDNEY DAM LEVELS

Ministerial Statement

Mr MORRIS IEMMA (Lakemba—Premier, and Minister for Citizenship) [2.15 p.m.]: Over the past two weeks Sydney and its surrounds have received some of the rain we have all been hoping for. The recent falls have dumped up to 320 millimetres into Sydney's drinking water catchments. I am advised by the Sydney Catchment Authority that this equates to a boost for the dams of 336 billion litres. While it is very welcome, we still need more. Figures released this morning show the percentage of New South Wales affected by drought has fallen from 83 per cent to 80 per cent, showing that the drought is a long way from over. The Sydney Catchment Authority also advises me that over the past two weeks the total dam storage has increased significantly. Two

weeks ago the total storage capacity was at 36.9 per cent, and the last two weeks of rain has resulted in it increasing by more than 33 per cent, or by around 13 percentage points. That means an increase over the past 14 days to approximately 49.6 per cent, as at first thing this morning.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members on the Opposition benches will remain silent.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: I am advised that right now our dam levels are passing the 50 per cent mark. The last time our total water storage capacity was above 50 per cent was in May 2004. The Sydney Catchment Authority advises the following storage levels for the state's dams: Cataract Dam is now at 76.5 per cent; Cordeaux Dam is at 61.3 per cent, and Avon Dam is at 65.7 per cent. Nepean, Tallowa, Fitzroy Falls and Blue Mountains dams are at 100 per cent of capacity. Prospect Dam is at 81 per cent, Woronora is at 50 per cent, and Wingecarribee is at 86 per cent of capacity. Collectively these dams represent 20 per cent of Sydney's overall drinking water storage capacity. Warragamba Dam makes up the other 80 per cent. I can advise the House that Warragamba Dam is now at 43.1 per cent of capacity.

While this rain is welcome, two weeks of rain does not change our long-term plans to secure Sydney's water supply. That means we are 100 per cent committed to building the desalination plant and our recycled water grids as just part of our plans to ensure Sydney never runs out of drinking water. But meeting Sydney's water needs depends on a continuing partnership between the Government, industry, farmers and the community to use water wisely. I take this opportunity to thank the people of New South Wales for a tremendous combined effort in conserving water. Since October 2003 when mandatory restrictions were introduced Sydneysiders have saved almost 300 billion litres of water. That is a very, very impressive achievement.

Through the mixture of projects that make up the Metropolitan Water Plan we can now be sure that we have sufficient water to meet our needs through until at least 2015, we are in a strong position to accommodate population growth beyond 2015 and, for the first time ever, Sydney is strongly positioned to withstand the current drought, and droughts we may encounter in the future. We are working hard with the community and industry to ensure we continue to recycle water and improve our preparedness for the next drought. Over the next 25 to 30 years the use of recycled water in Sydney will reach about 100 billion litres a year, which represents around one-fifth of Sydney's water needs in recycling alone. The Sydney Catchment Authority continues to work on projects to access groundwater to be used as a supplement to Sydney's water supply.

I am advised that reaching 50 per cent storage capacity is the point at which the catchment authority may recommence releasing environmental flows into the Hawkesbury-Nepean. Officers from the departments of Environment and Climate Change, and Water and Energy will review this issue to determine whether environmental flows can be resumed. While we continue to monitor the weather patterns and ongoing inflows into dams, the advice today from water experts is that we should not change our current water restrictions at this time. Obviously we will continue to review the situation, based on the conditions and based on consumption levels.

Notwithstanding population and economic growth, we are now using less water than we did three years ago. That is not something we want to dismiss on the basis of our first two weeks of decent rain in years, because recent history tells us we should take a conservative approach when it comes to water management. That is how we survived without having to use level 5 restrictions, unlike other cities. We will not lift water restrictions until we have guaranteed levels of supply and storage. In short, we will not gamble with the city's future water needs or, indeed, the State's future water needs—unlike the Opposition.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER (Terrigal) [2.23 p.m.]: In the spirit of bipartisanship I join the Premier in congratulating the people of Sydney on the magnificent conservation effort they have undertaken individually in their tens of thousands to save 300 billion litres of water since October 2005. It is a magnificent effort and the people of Sydney deserve congratulations. I then move on to the more significant point of what the Premier had to say. This is the man who solemnly promised the people of New South Wales that the desalination plant would not go ahead unless the water levels at Warragamba Dam fell below 30 per cent. That was his commitment.

When the Minister for Water Utilities was interviewed today and he was asked why the Government made that commitment when it did not know what the water levels would be, he said he did not know. But we had a commitment from no less a person than the Premier of New South Wales that there would be no desalination plant unless those levels fell below 30 per cent and what happens? The levels are now at 43 per cent and the desalination plant is going ahead—so much for the integrity of the Premier. This is a tipping point in the assessment of this Government in its approach to water conservation, but more in its approach to the people of

New South Wales. The Government is telling the people of Sydney to conserve water. But it will not play its part, and it will do whatever suits it politically at any given moment.

The people should not rely on the integrity of any promise this Government gives them because it promised there would be no desalination plant unless water levels fell below 30 per cent, but when the water levels were 38 per cent that promise was repudiated. As the water levels continue to rise to 43 per cent the Premier is prepared to stand up here and still say the desalination plant will go ahead. The *Sydney Morning Herald* in its editorial today said there is a time to call "stop" and it asked the Premier to stop, because although this Government is supposedly committed to climate change control to preserve our future, it is more committed to increasing CO₂ emissions from all the electricity that will be required to run a desalination plant.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Bathurst will come to order.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Government is committed to disturbing the ocean off the coast by increasing the saline content six-fold as large quantities of saline are dumped from the Kurnell plant once it becomes operational.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister for Police will come to order.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: So much for marine life; so much for conservation; so much for the migratory pattern of whales. As the whales go up and down the coast, they are going to be severely disturbed by the Premier. The Premier can sit over there and propose for the next four years that he will protect the environment in this State but people will remember what he did to Kurnell. He can talk about climate change but people will remember what he did to Kurnell. He can talk about the integrity of his Government and its promises and people will remind him what he did to Kurnell. The member for Miranda was saved by 600 Greens preferences—

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

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: —and the member for Miranda made the magnificent comment about how ungrateful the electorate was because it took the member up to 600 votes to retain his seat.

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

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: That is nothing compared to what the Premier said today.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Miranda to order.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Premier said all promises are off. He promised there would be no desalination plant unless water levels were under 30 per cent, but he is going to break that promise. When the Premier stands here and proudly acknowledges that he has broken a promise—like his Minister for Roads in another place—it says everything about his and his Government's integrity over the next four years. It also says everything about the Minister for Water Utilities, who has a big story to tell over the next four years about what he was doing in the office of the then Minister he served prior to the 2007 State election. But we will come to that at another stage. It says everything about the Minister's performance on radio 2GB this morning when he was unable to justify why the decision had been made on the desalination plant. There are many questions to be asked about this Government and many questions that are yet unanswered, but they will be answered over the next four years.

MV PASHA BULKER SALVAGE

Ministerial Statement

Mr JOSEPH TRIPODI (Fairfield—Minister for Small Business and Regulatory Reform, and Minister for Ports and Waterways) [2.30 p.m.]: At 9.54 a.m. on Friday 8 June, during the worst storm the Hunter has experienced in 30 years, the panamax class coal ship *Pasha Bulker* ran aground on Nobbys Beach in Newcastle. The *Pasha Bulker* is a 40,000 tonne ship carrying around 700 tonnes of fuel oil, 34 tonnes of diesel and 16 tonnes of lube oil. Action to protect the port and coastline from a potential environmental disaster commenced immediately.

Plans and exercises for dealing with oil spills paid off as equipment and expert personnel were mobilised immediately from across New South Wales and interstate. More than 20 agencies have worked tirelessly and committed personnel and equipment to prepare for any potential incident. The agencies include the port corporations of Newcastle, Sydney and Port Kembla, NSW Maritime, the Australian Maritime Safety Authority, Marine Safety Queensland, the Oil Response Company of Australia, the Australian Marine Oil Spill Centre, the NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change, and others.

The owners of the *Pasha Bulker* have engaged Svitzer Salvage to manage the recovery operation. The salvage team continues to evaluate the condition of the vessel and prepare for an attempted refloat. I am advised that the *Pasha Bulker* is currently standing up well to the wet and heavy seas off the coast. While the sight of a coal ship so close to the shore may be something of a spectacle, the situation confronting maritime authorities and the salvage team is very serious. Refloating a 40,000 tonne bulk carrier is a difficult task, made more complex by a breach in the vessel and creasing of the sides of the vessel.

I advise the House that despite the detailed planning and continuing efforts of the salvage team, the risk remains of an oil spill during both preparation for and the refloating attempt. Incident control and oil spill teams are already on standby and remain on full alert to respond immediately should there be an oil spill of any nature. Among the oil pollution combat equipment on standby are five different types of boom totalling more than 4,000 metres, mechanical skimmers, flexi-dams for oil storage, towable storage bags, dispersants and associated pumps and equipment.

In addition, the salvors continue to transfer fuel from lower storage compartments to higher and safer compartments. We anticipate that this stage of the salvage operation will be completed tomorrow. Two salvage tugs, the *Woonah* and the *Keera*, are currently in port to assist with the salvage efforts and a third tug, the anchor-handling *Pacific Responder*, arrived from Cairns today. The oil spill response vessel *Shirley Smith* is in Newcastle and remains on call. I would like to thank all those involved in the operation for doing a great job whilst under a lot of pressure in a very difficult situation. The situation facing the *Pasha Bulker* remains high risk. The New South Wales Government will continue to provide whatever assistance is necessary to aid the salvors in the refloating of the *Pasha Bulker* and to protect the environment.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER: On behalf of the House I acknowledge the presence of a former member of the Legislative Council, Andy Manson, in the public gallery.

QUESTION TIME

PUBLIC SCHOOLS CAPITAL WORKS BUDGET

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: My question is directed to the Premier. Despite all the promises and the repeated failure to spend the Department of Education and Training's maintenance budget or the New South Wales Capex budgets, creating a maintenance backlog across schools of more than \$116 million, will he now admit the real obstacle to improving public schools is Labor's failure to deliver?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: What we will admit in terms of failing to deliver is that the Leader of the Opposition has failed to deliver anything. He approaches his 100 days as Leader of the Opposition and we have a question like the ones in previous days on a budget that has received widespread acceptance from the business community and those in the financial markets. But the Leader of the Opposition has been unable to find any flaw with the budget. Yesterday he mentioned maintenance, capital works, and some supposed underspend.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: Are you sure you know which day it is?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: This was on Tuesday. He quoted a figure but he neglected to mention the analysis in the budget papers. He produced a figure of \$220 million-odd when it came to maintenance, jumped to his feet saying, "Underspend, how outrageous. You can't deliver." That was the figure. He saw the table and he thought, "Fantastic. Something negative to say about the budget." What he deliberately did not do after he quoted the figures was to give an outline of the explanation in the budget. Guess what? The maintenance was actually spent. It was classified as capital expenditure. It took place. It shows what a no-impact Leader of the Opposition he is. Then he latched onto capital works and we have heard the rebuttal in the last 24 hours about that. He gave his speech in reply to the budget this morning and what a reply that was!

Mr Barry O'Farrell: What about fiscal responsibility?

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will remain silent.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: He asks about fiscal responsibility, the shadow Treasurer, the man who blamed the photocopier for not being able to explain his costings 24 hours before an election. He went to a press conference and said, "I can't provide you with any detail. I don't know how we're going to spend \$9 billion worth of promises. I do not know how we're going to fund \$9 billion. I'm sorry, I was too dishonest to sign up to the Charter of Budget Honesty and my photocopier doesn't work." And he talks of fiscal responsibility! Yesterday he said, "You're spending too much on infrastructure; you've got to take things as they are. You can't spend money to untangle our rail lines to improve our hospitals, schools, improving the State's economic capacity or building our ports."

Today the Leader of the Opposition is saying we have to do more. He says he will set up an infrastructure fund. He will privatise retail electricity and establish an infrastructure fund. He will put \$2 billion into the infrastructure fund hoping that it will earn \$150 million or \$180 million of interest a year. That will make a real difference to the north-west or south-west rail projects. On our estimates, by spending \$150 million interest out of the infrastructure funds, the north-west project will arrive in 30 years.

The Leader of the Opposition does not know what he wants or what he stands for. On the one hand, he attacks the Government for not investing enough in infrastructure. When the Government brings down the biggest infrastructure program in the State's history he says we are building too much, borrowing too much, spending too much, modernising too many hospitals, too many schools and building too many roads and rail lines. He should tell us which ones he would abandon. I offered him the opportunity yesterday. He might start by sacrificing Lindfield railway station. I am sure his constituents in Lindfield would really appreciate that.

Now the Leader of the Opposition asks about the education capital works budget—\$120 million over the next four years for maintenance. At the election we offered \$2 billion for gymnasiums, halls and canteens. The program starts today. All the Leader of the Opposition has in reply is an idea stolen from Nick Greiner in February this year. The words were almost identical—"Sell retail," he said. That was the first idea, Nick's idea. Then there was the future fund. From where has he stolen the future fund idea? No prize for guessing that—Peter Costello. You can just picture it: he got the instructions over the phone yesterday. Then there was the education spending this morning. He got that from Julie Bishop and Peter Costello as well.

There was not one new idea in his reply. There was not one piece of evidence that he has done any work over the past 100 days, and not one credible alternative proposition was advanced other than a series of confused statements. One minute we are spending too much on infrastructure; the next minute we are not spending enough, and then three propositions that all had their origins in Canberra, from his political masters. That is why the Leader of the Opposition will never stand up for New South Wales. The one thing he has been able to do in 100 days is to establish himself as a no-impact player.

SYDNEY OLYMPIC PARK DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Ms ANGELA D'AMORE: My question is addressed to the Minister for Planning. Will the Minister update the House on the latest developments at Sydney Olympic Park?

Mr FRANK SARTOR: I thank the member for Drummoyne for her continuing interest in balanced and sustainable development in greater Sydney. For two heady weeks in 2000 it seemed like Sydney was the centre of the universe. The "best games ever" helped to cement this city as a global destination and a player on the world's stage. After the Games we inherited a first-rate sporting and entertainment precinct at Sydney Olympic Park. But the precinct needed to grow into something more, something to pump fresh blood through the city's arteries. It is a challenge faced by all former Olympic cities. For example, Barcelona transformed its Olympic site into a popular museum and recreation precinct.

As we approach the seven-year anniversary of Sydney's landmark event, Sydney Olympic Park is flexing its own economic muscle—from a degraded wasteland and abattoir site to our shining Olympic success and now the fastest growing subregion in Sydney; it is a red-hot precinct which is fulfilling its promise as a key growth centre identified in the metropolitan strategy. It still attracts Olympic pilgrims with visitor numbers soaring to an expected 10 million a year by 2010. It draws 3.7 million people to some 4,000-plus events annually. Under the Government's vision the park will grow to house around 20,000 workers, 15,000 residents

and thousands of students. Another 55,000 residents will move into the wider subregion over the next 20 years, including nearby Homebush Bay West, Rhodes Peninsula and the Olympic Village precinct.

To guide the park's future the Government is working on a new master plan for the site. The master plan will provide a framework for future growth and infrastructure needs, including a new sports and education campus catering for students from kindergarten through to university. It could also feature a new school. Many are envious of the exponential economic growth at Sydney Olympic Park, but it is also a leader in environmental sustainability, taking the torch of the "Green Olympics" and carrying it forward. This is the first time in the world that an Olympic precinct has been so well transformed into such a sustainable community, integrating commercial, residential, education and recreation activities. Sydney Olympic Park is a showcase of the Government's BASIX building sustainability index and other innovative design features. It will help to achieve the Government's State Plan targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and recycle water.

Across the park 850 million litres of water are recycled annually; 21 per cent of electrical power used in the precinct is green power generated from renewable energy sources, and more than 90 per cent of sewage from all park venues, Newington and Silverwater Correction Centre is recycled annually. We all remember Newington. Used as the athletes village during the Olympics, it was Sydney's first suburb built according to environmental sustainability principles. New residential developments on-site will contribute to the statewide BASIX scheme, which is expected to save around 11,000 Olympic swimming pools of water and 800,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions annually by 2014-15.

Today I have approved plans for a new residential development at Olympic Park that takes the precinct's green credentials ever further. It will use cogeneration technology to power common areas such as car parks and foyers as well as domestic hot water and pool heating. It will use recycled water from the park to flush toilets, for laundry use, landscaping, the car wash and cooling towers. This project, worth \$63.5 million, will provide 208 apartments, commercial space and a childcare centre, as well as another 370 jobs including 350 in construction.

While the park's green credentials remain strong, the Government is pushing ahead with other new investment and development on the site. Already more than 80 organisations and 4,000 workers are located within the park, including Dairy Farmers, Samsung, BP Solar and New South Wales Lotteries. But the cranes and construction workers on-site every week tell an even bigger story. They are part of more than \$1 billion in total projects approved by the New South Wales Government at Sydney Olympic Park since 2000.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Wakehurst to order.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: In the past year alone we have approved \$59 million worth of projects at the park, including an 18-storey, five-star hotel and a 156-room budget hotel. In a few months the Commonwealth Bank of Australia will begin relocating 5,000 workers to its new headquarters at the park. All of this is part of \$18.7 billion in major projects approved by the New South Wales Government across the State in the 22 months to May. Just so Brad can hear it, because these days he is a bit slow, that is \$18.7 billion—big ones, Brad—in major projects in the 22 months—

Mr Brad Hazzard: Point of order: Standing Order 59 refers to tedious repetition. I was wondering—did the Minister say that he has done away with the BASIX requirement for these developers? Is that what he has done?

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Wakehurst to order a second time.

[Interruption]

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Wakehurst to order for a third time. He will resume his seat.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: The member for Wakehurst is misinformed.

The SPEAKER: Order! I will not tolerate that type of behaviour from the member for Wakehurst again. If he so much as breathes out of order I will have him removed from the Chamber.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: That \$18.7 billion in the past 22 months includes 57 projects approved since the election alone, worth \$3.1 billion. Since August 2005 we have created 48,500 new jobs in New South Wales.

The State is open for business and the former Olympics site is leading the way. The future is bright for Sydney's fastest growing precinct, Sydney Olympic Park.

NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS INTEREST LOAN SUBSIDY

Mr ANDREW STONER: My question is directed to the Premier. Given the Premier claims to have this year delivered a budget surplus of \$376 million but still has decided to slash funding for an unspecified number of non-government schools, will he admit that his decision to scrap the interest loan subsidy for major building programs is driven not by budgetary constraints but by Labor's ideological hatred of private schools?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: That question justifies the comment by Ian Smith of Gavin Anderson and Company that when the Opposition open their mouths they often espouse the policies of the barking mad. Given the Leader of the Opposition's proposal in his reply to the budget speech to establish an infrastructure fund in which to put underperforming assets, I look forward to logging on to eBay this afternoon because that is where they can put all of their underperforming assets.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of The Nationals has asked his question. He will listen to the answer in silence.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: The change is from an interest rate subsidy program to a grants program. I am advised that the subsidy is worth approximately \$65 million. We will establish a grants program, which, I am advised, will align New South Wales with the Commonwealth and other jurisdictions. The budget is evidence of the Government's commitment to education. I do not need to recount the figures in the budget on capital works expenditure or the expansion of services. The Leader of The Nationals is well capable of doing that, before he is placed in the underperforming assets fund on eBay.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

Mr PAUL McLEAY: My question is directed to the Premier. Can the Premier update the House on the progress of the Owen inquiry into New South Wales' future electricity needs?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: This week the Government delivered a budget that lays the foundation for future prosperity in this State, with a \$50 billion investment in infrastructure over the next four years and investment in expanding services. With the budget in place we are now pressing ahead on the most important economic decision that we will make in this term of government—a decision on how we secure our energy future to provide families, businesses and industries with the electricity they need.

As members would be aware, on 9 May 2007 I announced the establishment of an inquiry into electricity supply in New South Wales to be headed by Professor Anthony Owen of Curtin University of Technology. The people of New South Wales have access to a competitively priced and reliable supply of electricity. We are laying the groundwork to ensure that this continues. Over the next 12 months we will invest \$2.8 billion to upgrade our electricity infrastructure. But the decision remains before us on how we will meet our future energy needs. As our economy and population grow, our spare or reserve electricity supply capacity is being used up.

Earlier this week New South Wales set an all season energy consumption record of 13,343 megawatt hours, which is higher than the previous peak in the summer of 2006. Our electricity system was able to meet that peak demand with reserves to spare, but those statistics underline the importance of this decision. We need to take steps now to secure future base-load electricity capacity in this State to ensure a reliable energy supply to homes and businesses in the coming decades. Moreover, we are on the cusp of significant national developments in climate change policy, and it is timely that we examine how best we can ensure that we will have as clean and green an energy mix as possible.

I am able to report that the inquiry is well underway and is making good progress. I am advised that Professor Owen has met with 32 stakeholder groups to date, including market and regulatory bodies, peak industry bodies, individual market participants, environmental groups and advocates of small and large energy consumers. While the views and opinions expressed have been diverse, some broad issues and themes are becoming clear.

A few early points to note are that, first, there appears to be general agreement on the importance of establishing a carbon price to determine the economic viability of base-load technology options. Second, it will

be important to consider the potential impact of fuel prices, demand management, energy efficiency, and renewable energy targets on future base-load needs. Third, there is widespread understanding of the Government's no nuclear power industry in New South Wales policy. Expert advice to the inquiry has indicated that demand management alone is not the answer. I am advised that while demand management initiatives can smooth out the peaks in demand, it does not necessarily mean that less energy is consumed. It simply means that energy is consumed outside peak times. That is an example of the work that is being done on the issues that are being explored.

I can also advise the House that the inquiry has engaged Morgan Stanley to assist in work related to the determination of conditions needed to encourage private sector investment in any emerging generation. As part of its task Morgan Stanley is having in-depth discussions with market participants on the conditions needed to support investment. The inquiry is also receiving advice on the technical suitability of new and emerging electricity generation and emission reduction technologies and how much gas is potentially available for new base-load generation in this State.

I take the opportunity to remind all individuals, organisations and peak groups that have an interest in this issue that the closing date for written submissions is Friday 29 June. I encourage all interested parties to provide their views to Professor Owen, if they have not already done so. Submissions can be lodged by email or mail, and details can be found on the New South Wales government website. I look forward to providing further updates to the House.

STATE UNFUNDED SUPERANNUATION LIABILITY

Mr MIKE BAIRD: My question is directed to the Premier. As the Premier has failed to release the full triennial review into the assumptions underlying his unfunded superannuation liability in this budget, what assurances can he make to the State's hardworking teachers, nurses, police and other employees that he has not financially engineered their superannuation fund to achieve his ongoing budget surplus?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: If the member for Manly bothered to look at past budget papers—the Leader of the Opposition likes to refer to 12 years—he would find that State liability is going down. He would also find that, as a result of our financial management of the budget and the State's liabilities, general government sector net debt and overall debt are going down. Despite the biggest infrastructure program in the State's history taking place in the next four years, on both levels State liability will be lower than it was in 1995. Of course, I can assure teachers and nurses that their superannuation funds are being managed prudently and responsibly to protect them in their retirement. That would not be the case if that lot were in Government.

The member for Manly might explain to the nurses and teachers in his electorate how, had he been elected to the government benches, they would have paid for superannuation along with \$29 billion worth of unfunded promises. I do not know what sort of impact he thinks that would have had on the budget. We would not be talking about budget surpluses of \$300 million to \$500 million. We would be talking about a chronic deficit. We would be talking about New South Wales being put on credit watch, which was the case when his father was a Minister in a Liberal-National Party Government.

At that time New South Wales was on credit watch. I do not see how that would improve the position of nurses and teachers. Whilst flicking through the budget papers, the member for Manly might look at the estimated increase in the State's net worth following our budget strategy and infrastructure program. That is an increase to \$183 billion in net assets. New South Wales is in a very strong financial position. The budget strategy is consistent with maintaining our triple-A credit rating. I might add that that is something that has been confirmed four times in the past 20 months.

Mr Mike Baird: Point of order: I rely on Standing Order 129. The question was very specific. The Premier has been speaking for three minutes and he has not mentioned superannuation once. It was a very specific question.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: I have concluded my answer.

STATE BUDGET

Mr PAUL GIBSON: I direct my question to the Deputy Premier. What is the Government's response to the Opposition's response to the budget?

Mr JOHN WATKINS: To understand the Opposition's budget response one must first understand the financial acumen of the man who delivered it. Prior to the State election the Leader of the Opposition was, of course, the shadow Treasurer. As the Premier said today, his most incisive budget statement in that job was, "Boo-hoo, the photocopier is broken." That is a version of the "dog ate my homework" excuse that even the students in the gallery from Thomas Hassell College, who are now leaving, would not use. However, the Leader of the Opposition expected that to go down.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members of the Opposition will remain silent.

Mr JOHN WATKINS: He was the shadow Treasurer who left his colleagues without costings and who refused to comply with the Charter of Budget Honesty. Members opposite voted for the charter in this place, but out there when the pressure was on they refused to comply. We should not be surprised, because the Leader of the Opposition was the shadow Minister for Transport who left the Coalition without any transport policy. At one stage prior to that he was the shadow Minister for Education, and he left his colleagues without a clue about schools. A theme is developing here: in his shadow portfolio positions he had no content at all. I have lost their attention.

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order.

Mr JOHN WATKINS: Listen! This is good.

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

Mr JOHN WATKINS: Looking back over the Leader of the Opposition's career, we see that as a director of the State Liberal Party he actually plunged his party into so many financial disasters—

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: Mr Speaker, I refer you to Standing Order 129, which relates to relevance. The question, as ridiculous as it was, referred to the Leader of the Opposition's speech in response to the budget. There was no reference to his former career, former jobs or anything like that. The Deputy Premier has already cleared out those poor unfortunate students with the rubbish we have heard. Mr Speaker, you have made it your ambition to improve the standards of the Parliament. This question was clearly designed to allow the Deputy Premier to dump on the Opposition. That is not what—

The SPEAKER: Order! I have heard enough. I have taken the opportunity to have a quick look through previous questions. The question is in order and the answer is relevant to the question.

Mr JOHN WATKINS: Looking back over the Leader of the Opposition's career we see that as director of the State Liberal Party he plunged his party into—

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: I refer to Standing Order 129. With respect, I do not see how the Leader of the Opposition's career is in any way relevant to the question asked. I have no doubt that the question is in order; it is the answer that is the problem. If the Deputy Premier wants to continually flout the standing orders, we will continue to take points of order and disrupt the Parliament.

The SPEAKER: That point of order is most revealing.

Mr JOHN WATKINS: As the State Liberal Party director, the Leader of the Opposition plunged the party into so many financial disasters that—

[Interruption]

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will stop interjecting.

Mr JOHN WATKINS: —he makes Peter the prawn hatchery proprietor look like Donald Trump. Between 1992 and 1995 the Leader of the Opposition was the director of the Liberals and also a director of Bunori Pty Limited. The State Electoral Commission—

Mr Andrew Stoner: Point of order: Standing Order 59 states:

The Speaker may direct a Member to discontinue a speech if the Member persists in irrelevance or tedious repetition.

I think we have a very good case for the application of Standing Order 59. Mr Speaker, I ask you to direct the Deputy Premier to cease his boring speech.

The SPEAKER: Order! I will not hear any more on the point of order; I have heard enough. At this stage the Deputy Premier is in order. However, I ask him to ensure his answer is relevant to the question asked.

Mr JOHN WATKINS: Of course it is, Mr Speaker. The Leader of the Opposition's reply to the budget goes right to his credibility with regard to financial acumen. It is entirely relevant. The address of the registered office of Bunori Pty Limited was 47-51 Riley Street, Woolloomooloo. Those of us who know something about politics know that that was the headquarters of the old Liberal Party—but I suppose the new Liberal Party is much the same thing. That property was mortgaged to Westpac and subsequently had to be sold after receivers were appointed. The financial statements show us conclusively that when the Leader of the Opposition was a director of Bunori the company recorded spectacular losses.

Mr Andrew Fraser: Point of order: Mr Speaker, under Standing Order 59 you just ruled that the Deputy Premier must be relevant. He is canvassing your ruling and I ask you to draw him back under the standing orders of this House and to direct him to answer the question asked.

The SPEAKER: Order! I have ruled on a similar point of order. I remind the Deputy Premier that there is a limit to the background information than can be canvassed.

Mr JOHN WATKINS: There is a bit more coming. There was a loss almost every year that the Leader of the Opposition was a director of Bunori Pty Limited. In 1991 there was a \$129,000 loss, in 1992 it was \$57,000, in 1994 it was \$34,000—

Mr Brad Hazzard: Point of order: Mr Speaker, you have three times directed the Deputy Premier to complete his preliminary comments. He is now discussing 1991 to 1995 along exactly the same lines. If there is one rule for me and other members on my side, there must be a rule for the Deputy Premier and other members on his side.

The SPEAKER: Order! I can assure the member for Wakehurst that the same rule applies to all members.

Mr Brad Hazzard: Mr Speaker, I ask you to direct him to comply with your direction.

Mr Alan Ashton: Further to the point of order: A little while ago the member for Murrumbidgee said that if things did not go the Opposition's way, they would continue to disrupt the Parliament. That is clearly what they are doing. I ask you to keep in mind what they are doing and to rule on that.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for East Hills will resume his seat. A number of points of order have been taken on the answer. The question was in order, and I have ruled on the answer on a number of occasions. I ask the Deputy Premier to continue but to conclude his answer.

Mr JOHN WATKINS: If Barry cannot take it, and if Liberal Party members cannot defend themselves against these charges, they should give up and tell us they are not willing to defend themselves. If we look at the acumen of this man who pretends to be the Leader of the Opposition, there is nothing there. That is what was at the heart of his reply to the Budget Speech today: no plan for New South Wales and no recognition of what a great budget this is for the hardworking families of this State. The Leader of the Opposition simply retreated, as he has done all his political life. He has stood beside the leader, with a knife in his hand. He has stood beside all of them—until finally the job fell into his lap and he does not know what to do with it.

BAULKHAM HILLS ELECTORATE SCHOOL MAINTENANCE

Mr WAYNE MERTON: My question is directed to the Premier. Since the Premier promised a gymnasium for Model Farms High School and he has finally decided to act on the deplorable toilets at Crestwood Public School, can he explain to the people of my electorate why these projects are not in this year's budget and when they will be delivered? Or is this press release just more spin?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: I commend the budget papers as good bedtime reading for the member for Baulkham Hills.

SCIENCE AND MEDICAL RESEARCH INVESTMENT

Ms NOREEN HAY: My question without notice is to the Minister for Science and Medical Research. How is the Government meeting its commitment to support science and medical research in New South Wales?

Ms VERITY FIRTH: New South Wales' world-leading research institutions and inspiring scientists will benefit from the recent State Budget's significant public investment in science and medical research. The 2007-08 State Budget provides more than \$190 million over the next four years to support the research endeavours of scientists and to build the modern facilities in which they can test their ideas and theories. This significant further investment is a demonstration of the Iemma Government's determination to make New South Wales a magnet for scientific endeavour, home to the world's leading researchers, and a base from which discoveries can be translated into commercial successes.

But ultimately this investment is all about saving lives and finding cures and therapies for untreatable diseases and disabilities. In particular, the 2007-08 State Budget offers renewed hope to the 9,000 Australians living with the physical and physiological consequences of spinal injury and other neurological conditions. Research that will improve our understanding of these conditions will receive funding totalling \$13 million over four years, with \$4.35 million allocated this year. The Spinal Cord Injury and Related Neurological Conditions Grants Program 2007-11 will provide financial assistance to research projects and scholarships leading to discoveries that will have a positive impact on the lives of people with spinal cord injuries and other neurological conditions.

The investment the Government has already made in this field of medical research is now starting to deliver dramatic yet practical results. For example, a cough-assist device and a bionic hand are in their early stages of development. These two inventions alone have the potential to improve the quality of life of those living with spinal cord injury and related conditions, and to help reduce the morbidity and mortality associated with these afflictions.

There are four other significant budget measures I wish to mention today. First, the budget provides ongoing support to the \$40 million Science Leveraging Fund, a four-year program that is boosting the State's research capacity and providing essential research infrastructure. The \$23 million already committed from this fund is leveraging Commonwealth and private contributions of over \$250 million into technologies and research infrastructure in areas such as quantum computing, proteomics and fraud detection. Second, the budget sets aside \$20 million over the next four years for life sciences research, including \$5.8 million towards grants that encourage internationally renowned researchers to continue their work here in New South Wales and \$13.3 million for the commercialisation of scientific discoveries.

This extra funding builds on the Government's BioFirst Strategy, which successfully leveraged over \$300 million into New South Wales-based research centres and businesses, as well as attracting 13 top researchers back to the State. Third, the budget commits a further \$17.3 million to the Medical Research Support Program, a \$61 million triennial program that is investing in vital research infrastructure such as laboratory equipment, subscriptions to gene databases, and computer equipment.

Finally, I am particularly pleased that this week's budget will help keep New South Wales at the forefront of cancer research, a disease that will at some point touch the lives of many members of this Parliament. Specifically, the Cancer Institute will be provided with \$97 million over the next four years to support new and innovative cancer research in New South Wales. In addition, five world-leading cancer research projects will be supported by the State Government. The Centre for Vascular Research at the University of New South Wales will receive \$3.75 million to enable it to research anti-mitochondrial cancer drugs, in collaboration with St Vincent's Hospital. The Centre for Vascular Research will receive a further \$2.96 million to enable it to research cancer-causing DNA, in collaboration with Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, in order to improve the treatment of skin cancers.

Concord Hospital will receive \$3.75 million to enable it, in collaboration with Macquarie University and the Garvan Institute, to help identify protein cancer markers in blood to better predict relapse and treat colorectal cancer. The Sydney Melanoma Unit will receive \$3.25 million to drive rapid improvement in cancer prevention and treatment, and improvements in survival and the quality of life of melanoma patients. Last but not least, \$1.4 million will be provided to enable the Surgical Outcomes Research Centre at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital and the University of Sydney to investigate how communication technology can improve the quality of life of cancer patients in remote areas. More than ever before, investment in science, medical research and

innovation offers the prospect of a healthier population, a cleaner environment, and a sustainable economic future for New South Wales.

PORT MACQUARIE FIRE BRIGADE AND STATE EMERGENCY SERVICE FACILITIES

Mr ROBERT OAKESHOTT: My question is to the Premier. Now that the new Port Macquarie ambulance station is nearing completion, can the Premier update the House on the long-awaited plans for the new Fire Brigade and State Emergency Service facilities as part of this new combined emergency services centre?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: I can inform the member for Port Macquarie that the Government supports the co-location of these emergency services when that has operational advantages for the services and it meets their priorities. As the member correctly pointed out, the \$1.4 million redevelopment of the Ambulance Service facility on the corner of Hindman Street and Central Road is nearing completion. Health is a very important issue in Port Macquarie.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members of the Opposition will remain silent. The Premier has the call.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: I will leave it to the member for Port Macquarie to tell the member for Murrumbidgee about Port Macquarie Hospital. Health is a very important issue in Port Macquarie. As the member for Port Macquarie correctly pointed out, the \$1.4 million redevelopment project is nearing completion. The State Emergency Service has indicated it would support relocating from its existing Hastings unit, which is in Gordon Street, to this location, if it suits its operational needs. The New South Wales Fire Brigades are also interested in a co-location and they are currently having consultations with the council about securing a portion of the site for redevelopment as part of a new fire station. That proposal will be considered along with the proposal for the State Emergency Service. The funding for the projects is primarily the responsibility of local government, but the Government will consider firstly the Fire Brigades proposal. When the consultations are complete it will consider the State Emergency Service proposal with respect to its operational needs and priorities.

WESTERN SYDNEY SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE BUDGET

Mr NINOS KHOSHABA: My question is directed to the Minister for Western Sydney. How is the Government meeting its commitments to communities across Western Sydney?

Mrs BARBARA PERRY: This year's State budget honours the Government's commitments and delivers improved and expanded services for families in Western Sydney. Western Sydney is a great place to live and we are working hard to make it even better, with more than \$2.16 billion being spent on vital health, education, roads and transport. That is a massive boost to services and infrastructure in Western Sydney—a jump of \$143 million over the previous year. What that means for the people of Western Sydney is better schools, transport, roads, hospitals and policing. It ensures Western Sydney gets its fair share.

This budget unashamedly backs Western Sydney through improved services for our region and record amounts of infrastructure spending, and it delivers on our commitments. It provides support and relief for hardworking families in Western Sydney who are doing it tough in the face of spiralling fuel prices and rising interest rates. I am especially pleased with the \$335 million to be spent on upgrading and maintaining roads in Western Sydney. This funding allows major projects to move forward in Western Sydney, such as the Great Western Highway, Windsor Road and the widening of the F5. The massive redevelopment of Auburn and Liverpool hospitals continues this year, with more than \$67 million to construct new and upgraded facilities.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Hawkesbury to order.

Mrs BARBARA PERRY: If the member has a problem he should come and ask me a question.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Hawkesbury to order for the second time.

Mrs BARBARA PERRY: This funding includes \$45.2 million for the construction of a new hospital on the existing Auburn Hospital site—

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Hawkesbury to order for the third time.

Mrs BARBARA PERRY: —to provide a comprehensive range of services. The funding also includes \$22.5 million for Liverpool Hospital stage two to continue the hospital's redevelopment to support projected population growth in the area. State Government capital works projects also will support more than 27,000 direct and indirect jobs in Western Sydney—of which the member for Hawkesbury should be very proud. Western Sydney is a great place to live. This budget drives improvements to the quality of life of families in Western Sydney and it delivers on our commitments to the people of Western Sydney; it guarantees the front-line services and the infrastructure we owe our children are guaranteed. That is a responsibility this Government will never shirk from. We will continue to provide a better future for the people of Western Sydney while delivering on our commitments.

Question time concluded.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON LAW AND JUSTICE

Government Response to Report

Ms Linda Burney tabled the Government's response, dated April 2007, to the report entitled "Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts" tabled in the Legislative Council on 23 November 2006.

PETITIONS

Hornsby and Berowra Railway Stations Parking Facilities

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

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 **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

Hawkesbury River Railway Station Access

Petition requesting improved access to Hawkesbury River railway station, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

Pensioner Travel Voucher Booking Fee

Petition requesting the removal of the \$10 booking fee on pensioner travel vouchers, received from **Mr John Turner**.

Urban Planning

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

Urban Areas Sex Shops

Petition requesting that the House prohibit the approval of sex shops in local urban areas, received from **Mr Malcolm Kerr**.

Hornsby Palliative Care Beds

Petition requesting funding for Hornsby's palliative care beds, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

Rescue Helicopter Services

Petition requesting that the Government halt the decision to award the contract for helicopter medical retrieval services to a foreign, for-profit company, review the tender process and make the tender documents publicly available, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

Breast Screening Funding

Petition requesting funding for breast screening to allow access for women aged 40 to 79 years, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

Cronulla Electorate Policing

Petition requesting reinstatement of police numbers at Miranda police station and maintenance of a strong visible police presence in Cronulla, received from **Mr Malcolm Kerr**.

Caringbah Traffic Conditions

Petition requesting the installation of a right turn arrow at the intersection of The Kingsway and Gannons Road, Caringbah, received from **Mr Malcolm Kerr**.

Inner City Bicycle Lanes

Petition requesting dedicated bicycle facilities for the entire length of William Street, and on Craigend Street and Kings Cross Road, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Whale Protection in Australian Waters

Petition requesting that whales are protected in Australian waters, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES

Establishment and Membership

Motion, by leave, by Mr John Aquilina agreed to:

That the following motions for the establishment of parliamentary committees and the appointment of members be agreed to:

(1) Public Accounts Committee

That:

- (1) in accordance with section 54 (2) of the Public Finance and Audit Act 1983, the following members be appointed to serve on the Public Accounts Committee: Mr Khoshaba, Ms McKay, Mr McLeay, Mr Oakeshott, Mr Roberts and Mr J. H. Turner; and
- (2) the committee have leave to make visits of inspection within the state of New South Wales and other States and Territories of Australia;

(2) Legislation Review Committee

That:

- (1) in accordance with section 5 (1) (b) of the Legislation Review Act 1987, the following members of the Legislative Assembly be appointed to serve on the Legislation Review Committee: Mrs Hopwood, Ms McMahon, Mr Pearce, Mr Shearan and Mr R. W. Turner;
- (2) the committee have leave to make visits of inspection within the State of New South Wales and other States and Territories of Australia; and
- (3) a message be sent acquainting the Legislative Council of the resolution and requesting the Legislative Council to appoint three of its members to serve on the committee.

(3) Committee on the Independent Commission Against Corruption

That:

- (1) in accordance with section 65 (1) (b) of the Independent Commission Against Corruption Act 1988, the following members of the Legislative Assembly be appointed to serve on the Committee On The Independent Commission Against Corruption: Mr Coombs, Mr Harris, Ms McKay, Ms McMahon, Mr O'Dea, Mr Stokes, Mr Terenzini and Mr J. H. Turner;
- (2) the committee have leave to make visits of inspection within the State of New South Wales and other States and Territories of Australia; and
- (3) a message be sent acquainting the Legislative Council of the resolution and requesting the Legislative Council to appoint three of its members to serve on the committee.

(4) Committee on the Office of the Ombudsman and the Police Integrity Commission

That:

- (1) in accordance with section 31C (1) (b) of the Ombudsman Act 1974, the following members of the Legislative Assembly be appointed to serve on the Committee on the Office of the Ombudsman and the Police Integrity Commission: Mr Draper, Ms D'Amore, Mr Kerr and Mr Pearce;
- (2) the committee have leave to make visits of inspection within the State of New South Wales and other States and Territories of Australia; and
- (3) a message be sent acquainting the Legislative Council of the resolution and requesting the Legislative Council to appoint three of its members to serve on the committee.

(5) Committee on the Health Care Complaints Commission

That:

- (1) in accordance with section 67 (1) (b) of the Health Care Complaints Act 1993, the following members of the Legislative Assembly be appointed to serve on the Committee on the Health Care Complaints Commission: Mr Hickey, Mrs Hopwood, Dr McDonald and Mr Morris;
- (2) The committee have leave to make visits of inspection within the State of New South Wales and other States and Territories of Australia; and
- (3) A message be sent acquainting the Legislative Council of the resolution and requesting the Legislative Council to appoint three of its members to serve on the committee.

(6) Committee on Children and Young People

That:

- (1) in accordance with section 29 (1) (b) of the Commission For Children and Young People Act 1998, the following members of the Legislative Assembly be appointed to serve on the Committee On Children and Young People: Ms Andrews, Mr Cansdell, Dr McDonald and Ms Tebbutt;
- (2) the committee have leave to make visits of inspection within the State of New South Wales and other States and Territories of Australia; and
- (3) a message be sent acquainting the Legislative Council of the resolution and requesting the Legislative Council to appoint three of its members to serve on the committee.

(7) Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters

That:

- (1) a Joint Standing Committee, to be known as the Joint Standing Committee On Electoral Matters, be appointed;
- (2) the committee inquire into and report upon such matters as may be referred to it by either House of the Parliament or a Minister that relate to:
 - (a) the following electoral laws:
 - (i) Parliamentary Electorates and Elections Act 1912 (other than Part 2);
 - (ii) Election Funding Act 1981; and
 - (iii) those provisions of the Constitution Act 1902 that relate to the procedures for, and conduct of, elections for members of the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council (other than sections 27, 28 and 28a);
 - (b) the administration of and practices associated with the electoral laws described at (a);
- (3) all matters that relate to (2) (a) and (b) above in respect of the 24 March 2007 state election, shall stand referred to the committee for any inquiry the committee may wish to make. The committee shall report on the outcome of any such inquiry within 12 months of the date of this resolution being agreed to by both Houses;
- (4) the committee consist of seven members, as follows:
 - (a) three Members of the Legislative Assembly of whom three must be Government members, and
 - (b) four members of the Legislative Council of whom:
 - (i) one must be a Government member,
 - (ii) two must be Opposition members, and
 - (iii) one must be a cross-bench member;

- (5) Ms Beamer, Ms Burton and Mr Coombs be appointed to serve on such committee as the members of the Legislative Assembly;
 - (6) notwithstanding anything contained in the standing orders of either House, at any meeting of the committee, any four members of the committee shall constitute a quorum, provided that the committee meets as a joint committee at all times;
 - (7) the committee have leave to sit during the sittings or any adjournment of either or both Houses;
 - (8) the committee have leave to make visits of inspection within the State of New South Wales and other States and Territories of Australia; and
 - (9) a message be sent acquainting the Legislative Council of the resolution and requesting the Legislative Council to appoint four of its members to serve with the members of the Legislative Assembly upon such joint standing committee, and to fix a time and place for the first meeting.
- (8) Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety

That:

a joint standing committee (to be known as the Staysafe Committee) be appointed to inquire into and report on road safety in New South Wales with the following terms of reference:

- (1) As an ongoing task, the committee is to—
 - (a) monitor, investigate and report on the road safety situation in New South Wales; and
 - (b) review and report on countermeasures aimed at reducing deaths, injuries, and the social and economic costs to the community arising from road accidents.

Without restricting the generality of the foregoing, the following are to be given urgent consideration—

- (i) counter measures aimed at traffic accidents associated with alcohol and other drugs;
 - (ii) traffic law enforcement measures and their effectiveness;
 - (iii) a review of human factors affecting traffic accidents, especially those relating to driver and rider licensing requirements and standards;
 - (iv) the social and economic impact of death and serious and debilitating injuries resulting from traffic accidents; and
 - (v) heavy vehicle safety.
- (2) such committee consist of seven members of the Legislative Assembly and three members of the Legislative Council and that, notwithstanding anything contained in the standing orders of either house, at any meeting of the committee, any five members shall constitute a quorum provided that the committee shall meet as a joint committee at all times;
 - (3) Mr Corrigan, Ms Fardell, Mr Harris, Ms Hay, Dr McDonald, Mr Maguire and Mr Souris be appointed to serve on such committee as the members of the Legislative Assembly;
 - (4) the committee have leave to sit during the sittings or any adjournment of either or both Houses;
 - (5) the committee have leave to make visits of inspection within the State of New South Wales and other States and Territories of Australia;
 - (6) a message be sent acquainting the Legislative Council of the resolution and requesting the Legislative Council to appoint three of its members to serve with the members of the Legislative Assembly upon such joint standing committee, and to fix a time and place for the first meeting.
- (9) Standing Committee on Public Works

That:

a standing committee on public works be appointed to inquire and report from time to time with the following terms of reference:

- (1) As an on-going task, the committee is to examine and report on such existing and proposed capital works projects, or matters relating to capital works projects, in the public sector, including the environmental impacts of such works, and whether alternative management practices offer lower incremental costs, as are referred to it by a Minister, or by resolution of the Legislative Assembly.
- (2) such committee consist of seven members of the Legislative Assembly;

- (3) Mr Baumann, Mr Borger, Ms Fardell, Mr Khoshaba, Mr McBride, Mrs Paluzzano and Mr Page be appointed to serve on such committee;
 - (4) the committee have leave to make visits of inspection within the State of New South Wales and other States and Territories of Australia.
- (10) Standing Committee on Natural Resource Management (Climate Change)
- That:
- (1) a standing committee be appointed to inquire into issues of sustainable natural resource management with particular reference to climate change impacts and, in particular, to report on the following terms of reference:
 - (a) The likely consequences of human-induced climate change on land (including salinity), water and other natural resources;
 - (b) Options for ensuring ecologically sustainable natural resource use, taking into particular account the impacts of climate change;
 - (c) Approaches to land and water use management practices on farms and other natural resource management practices, having regard in particular to the role of such practices in contributing to climate change or as a tool in helping to tackle climate change;
 - (d) The effectiveness of management systems for ensuring that sustainability measures for the management of natural resources in New South Wales are achieved, having particular regard to climate change; and
 - (e) The likely consequences of national and international policies on climate change on natural resource management in New South Wales.
 - (2) the committee consist of six members comprising:
 - (a) three Government members (one of whom shall be the Chair);
 - (b) two Opposition members; and
 - (c) one Independent member.
 - (3) the members be nominated in writing to the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly by the relevant party leaders and the independent members respectively within seven calendar days of the passing of this resolution; and
 - (4) the committee have leave to make visits of inspection within the State of New South Wales and other states and territories of Australia, but not outside Australia.
- (11) Standing Committee on Broadband in Rural and Regional Communities
- That:
- (1) a standing committee be appointed to inquire into the needs of rural and regional communities in relation to telecommunications (including broadband) and other technology services and, in particular, to report on the following terms of reference:
 - (a) The availability of telecommunications (including broadband) and other technology services in rural and regional communities;
 - (b) The benefits and opportunities for rural and regional communities of having access to telecommunications (including broadband) and other technology services;
 - (c) Disincentives and barriers to the provision of telecommunications (including broadband) and other technology services to rural and regional communities;
 - (d) The consequences for rural and regional communities of not having, or not having adequate, access to telecommunications (including broadband) and other technology services, having regard to likely future industry and technological developments; and
 - (e) Options for encouraging providers of telecommunications (including broadband) and other technology services to extend services to rural and regional communities.
 - (2) the committee consist of seven members comprising:
 - (a) four Government members;
 - (b) two Opposition members; and
 - (c) one Independent member.
 - (3) the members be nominated in writing to the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly by the relevant party leaders and the independent members respectively within seven calendar days of the passing of this resolution; and
 - (4) The committee have leave to make visits of inspection within the State of New South Wales and other States and Territories of Australia, but not outside Australia.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**Suspension of Standing Orders: Bills**

Mr JOHN AQUILINA (Riverstone—Leader of the House) [3.27 p.m.]: I move:

That on Friday 22 June 2007 standing orders be suspended to permit the resumption of the adjourned debate and consideration of all remaining stages of the following bills:

Biofuel (Ethanol Content) Bill 2007
Brothels Legislation Amendment Bill 2007
Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Amendment (Assistance in Foreign Criminal Matters) Bill 2007
Judicial Officers Amendment Bill 2007
Police Superannuation Legislation Amendment Bill 2007

Tomorrow we have the opportunity to deal with a significant number of bills that have been introduced into this House. They raise matters of concern for the State and for all members. Both the Opposition and the Government are keen to ensure that this legislation is passed prior to the rising of Parliament for the winter recess. We need to ensure that these matters proceed through the Legislative Assembly for determination in another place. Therefore I propose that these matters be determined tomorrow so there is time for consideration of the bills in another place prior to the rising of Parliament.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI (Murrumbidgee) [3.28 p.m.]: Only a month ago we introduced new standing orders that give members five days notice after bills have been introduced and the agreement in principle speech has been made. That provision not only gives the 93 members of this House the opportunity to consider complex, detailed and important legislation but also gives the greater community an opportunity to respond to legislation once it is introduced and the agreement in principle speech has been made. The Government now wants to give us, in some cases, only 24 hours notice of important legislation, such as the Biofuel (Ethanol Content) Bill, which is going to make a big difference to how fuel supplies are delivered in New South Wales.

At the beginning of the Fifty-fourth Parliament the Speaker and the Premier, with the support of the Coalition, agreed to the new standing orders. There was great enthusiasm about lifting standards. On that day I spoke about the abuse of the standing orders over the past eight years that I have been a member of Parliament, and members who have been in this place for the four years prior have told me the same situation applied then. This motion seeks to remove the rights of members. The Government drafts the standing orders, whose purpose is to provide members five working days before a bill is debated to enable them to consult the community. On many occasions the Government has introduced legislation that has been fundamentally wrong. The best way for those errors to be corrected is to have consultation with key stakeholders. It is a denial of natural justice to prevent key interest groups from having an opportunity to consider legislation before it is debated. That is why Parliament has existed for 151 years. To not give five days notice denies the Opposition and crossbench members their proper rights.

When the parliamentary sittings schedule was released the media reported that the Parliament was sitting very few days. The Government can be summed up in three words: lazy, lazy, lazy! We know that the Premier does not like going to functions; he likes to cancel functions. The Opposition would be happy to sit additional parliamentary days. Suspending standing orders to bring these bills on tomorrow is not necessary. The Opposition is happy to sit tomorrow to deal with bills for which we have been given five days notice, according to the standing orders. However, we object to being given less than five days notice.

The Government has moved this motion because it cannot get its act together. The Parliament has sat four weeks in the three months since the State election. Half of the bills have been on the notice paper for about a year, so what has the Government been waiting for? It cannot get organised because it is lazy. It follows on from the Premier's ministerial statement yesterday about the defence contracts that the New South Wales Government was not awarded because it is too lazy. The Federal Government asked this Government to make submissions and the Commonwealth spokeswoman said, "New South Wales pretty much directed us to their website." That is all the New South Wales Government was able to do in seeking to win an \$11 billion investment.

Mr Alan Ashton: Point of order: Actually, I will not take a point of order as the member's speaking time has just expired.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: Mr Speaker, I seek to move an amendment.

The SPEAKER: Order! The speaking time of the member for Murrumbidgee has expired.

Mr JOHN AQUILINA (Riverstone—Leader of the House) [3.33 p.m.], in reply: The member for Murrumbidgee would have us believe that this is a great surprise, that the Government has pulled this legislation out from under a pillow and that the Opposition was unaware of it. This confirms that the Opposition is not tuned in. The Government has been heralding this legislation for quite some time and the Opposition has known about it. It objects to the fact that we want to stay here and work tomorrow, yet it is accusing the Government of being lazy.

Mr Andrew Fraser: Point of order: The Leader of the House is misleading the House. We may have known about the legislation, but we do not get to see it until we have heard the agreement in principle speech. We do not have time to digest it. Therefore we cannot offer real debate on the legislation on behalf of the people of New South Wales.

The SPEAKER: Order! Those points are well made, but they do not constitute a point of order.

Mr JOHN AQUILINA: The agreement in principle speeches have been made on these bills. The Opposition would have us believe that there is something magical about five days. There is nothing magical about that. We need to get on with the job and the Government is ready. If the Opposition does not want to work, so be it. I have moved the motion. We will debate this legislation tomorrow. If the Opposition does not want to turn up, that is its prerogative.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 47

Mr Amery	Mr Greene	Mr Morris
Ms Andrews	Mr Harris	Mrs Paluzzano
Mr Aquilina	Ms Hay	Mr Pearce
Mr Brown	Mr Hickey	Mrs Perry
Ms Burney	Ms Horner	Mr Rees
Ms Burton	Ms Keneally	Mr Sartor
Mr Campbell	Mr Khoshaba	Mr Shearan
Mr Collier	Mr Koperberg	Mr Stewart
Mr Coombs	Mr Lynch	Ms Tebbutt
Mr Corrigan	Mr McBride	Mr Terenzini
Mr Costa	Dr McDonald	Mr Tripodi
Ms D'Amore	Ms McKay	Mr West
Mr Daley	Mr McLeay	Mr Whan
Ms Firth	Ms McMahon	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Gadiel	Ms Meagher	Mr Ashton
Mr Gibson	Ms Megarrity	Mr Martin

Noes, 39

Mr Aplin	Ms Hodgkinson	Mrs Skinner
Mr Baird	Mrs Hopwood	Mr Smith
Mr Baumann	Mr Humphries	Mr Souris
Ms Berejiklian	Mr Kerr	Mr Stokes
Mr Cansdell	Mr Merton	Mr Stoner
Mr Constance	Ms Moore	Mr J. H. Turner
Mr Debnam	Mr Oakeshott	Mr R. W. Turner
Mr Draper	Mr O'Dea	Mr J. D. Williams
Mrs Fardell	Mr Page	Mr R. C. Williams
Mr Fraser	Mr Piccoli	
Ms Goward	Mr Piper	
Mrs Hancock	Mr Provest	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Hartcher	Mr Richardson	Mr George
Mr Hazzard	Mr Roberts	Mr Maguire

Pair

Mr Borger

Mr O'Farrell

Question resolved in the affirmative.**Motion agreed to.****CONSIDERATION OF MOTIONS TO BE ACCORDED PRIORITY****Hunter Health Budget**

Ms JODI McKAY (Newcastle) [3.43 p.m.]: This matter is urgent and should be given priority as it directly impacts on people in my electorate and, indeed, the greater Hunter and New England regions. My community needs to know that members in this House welcomed the strong funding that has been allocated to health services in our region. The hardworking doctors, nurses and allied health professionals need to hear that their facilities have the support of all members in this House. This motion must be accorded priority as it impacts on such a vast area and the improvements funded this year need to be considered and supported.

Members opposite have failed to acknowledge that this year's budget provides for record funds for the Hunter and New England regions. The growth in the region requires commensurate improvements in services and must be given strong support and this support must be given today. The extra spending on capital works in the Hunter is supported by our community, but the community wants to know if that support is reflected by all members in this House. I urge all members of this place to support giving this matter the priority it deserves.

Health Funding

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER (North Shore—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [3.44 p.m.]: I find it extraordinary that the member for Newcastle would argue that priority should be given to a motion congratulating the Government when there are many complaints regarding the provision of insufficient funding to ensure medical staffing levels, to provide for training and support for rural doctors, a failure to fund dental care and an underspending on health capital works. These complaints are the subject of the motion that I suggest should be accorded priority. Should a motion of self-congratulations be given priority? It is typical of this Government to bury its head in the sand. I am happy to debate the member's motion and I will point out how many of the projects she has talked about have been delayed, and the people of her electorate have been forced to wait longer than they should have had to. Perhaps she does not know that because she was not a member of this place before March, but I have budget papers that go back before that time.

However, that is not as important to the people of the State as are the issues covered in my motion. In particular, I refer to a concern that "medical staffing levels are not adequate to deliver safe and effective care". That is a direct quote from the Australian Medical Association's press release commenting on the Lemma Labor budget. The press release is headed, "Doctors forgotten in health budget". It is a commentary from the peak doctors organisation about the failures of this Government. The second part of my motion talks about the "failure to invest additional funding in training and other support measures for the State's rural doctors". That is a direct quote from the Rural Doctors Association. That association says:

In the past 12 years alone, the number of rural GP obstetricians in NSW has more than halved—from 257 in 1994 to just 123 statewide in 2006.

The association goes on to say:

Despite repeated calls from us of the urgent need for a massive injection of funding into expanded training programs and better supports for rural doctors and procedural GPs in NSW, the Government refuses to pay—

Ms Tanya Gadiel: Point of order: I am somewhat confused as to whether the member is trying to establish priority, trying to support the motion of the member for Newcastle or rambling on about how bad the Federal Government is in not supplying places for students to go to university.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition is trying to establish priority.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: I am happy for the member to be involved in this debate. I am referring to a press release put out by the Rural Doctors Association about the State budget and its failure to provide funds.

In case the member for Parramatta does not understand, it is a State Government responsibility to provide training places in hospitals so that doctors who have finished their studies at university can complete their training and become doctors.

Ms Tanya Gadiel: Point of order: I do not appreciate the condescending attitude from this member. This is about the number of doctors who are given access to university places.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! That is not a point of order under the standing orders.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: It is not about university places; it is about the doctors who have finished their university training not having places in hospitals. Part of my motion talks about lack of dental care—only \$4 million extra in this year's budget. This is a disgrace. This Government has failed to meet its obligations to dental patients in New South Wales.

Finally, I refer to the underspending on health capital works. I have already spoken about those works in the Hunter. Royal North Shore Hospital has been delayed four years, with \$46 million underspent on the project during the term of this Government. Queanbeyan Hospital was promised before the 2003 election, after the project was announced by the Coalition, and was allocated money the year before the last budget. That project is now delayed and has been underspent. It will now cost more because of those delays. In the Hunter, all of the projects in the Newcastle strategy have been delayed by a year. I can quote chapter and verse from the budget for the benefit of the member for Newcastle because her constituents will complain about the Government's failure to provide funding for capital works in her electorate.

Question—That the motion of the member for Newcastle be accorded priority—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 46

Mr Amery	Mr Greene	Mr Morris
Ms Andrews	Mr Harris	Mrs Paluzzano
Mr Aquilina	Ms Hay	Mr Pearce
Mr Brown	Mr Hickey	Mrs Perry
Ms Burney	Ms Hornery	Mr Rees
Ms Burton	Ms Keneally	Mr Sartor
Mr Campbell	Mr Khoshaba	Mr Shearan
Mr Collier	Mr Koperberg	Ms Tebbutt
Mr Coombs	Mr Lynch	Mr Terenzini
Mr Corrigan	Mr McBride	Mr Tripodi
Mr Costa	Dr McDonald	Mr West
Mr Daley	Ms McKay	Mr Whan
Ms D'Amore	Mr McLeay	
Ms Firth	Ms McMahan	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Gadiel	Ms Meagher	Mr Ashton
Mr Gibson	Ms Megarrity	Mr Martin

Noes, 39

Mr Aplin	Ms Hodgkinson	Mrs Skinner
Mr Baird	Mrs Hopwood	Mr Smith
Mr Baumann	Mr Humphries	Mr Souris
Ms Berejiklian	Mr Kerr	Mr Stokes
Mr Cansdell	Mr Merton	Mr Stoner
Mr Constance	Ms Moore	Mr J. H. Turner
Mr Debnam	Mr Oakeshott	Mr R. W. Turner
Mr Draper	Mr O'Dea	Mr J. D. Williams
Mrs Fardell	Mr Page	Mr R. C. Williams
Mr Fraser	Mr Piccoli	
Ms Goward	Mr Piper	
Mrs Hancock	Mr Provest	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Hartcher	Mr Richardson	Mr George
Mr Hazzard	Mr Roberts	Mr Maguire

Pair

Mr Borger

Mr O'Farrell

Question resolved in the affirmative.**HUNTER HEALTH BUDGET****Motion Accorded Priority****Ms JODI McKAY** (Newcastle) [3.57 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) congratulates the Government on its record budget for health in the Hunter for 2007-08;
- (2) congratulates the Government on recognising the importance of the growing Hunter region with extra spending on capital works and new programs for hospitals in the area;
- (3) notes that families in the Hunter will benefit from the redevelopment and expansion of Maitland Hospital's emergency department; and
- (4) congratulates clinicians and nurses in the Hunter region on their ongoing hard work to ensure the best possible standard of care.

I am proud to report to the House on the Government's record investment in the Hunter in the 2007-08 budget. The Government continues its sustained investment in improved health services to the people of the Hunter, an investment that is already yielding results. The Government's investment in increased beds, staff and elective surgery over recent years, combined with the hard work of our dedicated health staff, has delivered a material improvement in the performance of the hospitals in the Hunter. Before turning to the budget, I take this opportunity to acknowledge and congratulate the fantastic staff of the Hunter New England Area Health Service. The Government will continue to support their good work with a record \$1.13 billion budget in 2007-08, which is an increase of 6.2 per cent or \$65.6 million on last year's budget. Improving access to surgery is a key target of the New South Wales Government State Plan. I am pleased that this budget includes an extra \$2.3 million to continue to reduce elective surgery waiting lists across the Hunter New England Area health Service.

Another key objective of the State Plan is to reduce unnecessary hospital admissions through early intervention. The budget funding for 70 community-based bed equivalents across the area will improve our capacity to keep people healthy in the community and, of course, out of hospital. This investment builds on the 122 new permanent beds and bed equivalents funded for the Hunter in the two previous budgets. I am pleased that \$831,000 is also being invested in the successful Healthy at Home program in the Newcastle area. That program supports early intervention to improve the health of older frail people living at home through coordinated health and community services. Another innovative early intervention strategy is the \$14.2 million New South Wales statewide preschooler eyesight screening program. I look forward to that being rolled out to the younger members of my electorate.

I am also particularly excited by the budget enhancements for John Hunter Hospital. These include \$4.5 million to complete the \$9.8 million upgrade of facilities for patients and staff at the hospital and \$200,000 to upgrade and enhance medical imaging and patient monitoring equipment at John Hunter Children's Hospital, which will also benefit from the neonatal flexi-cot. It will be on standby with a team of specialist nurses to boost neonatal intensive care services. This is an innovative approach and will improve the health system's capacity to provide highly specialised care for twins.

The New South Wales Government has a proud track record of investment in health infrastructure through the Newcastle Strategy, and the 2007-08 budget includes \$24.3 million to continue progress on that strategy. That includes \$2.35 million for the Belmont District Hospital upgrade, a project with an estimated total cost of \$31.6 million. The initial phase has been completed, providing a new emergency department, upgraded operating theatres and day surgery facilities. Work will continue on refurbishment in 2007-08. In addition, \$614,000 has been allocated to complete the new Newcastle Community Health Centre at an estimated total cost of \$9.7 million. Funding is also provided to complete the upgrade of road infrastructure at John Hunter Hospital.

Of course, the Government is also progressing the major redevelopment at the Mater Misericordiae Hospital. That involves a private-public partnership that will result in a significantly expanded cancer service for

the people of the Hunter and the construction of a new mental health facility. It is estimated that the Newcastle Strategy will cost more than \$200 million. That is evidence that the New South Wales Government has a clear, funded plan for health infrastructure in the Hunter region. This budget also reflects the Government's commitment to improved mental health facilities, with \$2.05 million allocated in 2007-08 to progress construction of the 20-bed non-acute mental health unit on the James Fletcher Hospital site.

As I said at the outset, we are fortunate to have hardworking, dedicated staff across the Hunter health system. The Hunter will share in the budget's \$46.5 million statewide investment to recruit and train more nurses and the \$38.8 million over four years for nurse scholarships, professional development, training opportunities, nurse practitioners and clinical nurse educators. The Hunter New England Area Health Service will also receive a share of funding to ensure targeted recruitment and relocation support for health staff. In terms of other health staff, the Hunter will also benefit from its share of statewide funding of \$46.5 million in 2007-08 to recruit and train more nurses, and \$35.8 million over four years for nurse scholarships, professional development, training opportunities, nurse practitioners and clinical nurse educators.

The budget also contains funding to improve medical recruitment. That is a particular focus of the Hunter New England Area Health Service with the establishment of the Centre for Medical Professional Development. The centre has developed leading-edge programs to support international medical graduates, career medical officers and teaching skills for senior clinicians. The service works closely with the University of Newcastle to attract senior clinicians, which often results in an offer of conjoint clinical-academic appointments to support medical education and research. It also has a close affiliation with the Hunter Medical Research Institute, of which I was a director. I understand that since July 2006 40 staff specialist appointments have been made across the greater Newcastle area, along with 10 visiting medical officer appointments and four career medical officer appointments.

The 2007-08 budget builds on the work that has been done so far and reinforces it with even more resources. I look forward to reporting on continuing improvements in health services for the people of Newcastle as the new budget initiatives are implemented. The Government has made a commitment with the Hunter New England Health Service to improve health services for the people of the region. This record \$1.13-billion budget represents an increase of 6.2 per cent or \$65.6 million on last year's budget. In my electorate alone, a new community health centre will open in the next couple of months and \$2 million will be spent on James Fletcher Hospital to improve mental health services.

I am proud to belong to a government that has mental health services as a priority, a government that acknowledges that we need to continue to invest not only in community care but also in hospital-based care. It is important that we continue to invest in health services in the Newcastle and Hunter region. My colleagues the members for Maitland, Wallsend, Swansea, Charlestown and Cessnock and I will continue to lobby the Government to spend more money in our region. The Government is committed to the Hunter region and it has acknowledged the role that it plays in this State. We are pleased to be able to report to our constituents that the work that we did in the lead-up to the election and our continuing efforts to bring to the Government's attention the needs of the Hunter region are bearing fruit. We are proud to represent the Hunter region and prouder still to know that the Government is listening to our concerns.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER (North Shore—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [4.07 p.m.]: I find it extraordinary that the member for Newcastle would be so self-congratulatory when some of the hospitals in Newcastle area have the longest waiting lists in the State. They are having terrible trouble meeting the needs of emergency patients. I particularly refer to John Hunter Hospital, which has the longest waiting list in New South Wales, with 3,489 people waiting for elective surgery. If the member is so keen to represent her constituents, she needs to raise this issue with the Minister for Health and ask her to ensure that the hospital has the resources it needs to treat patients. Maitland Hospital has 569 patients on its waiting list and Belmont District Hospital has 411. To put this in perspective, John Hunter Hospital has the longest list with 3,489 names, and Gosford Hospital has the next longest list with 2,426 patients. John Hunter Hospital has almost 1,000 more patients on its waiting list.

Mr Brad Hazzard: Which one has 3,000-odd?

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: John Hunter Hospital. Across the State 23 per cent of emergency department patients are awaiting treatment longer than they should, given the urgency of their condition. At Belmont hospital 27 per cent of patients, or 432 patients, were not treated in time. At the Newcastle Mater hospital 21 per cent of patients, or 498, were not treated in time. At John Hunter Hospital, 14 per cent, or 654 patients, were not treated in time.

The member for Newcastle congratulates herself and the Government on their capital works spending. I refer the member to the 2005-06 capital works budget. I know she was not a member of this place at the time, but she should not simply rely on the notes the Minister's office gave her; she should go back to previous budgets. The 2005-06 budget referred to the Newcastle Strategy. It said, for example, that the Belmont hospital upgrade commenced in 2001 and was due to be completed in 2007. However, according to this year's budget the upgrade commenced in 2001 and is due for completion in 2009, a blow-out of two years. At the time the upgrade was first announced it was supposed to cost \$31 million; this year it is estimated to cost \$31.6 million, representing a significant cost blow-out.

The member for Newcastle spoke about the community health centre. According to the 2005-06 budget, the project was supposed to be completed in 2007. However, it has now been delayed until 2008. Originally the project was estimated to cost a total of \$18 million, but the estimated cost has now been reduced to \$9.7 million. What will not be built? It is typical of what happens with this Government. It runs out of money, and then it says, "You can't have what we promised you originally." According to the 2005-06 budget the John Hunter Hospital access building was supposed to be completed in 2006. However, this year's budget shows the project will not be completed until 2008, representing a blow-out of two years. Originally the total cost of the project was estimated at \$97.4 million, but it is now up to \$101.4 million.

The John Hunter Hospital second access project was first announced in the 2005-06 budget and was to be completed in 2006. However, this year's budget estimates the project to be completed in 2008, representing a two-year delay. The estimated total expenditure for the project has blown out from \$4.7 million to \$7.5 million. As the Leader of the Opposition said today in his reply to the Budget Speech, this is a Government that is big on announcements but low on delivery. The member for Newcastle should make a big fuss about what she is going to do for her community. She should ensure she checks the forthcoming budgets to ascertain how many delays there have been and how the budget has blown out. The total underspend in this year's Health budget is \$133 million—

Ms Jodi McKay: Do you know where the Hunter is?

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: I have been to John Hunter Hospital many times. I know many of the doctors there. I know the ambulance officers, including Peter Rumble, who are complaining about ambulances being turned away from the hospital's emergency department. I also know many of the people at the Mater hospital. The expected completion date for improvements to the Mater hospital has been delayed as well. I forgot to mention that.

Ms Jodi McKay: What suburb is the Mater hospital in?

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: I can tell the House something about the credibility of the member for Newcastle, who keeps interjecting. Last Saturday night there were 300 people at the Mayfield Ex-Services Club waiting for the member for Newcastle to turn up to the 109th anniversary of Filipino independence. The Leader of the Liberal Party in the Legislative Council was there. Indeed, he spoke at the event. The organisers kept saying, "We'll wait for the member," but the member for Newcastle did not turn up. I know where Mayfield is and where these things are. The member for Newcastle let her constituents down. She should not interject suggesting I do not know where these places are.

I can assure the member for Newcastle that I have visited John Hunter Hospital, the old Newcastle hospital, Maitland hospital and Belmont hospital. I have also visited the community in another part of the Hunter which the member for Newcastle has completely ignored, the electorate of my very good friend the member for Port Stephens. What has the Government done to meet the needs of the people of Tomaree? They have a so-called hospital. It used to be called the Nelson Bay Polyclinic. It was renamed a hospital, but in fact it is not a real hospital: it is absolutely deficient in meeting the needs of local people. The Government has failed the people of that area. I am very pleased that the member for Port Stephens won that seat. Labor's last member there refused to represent his constituents to get their health care needs met. I have been to that part of the world more times than I care to remember.

The *Newcastle Herald* has had a lot to say about the Government's deficiencies in providing hospital services for the people of the Hunter region. Maitland Hospital has had terrible problems addressing disputes with doctors about their not having enough time to treat patients in the hospital's emergency department. That is reflected in the press releases issued not only by the Australian Medical Association but also by the Rural Doctors Association. As I said, I have met with Peter Rumble on many occasions, and I recommend that the

member for Newcastle meet with him. He is the head of the ambulance union in the Hunter and he regularly contacts the press, me and others to express concern about ambulances being turned away from hospitals in the region. He explains how ambulances do the circuit of Maitland and John Hunter hospitals and they cannot drop off their patients. He tells us about how the ambulances are banked up at the hospitals because the emergency departments simply do not have the capacity to treat the patients. That is why we have so many people on the waiting lists and why these hospitals are unable to treat patients within clinically appropriate times.

Pursuant to standing orders business interrupted, and motion lapsed.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of Motions

General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) given.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

M2-F3 CONNECTION

Mr MICHAEL RICHARDSON (Castle Hill) [4.18 p.m.]: Members may be aware of the federally funded inquiry into options for the M2-F3 connection currently being conducted by the Hon. Mahla Pearlman. The inquiry was established by the Federal Minister for Roads, Jim Lloyd, following requests from local residents and members of Parliament for a re-examination of the figures on which the SKM Consulting study on the link, published in April 2004, was based. The current link between the two expressways is Pennant Hills Road, which bounds one-third of my electorate. Pennant Hills Road forms part of the National Highway, but is operating at or beyond capacity. This has economic as well as social ramifications.

According to SKM, some 75,600 vehicles, including 8,800 trucks, used Pennant Hills Road each weekday in 2004. The figure has increased substantially since the report was written, not least because of the opening of the M7 in December 2005. SKM examined three broad corridors for a new connection between the M2 and the F3: type A, an easterly tunnel; type B, through Galston Gorge to the F3 north of Hornsby; and type C, joining the M7 at Dean Park to Kariong via a new bridge over the Hawkesbury River.

SKM's economic analysis strongly favoured a type A solution, with the preferred option being a tunnel under Pennant Hills Road. It estimated this would cost between \$1.6 and \$2 billion and would remove up to 40,000 vehicles, including 11,000 trucks, from Pennant Hills Road in 2021. By contrast, it estimated the type C option would cost \$2.7 to \$3.6 billion and would remove only 10,000 vehicles, including 2,000 trucks, from Pennant Hills Road by 2021. Based on these figures the tunnel under Pennant Hills Road was the obvious choice. However, many local residents and resident action groups, including the West Pennant Hills Valley Progress Association, strongly favour the westerly connection between the M7 and Kariong. That is why local Liberal members of Parliament lobbied Mr Lloyd to re-examine the assumptions on which the preferred option was based. The result is the Pearlman inquiry, currently underway in Parramatta.

If the figures change, the type C connection could well become the most attractive option. Even if the figures do not change, there is a new and compelling reason to build this road, and sooner rather than later. That reason is the torrential downpour that washed away part of the Old Pacific Highway at Somersby on 9 June and tragically took the lives of five members of a family, including three little children. Since then police have closed a further 30-kilometre section of this road because of safety concerns.

The Old Pacific Highway is the only alternative road to the F3 connecting the Central Coast to Sydney. But sometimes the F3 is closed due to bushfires, fog or accidents. There are 307,000 people living on the Central Coast, of whom 40,000 to 50,000 commute to Sydney each day, many by car. How would those people get to Sydney or return home at night if the F3 were closed, now that the Old Pacific Highway is no longer trafficable?

There is a critical need for a new, reliable connection from the Central Coast to Sydney, capable of carrying B-doubles as well as passenger cars. The M7-Kariong link can and should be that connection. It will be needed, regardless of what new statistics the Pearlman inquiry throws up or what decision Justice Pearlman makes on the M2-F3 connection. It would allow people living on the Central Coast to access the new jobs being

created in Western Sydney along the route of the M7 within 40 minutes rather than the hour and a half it takes currently, and it would slash half an hour off the time trucks take to travel from Huntingdon to Newcastle. It would mean also that people living on the Central Coast would no longer be trapped by bushfire or accident.

People living in Western Sydney, including my constituents, would also benefit greatly from this new connection. It would give Castle Hill residents the same degree of access to the F3 they currently enjoy to the F1, via the M7. The road would make Norwest—which is just a couple of minutes from the M7—one of the most accessible business parks in Australia. This will have significant economic benefits for New South Wales. Around 30,000 jobs are currently located in the 377-hectare Norwest Business Park, with a further 5,000 to be created over the next three years. The connection would make it less than an hour's travel from Gosford.

West Pennant Hills Valley Progress Association also makes the point in its submission to the Pearlman inquiry that currently there is only one major route north of Sydney. It asks why trucks travel from the outer rings into and through the middle rings, via Pennant Hills Road, when they are leaving the city. The association's submission adds:

A decision not to build an alternative route north will curtail the potential for an efficient transport link and will not achieve the planning objectives as stated for the National Highway Link.

I leave it to Justice Pearlman to decide whether a tunnel under Pennant Hills Road or a tunnel along the B2-B3 route from South Turramurra to Marsfield is needed. But whatever decision is made on amplifying Pennant Hills Road, the case for a second route north is well made out. We cannot do nothing.

A modern developed nation lives or dies by the efficiency of its transport systems and its communications. The United States literally cemented its dominance of the world's economy in the 1950s by building a massive network of freeways across America. Australia is an enormous country with a comparatively small population and it has always struggled to find the money to build the links that are needed. That is why aviation has played such a pivotal role in the development of our nation. But aviation cannot solve the problems of Pennant Hills Road. We are not going to airfreight the goods that currently travel north by road; people are not going to commute from the Central Coast by plane; and for many people the rail system is not a suitable alternative.

So today I throw out the challenge to the Government to start planning this road now with the assistance of the private sector. The Premier says he wants to kick-start the New South Wales economy. Here is his chance to prove it. At the moment we have nothing but vague arrows on a map. Let us develop a preferred option for a route and cost it. If we could build the Harbour Bridge 75 years ago, we can surely build the Dean Park to Kariong connection today.

BLAKEHURST PEDESTRIAN FOOTBRIDGE

Ms CHERIE BURTON (Kogarah) [4.23 p.m.]: I bring to the attention of the House an important event that occurred recently in my electorate of Kogarah—the official opening of the Blakehurst pedestrian footbridge over the Princes Highway. I was very pleased to share in this event with the Minister for Roads, the Hon. Eric Roozendaal, and the students of Blakehurst Primary School. The bridge, costing \$2.8 million, is part of the Iemma Labor Government's continued commitment to ensuring the health and safety of the children of New South Wales and road safety in general.

Included in the project is a lift on the western side of the highway to ensure handicapped access for those who are confined to wheelchairs. On the eastern side of the bridge, a ramp leads directly to the school gate and the staircase to the footpath has been screened. As the safety of citizens is always a paramount consideration of this Government, more than adequate lighting was provided for safe pedestrian use after dark. Construction of the bridge took seven months and was completed ahead of schedule and within budget—a commendable effort in itself, considering the bridge deck weighs 70 tonnes and spans one of Sydney's busiest highways.

The New South Wales Government has a comprehensive school road safety package. Around \$2.8 million is dedicated to school road safety programs each year. These programs are aimed at educating our young people about road safety from the time they start school until they reach driving age. Some of these programs are conducted through officers of the New South Wales Police Force, whose respect in the community and involvement in all matters relating to traffic put them in an ideal position to educate young people. Other innovative measures adopted by the Iemma Labor Government include high visibility school zone signs with

flashing "40 zone" signals built into the device, overhead flashing signs, and flashing high-visibility lights built into the road pavement, similar to airport runways.

All members of this House will agree that there is no excuse for bad or dangerous driving in school zones. We have received many complaints from local schools about careless and reckless driving, particularly around the time when children are arriving at and leaving school. Principals in particular have expressed great concern. The importance of this project was again brought to my attention when Mr Phil Heron, the principal of Blakehurst Primary School, reminded those attending the bridge opening that a child crossing the highway had been injured earlier this year—thankfully not seriously.

Those present at the bridge opening ceremony included Judith Thompson, the principal of Blakehurst High School, who will also be able to use the facility, accompanied by a party of her students and former pupils at Blakehurst Primary. Also present were Christine Gaubert of the Blakehurst Primary Parents and Citizens Association and the staff and pupils of Blakehurst Primary School. This event was made even more enjoyable by an interlude from the school band, under the leadership of the musical director and school principal, Phil Heron—one of the most respected and admired school principals in this State. This event also allowed me to show and share with my colleague from another place the pleasure and privilege of electorate work in general, but particularly in Kogarah.

I congratulate the Roads and Traffic Authority; this was a very difficult project. The Princes Highway is one of the busiest highways in Sydney and the way the bridge was constructed made it very difficult to install lift access and make sure the safety ramp is on the other side to allow for access for the disabled and young mums with prams. The consultation process was lengthy and exhaustive and the Roads and Traffic Authority made sure that the concerns of all residents, as far as possible, could be taken into consideration. Overall, we could not please everybody. Members of Parliament know we cannot please everyone all the time, but we certainly pleased the majority of people in this case, particularly the students.

I make special mention of Blakehurst Primary School, which first came to me with the proposal that we then took to the then Minister for Roads. The proposal was assessed, it was discovered it would be a very viable project, and it was delivered in seven months—ahead of schedule and on budget. I was very pleased with the way the Roads and Traffic Authority conducted the consultation and then got on with the job of building the bridge. I congratulate my colleague the Minister for Roads, who ensured the project was, indeed, delivered on time and on budget. Also, my special thanks go to Blakehurst Primary School for all its hard work and lobbying to make this project a reality.

SYDNEY CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL FUNDRAISING APPEAL

GOLD WEEK IN YOUNG

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck) [4.28 p.m.]: Recently I had the great pleasure of jointly launching Gold Week in Young as part of the Sydney Children's Hospital annual fundraising appeal. It was a particular pleasure as Lachlan Apps—who is 15 years old, lives in Young and is diagnosed with communicating hydrocephalus—joined me in the launch. Lachlan is an amazing young man who has displayed great strength and courage in dealing with this condition. It was very appropriate for Lachlan to launch the Gold Week fundraising in Young, because on three occasions the fantastic doctors and nurses at the Sydney Children's Hospital have saved his life.

Today I would like to pay tribute to the work, often unsung, of the staff of the Sydney Children's Hospital. I will also tell the House of Lachlan's story because it pays tribute to their work, and it will also help to raise awareness of hydrocephalus and the impact it can have on peoples' lives. About two years ago Lachlan was suffering from ear infections. In the course of treatment it was discovered that he was also suffering a loss of hearing in his right ear. This was unusual so he was referred to a paediatrician, an ear, nose and throat specialist, and a neurologist. During the diagnosis it was discovered that Lachlan had communicating hydrocephalus and required urgent surgery at Sydney Children's Hospital.

Communicating hydrocephalus is a pathological condition that occurs as a result of an imbalance between the production and absorption of fluid in the brain cavity. This excess fluid in the brain can have serious consequences leading to brain damage, learning difficulties, coma and even life-threatening brain stem compression. Lachlan underwent major surgery at Sydney Children's Hospital to have a shunt, or tube, inserted from his brain cavity to his abdomen to where the excess fluid could be drained and then absorbed by his body.

Quite amazingly two days after his surgery the hearing in Lachlan's right ear returned, which I am told is the first clinical record of a shunt procedure being associated with the return of hearing.

Lachlan made a good recovery and was discharged five days after his surgery. About seven weeks after his discharge some wrestling in the schoolyard led to the shunt being creased and blocked. Lachlan's head began to swell and he began to vomit. He was urgently airlifted back to Sydney Children's Hospital and the shunt was moved back into its correct position. In tribute to the staff at the Hospital, Lachlan's mother Debbie said:

You can't imagine the relief we felt once we got Lachlan safely to the Sydney Children's Hospital and finding out that he was going to be okay. This stress has taken its toll on all of us, especially Lachlan. We never know when the shunt might block and being so far from Sydney and the Hospital makes it even harder.

Lachlan suffered another headache later that same year, which was recognised as a warning sign of another blockage. Lachlan was again airlifted to Sydney Children's Hospital, the third time in seven months, where it was discovered that a valve in his shunt needed replacing. This was the third time that Sydney Children's Hospital had saved his life. Debbie Apps said:

We live our lives knowing that at any time Lachlan may become critically ill and need to be airlifted to the Sydney Children's Hospital. We don't know what the future holds, but we are forever grateful for what they have done and will continue to do to care for our dear son.

I would like to echo Debbie Apps' words and also congratulate the staff at the Sydney Children's Hospital on their tireless work, day in day out, not just for Lachlan, but also for thousands of other children across New South Wales, including young children like 10-year-old Bethany Tout, who unfortunately passed away from a brain tumour a couple of years ago. I congratulate also Big W in Young for supporting Gold Week. I particularly mention the manager and the social group members of Big W, who organised family day activities at the launch. The Young Branch of Bikers Australia held a rally in support of Gold Week and I congratulate them on their community spirit.

Lachlan was diagnosed with communicating hydrocephalus because he had an ear infection. Mrs Apps believes there could have been a much more serious outcome if he had not had the ear infection that caused further investigation. Over the past few years Debbie Apps has come to realise that hydrocephalus is not a commonly recognised condition. She has been lobbying for increased public recognition of the condition and the dangers it presents. I have had several discussions with Mrs Apps and we resolved to continue to bring this deserving issue to the public's attention. I strongly support Mrs Apps in this aim and I encourage honourable members to acquaint themselves with this condition and the special stresses and needs it places on families. I strongly urge the Minister for Health and the Minister Assisting the Minister for Health to support the calls by Mrs Apps and other parents like her for greater recognition of hydrocephalus.

YARRAMUNDI RESERVE

Mr ALLAN SHEARAN (Londonderry) [4.33 p.m.]: Recently I had the honour of representing the Minister for Lands, the Hon Tony Kelly, at the opening of the first stage of Yarramundi Reserve. It is significant that I opened the first stage of the reserve jointly with the Mayor of the city of Hawkesbury, Councillor Rex Stubbs. It is significant because this is a joint project with the appointment of Hawkesbury City Council as the Yarramundi Reserve Trust Manager along with funding from the New South Wales Government. To date the New South Wales Government, through the Department of Lands Public Reserve Management Fund, has provided in excess of \$66,000 to help establish Yarramundi Reserve. This illustrates the New South Wales Government's ongoing commitment, as outlined in the State Plan, to secure our environmental heritage for future generations.

Yarramundi Reserve covers 78 hectares of land situated at the junction of the Grose and Hawkesbury Nepean rivers along Springwood Road. During the opening Mayor Stubbs said that his council wants "families to be able to have increased access to the river if they wish and take advantage of the walking tracks". The area incorporated into Yarramundi Reserve was formerly a sandmining site. However, both council and the Department of Lands have recognised the unique qualities of the area as an environmentally sensitive and important site requiring stabilisation.

The former sandmining occupants did an initial clean-up of the site and then donated their land to the Crown in 2001. This led to the establishment of a new Crown reserve, and council and the Department of Lands set about creating a comprehensive plan of management for Yarramundi Reserve. This project gives me a great

deal of pleasure. It shows how a degraded area, a former sandmining area, can be reclaimed and developed into something unique to the Hawkesbury, unique in that it is an environmentally sensitive and important site, one that will be forever preserved for the benefit of the community.

This was no small task as the plan of management had to incorporate an integrated approach to such things as managing and rejuvenating the wetlands, weed removal, significant bush regeneration, public access to the site for both people and vehicles, as well as the construction and maintenance of the required recreational facilities. Included in stage one works was the construction of a new entry wall with signage clearly identifying the area and large sandstone boulders on the boundary along the Springwood Road as a guard against unauthorised vehicles entering the reserve. The reserve has decomposed granite walking paths and landscaped planting and is a generally relaxed area of open space for all. In addition, consideration had to be given to the adequate management of flooding as well as bushfire prevention.

I attended the formal opening accompanied by my wife, Sharyn, and my 10-year-old daughter, Erin. Both my wife and I have many fond memories of this area, recalling our frequent visits to the site over 20 years ago when our three older children were mere toddlers. We would walk along the riverbanks where the children were able to safely paddle and play. Today I am pleased that Erin will now be able to enjoy such pleasures along with many other people.

Yarramundi Reserve will prove to be a valuable asset. It has enormous potential to become a pleasant escape for the public. It is a lovely environment near the river, and the continuing works will make it even better. It was fitting that present at the opening and conducting a "welcome to country" ceremony was Auntie Edna Watson, who was joined in the ceremony by her grandchildren as representatives of the local Darug tribe. I might add that the grandchildren welcomed people to the area in their native tongue, which was appropriate for the occasion.

Yarramundi Reserve was named after one of the local Aboriginal chiefs and will be a constant reminder of our links to the Aboriginal community and its proud historical past. A very good friend, Uncle Greg Smith, along with Uncle Wes Marne, conducted the smoking ceremony to cleanse our souls, and thereafter a community gathering of about 100 people enjoyed a barbecue. It is appropriate to record my congratulations to all involved on the success of stage one of this wonderful initiative and I look forward to future improvements to enable Yarramundi Reserve to be enjoyed by future generations.

GARIGAL COMMERCIAL BUILDING, AUSLINK BUSINESS PARK, BELROSE

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA (Davidson) [4.38 p.m.]: I take this opportunity to draw the attention of the House to a project initiative in the electorate of Davidson. The Garigal is a commercial building located at 23 Narabang Way in the Auslink Business Park at Belrose on the edge of natural bushland. The building's strata units are about to be occupied by a multinational business and smaller local businesses. The special features of this building should be recognised as progressive and responsible. The designer's aim was to give sensitive consideration to the local environment and demand for energy and other utility resources locally. The team behind this project includes Mr Michael Mobbs, an environmental lawyer with a special interest in water and energy conservation. Michael's colleague Steve Shenagle had a guiding hand in the design of the building. Andrew Callaghan is also a member of the team. These local men worked together to design and implement this concept and then build this innovative building.

The building design features include the following. There is a fully integrated system for the treatment of sewage and water recycling. Excess water is used for drip irrigation of the surrounding gardens. Two 20,000-litre water tanks are filled from water off the roof for recycling. The tanks are located at the back of the building, also providing a source of emergency water supply in the event of fire. Solar hot water supplies the building throughout. Energy-efficient airconditioning is in place, with separate units for individual suites. Each suite has the option of using natural ventilation with louvred windows protected by insect screens. The fire stairwells are designed to extract hot air during summer, thus maintaining even temperatures inside the building on hot days.

The access stairs and the central spine of the building work as chimneys to manage the cool and warm air flows. There is an automatic clerestory window along the length of the building at the rooftop. The sensors are programmed to respond to air temperatures to extract hot air. Each of the three floors has large, two-metre wide balconies and transparent blinds fitted with sensors that respond to the level of sunlight and support heat and light control all around the building. The blinds are fitted on the edge of the balconies instead of being aligned to the windows. These blinds shade the glass at the peak of the day and provide heating installation.

Energy efficiency is considered in the lighting throughout the building, in corridors, car parking and all offices. Sensors are fitted to all lights to ensure that lights are off when there is sufficient natural light or an area is unoccupied. The lights come on when an area is occupied or natural lighting is suboptimal. All of these features help to provide for an excellent workspace for any business that wishes to be water and energy efficient as well as cost efficient.

The internal visual presentation of the building is spatially considerate, encouraging a pleasant workplace for its occupants and visitors. The clever use of space will assist any business located in the building to operate efficiently and have happy, healthy workers. I congratulate the designers and developers of the Garigal, who had the insight to build a structure with extensive and well-integrated as well as environmentally sensitive features. They have set an example in building design that others should follow.

HUNGRY GIANT RECYCLING MACHINE

Ms ALISON MEGARRITY (Menai) [4.42 p.m.]: I am pleased to advise the House that the people of the Menai electorate are actively embracing the environmental challenges facing the world today and they should be congratulated on their efforts to date. Thousands of subsidised water saving devices have been installed in homes under the WaterFix program. Rainwater tanks have been installed in homes and schools, saving millions of litres of drinking water per year. Hundreds of washing machine rebates have been paid to residents in my electorate. Businesses and community groups have been volunteering for the Every Drop Counts program.

Planet Ark ranked shire residents in the top 10 nationwide when it comes to seeking out information on recycling, and Sutherland Shire Council was awarded a green rebate under the New South Wales Government's environmental performance payments in return for improving local recycling services and cutting waste. It is pleasing to see that the community's great efforts are being rewarded with thousands of dollars handed back to council and ratepayers.

Of course we should all do our bit to protect the environment, and today I want to advise the House of the achievement of one young shire resident who has taken the concept of doing one's bit to an entirely new level. At only 20 years of age, Chris O'Brien was working part time in a Good Guys warehouse while starting his commercial cleaning business. It was then that he noticed the large amount of packing foam that had been protecting electronic and white goods being thrown straight into the bins. He realised that every other bulky goods company would also generate large volumes of polystyrene waste. He identified this situation as a major environmental concern and he also knew that disposing of the material was a very costly exercise for the waste generator.

Chris began a relentless search for a solution to the disposal of expanded polystyrene. He created a foam compacting and recycling machine called the Hungry Giant. It is the first machine of its type in the country. Thanks to Chris's ingenuity and perseverance, white goods companies can now make considerable savings in their waste costs. A recent trial of one of the Hungry Giants, conducted at the Good Guys Chatswood store, found that the general waste pickup costs were reduced by more than 70 per cent. Moreover, this material can be diverted from landfill, as the material in its compact form is 100 per cent recyclable. The machine is now being sold Australiawide and the Hungry Giant's customers include SITA, Harvey Norman, the Good Guys and Winning Appliances amongst many other waste companies and suppliers to the industry. The *St George and Sutherland Shire Leader* of 1 May 2007 ran an article about Chris's achievements. It stated:

There's a hungry giant on the prowl and its favourite food is definitely not on the endangered list.

It loves nothing more than being crammed to bursting point with polystyrene, which might protect our electrical appliances during transit, but delivers a 500-year environmental headache.

These are the impressive facts as they stand today, but so far I have only given the House the very "short story". To fully appreciate Chris O'Brien's achievements I need to provide additional background about his journey to this point. It is a story of courage and determination in the face of financial hardship and some very frustrating technical setbacks along the way. Chris is now 24 years of age and has spent the past four years developing this machine from scratch. He was the only person working on the development of the machine and somehow he kept operating his cleaning business, maintaining his good reputation for customer service and his customer loyalty.

He first explored the idea of a granulating machine that would break the foam up so it could be used for beanbags and other similar purposes. Using savings from his small cleaning business, Chris travelled to China

and found a machine that he thought would be suitable. He imported it and made some technical changes, but it failed miserably in the testing phase and was very labour intensive. He then designed a whole new machine that would granulate larger volumes. After several months of design, more trips to China and spending every cent from his cleaning business he had a working prototype. He trialled that too in a commercial environment but it was also too labour intensive for the amount of foam processed.

By that stage he had been pursuing his dream for nearly two years and was devastated by the latest failure. However, his personal resilience again kicked in. He had come too far to be beaten and went back to his research. Looking at the material itself, Chris realised that expanded polystyrene is made of 98 per cent air and sticks together through polymerisation. He realised that if he could squeeze the air out of the material it would still hold its structure. Of course, his finances were incredibly stretched. He was completely dependent on his fiancée, Amanda, at this point. All the money from his cleaning business was going into the Hungry Giant. Through testing, he found the machine was able to granulate and then compact this voluminous material by an astounding ratio of 50:1.

Too often we hear the less generous people in our community decry the motivation and actions of the younger generation. Four years ago the concept of the Hungry Giant was just a bright idea in the imagination of a 20-year-old man. Despite the absence of formal qualifications in engineering or work experience in that field, Chris had to come up with the ideas for mechanical solutions to a range of product development problems. I am sure all members of this House will join me in congratulating this enterprising and determined young man on his achievements to date and wish him every success in the future.

TRIBUTE TO MR FRANK SCARRABELOTTI

Mr DONALD PAGE (Ballina) [4.47 p.m.]: I pay tribute to my friend and a friend of many people on the North Coast, Frank Scarrabelotti, who passed away last week in his sleep at the age of 109, just short of his 110th birthday. Bangalow has lost its favourite son and Australia has lost a real gentleman with the passing of Frank Scarrabelotti. At 109, Frank was Australia's oldest man and one of the worlds' oldest. Frank was one of nature's gentlemen. He was highly respected and very well liked by all who knew him. It was not just that Frank lived a long life; he lived a good one, and even if he had died much earlier people would have still felt the same way about him. We were fortunate to have a man of Frank's calibre with us for so long.

Frank Scarrabelotti was born in 1897 at Bungawalbyn, near Coraki, to Italian parents who migrated to Australia in 1880. He was one of 12 children. He lived in three centuries—the nineteenth, the twentieth and the twenty-first—and saw enormous change. He lived through both world wars, Australia's Federation and the advent of the car and the plane; he saw man walk on the moon, and lived through historical events such as the sinking of the Titanic and the 1956 Melbourne Olympics and the 2000 Sydney Olympics. Frank, whom I knew for 20 years, was a fascinating person to talk to because, matching his incredible life experience, was a wonderful memory, both short and long term. Asked by a friend recently whether Frank thought they could grow potatoes near Bangalow, Frank replied, "Yes, we grew them there a hundred years ago."

Frank said that with all of the economic progress the world had seen over the past century, he was not sure that there was a corresponding growth in the spiritual evolution of humanity. In an interview with a local newspaper on his 109th birthday Frank said:

In many ways the world has become a much sadder place.

I see the single biggest problem as greed, from individuals to big corporations.

At times I fear we are losing sight of our basic humanity.

Frank was a dairy farmer, running his dairy at Nashua before retiring at 80 and coming to Bangalow to live. He was very much part of the Bangalow and North Coast community, having been actively involved in many activities, including cattle breeding and judging, local shows, horse riding, rugby league, rugby union, gardening, horse racing, church, the Bangalow billycart derby and, of course, his family activities. Frank had a wonderful rose garden and right to the end kept a keen eye on it. Frank had never missed the Bangalow show in 100 years. He opened the show a few years ago and I recall he did not use notes when making his speech. I know whenever I spoke at the Bangalow show and acknowledged his presence, the large crowd would break into spontaneous applause, such was his popularity among our community. He often led the street parade for the annual billycart derby, which is another huge community event at Bangalow. He had an incredible memory. He could tell you which horse won the Melbourne Cup in any year for the past 100 years.

Frank was a very knowledgeable but humble man. He was an intelligent, gifted, wise and decent man. He played the violin and enjoyed music. When asked about the secrets of his longevity he talked about the four Fs: family, friends, faith and good food. He was quoted last year as saying, "I have a marvellous wife and two wonderful daughters who tend to every need I require." He said he had palpitations when he first met his wife, Nell. Frank's exceptional health was testimony to his belief in a healthy diet of unprocessed, fresh food that is free of artificial colours and preservatives. I understand he started each day with a bowl of porridge followed by bacon and eggs. He had a very sharp mind and near perfect sight. One day Frank, having reached a century, so amazed a woman driving down his street that she collided with a telegraph pole after she saw him hurdle his front fence rather than walk through the front gate.

I recall when Frank turned 100 the then Bishop of Lismore presided over a huge mid-morning mass at Bangalow Catholic Church. A long lunch followed at which a few of us made congratulatory speeches and Frank responded. About nine o'clock that night Frank rang me at home to thank me for the nice things I said about him. I said, "Frank, you have had a big day, you should be in bed." He laughed. Three days later a handwritten note arrived at my home in which Frank again thanked me for my kind words. That is the sort of man Frank Scarrabelotti was. Frank was farewelled at St Kevin's Catholic Church in Bangalow last Friday where over 300 people attended to pay their respects. He requested that there be no eulogy. What he wanted was to go out with his boots on, which he did. He certainly did not want to end his days in hospital or in poor health. I, and many others, feel genuinely privileged to have known Frank Scarrabelotti over so many years. Our thoughts are with his wife of 54 years, Nell, his daughters, Mary and Helen, and their families. Frank Scarrabelotti is gone but certainly not forgotten. He will live long in our memories and our hearts as one of nature's gentlemen and a thoroughly decent and honourable man.

SUTHERLAND SHIRE NETBALL ASSOCIATION

Mr BARRY COLLIER (Miranda—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.52 p.m.]: Over the long weekend of 9 to 11 June Sutherland Shire Netball Association hosted the 2007 New South Wales State Championships at its Bellingara Road complex, which is located in my electorate of Miranda. Now in its forty-seventh year, Sutherland Shire Netball Association is the largest netball association in New South Wales, and I believe in the world. The decision to hold the championships at the Bellingara Road courts was a clear acknowledgement of the outstanding expertise of the Sutherland Shire Netball Association to stage large-scale events. The State Championships afforded 1,300 talented netballers 17 years and upwards from across New South Wales the opportunity to compete in one of the largest sporting events for women in Australia. Some of the best talent in New South Wales was on display, and the shire witnessed some spectacular netball skills.

This year 131 teams from 65 associations competed in three divisions: opens, under 19s and under 17s. Also, 250 players participated in the increasingly popular divisions of over 35s and over 40s. More than 260 umpires, countless officials, volunteers and supporters gathered to ensure the success of this gruelling and intense competition. The open championship division was won by Penrith, the under 19s by Eastwood Ryde and the under 17s by Manly Warringah. The over 35s winner was again Manly Warringah and the over 40s was won by Penrith. Our three Sutherland shire teams performed very well. They were runner-up in the under 17s, ninth in the opens and fourth in the over 35s. I congratulate all teams on their performance and thank all the teams, coaches, managers, officials and umpires for the spirit in which the games were conducted over a very wet weekend. I also congratulate the players selected in the President's 12. This is a merit squad of 12 outstanding players who are chosen at the conclusion of the championships. The team included St George and Sutherland shire players Leanne Trembath and Ashli Ledbrook.

The 2007 State Championships held in Miranda over the long weekend was clearly not without its challenges off the field, as well as on. The official opening by the Hon. Graham West, the Minister for Sport and Recreation, was washed out and the first scheduled day of play was also cancelled. Our shire volunteers diligently braved Saturday's cold weather and torrential rain to direct motorists to the various parking areas and players to their respective rain-sodden marquees and tents. The Sutherland Shire Netball Association and New South Wales Netball officials worked side by side in the control room at the Bellingara Road courts directing proceedings. They even had candles when the lighting failed. The ferocious storms on Saturday morning had caused power outages in the Miranda area.

It was the skill and expertise of the many volunteer groups, community groups, parents, grandparents and supporters under the leadership of Sutherland Shire Netball Association's President Petra Hayman, Secretary Vicki Morris and a committed and dedicated executive team that made this mammoth event such a great success. I congratulate all those involved on the success of the championships. I acknowledge the local

council, which works with the association to maintain the high quality courts at the Bellingara Road complex. I also acknowledge Hammondville Homes, the new owner of the old Sydney Water site, for making part of its site available for parking. I also thank GyMEA Gorillas Rugby League Club, which made available its oval for team tents and its club facilities to visiting teams. Also, the club's junior players cooked up a great barbecue.

I take this opportunity to congratulate shire resident Ms Margaret Corbett. On the weekend of the championships the Hon. Graham West named Ms Corbett as only the second winner of the New South Wales Minister's Recognition for Contribution to Women in Sport Award. Margaret spent 20 years as a New South Wales selector, New South Wales State coach and New South Wales coaching director, and 12 years as a New South Wales convener. She has worked extensively in coaching roles for elite netball teams, including six years as head coach of netball for the New South Wales Institute of Sport. From 1997 to 2000 Ms Corbett also coached the Sydney Sandpipers, a leading team in the national netball competition. Ms Corbett's contribution has extended far beyond the elite level. She has been a huge influence on netball at the grassroots level where she was a selector of junior players for 14 years.

Margaret established netball programs for the Academy of Sport across regional New South Wales and was instrumental in the development of levels 1, 2 and 3 coaching courses. Her dedication and extensive contribution to netball has been acknowledged by New South Wales Netball, which has inducted her into its Hall of Fame. Margaret Corbett has been a mentor to thousands of young girls in the shire and across the State. I commend and thank her for her many years of service to New South Wales Netball and her obvious commitment to and love of this fantastic game. New South Wales is one of the most successful netball States in Australia, producing some of the best players in the country and claiming countless titles. Netball in New South Wales continues to grow. More than 100,000 members play the game at all levels across the State. I commend New South Wales Netball Association President Ms Wendy Archer, General Manager Ms Carolyn Campbell and all involved in the association for their continuing contribution to netball in the State.

HORNSBY ELECTORATE VOLUNTEERS

Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [4.57 p.m.]: This afternoon I want to speak about three amazing volunteers in my area, all of whom are women. The first is Lee Lowe, the media officer for the Hornsby State Emergency Service. I have known Lee for the five years I have represented Hornsby. Lee has done a fantastic job in her role with the Hornsby State Emergency Service. Most recently her work related to the bad storms that occurred over 8, 9 and 10 June where the service dealt with fallen trees, water damage and other associated issues in Hornsby and, obviously, much more damage on the Central Coast and in the Hunter. Lee and her team, which was headed by controller Bob Corbett, had a very busy time servicing not only the needs of the local Hornsby area but also providing resources to the Central Coast and Hunter Valley. This is just one of many times Lee has come to the fore in her role with the State Emergency Service and delivered for the people in her community.

The second woman I wish to honour this evening unfortunately died after a long battle with cancer on 23 May. I refer to Lory Price. Lory was one of those amazing people that you meet probably only once in your life. She was a fantastic mentor to many people in the area and gave an amazing amount of her life and time to the local community. She was associated with work on drugs and alcohol, education, particularly the University of the Third Age, and aged affairs where she held an executive position with the Hornsby Shire Council Seniors Advisory Committee. I miss her tremendously, as do many people in the area. Her death is certainly a great loss to the community. She worked extremely hard and gave up a great deal of her precious time, even in the late stages of her battle with cancer.

Linda Mayo has been instrumental in establishing the Hornsby chapter of the National Association for Loss and Grief New South Wales Incorporated. She has held a number of different forums and has gathered together a group of focused and dedicated women to help. I congratulate Linda, who has been the spearhead in this project, for her work. I also acknowledge the work of Helen Downs. The association was founded in 1977 after the Granville train disaster. Its main aim is to encourage and promote professional and community education in loss and grief. Since then it has been involved with the establishment of many of the loss and grief support groups throughout Australia. It is frequently called upon to provide training and advice to schools, corporations, government departments, media groups and individuals.

Regional chapters in New South Wales are located at Albury, Armidale, Bourke, Central Coast, Coffs Harbour, Coonabarabran, Dubbo, the Hunter, the mid North Coast, covering Taree, Gloucester, Forster and Narromine, and the Blue Mountains. The New South Wales membership comprises more than 500 professionals

and non-professionals, and membership is open to anyone in the community. I am a member of the Hornsby chapter and its patron, and it is an honour to take on that role. The Dubbo chapter of the association was established in 1980. It has been active in supporting education in not only the Dubbo region but also statewide. The chapter members have assisted in the establishment of other chapters. I commend Trudy Hanson from Dubbo for the wonderful role she has played as a mentor in the establishment the Hornsby chapter. Julie Dunsmore has also given a great deal of time participating in forums and providing ongoing support for the chapter.

Mr NATHAN REES (Toongabbie—Minister for Emergency Services, and Minister for Water Utilities) [5.02 p.m.]: I welcome those remarks from the member for Hornsby. As she said, volunteers from every electorate have been involved in the rescue and recovery operations undertaken in the past couple of weeks. Some 3,000 volunteers have attended to almost 20,000 calls for assistance. It has been an absolutely stunning effort by those volunteers. On behalf of the Government I welcome the comments from the member for Hornsby and wholeheartedly concur with her sentiments.

HUNTER AND CENTRAL COAST STORM DAMAGE

Mr MATTHEW MORRIS (Charlestown) [5.03 p.m.]: I also wish to make a contribution about the recent storm events in the Hunter, including the Charlestown electorate. It is fitting that the Minister for Emergency Services is at the table and I am pleased that he will hear my contribution. I place on record my personal thanks to him and his staff, who have been superb in supporting the Hunter and our communities through a devastating time. The weather events of the past couple of weeks in the Hunter and the resulting flooding can only be described as devastating. I have inspected many storm damaged and flooded properties and the destruction was on a scale that I have never previously experienced. Businesses and homes have been flooded, totally destroyed or severely damaged; property has been lost; cars have been swamped; trees are down; and there are no telephones, power and, in some cases, water supplies. There is absolute chaos across the region and parts of my electorate after the intense weather pattern delivered significant rains and winds in a period of about eight hours.

The legacy of these events will remain in the minds of many for years to come, and this will certainly be a part of the Hunter's history we will not be rushing to experience again. My full credit goes to the Hunter community for its strength of will to survive, recover and support one another during this time of need. We in the Hunter have a strong bond and commitment to each other, particularly in times of disaster. During that terrible Friday evening and following days our emergency and volunteer rescue services yet again did us proud. I pay tribute to the police, the ambulance and fire services, the State Emergency Service, a raft of community organisations and churches, and the Department of Community Services and the Department of Housing. Under extreme conditions, with a huge workload and long hours, all emergency staff worked tirelessly to assist hundreds in our community. While cleanup activities continue today, for the most part families are getting back to normality.

Even though the recent events have settled, there is a new need: to examine the chain of events during the storm activity. What is clear is the fact that our local waterways and creeks did not cope well with such heavy rain. While I recognise that this rain event was not normal, areas such as King and Parker streets, Hillsborough, and View Street, Cardiff suffered badly. Both have an extensive history of flooding, yet these sites were at their most vulnerable during our wild weather. In fact, a number of creeks simply failed to move water away from properties, resulting in terrifying flooding conditions. The personal property loss for families and businesses is huge. I acknowledge a very high level of cooperation from the insurance sector, and I thank all insurers for their assistance to families and businesses.

The obvious issue now is: What are we going to do to address the condition of our creeks and waterways? Upon inspecting many of the local creeks it was obvious that many have not been maintained for many months. Creeks were found to be overgrown with vegetation, littered with rubbish, and heavily laden with sediment. These factors contributed greatly to the flooding of many properties. A full review of all main creeks and waterways should be completed to determine their performance during the storm activity. This will help to determine priority sites and what works are required to give better protection to property. I will be keen to work with the council engineers in establishing a scope of works and funding options to better protect our community from such events in the future.

I also thank the Premier and the other Ministers who joined the Minister for Emergency Service in visiting the Hunter. Feedback indicates that that was much appreciated by the community. I commend the speed

with which the Government took action not only to acknowledge the event as a natural disaster but also to provide the resources required for families to access support services to regain their quality of life.

Mr NATHAN REES (Toongabbie—Minister for Emergency Services, and Minister for Water Utilities) [5.08 p.m.]: I briefly place on record a more elaborate outline of the efforts and achievements of the State Emergency Service volunteers over the past fortnight or so. The Premier and I visited Newcastle, Wallsend, Hinton, Cessnock, Cardiff, Chittaway Point, South Tacoma and Maitland. We travelled around the region with the local members to see the devastation that was caused by this disaster. From the air it was staggering. There was water from north to south for about 40 miles and from east to west for about 25 or 30 miles. There was water as far as the eye could see, with the standout exceptions of Newcastle City and Maitland.

When we arrived in Newcastle on the Saturday morning it was a disaster zone. The water had receded but there were what must have been thousands of cars in the streets that had simply been washed up against walls, poles or trees. In Cessnock we met with shop owners who had lost their livelihoods, their cars, and also their houses. On behalf of the Government and the community of the Central Coast and the Newcastle area we pay tribute and extend thanks to all the volunteers who assisted, some 3,000 of them, many of whom were called in from places as far away as Bourke to assist in the clean-up and recovery operations. We also extend thanks to the State Emergency Service and Rural Fire Service members who did an absolutely outstanding job, assisted by our Fire Brigade members and also by Marine Rescue Services.

Thanks particularly to the residents of the Central Coast and the Newcastle area for their tremendous resilience. We have seen it in the past in their response to the earthquake disaster, but yet again it came to the fore in this instance. Every person I spoke to amongst the hundreds that were affected said to me, "There's someone worse off than me." That was the sort of spirit that was around. Special thanks to everyone involved, including the local mayors, as well as the Premier's Department and the Premier himself for their leadership in establishing the one-stop shops.

ISOLATED CHILDREN'S PARENTS ASSOCIATION

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES (Barwon) [5.10 p.m.]: In March this year the Walgett branch of the Isolated Children's Parents Association played host to its annual State conference. The association has long been the advocate and representative body for children and families living in isolated areas of the State. It is an extremely important body in terms of the advice and support it provides to its members and a vital conduit between levels of government, decision makers and policy developers when it comes to providing assistance for families in isolated and extremely isolated areas. Education is a key priority of the association.

The thirty-fifth Annual Isolated Children's Parents Association Conference was treated to great hospitality and an informative conference. Walgett established a number of creative venues, allowing people to mix at both a social and formal level. The township of Walgett is located at the junction of the Namoi and Barwon rivers and offers visitors many opportunities for fishing, bird watching, opal fossicking or a relaxed break in the hot artesian baths. A large shire within the Barwon electorate, Walgett makes up 22,000 square kilometres, or approximately one-tenth of the electorate. The shire is a large producer of agricultural product, including wheat, cotton, sheep and cattle farming.

The theme of the conference was "Obstacles and Opportunities". Key speakers included Sam and Jenny Bailey from Croppa Creek. Sam is picking up his life after a serious car accident. He is now a major motivator and wonderful advocate for people with disabilities, demonstrating that by focusing on the positive you can pick up the pieces and move on. Proposing to his wife live on ABC radio, Sam has now captured the moment and his story in the book *Head Over Heals*. We cannot wait for the movie! Victoria Shannon, nee Friend, spoke of her recovery after a plane crash and how, out of adversity, the human spirit can prevail. Victoria said:

There is so much to live for now and I have realised whatever the ride it is life. However wonderful, however awful, it is still life and I am happy. I went for the future to see what it would be like.

A series of speakers addressed the conference, and motions were tabled and the issues were discussed. The issues discussed included special education. A call was made to the Minister for Education and Training to address the teacher shortage at Palm Avenue School. The need for an additional speech pathologist at Dalwood Assessment Centre was also raised. A longstanding issue the association has taken up is choice in schooling. Isolated parents need to have choice in their children's schooling, particularly at the secondary level. That right of choice in schooling needs to be supported by government, for the benefit of all rural people, both country and town.

Just as families who are the required distance from their nearest town school are able to bypass the larger and urban-based educational centres by being provided with support, there is now a stronger call for town-based families to receive similar support. This is an issue that needs addressing for many of our western towns, including Walgett, Brewarrina and Bourke. A similar support scheme exists in the western districts of Queensland, and I call on the New South Wales Government to adopt a similar scheme.

As families grow, education becomes a key priority. If we are to keep families in our western districts, they must be supported in accessing choice of schooling. If they are not happy, they will move. The issue has been exacerbated by the drought and difficult circumstances. If parents in these towns do not receive support, to ensure they provide the best education for their children it is easier for them to move—and they do. In effect, the role of the Isolated Children's Parents Association is growing as the definition of "isolated students" expands. The president of the association, Sue Gordon, outlined the mood:

Our business has been exacerbated by this prolonged drought, the extra work it creates, the extra responsibilities, the extra decisions that need to be made in our personal lives. Rural and remote New South Wales is weary. It is tired and it is angry. It is fed up with fighting for even the most basic of services. It is fed up with being treated like second-class citizens. It is fed up with being dictated to from Macquarie Towers and the bureaucracies that support it. It is fed up with policies created whilst overlooking Sydney Harbour and that have no practical use or thought given to its impact on rural and remote communities. It seems the obstacles are just too great.

I would like to thank the Walgett organising committee—the chair, Sue Gordon from Young, David Cameron from Rowena, Alison Campbell from Warren, Helen Rogers from Booligal, Michael Davis from Brewarrina, Trish Williams from Balranald, Anne Milliken from Hay, Vivian Slack-Smith from Brewarrina, Meg Pawley from Bellata, Helen Morphet from Booligal, Shame Dutton from Hermidale, Wendy Carrigan from Boomi and Ellen Walker from Rankins Springs. It is an outstanding organisation in the true Australian spirit.

HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE ITALIAN EXCELLENCE AWARDS

Ms ANGELA D'AMORE (Drummoyne) [5.15 p.m.]: I wish to inform the House about the fifteenth annual awards presentation for excellence in Higher School Certificate Italian held at Parliament House on 6 June 2007. The Department of the Italian Consulate General awards prizes to the top students in Higher School Certificate Italian. The goal of the Italian Consulate is to allow these young Australians of New South Wales who have shown their interest in Italy and its culture to expand their knowledge. The intent is to allow students who have achieved outstanding marks in Higher School Certificate Italian to gain a comprehensive knowledge of Italy and its economic and social development.

I sincerely thank the Italian Consul General, Dr Benedetto Latteri, and the education director, Sergio Rapisardi, for their continued commitment to the annual awards. I commend the Italian Consulate for this initiative in acknowledging our best students and giving the Italian language such a focus. It is hoped that the initiative will provide a platform to students studying Italian in high school to extend their knowledge and establish further links between Australia and Italy. The importance of speaking a second language is both understood and appreciated by our local community. The teaching of the Italian language is well supported in our schools, and it allows students to study and understand another culture.

As part of the awards presentation the students are awarded trips to Italy, intensive language courses in Italy, and in Sydney a subscription to the Italian Cultural Institute, as well as with luxury objects and gifts offered by successful Italian businesses. The awards are made possible by the remarkable generosity of several sponsors, who consider giving scholarships to students of the Italian language and culture a worthy cause. I extend my thanks to sponsors such as Assetlink, Art BC Jewellery, the Five Dock Learning Centre, the Italian Chamber of Commerce, NJ Papallo & Co, Cammareri Travel, San Francesco Catholic Association, Omega Travel, Le Montage, Eptec, Laf Group, Duncan & Dovico, and Barilla for their support. They have recognised the value of supporting the promotion of the Italian language and culture in our high schools.

More than 1.3 million people in New South Wales speak a language other than English at home. A quarter of our population is born overseas, and over 40 per cent of New South Wales residents have one or both parents born overseas. With the ever-increasing pace of globalisation, language skills will remain a key factor in the continued growth of both the New South Wales and Australian economies. It is estimated that Italian is spoken by more than 80 million people—principally in Italy, but all over the world. Italian is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful languages in the world. However, it is not a language that is easy to master. Its grammatical complexity has presented a challenge to many native English speakers. Having studied the Italian language at high school and at university level, I understand the benefits of speaking two languages.

As a member of Parliament I am often required to assist constituents in a language other than English. Twenty per cent of the constituents of my electorate of Drummoyne are of Italian background. For many of them, Italian is their first language.

The students who achieved outstanding marks in Higher School Certificate Italian are to be commended for the dedication in mastering the Italian language. The tireless hours put in by their teachers to bring the students to such a standard must also be acknowledged. Awards were presented to 13 students who achieved the top marks in the 2006 Higher School Certificate examination in Italian, as determined by the Office of the Board of Studies of New South Wales.

I would like to acknowledge the 13 students who received awards: Lara Johnson from St George Girls High School, Jonathon Hon and Andrew Swain from Sydney Grammar School, Nicoletta Aureli from North Sydney Girls High School, Else-Clare Kennedy from Penrith High School, Lydia Moore from Loreto Kirribilli, Leah Turler from Castle Hill High School, Laura Ferraro and Simone Salle from Santa Sabina, Jane Favretto and Edwina Tidmarsh from Queenwood Mosman, Trina Del Vecchio from Rose Bay High School, and Rachel Zuch from Kiama High School. These students have come from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds and have excelled in the Italian language. No doubt the students will enjoy their trips to Italy and the other prizes they have received. I am sure they will use their bilingual skills to further their careers. I look forward to attending many more awards ceremonies.

SOUTH COAST ELECTORATE INTERSECTIONS

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK (South Coast) [5.20 p.m.]: This evening I bring to the attention of the House a number of intersections that have been the subject of concern within the Shoalhaven community. One intersection has been the site of a fatality and several serious accidents that have caused injury. The first intersection to which I refer is the Forest Road and Princes Highway intersection, which is south of Nowra. Until last year Forest Road was an unsealed road leading to the villages of Callala Beach, Callala Bay, Culburra Beach and Orient Point. The road was rarely used because it was unsealed and it was, at most times, dangerous to traverse, except perhaps for 4-wheel drive vehicles. However, it provided a much shorter route to the villages I mentioned earlier than the alternative route using Greenwell Point Road, especially for southbound vehicles. Residents lobbied hard for many years, almost a decade, for the sealing of the road. This would, after all, decrease traffic on Greenwell Point Road and reduce pressure on the Kalandar Street-Princes Highway intersection at South Nowra.

Finally, as a result of funding received from the Federal Government and the local council, Forest Road was sealed last year, much to the satisfaction of residents. Following the sealing works it became obvious that the intersection was becoming extremely dangerous due to the increased traffic on the road and the fact that the intersection is in a 100-kilometre speed zone but offers no appropriate opportunities for vehicles to enter the Princes Highway. Forest Road is a single-lane carriageway with no opportunity for vehicles to enter safely or even negotiate the intersection, especially to turn right and head north.

That situation is causing enormous concern for residents and community groups, who have made numerous representations to the Minister for Roads. Unfortunately, at this stage those representations have been to no avail. Works could be undertaken in the short term at the location of Forest Road which would, without great financial cost, improve safety immediately and possibly save lives. I have been pleased to receive representations from the Sussex Inlet Community Forum, the Orient Point Progress Association, the Culburra Beach Progress Association and from as far south as the Murramarang Progress Association, who all, on behalf of their members, consider this intersection most dangerous. I thank those organisations, as well as the constituents in the area, for their representations.

The second dangerous intersection that has been the subject of petitions, letters and representations from a number of residents and community groups such as the Tomerong Community Forum is the Island Point Road-Princes Highway intersection, which has been the site of a number of serious accidents and last year resulted in the death of a three-year-old child. That intersection is clearly problematic for northbound drivers wishing to turn into Island Point Road to access one of the fastest growing areas in the State, the central Shoalhaven. The intersection is difficult and confusing to negotiate and this has resulted in several very serious accidents causing injuries and death.

The New South Wales Government has been offered financial assistance by the Federal Government for an intersection upgrade. Apparently, Roads and Traffic Authority officers have completed plans for the

upgrade and have even presented these plans to a local community forum. However, that was months and months ago. Nothing has happened yet to upgrade this intersection despite Roads and Traffic Authority officers admitting to locals that indeed work needs to be done. The Roads and Traffic Authority has now erected a crash camera to supposedly provide additional information about driver behaviour at this site, even though the intersection has a high accident history.

In addition, the Roads and Traffic Authority has now erected two mobile illuminated signboards to warn drivers to proceed with caution when approaching the Island Point Road intersection. Both measures reveal only that the Roads and Traffic Authority knows that this is a dangerous intersection but it has not received adequate funding from the Government to proceed with its plans. Communities of the coastal villages of the South Coast are aware of the impending danger of both sites and are frustrated that the Government talks a great deal about infrastructure spending but rarely delivers, even when the solutions may be fairly simple in the short term. That is especially so in relation to the Forest Road intersection.

The Federal Government has invested strongly in the Princes Highway over the past decade, a fact lost in the past on the member for Kiama and the Minister for Roads, and it continues to invest in black spot funding and major road projects on the Princes Highway. But when it counts the New South Wales Government and the Minister for Roads are missing in action. I particularly thank Dorothy Barker, a resident of the central Shoalhaven, who has been passionately committed to disseminating petitions and information about this intersection and making continued representations on behalf of residents in this area. Her actions are continuing. I urge the Government to see reason and bring forward the upgrades of both these intersections.

NEWCASTLE STORM DAMAGE

Ms JODI McKAY (Newcastle) [5.25 p.m.]: I acknowledge the presence in the House of the Minister for Emergency Services. Friday 8 June will long be remembered by Novocastrians as the day of the big storm, the day the *Pasha Bulker* crashed into Nobbys Beach, and the day Newcastle came together in the face of nature's mighty wrath to once again show the nation our community's unique spirit and character. The day started with strong winds and rain: it was clear the city was going to be in for a torrid and rough day. However, no-one could have expected the extent of the disaster that was to come.

At around 9.00 a.m. a number of coal ships anchored off our coast began to experience difficulties. The coal carrier *Pasha Bulker* was grounded and the *Sea Confidence* and *Beetus* issued calls for assistance. The rain and winds continued throughout the day and by early evening serious localised flooding in nearly every suburb in the Newcastle electorate began to inundate homes and property. To date, more than 33,000 insurance claims have been lodged worth an estimated \$350 million. I thank the Insurance Council for its help in resolving concerns my constituents have raised with me regarding their insurance policies. I expect that assistance to continue in the weeks to come as residents of Newcastle continue to work through their claims.

I also pay special tribute to the extraordinary efforts of the staff of 1233 ABC. When I arrived at Nobbys Beach just after 9.00 a.m. on that Friday, presenter Madeleine Randall was already on the scene. The commitment of the ABC to providing not only news but also essential emergency information continued for four days. ABC radio put in a herculean effort, providing a lifeline to people in Newcastle and, indeed, the whole of the Hunter region. Around the clock, broadcasters Aaron Kearney, Garth Russell, Madeleine Randall, Carol Duncan, Craig Hamilton, Simone Thurtell, Mike McClusky, Maynard, Helen Clare, production staff and field reporters maintained a vigil-like presence in the blacked-out lounge rooms and cars of Novocastrians. I will read a tribute from Janine Gluyas, posted on the 1233 ABC guestbook, as it sums up the community's appreciation. It reads:

Thank you ABC for your brilliant coverage of the tragic events over the weekend. If it wasn't for ABC Newcastle nobody would have known what was going on, who to ring, where to go or what to do. It made people feel a bit more comfortable about the situation. Novocastrians helping each other with our ABC Newcastle leading the way.

The storm has also shown once more the vital role played by our emergency services in times of such natural disasters. The commitment and hard work of the police, New South Wales Fire Brigades, EnergyAustralia, the Rural Fire Service, the Volunteer Rescue Association and the State Emergency Service have been inspiring, as they turned out, often at risk to their own safety, to help those in desperate need.

The State Emergency Service received around 19,500 requests for assistance from families and businesses throughout the region. The men and women of our emergency services, who showed the great spirit of community and cooperation, heeded the call for help and gave their time unstintingly. Our volunteers do this

for no reward, except the genuine thanks of those they help. I also thank the 400 members of the Victorian, Queensland, South Australian and Australian Capital Territory State Emergency Services who generously came to our aid.

Finally, I commend the crew of the Westpac Rescue Helicopter, in particular captain and pilot Ian McFadden, air crewman Graham Nickisson and rescue crewman Glen Ramplin. I was in the police command centre at Nobbys Beach as the rescue effort was planned and executed in gale force winds and 18-metre high waves. Twenty-two people were rescued from the *Pasha Bulker*, and while the rescue helicopter crew was saving those lives, their own helicopter base was being flooded. That rescue, which took one hour and 28 minutes, is perhaps the single biggest rescue from a bulk carrier in Australia's history. Novocastrians are renowned for their strength of character, their good humour and their resilience. The difficulties of the past couple of weeks once again have shown not just the nation but also the world what we in Newcastle and the Hunter are capable of.

Mrs BARBARA PERRY (Auburn—Minister for Juvenile Justice, Minister for Western Sydney, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Citizenship) [5.30 p.m.]: It is clear that the member for Newcastle is well connected to the community that she loves. That has been demonstrated through her representations to the Insurance Council of Australia on behalf of her constituents and the fact that she was on the ground in the police command centre when the coordination of emergency services operations was taking place. It is important that her community knows of her efforts in that regard. Her private member's statement confirms the inner strength of the Newcastle community during this time, when it has faced considerable heartache and destruction and significant damage to homes, businesses and places of recreation.

The member for Newcastle was quite correct when she stated that Novocastrians are well known for their resilience, and clearly she is part of that community. I join her in thanking the emergency services personnel for their incredible efforts. They carried out their tasks at great risk to themselves. We owe a debt of gratitude not only to them but also to their families, who watched them go out, day after day, to face this danger and support others in the community. I also acknowledge the role played by the Westpac Rescue Helicopter. As Australians we can be proud of our emergency service personnel. They are always there when we need them most.

TYNAN ROAD, ALBURY, LEVEL CROSSING

Mr GREG APLIN (Albury) [5.32 p.m.]: At about this time one year ago a bridge was opened on the Bells Road at Gerogery, where a terrible accident had occurred some five years earlier and five young Wagga Wagga men were killed when their car collided with the Melbourne-bound XPT. Level crossings continue to haunt many in New South Wales. Indeed, this was brought home to us earlier this month by the terrible disaster at Kerang. The Minister for Transport is right when he says that the State will never be able to eliminate all of its 3,800 crossings, but we all know that politics is also the language of priorities.

In Albury we have a situation that stands out clearly as an anomaly. The construction of the Hume Highway upgrade, now known as the Albury-Wodonga Freeway, eliminated six level crossings in the Albury City Council area. The duplication of the Hume Highway northwards has now commenced and is long overdue. We look forward to its completion, first in 2009, and subsequently with the bypasses in 2012. However, the anomaly I refer to is the Tynan Road level crossing, which will continue to remain unprotected into the future, leading directly onto a four-lane Hume Highway.

It is inconceivable that it was overlooked in the planning of the Albury-Wodonga Freeway and now in the duplication of the road to the north. Anyone who looks for the reasons why this might have occurred need look no further than the fact that at Ettamogah, where the junction with the highway occurs—and the level crossing is some 80 to 90 metres distant from that junction—we have a situation that was always present in that the duplication was already complete and, therefore, was not taken into account in the new works being done to duplicate the Hume Highway northwards and now the completed south portion. It was overlooked and remains as the single problem within the boundaries of Albury City Council.

It is obvious that this crossing at Ettamogah needs to disappear in favour of a bridge over the tracks and over the Hume Freeway. We have lost six level crossings from Ettamogah to South Albury in that recent freeway project and another, which is just north of Tynan Road at Perrymans Lane, will go. Under the projects being conducted by the New South Wales Level Crossing Strategy Council all parties have decided that that particular crossing needs to be removed because it joins the freeway, which is to be duplicated, without leaving

sufficient space for B-doubles to safely leave the highway and enter Perrymans Lane without encroaching on that level crossing. A connecting road is to be constructed from Perrymans Lane to Tynan Road, thereby increasing the amount of traffic on Tynan Road in the vicinity of the junction with the freeway and, of course, leading directly to the level crossing.

Many people from the region use the level crossing because it is the main east-west crossing between The Olympic Way and the Hume Highway. It will be an expensive exercise, but it needs to be undertaken because lives cannot be judged in dollar terms. With \$24.5 million having been spent on Five Mates Crossing at Gerogery it is inconceivable that the New South Wales Government will not move to take this crossing under its wing, in concert with the others involved in the New South Wales Level Crossing Strategy Council and, indeed, the Federal Government.

Approaches have been made to both the Federal and State governments for an overpass at this particular point. I implore the Minister for Roads to realise the urgency of the situation, to have a look at the problem that exists where Tynan Road joins the highway and to eliminate this single remaining level crossing at this junction with the Hume Freeway. It is inconceivable that we should get rid of six level crossings, progress the removal of another and leave one remaining level crossing joining the Hume Freeway with increased traffic. I implore the Minister to meet with representatives of Albury City Council and relevant parties to take action to remove this level crossing at such a significant transport point.

ST GERTRUDES PRIMARY SCHOOL, SMITHFIELD

Mr NINOS KHOSHABA (Smithfield) [5.37 p.m.]: Tonight I speak about my recent visit to St Gertrude's Primary School, which is located in Smithfield and has approximately 800 students. The principal, Mrs Sharyn Dickerson, is a committed woman who helps not only her school but also helps to raise the education standards among women in countries like Vietnam. Mrs Dickerson has achieved much in her career and leads her school with enormous pride. St Gertrude's is a religious school and the teachings and doctrines of the school are evident in its dedication to the welfare of its students.

Recently I had the pleasure, in company with the Federal member for Prospect, the Hon. Chris Bowen, of attending a presentation on values. This presentation showcased how the school is promoting and teaching the importance of values in our society. More than 50 parents, staff and teachers were present at the forum, which I found very informative. I was extremely impressed with the video presentation made by the students. St Gertrude's Primary School runs an outreach program called KIDSO—Kids Doing Something for Others. This program is a fantastic way to teach children to help others, especially those in need. They also look after the upkeep of Smithfield Memorial Park and organise senior citizens morning teas. They have another program called Season for Growth, which is offered to students who experience grief or loss.

In a country like Australia there is general agreement within the community on acceptable standards of behaviour. This school teaches concepts like respect, responsibility, integrity, understanding, a fair go, doing your best, tolerance, honesty, trustworthiness, and inclusion. These are addressed directly through lessons and they are filtered throughout the whole curriculum. These concepts act as a basis for the social, intellectual, emotional, spiritual and moral development of its students. It is evident that St Gertrude's is a school that is well structured and a lot of time and effort is placed on developing the welfare and success of its children. St Gertrude's is a caring school that is helping students achieve and reach their potential.

I was very encouraged by the level of commitment and involvement shown by the parents of the children attending the school. A school can only do so much. The family unit—and this is a topic I identify very closely with—is primarily responsible for building and creating the strong value systems of our young children. I am a firm believer that values start in the home. The first school is at home, with parents instilling in their children traditions, customs, respect, responsibility and a firm set of values. The support and involvement of parents at school is extremely valuable. Parents and citizens provide a layer of additional support to the school often helping with fundraising and other support activities. It is also an example of their commitment to the school and one that will reflect on their children.

Values arise out of what we believe to be important about people, about society and about learning and knowledge. Values inform and shape not only how a school is organised, but also its individuals and families. We have a common beliefs system shared by many, and it is possible for communities to agree on a set of core values. School communities can identify and agree on a set of core values at a local level and they are shared across the school, becoming a standard that students abide by. I believe our knowledge, skills and attitudes are developed because of our values. St Gertrude's Primary School is recognising and teaching these core values.

I place on record and acknowledge today the good work being done by St Gertrude's Primary School. This school is continuing to build on the values taught at home and contributing to the development of their students. The Smithfield electorate is predominantly a family area, with very strong family values. There are many families from a range of multicultural backgrounds. It has a large number of young families, a growing number of aged people and the one of the highest populations of young people in Australia. The schools, churches and community groups play an important role in preserving these unique cultures. Mums and dads are doing the right thing by their families, being good role models and working hard to support them. I am pleased by the contribution that schools such as St Gertrude's Primary School are making to the moral and academic successes of our children. I take this opportunity to thank the school for its hospitality at the forum and I felt very humble by the reception and the respect that was shown to me. I am very proud to see St Gertrude's Primary School taking a leading role in contributing positively to the fabric of our society.

Mrs BARBARA PERRY (Auburn—Minister for Juvenile Justice, Minister for Western Sydney, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Citizenship) [5.42 p.m.]: Clearly the member for Smithfield is playing an active role in his community, visiting the many educational institutions in his electorate. I join him in congratulating St Gertrude's Primary School, Mrs Dickenson, the principal, and her staff and, importantly, the 800 young people who attend the school and the parents who are part of the school community. A school community is based on a partnership between the staff, the parents and the students.

It is clear that at St Gertrude's—as with many of our Western Sydney schools that we are so proud of—parent participation makes a difference, as does the teaching of values in the school's curriculum. The values of respect, responsibility, integrity and inclusion are core values to any community, any school community, any home or any nation. Those values have filtered through the school's curriculum. The same can be said of all schools in New South Wales, and that is something we should be proud of. We are building a generation of people who talk not only about tolerance but about inclusion, respect and integrity. I am often worried when the word "tolerance" is used, but those values are better than the value of tolerance; they are at a different level.

SYDNEY WATER SUPPLY

Ms CLOVER MOORE (Sydney) [5.44 p.m.]: Tonight I call on the Government to implement a sustainable long-term solution to ensure Sydney's water supply. I oppose the desalination plant proposed for Sydney. It is environmentally and financially costly and unsustainable. It is interesting to note that more rain falls in Sydney than in London, and we have a far smaller population. Our rainfall produces plenty of clean, drinkable water and provides many sustainable opportunities to secure our water supply. Sydney's water shortage is generated from a lack of past action, an exclusive reliance on remote dry catchments, and an excessively casual disregard when it comes to using water efficiently. Many constituents have contacted me in support of government funding for rainwater tanks, which reduce the demand on existing water supplies and reduce pressure on stormwater drainage. I welcome the Government's increased rainwater tank rebate.

A recent report states that over one million households, approximately 70 per cent of Sydney, could be using rainwater tanks. The report showed that if the Government subsidises rainwater tanks in 5 per cent of Sydney houses each year the proposed desalination plant could be deferred beyond 2026. The City of Sydney has over 30 water harvesting and reuse programs under way, including a project to use water from the Cross City Tunnel to drought-proof Hyde Park, and harvesting stormwater and recycled water in our parks. Our new Surry Hills library and community centre, now under construction, includes water conservation measures such as on-site rainwater collection and storage for landscape irrigation.

BASIX has been important in delivering water efficiency targets in new buildings and in renovations. For apartments in particular, which use more water per person than detached dwellings, we must go beyond BASIX to improve water efficiency, and extend these requirements to commercial and industrial building types. I call for a long-term plan that ensures successive water efficiency improvements in all New South Wales buildings.

We must manage water demand for long-term sustainability, including permanent low-level water restrictions. A household survey conducted for the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal [IPART] review of metropolitan water prices found that 70 per cent of respondents supported some form of permanent water restrictions. Despite a predicted population increase in the next 10 years of around 15 per cent, the City of Sydney has set targets for a zero increase in mains water by 2015, based on 2006 levels, including a 25 per cent recycled component. We are pleased to be working with Sydney Water and the State Government in delivering this target.

Current water recycling levels do not go far enough. More than 450 billion litres of barely treated sewage are pumped into Sydney's ocean annually. Treating this water to drinkable standard and delivering it through Sydney's existing water delivery system could provide enough water for Sydney's current and future needs. I share the view that Sydney residents will accept treated "clean" recycled water, and call for a strong commitment to stop wasting this vital resource. Even treating this water to a lower standard and recycling it for non-potable uses—watering, toilet and industrial uses—would substantially augment Sydney's water supplies.

Sydney's old, leaky water infrastructure needs fixing. Although there have been improvements, we are still losing 10 per cent or 700 million litres of clean drinkable water a day, and more needs to be done to fix this problem. A visionary plan could include potable and recycled water supplies and the upgrade of infrastructure. Grey water reuse infrastructure should be required in all new residential and commercial construction. Genuine financial incentives are needed, including partial cost rebates combined with education programs to encourage retrofits of grey water reuse.

I was recently briefed on a State Government project which could meet non-potable water needs in Green Square and other urban renewal projects in the city to airport corridor. The City of Sydney is currently looking at how its water supply initiatives could contribute to that supply system. Green Square is a City of Sydney and Landcom project. These initiatives demonstrate that there is no need for a desalination plant. Building and operation costs will amount to over \$1 billion of taxpayer funds and increased water prices. The proposed plant will produce greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to approximately 220,000 additional cars on the road each year, representing a 2 per cent increase in Sydney's electricity use. We have other real, achievable options to drought-proof our water supply and the desalination plant is environmentally and financially costly, unsustainable and short-sighted. Sydney needs innovation and leadership: water shortage should be a catalyst for action. I call on the Government to implement a combination of sustainable measures to reduce demand to secure a long-term sustainable water supply for Sydney.

LAKE MACQUARIE ELECTORATE STORM DAMAGE

Mr GREG PIPER (Lake Macquarie) [5.49 p.m.]: I wish to inform the House in more detail of the impact on Lake Macquarie of the storm event that occurred in the Hunter and on the Central Coast on the Queen's birthday weekend, 8 and 9 June. The event has been well documented and commented on in the media and in this House. It is now a fortnight since the start of the storm and with the clean-up underway and ongoing efforts by many involved government agencies, local councils, non-government organisations and charitable organisations, I will provide the House with some further details of the impact on the local government area of Lake Macquarie.

The storm impacted residents and communities through widespread flash flooding, rain and wind damage. These elements also had substantial impact on public infrastructure and community lands. The loss of life experienced in this event was tragic and all those affected have the sympathy and support of the wider community. Lake Macquarie incurred one death when a dislodged tree fell and crushed a vehicle at Freemans Waterhole. It was a terrible tragedy. As a community we can take great pride in the stories of selfless and heroic acts that occurred throughout the region during the event. Everyone who did anything, even in the smallest way, to assist friends and neighbours should be acknowledged. The impact on private property throughout Lake Macquarie was substantial. The huge bill incurred by the community will be met, hopefully, by insurance payouts, but unfortunately in many cases from private finances. In some cases the losses will not be able to be replaced.

The impact on local government has been substantial. Councils immediately recognised the need to carry out a large city-wide clean-up of public land and to assist private householders to remove the debris of damaged trees and stormwater-damaged household goods. A genuine consideration at this early stage was the potential cost to council from the impact of the waste levy. I raised this matter in a conversation with the member for Newcastle, who contacted me within hours to advise that Minister Koperberg had agreed to waive waste levy fees for a short period—the period requested at the time. I note that a further extension has been granted. I thank the Minister and the member for Newcastle for their consideration on this matter.

At this stage Lake Macquarie City Council has commenced much of the clean-up work and is focusing on areas of public safety and utility before moving on to other issues of amenity. As well, it has been assessing asset condition and prioritising required repairs. At this stage the council has inspected 80 per cent of the assets and has commenced cost estimates. More precise figures will be available over the next few weeks. Some of the estimates include costs of kerbside and parkland clean-up, clean-up of storm-damaged household goods,

restoration and stabilisation of landslips on public land, damage to bridges and roads, stormwater quality improvement devices, foreshore damage and minor building repairs. Total cost to the public purse is estimated at \$11.5 million. This figure is likely to rise. The clean-up will continue for many weeks. Assisting Lake Macquarie City Council is Baulkham Hills Shire Council and the council has had discussions with and offers from Port Stephens, Wyong and Hornsby councils. Their assistance is greatly appreciated.

To date, the State Emergency Service has received 2,830 requests for assistance, of which 2,328 have been completed. The service currently has the assistance of crews from South Australia, and additional crews from Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory are expected on the weekend. The Department of Commerce and the council are currently assisting with 20 landslips on private land and 19 landslips on public land. There has been a wonderful response to the plight of the Hunter and the people of Lake Macquarie. With the knowledge that not everyone can be acknowledged, I would like to recognise the Department of Premier and Cabinet for pulling the recovery operation together. I particularly mention Ben Chard, Jodie Calvert, John Trevillian and Robyn Kruk. Among the service agencies, the Department of Community Services did much to help and bring comfort to affected persons. I note the work of Anne Maree Gleeson and her staff in this regard. Mr Tony Farrell of Lake Macquarie City Council has taken a lead role in representing local government in the region. I know that his skills are greatly appreciated.

The State Emergency Service, Rural Fire Service, NSW Fire Brigades, NSW Police Force, volunteer organisations and non-government organisations have all done enormous good under difficult circumstances for our community. EnergyAustralia, Hunter Water and Lake Macquarie City Council worked hand-in-hand with other services. I thank their staff and congratulate them on their efforts. In closing I thank the House for its bipartisan support of our region and particularly thank the Premier for his leadership in the response of the Government and Ministers. I have no doubt that through the resolve and character of our region we will not only recover but prosper.

Mrs BARBARA PERRY (Auburn—Minister for Juvenile Justice, Minister for Western Sydney, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Citizenship) [5.54 p.m.]: I thank the member for Lake Macquarie for bringing this matter to the House. I congratulate him on his bipartisanship on many issues in the House. I thank him for his acknowledgement of government agencies, including the Department of Premier and Cabinet, the Department of Community Services and the State Emergency Service. Once again, the member for Lake Macquarie has brought to the House examples of how a community pulls together in times of great despair. I have no doubt that the Hunter, including the Lake Macquarie community, will count the financial costs of the devastation from the incredible flood damage for months to come.

The emotional cost is of great concern to many people, particularly the loss of precious mementos and family items that can never be replaced. It is incredibly sad for the community of Lake Macquarie to have one of its members die as a result of a fallen tree. On behalf of the New South Wales Government I pass on my deepest sympathies to the family on their loss. It will take some time for them to recover and they will never forget the family member they have lost. Most importantly, I thank the member for Lake Macquarie for his commitment to and ongoing passion for his community not only in times of great despair but at other times when his advocacy for community members is needed.

Private members' statements noted.

The House adjourned at 5.56 p.m. until Friday 22 June 2007 at 10.00 a.m.
