

# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Thursday 27 September 2007

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

**The Speaker** read the Prayer and acknowledgement of country.

## ROYAL REHABILITATION CENTRE SYDNEY SITE PROTECTION BILL 2007

### Agreement in Principle

**Debate resumed from 28 June 2007.**

**Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS** (Lane Cove) [10.00 a.m.]: I speak today with a determination to see the right thing done in relation to the Royal Rehabilitation Centre Sydney Site Protection Bill. I have spoken on this matter many times before in the House and I do so again, conscious of my duty to the people of Putney, my electorate as a whole and my principles. In pursuance of the wellbeing—

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Hansard is having a little trouble understanding you, and so am I.

**Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS:** I will do my best. I should just table the speech. In pursuance of the wellbeing and harmony of his or her community, a member of Parliament cannot do enough to protect and serve the community and, as legislators in this House, we must all do what we can to achieve good and responsible governance, something we do not often see in New South Wales under this Government. Sadly, as I have said many times before, good governance and concern for the wellbeing of the community do not seem to be in the minds of Frank Sartor, the Godzilla of planning—or lack of it—and the State Labor Government when it comes to the fate of the Royal Rehabilitation Centre Sydney in Putney. It is the hope of this community that Parliament, in these final hours, will respond to their pleas and set a precedent for other communities that are similarly straining under the pressures of inadequate infrastructure and the destruction of their traditional family-oriented communities.

As I have stated before in this place, no-one in the community is against reasonable and sustainable development. However, no-one can claim that development that will increase the number of dwellings in the suburb of Putney by 50 per cent is a reasonable or sustainable development. The traffic increase alone will turn a quiet, family-friendly area into a quagmire of cars and a haze of pollution. Thousands of additional vehicle movements in local streets that are, by Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] guidelines, already 300 per cent above capacity will bring ruination to this vibrant and close community. The question must be asked why the RTA still ignores its own guidelines by forcing traffic onto local roads, and going against Mr Iemma's metropolitan strategy of quarantining 85 per cent of Sydney's streets from a sizeable loss of amenity. There has been a recent pedestrian death on Morrison Road and the question must be asked: how many more deaths will this Labor Government ignore before they face up to the fact that our local roads in Putney are on their way to becoming killing zones endorsed by this lazy and arrogant Labor Party and their developer mates.

The local community has partaken in three public rallies, attended by thousands of concerned and justifiably angry residents and thousands have petitioned the Government in righteous indignation against Frank Sartor's plans to destroy their suburb. I have been proud to stand shoulder to shoulder, and will continue to do so, with our local community advocates Rolf Clapham, recipient of our local State community leader of the year award; Bill Pickering; Eleanor Chaine; Sue MacGregor; Ted Weber; Kylie Rennie; Rona Agnew; Kath Balnase; Sue Bourne and Grahame Clift, to name a few. What a wonderful job they have done of standing up for the good of the community. I am proud to call them friends.

Thanks should also go to Ryde City Council, the member for Bennelong, and Prime Minister John Howard for their continued support. Great thanks should go to John Booth and Ulrike Eichmeyer of *The Weekly Times* for their wonderful support and the *Northern District Times*, particularly journalist Mr John Blair, a most articulate and professional journalist, who has been a great advocate for the victims of this overdevelopment. Special heartfelt thanks must go also to Alan Jones and Ray Hadley of Radio 2GB whose monumental advocacy

and support for the victims and underdogs in this issue has been fantastic. It should be noted that the Federal Labor candidate seems to have fallen in with State Labor—the support from that direction has been deafening in its silence.

I now draw the House's attention to the plight of Weemala residents and Riding for the Disabled. It should be placed on the public record here that just as the Putney community has been forced into a position at the edge of destruction it neither sought nor deserved, these individuals have become victims of Frank Sartor's arrogance and lack of planning ability. The residents of Weemala and members of Riding for the Disabled would not have had to endure uncertainty of a home, or the pain of uncertainty, if planning powers had remained with Ryde City Council. Let me make this very clear: the residents of Weemala and the members of Riding for the Disabled must be looked after. I am proud to be part of a Liberal-National Coalition in New South Wales that has placed on public record its support for the community on this issue—that planning powers should revert to Ryde City Council.

The House should also note that it is a widely held view that this overdevelopment at Putney was suspect from the start and has become more suspect as it has progressed. Lack of consultation, arrogance, greed and misinformation are the foundations of the 800 dwellings proposed for the site. It is not too late for Frank Sartor and the State Government to listen to the case of reason and fairness put forward by the people of Putney. It is not too late to hear their pleas to save their community. At the very least, the people of Putney deserve to be protected from an unacceptable increase in traffic numbers on their local streets, by making all ingress and egress to the overdevelopment via Victoria Road.

**Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Joseph Tripodi and set down as an order of the day for a future day.**

## **BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

### **Postponement of Business**

**General Business Notice of Motion (for Bills) No. 1 postponed by Ms Clover Moore.**

### **CHANNEL 7 FORMER EPPING SITE PROTECTION BILL 2007**

**Bill introduced on motion by Mr Greg Smith.**

### **Agreement in Principle**

**Mr GREG SMITH** (Epping) [10.05 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

The object of the Channel 7 Former Epping Site Protection Bill 2007 is to protect the site at Epping by ensuring that Parramatta City Council remains the consent authority for any application to carry out development on the site, by prohibiting the carrying out of excessive development on the site and by requiring community consultation in relation to the carrying out of the development on the site. Part 2 of the bill provides for council authority in relation to the carrying out of any development. Part 3 provides that the development of the site is to require the consent of Parramatta City Council. Part 4 requires that the council develop a concept plan for the site. Part 5 requires that community consultation be undertaken by the council in finalising that plan. The Minister for Planning, the Hon. Frank Sartor, has already taken a decision to take over control of this site and a legal declaration to that effect has been made. In particular, clause 5 of the bill states that it:

... prevents the making or operation of any declaration under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* that the carrying out of development on the site is a project to which Part 3A of that Act applies or that has the effect of making development on the site a project or part of a project to which Part 3A of that Act applies.

Most crucial is the reference to:

Any such declaration that has been made ...

A declaration has been made.

... or is made has no effect to the extent to which it applies to the site.

This bill is based on a previous bill introduced by my distinguished predecessor, the former member for Epping, Mr Andrew Tink, on 31 August 2006. Whilst based on a bill by the member for Lane Cove, it is essentially a simpler bill.

**Ms Gladys Berejiklian:** Epping.

**Mr GREG SMITH:** No, Lane Cove. Mr Roberts introduced a similar bill earlier. The need for the bill goes back some little time and the antecedents go back to 2005. Channel 7 owns a large area in Mobbs Lane, Epping, which is a very narrow lane. They are proposing to put 700 or so dwellings on there, which is far more than the Parramatta City Council would allow. The residents of that area are totally against it. They are already facing enormous development with the brick pit site on the corner of Midson Road and Mobbs Lane, which has caused extra traffic. The traffic and other problems associated with this development, with massively increased approval for sites, will be catastrophic.

The circumstantial evidence is overwhelming that the reason for this becoming part of part 3A and the Minister taking it over is that there has been a sweetheart deal between this Government and Channel 7, which has taken over premises or is building premises at the former Eveleigh railway yards, now the Australian Technology Park, and it is very much in the Government's interest to have such a large tenant and to keep on side with a large media organisation. It is a disgrace that this State is taken over by a Minister for Planning who has more powers, apparently, than Attila the Hun. The money floating into this Government to fund election advertising against the State Opposition and the Federal Government is a scandal. The people of Epping will not tolerate it. At this stage, by consent, I postpone the completion of my agreement in principle speech until a later hour.

**Debate set down as an order of the day for a later hour.**

## **BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

### **Postponement of Business**

**General Business Notice of Motion (for Bills) No. 3 and postponed by Mr Anthony Roberts.**

**General Business Notice of Motion (for Bills) No. 4 and postponed by Ms Gladys Berejiklian.**

## **LIQUOR AMENDMENT (SMALL BARS AND RESTAURANTS) BILL 2007**

**Bill introduced on motion by Ms Clover Moore.**

### **Agreement in Principle**

**Ms CLOVER MOORE** (Sydney) [10.11 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

For too long the New South Wales night economy has been dominated by large pubs and clubs with poker machines and televised sport, and large nightclubs with loud pumping music. While these venues provide entertainment for many, growing numbers of people support an alternative night culture. The Liquor Amendment (Small Bars and Restaurants) Bill aims to encourage a new night economy that has less impact on neighbouring amenity; a night economy that is diverse and in line with other cities—Australian cities like Melbourne and Perth, and European, American and Asian cities, such as Paris, Florence, San Francisco and Shanghai. Our current liquor licensing system is more restrictive, expensive and complex than any other system in Australia. Small venues that would have less impact on the local neighbourhood either do not fit within the rigid licence categories or entrepreneurs cannot afford the exorbitant costs.

Since announcing my intention to introduce legislation to encourage smaller, lower impact, boutique style bars, my office has been inundated by responses and support. I have received letters, emails and telephone calls from residents and business people asking how they can support the bill. The facebook group We Want Funky Little Pubs in Sydney has over 4,500 members and when the *Sydney Morning Herald* ran a number of articles on liquor licensing, more than 50 people posted blogs in support of my proposed bill on day one. I refer

to a couple of those blogs. Peter H said, " We need a more diverse bar scene other than booze, drunks and vomit. Come on Sydney get this city on the map for more than the Harbour and Opera House". Mat Rawnsley said, "If the line of argument that more accessible/cheaper/less restrictive liquor licences will lead to more binge-drinking is to be believed, where is the evidence? Look around the world. The few countries where binge drinking is a problem [are] generally where laws are toughest." Indeed, in today's *Sydney Morning Herald* former Prime Minister Keating said:

The pub culture in Sydney is stultifyingly bad. It's raucous and it's noisy in the Klondike-like saloons. All that's missing is Lola Montez. The idea that you have to go into these swills to get a drink, and not in some more beguiling place, is a shame.

Change is needed to promote tourism and business. On any night in Sydney approximately 20,000 visitors in city hotels could benefit from a quiet place to drink. As Australia's global city, Sydney is the key destination for business and "deal making". It is estimated that a third to a half of hotel guests stay in the central business district [CBD] for business and they want to be able to conduct face-to-face meetings in conducive surroundings where knowledge can be shared and decisions made.

The Sydney Chamber of Commerce supports this bill, stating, "For Sydney to grow and prosper as a global city, the Sydney CBD must offer a variety of drinking venues to cater for the tastes of all patrons". The Property Council also supports this bill because it promotes vibrancy in the city encouraging work and recreation and thereby strengthening the economy. The Property Council says that Melbourne's bar culture, which has arisen from reforms to liquor licensing last century, leaves Sydney's for dead. Indeed, Ken Morrison, chief executive officer of the Property Council, in an opinion piece in the *Sydney Morning Herald* said, "The business case for small bars in our city is really a no-brainer."

Liquor reforms introduced in Victoria in the 1990s have allowed Melbourne to fare better. Professor John Niewenhuysen, who recommended that Victoria relax its liquor laws in the 1980s, demonstrated in a recent discussion paper the economic benefits of liquor licensing reform in Victoria, including a 24.6 per cent increase in restaurant employees between 1999 and 2004, compared to a 17.7 per cent increase in New South Wales. While the number of liquor outlets increased by 96 per cent in Victoria between 1998 and 2006, compared with a 34 per cent increase in New South Wales, Professor Niewenhuysen points out that the increase has not increased per capita consumption. Victoria's growth in venues reflects a greater choice in the style and type of premises, including smaller bars, particularly in the laneways of Melbourne's central business district.

The Liquor Amendment (Small Bars and Restaurants) Bill is not about competing with big hotels; it is about creating alternatives. Recent comments by the Australian Hotels Association President, John Thorpe, indicate that laws remain restrictive, expensive and complex to protect existing hotel operators from competition, many of whom, as we all know, are political donors to major parties. Community response tells us that trust in politicians is fragile and this bill is an opportunity to demonstrate to the public that Parliament does represent the public interest. The bill is simple, working with the current framework and complements the aims of the city's Late Night Trading Development Control Plan to encourage low impact venues in the city of Sydney local government area.

The bill does two things. Firstly, it allows restaurants to supply liquor without a meal, provided that food service remains the predominant activity, and tables and chairs are available to at least 70 per cent of patrons at all times. Currently restaurants have to obtain a dine-or-drink authority to serve alcohol without meals, which can cost up to \$15,500 and still require food service to at least 70 per cent of customers at all times. Should the bill be enacted, there will be no need for restaurants to obtain a dine-or-drink authority because they will be able to serve alcohol without food. Victoria has similar provisions except seating is required for 75 per cent rather than 70 per cent of patrons; 70 per cent was chosen for New South Wales to allow a seamless transition for restaurants with existing dine-or-drink authorities.

Secondly, the bill introduces a new small bars category of licences. The small bars licence will be different to other licences because the supply of alcohol must be the predominant activity, whether or not other entertainment is provided—that is, alcohol does not have to be ancillary to any other activity. Like the small bar licence introduced in Western Australia last year, it will be limited to venues with 120 patrons or fewer, ensuring that it applies only to small, low-impact venues. Small bar licences will not permit premises to have gaming machines or be allowed to sell take-away liquor. The cost of a small bar licence will be \$500, in line with other low impact licences including restaurants, public halls and theatres.

Standard trading hours for small bars will be: 7.00 a.m. to 11.00 p.m. on Mondays to Thursdays, 7.00 a.m. to 1.00 a.m. on Fridays and Saturdays, and 10.00 a.m. to 11.00 p.m. on Sundays. On restricted trading

days the standard trading hours will be noon to 10.00 p.m. On New Year's Eve small bars will be allowed to trade until 2.00 a.m. the next day. However, small bars can apply to the Licensing Court to have their trading hours extended, but the court must be satisfied that extending trading hours would not result in the frequent undue disturbance of the quiet and good order of the neighbourhood. Small bars will be required to ensure toilet facilities are available for their patrons.

When the Western Australian Labor Government introduced small bar licences as part of a liquor reform package in 2006, its Minister for Racing and Gaming said in his speech that reforms were aimed at "encouraging a more vibrant, lower risk, family friendly, cafe style drinking culture", which is line with the aims of this bill. However, the New South Wales Premier has stated publicly that he would not support the introduction of licences without social impact assessments. The Liquor Act 1982 does not require social impact assessments for nightclub licences; they are required only for hotel licences and retail off-licences, with a fee of up to \$6,600, but legal assistance can blow out costs to well beyond \$50,000 and the applicant prepares the social impact assessment, which raises questions about the independence of the assessment.

When the Western Australian Government was preparing to reform liquor licensing, it commissioned the Allen Consulting Group to report on the effectiveness of liquor licensing in other Australian jurisdictions. The report stated that according to the New South Wales Department of Gaming and Racing the quality of social impact assessments was generally poor and the quality and availability of research material made the process difficult for both applicants and assessors. The purpose and value of the social impact assessment is questionable. Is it designed to protect communities from the adverse social impacts of licensed premises? The New South Wales Police Force argues it needs increased police powers to enforce conditions of licences to reduce impacts from venues. It says that current fines of \$5,000 or \$10,000 do not deter large venues, which can cause serious problems for police and distress for neighbouring residents. Or is this complex process designed to make it difficult for new players to enter the market? Is it designed to discourage entrepreneurs from providing alternatives?

The Liquor Amendment (Small Bars and Restaurants) Bill does not require social impact assessments for small bars, just as social impact assessments are not required for restaurants. Small bars will not have gaming machines or sell takeaway liquor. Limiting the clientele to a maximum of 120 people will enable the responsible service of alcohol to be better managed. Small bars, however, will require development approval from the local consent authority, which will provide a more open, accountable, independent and comprehensive process than social impact assessments. Development applications will be assessed in the context of planning controls. Small bars in the City of Sydney local government area, for example, would be assessed in the context of our Late Night Trading Premises Development Control Plan, which aims to manage the impacts of late-night premises on neighbourhood amenity, while encouraging vibrancy and diversity. Affected residents are notified of development applications and given the opportunity to make submissions. They can also address council committees before a final decision is made. Development applications for small bars would include conditions to minimise amenity impacts.

The Liquor Amendment (Small Bars and Restaurants) Bill is a simple bill that works within the current process of the current Liquor Act 1982 and maintains the Licensing Court's role of granting licences. Liquor licensing is complex and major reform is needed. Since announcing my intention to introduce the bill, I have been contacted by applicants for many types of licences who are finding the process expensive and inhibitive. If the Government does not introduce long-awaited changes, I am considering a second stage of reform involving a different liquor licensing process in line with other jurisdictions. The community believes that the current liquor licensing fails to allow the diversity in late-night trading that they as consumers demand and they want the Liquor Amendment (Small Bars and Restaurants) Bill to pass. In his paper, Professor Nieuwenhuysen wrote:

One of the great strengths of the Victorian liquor and hospitality industry, which could be emulated in New South Wales, is its diversity, and the ability of licensees to identify and respond to the changing needs and expectations of the market—whether as a traditional pub/hotel; as a vibrant gaming venue with a range of associated dining, lounge, entertainment or bar facilities; or as a café/bar or lounge responding to more eclectic market opportunities. The concentration of European style facilities is especially evident in the CBD and its cosmopolitan street culture, which has proved so popular with Melbournians and made it a mecca for tourists and visitors. It remains to be seen if New South Wales will make the changes necessary to secure the reforms required.

This bill provides the Parliament with the opportunity to make these changes. I commend the bill to the House.

**Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Joseph Tripodi and set down as an order of the day for a future day.**

**CHANNEL 7 FORMER EPPING SITE PROTECTION BILL 2007****Agreement in Principle****Debate resumed, by consent, from an earlier hour.**

**Mr GREG SMITH** (Epping) [10.23 a.m.]: The need for this bill goes back some little time and the antecedents go back to late 2005. I refer to part of a letter dated 16 December 2005 from a constituent, Mr R. N. Burwood, 6 Marook Street, Carlingford, addressed to the Acting Director, Department of Planning, which was written in response to a letter he had received in his letterbox. Mr Burwood writes:

I am writing in regard to your letter dated 17 November, 2005 covering the above matter—

that is, the site development concept proposal plan for Channel 7, 61 Mobbs Lane, Epping—

It was with some amazement that I should receive a letter from your department about a development on this site as one would think that this should be first processed through Parramatta City Council. This site falls in the Parramatta City Council zone and one would think that the local Council would have a better insight into this area than a centralised department in the city. Parramatta City Council would also know the impact on the local area, which would be made by such a large development on this site.

That interesting letter expresses surprise that the Department of Planning has jumped into this matter from day one. From day one the department has not given a toss about Parramatta council. Looking back on this matter with hindsight, I expect the department always had the express intention of taking over this site and leaving Parramatta City Council completely out of the picture. On 7 November 2005 Mr Tink wrote a lengthy letter to the Minister for Planning. In that letter he said that he understood there were rumours that the Minister was considering the former Channel 7 site as a potential State significant site under the State environmental planning policy for major projects and that there was a proposal to put 900 residential dwellings on the site. In the letter Mr Tink asked the Minister to determine that the site is not of State and regional importance and to allow Parramatta City Council to undertake its normal decision-making in relation to development applications.

In the reply Mr Tink received in December 2005 the Minister said that following an approach from Channel 7 he had agreed to consider the potential to declare the site a State significant site and to consider a concept plan. In the letter he indicated that he had not made a decision, and that he had forwarded Mr Tink's letter to the department for its information. After further pressing, in January last year Mr Tink received a letter from the Parliamentary Secretary. Apparently the Minister did not seem to think that it was important to continue direct correspondence, so he replied through his Parliamentary Secretary. With no disrespect to that office holder, that indicated to Mr Tink that in the Minister's mind the matter was being downgraded and pushed aside as an irritant. It is more than an irritant to the residents of Mobbs Lane and surrounding streets. Mr Tink was advised by the Parliamentary Secretary that the Minister had agreed to consider a concept plan for the site and that public submissions were being reviewed. That was where the matter stood: the Minister had not made a decision.

The Minister has advised me in answer to a question on notice that 208 written submissions were received in response to the public exhibition. From my reading of the written submissions of which I have copies, the vast majority—which were from local people affected by this decision—were in opposition. Apart from a large number of letters in similar or identical terms that had been sent as responses to constituents, Mr Tink heard nothing more from the Minister. In addition to writing to the Minister he raised the matter in a private member's statement in the House on 17 November 2005. At that time he outlined a number of issues of concern, apart from the bulk of this development. Mr Tink said that the site had a history of major life-threatening flooding down into the Eastwood area, which was under the control of Ryde City Council, that there had been two massive flood events and that run-off from the high ground that the Channel 7 site occupies acts as a natural accelerator during major flooding to create problems.

Mr Tink believes, as I do, that the problems attendant on the development of a largely open greenfield site, which would be substantially covered by dwellings that act as mini-accelerators during heavy rain events, would be better considered by councils rather than by a department in the central business district, or wherever it may be located these days. Another major issue is traffic generation, especially along Mobbs Lane. The development site has a street address of 61 Mobbs Lane. The street—by which I mean the actual road paving—is well described as a lane and has not developed much from when it was originally laid some time around 1900 as access to a dairy. The road is barely coping with current traffic volumes, let alone the volume that would be

generated by a development of many hundreds of units. A number of other issues also need to be taken into account.

The Epping Civic Trust, under the leadership of its president, Graham Lovell, and with assistance from Alan Swales and Graham Wyber, has taken a very active part in this issue, as have John Blair of the *Northern District Times* and John Booth of the *Weekly Times*. The civic trust first raised the matter in its October 2002 newsletter under the heading, "What Type Residential Development for the Channel 7 Site?" It has followed through pretty assiduously ever since. A meeting organised by the trust was held on 27 June 2006. A large number of people attended that significant meeting and a number of resolutions were passed. In July 2006 Mr Tink received a letter from constituents, Barbara and John Buzio, who live in Valley Road, Epping, near this development. They said that they had attended the public meeting organised by the Epic Civic Trust. The letter stated:

As the Parramatta Council can no longer successfully represent the concerns of the community in this matter, I ask you to take up the battle on our behalf and use the strength of the opposition ...

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

## **RURAL COMMUNITIES IMPACTS BILL 2007**

### **Agreement in Principle**

#### **Debate resumed from 21 June 2007.**

**Mr GEOFF PROVEST** (Tweed) [10.30 a.m.]: It is with great pleasure that I speak to the bill. As members know, I am 100 per cent committed to the Tweed electorate and 100 per cent behind its constituents. Over many years the people who live in the Tweed have suffered as a result of various decisions made by the Government that have deeply impacted upon their lifestyle, work commitments and many other aspects of their daily life. Difficulties have been brought about as a result of due consideration not being given to the impact on my electorate of laws that are made in Sydney. The first issue I wish to discuss relates to ambulance charges. Late last year cross-border subsidies allowing pensioners to be transported from Queensland to New South Wales changed and as a result patients received horrific bills. The Government moved to alleviate the situation, but at that point there was no change in the way ambulance charges affect New South Wales schoolchildren who attend school excursions in Queensland.

A large number of cultural and social activities are conducted on the Gold Coast, but those activities are not covered by any subsidies from this Government or the Queensland Government. I will cite a classic example. In recent times it was brought to my attention that two 15-year-old boys were injured at Coolangatta Beach. They were picked up by a New South Wales ambulance and were transported approximately 700 metres by that ambulance to the hospital. Both sets of parents received bills of in excess of \$850, causing them significant hardship. It is ludicrous that the parents of school children are receiving large bills for a 700-metre trip in an ambulance. A large number of schools are cancelling school excursions, severely disadvantaging schoolchildren and people in my electorate.

On a number of occasions issues relating to Sextons Hill have been mentioned in this House. Under instructions from the Minister for Roads, the Hon. Eric Roozendaal, the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] has made decisions aligned with preferred option B while totally ignoring the community's preferred option C. Many lies and much misinformation have been circulated by the Labor Government in Sydney about option C, despite option C being the best option for the area. Option C is the only option that recognises the local people. That cannot be done by looking at a map. To properly assess the issues a person needs to be physically present in the area and examine the conditions firsthand.

An issue very dear to my heart is radiation treatment in the Tweed. Currently there is no provision for any public access to radiation treatment in the Tweed. In recent times the Tweed Cancer Task Force, comprising a number of leading specialists in cancer treatment, a number of community leaders and a number of cancer sufferers, has been set up. The goal of the task force is to create awareness in Sydney before final decisions are made to place treatment and services elsewhere. I understand the Government conducted very successful trials of radiation treatment at Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour. The Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Cancer) announced that Lismore was the next centre on the priority list for those facilities. While not wishing

to take anything away from Lismore and supporting the Lismore community's endeavours to obtain those types of facilities, I say that the facts simply do not stack up.

Currently Lismore has 1,700 cancer sufferers whereas the Tweed has 3,500 sufferers. Moreover, the official treatment area of the Tweed Hospital takes in a small section of the Gold Coast which has 2,500 cancer sufferers. The Tweed Hospital treats a total of approximately 6,000 cancer sufferers. It is ludicrous for the Minister to suggest that those people could be adequately serviced by medical facilities in Brisbane. A person who lives in Tweed Heads and requires radiation treatment has to take three buses and one train to travel to Brisbane. A one-way trip takes three hours. A cancer patient has to spend six hours, a whole day, travelling. That is incredibly difficult for cancer sufferers, and that is why we need rural communities impact statements.

There are also issues associated with the construction industry. I cite a current example of two identical houses built on two identical blocks of land, one block in Queensland and one block in New South Wales. There is a difference of approximately \$27,000 in the cost of building exactly similar houses. The Government makes claims about housing affordability, and a rural communities impact statement could clearly address the issues, particularly in border regions. Another issue that is very dear to my heart is an issue concerning the Kingscliff High School, which has taken nine months to compile a risk assessment for the State Government associated with a trip to the Kokoda Trail to be undertaken next year by 30 students and four teachers. The school was recently advised that it is not permitted to undertake the trip because no New South Wales public school has ever been permitted to go to the Kokoda Trail.

I point out that a number of private schools, Scots College, King's College, and the Armidale School, undertake excursions to the Kokoda Trail. As I speak the Armidale School has a number of children undertaking that famous walk. This is another incidence of discrimination against New South Wales schools, because a number of Queensland schools currently have school students walking on that track. A rural communities impact statement would go a long way toward addressing inequities between cross-border regions. There should be one standard for all. It is unacceptable for two different standards to be operating in this State, one for private schools and one for public schools.

I will do everything I possibly can to ensure that those 30 schoolchildren and four teachers get to the Kokoda Trail. We often hear about problems associated with young people, particularly about their lacking leadership and moral fibre. This is a chance for 30 young people to be involved in an expedition on the Kokoda Trail. They are raising their own funds; they are not asking the Department of Education and Training or the Minister for Education and Training for financial assistance. Quite frankly, all they are asking for is permission. They are washing cars, selling lamingtons and saving pocket money. They are showing strong moral fibre.

A rural communities impact statement would identify the issues and mitigate any adverse effects. I plan to go with the schoolchildren on the Kokoda Trail next year, if the expedition is endorsed by the Minister for Education and Training. I make a special plea to the Minister to revisit the issue and allow commonsense to prevail.

Also, I throw down a challenge by asking the Minister for Education and Training whether he would like to accompany me on that trip to Kokoda. I have visions of Joe Hockey and Kevin Rudd with the Minister and me.

*[Interruption]*

I might even ask the member for Macquarie Fields to come along in case we need some medical treatment. It is imperative that we have rural communities impact statements. The issue is ongoing. It is alive and it is impacting, particularly in my area, every day of the week. It is taking away many of the social, moral and business opportunities from the people in my electorate. I hope this bill has support because it would clearly identify these types of issues, particularly radiation. To somebody in Sydney looking at the map Lismore may not seem far from Tweed but the drive between them takes an hour and fifteen minutes. The road from Tweed to Lismore is winding and is not serviced by public transport.

Another big issue is the Murwillumbah to Casino rail line. If we had a commuter rail line there people could use that, but a number of years ago an economic decision was made to discontinue the service and the route sits there unused. Approximately 1,200 schoolchildren a day could use the commuter rail line but they are forced onto buses on the notorious Pacific Highway and on many of the back streets in the area. We are continuing the battle for the Murwillumbah rail line. I believe the Deputy Prime Minister is still waiting for the



final costings to be provided by the New South Wales Labor Government. The Minister for Transport promised approximately one year ago to send those costings as soon as they were available. The costings still have not been received in Canberra, but once they are received the Federal Government will react.

There is a fantastic organisation in the area called TOOT—Trains On Our Tracks. The members wear red T-shirts. Karin Kolbe and the other members are very active. I recently attended the annual general meeting. They have not given up the fight. It has become a Federal issue as well, but the onus rests on the Parliament here in Sydney. I implore the Minister for Transport to look at this issue again and provide the figures to Canberra because until he does that nothing can be done. We need our train back now. This is another example of the need for the Rural Communities Impact Bill. Government members do not even have to leave Sydney, which would be a great plus for them; the provisions of the bill would allow them to analyse the true impact on our areas of decisions made here in Sydney.

A colleague of mine runs a successful display business. Wilson's Displays, run by Mark and Cathy Wilson, supplies everything from Christmas decorations to shopping centre displays. They need two types of insurance cover for workers because they work either side of the border. They need different permits from the Roads and Traffic Authority and so on. A rural impact statement would clearly identify the problems and allow some common sense to prevail. In conclusion, I fully support the Rural Communities Impact Bill and I implore the Government to reconsider its position. The bill would introduce common sense and give clear direction. I am thoroughly committed to one standard for all the people of New South Wales.

**Mr DARYL MAGUIRE** (Wagga Wagga) [10.43 a.m.]: My contribution on the Rural Communities Impact Bill will be brief. I congratulate the member for Tweed on his passionate and descriptive speech. So many issues affect rural communities. Decisions of the Parliament and especially the Government that are made without consultation with the affected communities can have a huge impact. For example, we are experiencing the worst drought in our written history and communities are concerned about the reduced funding for drought proofing. Previously the New South Wales Government provided 50 per cent of the funding for water infrastructure, which allowed councils to do drought-proofing work and provide a decent supply of water to rural communities. Now that the Government has reduced its contribution to 11 per cent councils are struggling with the impact of that decision.

Across New South Wales councils, including Wagga Wagga, are struggling to be financially viable. Just that one decision has had an impact of many millions of dollars. The funds that traditionally were allocated to councils for additional sewerage works have been reduced as well. Councils now have to borrow considerable amounts to provide infrastructure that was once delivered in partnership with the State Government.

Mr Speaker, just a few weeks ago you came to Wagga Wagga as part of a rural task force. The submission to the task force by the Regional Organisation of Councils went for about 20 minutes; my submission went for about three-quarters of an hour. I do not apologise for that, because there are so many issues that need to be aired. One of the solutions I put forward was for the Cabinet and the Premier to prepare rural impact statements so that the decision-making process is transparent. Communities could then see the reasoning behind decisions and understand the complications and challenges that face government in coming to reasonable, sensible and fair decisions.

But that is not the case at present, as members on this side of the House will agree. Decisions are often made in a closed room by what is called a Cabinet of government. For no well explained reason the public is supposed to cop it. When the task force went out to Wagga Wagga, Broken Hill and other places enormous crowds of people turned up, all venting their spleen about how badly they had been treated. They could not understand the reasons for decisions because there was no transparency. This bill will give transparency to the government decision-making process. I congratulate the Leader of The Nationals on introducing this important bill and giving us the opportunity to talk about it.

The member for Tweed mentioned rail lines. All rural electorates are affected by the need to improve infrastructure, and in particular, grain lines. There has been an ongoing debate in our region about the rail line from The Rock to Boree Creek. Through some very enthusiastic and energetic lobbying our communities have managed to gain funding for that line and improvements are being made. We appreciate the fact that we have been able to gain investment to keep that line open, because the closure of the line would have a catastrophic impact on rural roads. It would mean more trucks on the road and it would be more expensive to move grain. To move a tonne of grain from The Rock to the ports at Melbourne costs \$7 by truck but \$1 by rail.

The community derives many benefits, such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions, from rail transport, and we have fought hard to save the branch line. I understand that up to 17 other branch lines are sitting idle while the Government decides their future. If they are closed—and they probably will be—the rural communities affected must understand how the Government reached its decision and how that decision will impact locally. I foreshadow that the likely impact is that councils will be left with an enormous road maintenance bill. Roads were a major issue of concern identified during the rural communities consultation process in which the Speaker and the member for Monaro were involved.

The Government has made many other decisions that impact on rural communities. The area of the State designated national park has expanded enormously during the past 12 years of Labor government. That has impacted heavily on rural communities. The decision-making process was not transparent: the Government did not reveal the relevant studies that were conducted or how it intended to address the impact of its decisions. Geographically the area of New South Wales designated national park has tripled from the time that Bob Carr came to power but the funding has not kept pace with growth. We now face enormous problems with bushfire prevention and feral animal and vegetation control. Weeds and feral animals are taking over our national parks. Rural communities adjacent to national parks must pick up the cost when weeds are not controlled. Weeds are spreading into good grazing country and farmers are battling epidemics of Paterson's curse, blackberry bushes and other noxious weeds.

The Government's health policies have also impacted heavily on rural communities. For example, history will record that the recent decision to create eight large area health services had an enormous impact on rural communities and the State as a whole. This decision was made after so-called "consultation" but no rural impact statements were produced. I have heard Labor members suggest that impact statements are supplied to Cabinet, which then bases its decisions on the information they contain. But what is wrong with making those statements public so that the citizens of New South Wales can access them and understand the logic that the Cabinet applied in their decision-making?

When Morris Iemma was Minister for Health he signed off on the amalgamation of area health services that put basket case with basket case and created enormous, unwieldy and unmanageable area health services. The current crisis at Wagga Wagga Base Hospital is directly attributable to that decision, which has impacted the local community adversely. I urge those members who think I am talking rubbish to go to the Parliamentary Library and watch a tape of Monday night's episode of *A Current Affair*. One woman described the hospital as a "meat factory". I think members will be shocked by the claims made on the program. The front page of one of today's newspapers carries the headline "Hospital in crisis". Why is Wagga Wagga Base Hospital in crisis? It is because the amalgamations have created enormous difficulties in providing health services in regional New South Wales. The Government ignored the screams of protest by health professionals and proceeded as planned.

Wagga Wagga Base Hospital has now lost its accreditation to teach emergency specialists. That is a problem. Helicopters now fly emergency patients to other facilities. This hospital, which serves a population of 200,000 people, is unable to train emergency specialists. If a person is involved in a car accident in Tumut and requires specialist treatment there is no guarantee that an experienced health professional can provide it at the emergency ward of Wagga Wagga Base Hospital. That is unacceptable. We appreciate the efforts of the many dedicated health professionals who work extremely hard under stressful circumstances. However, the impact of the Government's decision to amalgamate the area health services is starting to come home to rural communities. Monday night's episode of *A Current Affair* also revealed that babies are dying at the hospital. That is another impact of the Government's decision.

The entire southern region complained bitterly about the amalgamation. The Government's consultation process was an absolute sham. Interested parties were invited to attend a meeting that was chaired by a panel. At the meeting I attended about 150 people were present. There was a document on every chair and attendees were expected to read its contents, assess the plan and reach a decision within an hour about the amalgamation of an area health service that is the size of Tasmania. That is unreasonable and unjust, and the plan was ill thought-out. The results are now evident. As I speak the Health Care Complaints Commission [HCCC] is investigating the deaths of three babies at the hospital. Investigations are also underway into the deaths of mental health patients at Wagga Wagga Base Hospital. The Government's headlong rush to amalgamate area health services has delivered grief and death to our communities.

I am not trying to scare people; I am simply stating the facts as they appear in the newspapers and on television. I encourage Labor members to see for themselves. As today's edition of the *Daily Advertiser* states, there is a crisis in regional health and action must be taken. No impact statement was produced about the likely

effects on rural communities of the Government's decision to amalgamate the Southern Area Health Service and the Greater Murray Area Health Service, both of which were debt-ridden basket cases. Control of the region's health is now centralised in Queanbeyan and the local chief executive officers or chairpersons are temporary—the positions are never filled permanently.

At last count between 30 and 50 nurse positions were vacant. Wagga Wagga Base Hospital can no longer train emergency specialists. How long before the clinical school attached to the hospital is also in danger? The Minister claimed that the health service was not informed that the training criteria had changed. But the health service received that information in 2005 and was sent a follow-up letter when it did not respond. Now that the hospital's accreditation has been revoked the Minister is seeking to blame someone else. But there is only one person to blame: the architect of this disaster, Morris Iemma. If he had consulted properly with the community and commissioned a rural impact statement, as the Leader of The Nationals has suggested, perhaps some of the dreadful catastrophes that are splashed daily across the pages of our local newspapers and that feature almost nightly on *A Current Affair* and news bulletins—I remind members of the recent tragic events at Royal North Shore Hospital—could have been avoided.

**Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Joseph Tripodi and set down as an order of the day for a future day.**

## **GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS (INFRASTRUCTURE REGISTER) BILL 2007**

### **Agreement in Principle**

**Debate resumed from 7 June 2007.**

**Mr JOSEPH TRIPODI** (Fairfield—Minister for Small Business, Minister for Regulatory Reform, and Minister for Ports and Waterways) [11.00 a.m.]: The Government opposes the Government Schools (Infrastructure Register) Bill. It is no secret that this is not the first time the Opposition has pursued this bill in the Parliament. In fact, the Leader of The Nationals admitted as much when he introduced the bill. It is a recycled idea, it is an old idea and it is an impractical idea. It would be a shameful waste of time and resources that would better be spent delivering the Iemma Government's maintenance program. I acknowledge the Leader of The Nationals' moment of honesty—at least he is not trying to pass off this bill as all his own work. However, I would prefer it if he got some ideas of his own, or at least if he gave up his bad habit of talking down public education in this State.

The proposals in the bill are totally impractical and demonstrate a lack of thought and vision. Even worse, they would do nothing to improve the condition of our schools. What the bill would do is oblige the Department of Education and Training to post tens of thousands of pages of data on its website. It would cost in the order of \$500,000 each year and would require a team of staff to comply with its provisions. Furthermore, complying with the bill would not provide one extra coat of paint, a single new roof or one new playground for any school in New South Wales. This is yet another example of the Opposition attempting to destroy the community's confidence in public education. Members on that side of the House only ever talk down public education; they never do a single thing to promote public education or to support our teachers and students. By contrast, the Iemma Government is providing more than \$256 million in maintenance for school and TAFE colleges this year.

No Government in the history of this State has spent more on maintenance. In fact this Government is spending more than \$4 million each and every week. This includes an additional \$30 million as part of our \$120-million four-year funding enhancement to accelerate our program of works. That funding enhancement was announced in the 2006-07 budget and is continued in this year's budget. Each year for the four years of the enhancement program the additional funding will allow about 1,000 extra maintenance projects to be undertaken. This Government's school and TAFE maintenance budget over the next four years will top \$1 billion. That is in addition to the Iemma Government's massive spending on new school and TAFE infrastructure.

As announced in this year's budget, the Government is spending a record \$617 million this year on the construction of new school and TAFE facilities. That includes the commencement of 24 new major building projects in schools and 11 new major building projects in TAFE. An additional \$280 million will be provided over the next four years under the Iemma Government's Building Better Schools Program for the construction of new halls, upgrading science laboratories, renovating toilet blocks, installing security fences and upgrading electrical systems.

In introducing this bill, the Leader of The Nationals referred to the Vinson Inquiry. This inquiry, which was conducted by Professor Tony Vinson, is four years old. Now we know what the Opposition has been doing about public education for the past four years—absolutely nothing. It has simply brought on an uninformed debate. It has not come up with any new ideas; it is still wheeling out the same old proposals. Of course, the same cannot be said of the Government or of the Department of Education and Training.

Over the past four years the Government has invested significant amounts of money in school maintenance and the department has made considerable changes to the way school maintenance is managed. In May 2003, the School Maintenance Taskforce was established. The taskforce focused not simply on maintaining our public assets but also on ensuring that school facilities create a better learning environment for students. The taskforce made 36 recommendations to improve school maintenance and a project team was formed to implement those recommendations. Of course, all of the 36 taskforce recommendations have been implemented—all of them.

In 2004 the department established new asset management units in each region to support schools in line with the taskforce recommendations. In July 2005 the department implemented new four-year maintenance contracts. These contracts provide schools with a 24-hour, seven-days-a-week emergency repair service. Principals have also been given a greater say over what work should be done and when. The department's asset management units work in close partnership with principals to determine the maintenance needs of their schools.

I feel that as a matter of public significance I should alert members of the Opposition to the fact that Professor Vinson has since conducted an audit of his original inquiry of 2003. This audit, which was undertaken in 2005, should be of real interest to the Opposition because what Professor Vinson found was that the department's new maintenance contracting arrangements satisfy his recommendations about emergency maintenance. Following the taskforce recommendations of 2003, the department instituted a system of condition assessments with all schools assessed against maintenance standards by independent contractors.

The department reports to the Auditor General on the maintenance of school buildings and continues to look for ways to improve further on its process of assessing schools' maintenance needs. Alongside these improvements to maintenance, the department's new maintenance system provides even more information to schools and even more flexibility for school principals in managing their assets. These improvements have also resulted in clear guidelines and standards for contractors, for schools and for the department, providing better value for money. The department has also developed a state-of-the-art asset management system that supports the Government's total asset management philosophy. School planning for maintenance and capital works are recorded on the asset management system, which holds a wealth of information about the management of school sites, including spatial plans, up-to-date school enrolment data and demographic analysis, and details of current minor works projects, nominations and priorities.

There has been record spending on school maintenance, funding enhancements to accelerate our maintenance program of works, record spending on school and TAFE capital works and funding enhancements to deliver the Government's election commitments. That is what the Government is doing for our schools. However, all the Opposition can come up with is this tired old proposal to add tens of thousands of pages to the department's website, to add hundreds of thousands of dollars to our compliance costs and, yet again, to try to undermine public confidence in our excellent education system. The Government opposes this bill because it is impractical and would waste valuable time and resources while providing no benefit to schools, students, teachers or communities.

**Mr RUSSELL TURNER** (Orange) [11.07 a.m.]: It gives me pleasure this morning to speak briefly on the Government Schools (Infrastructure Register) Bill and to congratulate my leader, the Leader of The Nationals, on introducing such an important bill. Despite what the Minister has just said, members on this side of the Chamber are all very interested in public education. The fact that we are interested in and support public education is one of the main reasons that the Leader of The Nationals has introduced this bill. Unlike the Minister, we visit our schools and have seen how the infrastructure is continually running down and maintenance is neglected.

The object of this bill is to establish a requirement for the director general of the Department of Education and Training to keep an infrastructure register in relation to government schools. The register is to comprise reports on the status of capital infrastructure of schools on three-yearly plans and on building and maintenance work in those schools. School status reports and school building plans are to be prepared by the

director general and included on the Department of Education and Training website. That is the main thrust of the bill.

The bill goes on to provide that a government schools infrastructure register, a school status report and a schools building plan must be kept. The director general will be required to prepare and submit to the Minister a plan within four months after the end of each financial year with respect to building and maintenance work in government schools for the next three financial years, including the financial year in which it is submitted. This would make the Government accountable and would also let the schools, the principals, the teachers and the school councils or parents and citizens associations involved in those schools know what maintenance has been scheduled and when it will be carried out. They would have a say in the priority of the maintenance to be carried out.

To highlight some of the concerns that the Opposition has, as part of getting around to schools and businesses and seeing people in the new areas of my electorate, I recently visited Gulgong High School. As a result of that visit, where I met with the principal and the school council, I wrote to the Minister for Education and Training, the Hon. John Della Bosca. I have received an acknowledgement of that letter but I have not received a response to the concerns that were listed by the school council. I will raise some of those concerns now and read part of that letter. It said:

This week I visited the Gulgong High School to meet with the Principal and members of the Gulgong High School Council in relation to the ongoing Capital Works program.

Minister I have to say, the rundown state of this school shocked and appalled me. I have visited many public schools in my electorate over the past twelve years and I have to say this school would have to be one of the worst that I have seen.

The Council members and Principal showed me around the grounds and the school buildings. It was most evident that the school looks "tired" and unkempt.

The paintwork in particular is all cracked and peeling on every building. The carpets in the classrooms are the original carpets laid in 1978. The guttering needs replacing and/or repaired.

I saw for myself where the guttering is just hanging off buildings. The letter went on:

I was told that during the wet months of the year, students complain about getting soaked running from building to building under guttering, which is overflowing and leaking. There are now 9 demountable buildings, which include 4 general learning spaces, a special education room, a science lab, a music room and spec. ed. Toilet and a senior's study for year 12 students. These demountables have been at the school since 1978 and coupled with poor maintenance it makes it extremely difficult to maintain the optimal learning environment to which the students are entitled.

I also saw for myself that there was no fencing around the school. That leads to vandalism and to the school becoming a thoroughfare, because there are sporting fields alongside. Evidence shows that whenever you put security fencing around a school vandalism drops down to zero, yet there was not one metre of security fencing around Gulgong High School. I was shown the disabled toilet—this is a good one! The toilet for disabled students—in wheelchairs and those not able to walk or whatever disability they have—has three steps in front of the door. The one student I saw in a wheelchair has to be lifted up the steps in his wheelchair by two teachers. Surely that is against occupational health and safety standards, apart from anything else. That has been the case since this demountable disabled toilet was put in place at the school. The letter went on:

Students must find it very difficult to have a real sense of pride in a school which has nine demountables, no fences, broken and vandalised property, classrooms which have paint peeling off them and poor guttering.

...

This school is growing, and has 280 students this year.

I then called on the Minister to take time to assess the urgent needs under the capital works program for this high school, and I look forward to his comments. I received from the school council a brief history of the school and some comments. I was informed that the agitation for the development of permanent classrooms at Gulgong High School has been ongoing since the 1990s, when records show that the school council made representations to the department regarding the provision of permanent buildings. Several representations were made before 2002 to the department and the then local member, George Souris. A meeting was held at the school in March 2002 between the previous principal, Mr Souris, the general manager of properties and the school council. Towards the end of 2002, following further representations, it was announced that funding had been allocated and that planning would commence for capital works at Gulgong High School.

The first plans were provided at the end of 2002 and, following consultation with the school community, the community's comments were returned in February 2003. A revised set of plans was provided and, following further consultation, the school council's comments were returned in May 2003. The school community cooperated fully throughout this consultation period. Nothing happened during 2003. Revised plans were provided in 2004 and, following further consultation, those plans were returned in June 2004. These plans consisted of a downgrading of the number of classrooms to be built but the school community accepted the plans and looked forward to the announcement of the funding for construction. No further developments have occurred since that time—and it is now well into 2007—despite further representations, including the provision of information regarding major developments in the area. Those developments are a positive indication that school numbers will continue to climb.

Most members will be aware that the Ulan coalmine has been operating there a number of years and has many years of life left in it. We have seen enormous growth in the winery industry, with the vineyards around Gulgong with cellar door sales all providing employment. The recent announcement of the Moolarbone coalmine alongside Ulan is an indication that pupil numbers will continue to increase over the years. The school council went on to inform me that it was finally contacted by the Parliamentary Secretary for Education and Training on behalf of the Minister in March 2006 to explain the reasons the capital works would not be going ahead. As I said, funding was approved in 2002, yet in 2006 the Government came up with another set of excuses as to why the school will not be maintained. It said it was because of projected numbers, but it has not taken into account the developments going on in the Gulgong district.

For the first time in a number of years, in 2006 the student population increased. That was predicted in the information provided previously, and that increase resulted in another demountable building being provided to the site. Let us say that student numbers remain static or slip a little bit. Does that mean that the school gets no maintenance, no upgrading? Is this an indication from the Government that if it lets maintenance run down and lets student and teacher morale run down, more and more students will leave and go to private schools or to Mudgee High School or whatever it might be? That then gives the Government the excuse to close the whole school down.

Is that the policy, or is the policy to look after students in public education? Earlier the Minister for Small Business and Regulatory Reform tried to rubbish the Opposition about public education. The Government seems to be obsessed that everyone on this side seems to be against public education and that all our kids go to private schools. That is not the case. We do support public education. All my children went through public education and I am proud of that. But is this being used as an excuse to run the school down?

As I said, I saw the school. I came away completely deflated. Those students and teachers must work in that environment every day. I left and went on to deal with other issues. That is just an example that this Government, despite the remarks of the Minister earlier when he made the school maintenance program sound completely rosy, is not maintaining schools in the country. I doubt that it is happening down here, in the city. Too much reliance for maintenance and upgrading is being given to parents and citizens associations and school councils. Some schools are given more consideration than others but Gulgong High School is not one of those. The Government is allowing the maintenance of a very valuable asset, which is a taxpayer asset, to be rundown and students are not learning in the right environment. I call on the Government, despite the Minister's statement, to support this important legislation for public education and to support all schoolchildren of New South Wales who attend public schools.

**Dr ANDREW McDONALD** (Macquarie Fields) [11.20 a.m.]: The Government opposes the Government Schools (Infrastructure Register) Bill. This bill is another case of political shenanigans from our Opposition colleagues. The proposals in the bill are unworkable and demonstrate a lack of vision. The bill would do nothing to improve the condition of schools for our children. The Iemma Government has a proud record of investing in our educational facilities and this year's education and training budget is a record \$11.2 billion. That is an increase of more than \$500 million or nearly 5 per cent on last year. As part of this we are spending record amounts on new school facilities and maintenance of our existing schools.

This year's budget alone includes 24 new major school capital works projects on top of the 42 major building works that are already underway in our schools and on top of the five brand new schools that will be finished this year as part of our very successful public-private partnership. We are also spending more than \$300 million this year in minor capital works for upgrades and additions to improve facilities in our schools to meet the needs of students with special needs and to purchase computers. And for maintenance, the funding continues to flow.

Over the coming four years we will spend more than \$1 billion on maintenance for our schools and TAFEs. The Iemma Government is making a massive investment in our schools to ensure that our students have access to the best possible educational facilities. Yet we get nothing from the Opposition. This bill will do nothing to improve the condition of our schools. Instead, it would require the Department of Education and Training to waste time and money loading around 44,000 pages of data onto its website. It would mean the creation of an army of departmental staff whose sole job would be to load pages onto the website. It would cost more than \$500,000 a year. We would rather spend our time and money on improving schools, not on some pointless busy work invented by the Opposition.

I have met many school principals in my time and they are a wonderful example to members on all sides of the House of dedicated professionalism. Our school principals already have enough to do. They do not need to do extra work, which will be of no benefit to anyone. Perhaps if the Opposition had checked with them, it may not have bothered to introduce the bill. The Government opposes the bill because it is an impractical waste of time and resources and would provide no benefit to schools, students, teachers or communities.

**Mr MIKE BAIRD** (Manly) [11.23 a.m.]: It is most ironic that we should be debating public education given the Government's record on the northern beaches. However, first I commend the Leader of The Nationals for playing an important leadership role on this important issue. The Government merely talks about numbers and rhetoric, symbolising that it has lost touch. Anyone visiting public schools around the State will see the extent of the neglect. I am proud of the leadership shown by the Leader of The Nationals. Indeed, the bill proposes a new form of leadership for the Coalition, a leadership that listens, understands and puts in place a framework that delivers solutions to the problems the community faces. Such an approach is sadly missing from this Government.

This bill seeks to provide a framework that will enable us to understand the maintenance and capital needs of our public schools across the State. At the moment we have nothing more than a Dutch auction. This bill provides a clear model that enables an annual update of the capital needs of the schools. The Leader of The Nationals quoted from the Vinson inquiry, an inquiry that the Government has happily buried. However, the research in that inquiry showed that the quality of physical space affects self-esteem, teacher-student interaction, discipline, attention and motivation. There is a direct link between educational outcomes and the physical. This must be a priority; to knock it back is a nonsense. The current system is not working. Adopting this framework will help.

I turn now to public education. Members opposite purport to be the bastions of public education. Some members might remember Beacon Hill High School on the northern beaches. However, anyone standing on that block today will see that the school is no longer there. The library at that school was named after someone that Government members would well remember. It was called the Whitlam Library because the Whitlam Government provided a grant for a library to be built at that high school. Beacon Hill High School was closed because the Government could put the \$8 million from the sale of that site into the slush fund of the Department of Education and Training. During a forum at the last State election the Australian Labor Party candidate for the seat of Wakehurst said, "I do not agree with the policy of demolition." Labor has lost touch with the community. Its arrogance on public education goes beyond words.

Seaforth TAFE was in the electorate of Manly. In 1999 the Government decided to put chains around the site and sell it. To date nothing has been done about the site. Approximately 2,000 students attended Seaforth TAFE and to this day the community would support TAFE and education at Seaforth TAFE and Beacon Hill High School if we had more than the Government's rhetoric, words and plans. However, that is all we get from this Government: no positive action. The Government takes a high moral ground on education yet it knocks down high schools for commercial profit.

In contrast I turn to the new form of leadership from the Opposition, which goes out to the communities, listens and puts in plans to act. I turn now to local schools in my electorate. Since 1994 Manly Vale Public School has been seeking \$2 million to replace its demountable administration building, including a sick bay, and to extend its library. The library at that school is at least half the size of an average school library; indeed, it maybe the smallest school library in the State. Seaforth Public School applied to have its toilet block fixed in 1995, and it took 11 years to be approved. The interiors of the classrooms have remained unpainted for 14 years.

For almost a decade Balgowlah North Public School has sought a new administration block and car park, but still those improvements have not been carried out. If the Government took time to understand what is

going on in these communities it would prioritise school improvements. Over the past four years Curl Curl has seen a 14 per cent increase in the demographic of 30-year-olds to 39-year-olds. Young families are booming in the area. Over the past 10 years the population of Curl Curl North Public School has doubled, yet its infrastructure remains unchanged. The school has been waiting for new classrooms. I have stood in the school's staff room on a few occasions; it is standing room only at morning tea. It is disgraceful that our teachers are not even provided with a chair to sit down and have morning tea.

I have given just a small snapshot from my electorate to demonstrate the importance of capital improvements and maintenance works being carried out in our schools across the State. The bill provides a framework to help prioritise such improvements and maintenance works. It is the height of hypocrisy for the Government to talk about public education while it bulldozes Beacon Hill High School and locks up a TAFE institution. Last month it was revealed that the New South Wales Department of Education and Training spent \$3 million on entertainment and hospitality in 2006-07. The Government says it supports public education, yet it ignores the basic requirements of school maintenance by engaging in political games. It is an absolute outrage that the Iemma Government closes public education institutions, yet it pats itself on the back for supporting public education. It is time the Government took the needs of schools seriously. I commend the Leader of The Nationals for introducing the bill and believe it will assist our schools.

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

## **BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

### **Postponement of Business**

**General Business Notice of Motion (General Notice) No. 1 postponed by Mr Daryl Maguire on behalf of Mr Andrew Stoner.**

## **BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

### **Business Lapsed**

**General Business Notice of Motion (General Notice) No. 2 called on and lapsed.**

## **BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

### **Postponement of Business**

**General Business Notice of Motion (General Notice) No. 3 postponed by Mr Daryl Maguire on behalf of Mr Barry O'Farrell.**

## **QUEANBEYAN EXPANSION**

**Mr STEVE WHAN** (Monaro—Parliamentary Secretary) [11.34 a.m.]: I move:

That this House welcomes the decision by the Minister for Planning to secure the expansion of Queanbeyan through approval of future development at Googong and in the Jerrabomberra Valley.

This is a very important issue for Queanbeyan. Queanbeyan is, and has been for a number of years, one of the fastest-growing towns in rural New South Wales. It has had a healthy growth over many years because a lot of people who come to our region prefer to live in New South Wales than in Canberra. They prefer the lifestyle in Queanbeyan. In some cases they also prefer getting freehold title as opposed to leasehold. I am sure all members of the House would agree that it is entirely reasonable that people be able to choose to live in New South Wales if they so desire.

The problem we have in Queanbeyan is that we have started to run out of greenfields land. In the Canberra region the residential housing supply is controlled almost entirely by the Australian Capital Territory Government because it controls all land releases in the Australian Capital Territory. Indeed, a significant proportion of that Government's revenue comes from land releases in the Australian Capital Territory. For that reason the Australian Capital Territory Government has not had a lot of interest in seeing land released in New South Wales, and indeed at times has actively sought to discourage land releases in this State.



Queanbeyan has had a long history of working towards getting some areas approved for residential housing development. Several proposals have come before council or have been discussed around the region. They include two predominant development proposals which look as though they should be able to proceed, that is Googong and Tralee. Googong is located along the old Cooma Road, just outside the Queanbeyan urban area, and it looks like being a good potential site. Tralee is located in the Jerrabomberra Valley, adjacent to the suburb of Jerrabomberra. Both of those development proposals have taken far too long to come to fruition, for a number of reasons. One of the primary reasons is the difficulties we have had with the Jerrabomberra Valley development caused by Canberra airport's opposition to and obstruction of the developments.

We went through a long process of objections to development taking place in the Jerrabomberra Valley, on the basis that the airport claimed that some areas would be affected by aircraft noise. Obviously, that is something that needed to be investigated. I have supported having more than one housing development area in the Queanbeyan region. Googong and Tralee are the areas that look like they will be able to proceed, for a couple of reasons. First, housing affordability in the Queanbeyan region is extremely difficult at the moment. There is a lack of land supply, and that has been a contributing factor in forcing up land prices. Many people would not be aware that housing prices in the Canberra and Queanbeyan regions are the second highest in Australia; they are just after Sydney. The reason for that is not only that they are obviously popular places for people to live but also that for some years there has been a restriction on land supply. I believe that issue can be addressed by people having a decent choice and by competition in relation to the supply of land. That is why I have been a strong supporter and advocate for more land supply in the region.

Obviously the Canberra-Queanbeyan area has a ceiling on the population it can support in the long term based on its supply of water and resources, but that ceiling is a long way above what we have at the moment; it is probably closer to half a million than the current population. The Queanbeyan area should be able to get its share of that population growth. The Minister for Planning, Frank Sartor, has been active in trying to resolve this issue. The reason for this motion is that his department brought down a residential and economic strategy in April which gave the go-ahead to developing the areas in the Jerrabomberra Valley and Googong. We are now trying to urge the council to take the next step on that, which involves council putting in place planning measures to ensure the developments take place.

However, we have faced many difficulties in this process. As I said, part of it has had to do with Canberra airport's attempts to stop development based on its view of aircraft noise. Canberra airport has put proposals to the Federal Government for an Australian noise exposure forecast that would effectively rule out development in a large slab of this area. That Australian noise exposure forecast is based on Canberra airport's predictions of its own activities. This has revealed a substantial problem in the way the Federal Government approves such forecasts, in that the proponent, in this case Canberra airport, can effectively make its own predictions and then base the Australian noise exposure forecast on them. The Federal Government does not test whether the predictions are accurate. That is a poor precedent.

The Minister for Planning has written to the Federal Minister questioning the legitimacy of that process and suggesting that Air Services Australia needs to check these matters for technical accuracy. To give the House an idea of what is proposed, Canberra airport is forecasting an average of 780 movements a day, or 32 an hour, one every two minutes. That is about 283,000 aircraft movements annually. That is only just below the current level at Sydney airport, which supports a population of millions and not 320,000, as in the case of Canberra. That prediction forecasts that Canberra will accommodate the same capacity as Gatwick airport in London, which I think most people would agree is quite ridiculous. On that basis the airport has put up its Australian noise exposure forecast proposals, which would effectively rule out development in Jerrabomberra Valley. The Jerrabomberra Residents Association has made it very clear that it strongly supports development in the Jerrabomberra Valley because it will result in the construction of a high school—the Anglican Church has indicated it wants to build a high school in the area—an additional public school and sporting facilities.

This was a big issue in the March 2007 election, and I wonder why The Nationals have completely failed to back the residents of our region. At the time The Nationals candidate said he would not support the development, contrary to the wishes of the electors. Instead, he backed Canberra airport, which is owned by a very wealthy group of landowners who desire to maximise their economic return. They have every right to maximise their economic return but the local representatives do not have to agree with everything they say. During the election campaign The Nationals candidate promised that he would announce an alternative policy before the election about where schools and community facilities could be located. Believe it or not, without even being elected he broke a promise. At several public meetings he promised that he would find sites and he would announce them before the election. Three days before the election he phoned a landowner in the region and asked for their land—

**Mr Brad Hazzard:** Point of order: The motion moved by the member is quite specific. It seeks to congratulate the Government; it makes no reference to political fights with The Nationals. I ask you to bring him back to the motion.

**ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer):** Order! The member has been talking about the motion.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** The member for Wakehurst should pay attention to what is being said. I have been talking about development in the Googong area and Jerrabomberra Valley and the process we have gone through to get to this stage. The Nationals even failed to deliver on their promise, before the election, of having a policy. The Nationals arranged with the media to come to a media event and then pulled out of it three days before the election.

**Mr Brad Hazzard:** Point of order: Madam Acting-Speaker, your function is to ensure the standing orders are complied with. The motion says that this House—

**ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer):** I have the motion in front of me.

**Mr Brad Hazzard:** —welcomes the decision by the Minister for Planning to secure the expansion of Queanbeyan through approval of future development at Googong and in the Jerrabomberra Valley. It could not be more specific. It does not raise any political involvement at all. All we have heard for the last three minutes is an attack on members of The Nationals who are not even here to defend themselves.

**ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer):** Order! I was listening to the member for Monaro while the member for Wakehurst was looking at the motion. I understood the member for Monaro to be talking precisely about development at Googong, Jerrabomberra and Tralee. He is speaking to the motion.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I have been presenting well-documented facts, which the member opposite should bother to listen to so that the next time the Coalition goes to an election it might get its policy right. This development proposal has the strong support of the community in our region and the council. The Minister deserves congratulations for taking strong action on it, and I look forward to follow-through action and the approval of the development soon so that Queanbeyan can expand. [*Time expired.*]

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD** (Wakehurst) [11.44 a.m.]: The Opposition is obviously keen to see development in and around the Queanbeyan area. However, we are interested to hear the member for Monaro say—and I think I can safely quote his words—that the problems around the Queanbeyan area included the restriction of land supply over some years and that housing costs are prohibitive. He should realise that his Government has, sadly, been here longer than he has and has been the cause of many of the land release problems. The restriction of land supply over some years comes right back to a failure by the current State Labor Government. I move:

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

this House condemns the New South Wales Government for its failure to adequately plan for New South Wales housing and infrastructure requirements.

In recent times there has been report after report about the stress families are under when trying to access affordable housing. This stress relates not only to families seeking to purchase land but also to tenants who are seeking to rent properties. The problem with planning in New South Wales is that there has been a failure, as the member for Monaro acknowledged, in a number of areas by the State Labor Government. In recent times there has been a slowdown in the release of land in and around the metropolitan areas. The BIS Shrapnel report released this week indicated that in 2004-05, 3,100 lots were released and in 2005-06 that figure had dropped to 2,800 lots. In other words, at a time of increasing need for housing there had been a slower and slower land release by the Government. That is translating into developers, who are keen to work, leaving New South Wales and moving interstate. I quote from the May 2007 report of AV Jennings:

AV Jennings intends to do more work in less aggressively taxed states, such as Victoria and Queensland.

The member for Monaro should take note of that because, sadly, developers are hightailing it off over the border to Victoria and Queensland. Many of the developers I talk to tell me there is no longer any attraction in doing business in New South Wales. When a major developer such as AV Jennings puts in its report to shareholders that it intends to do more work in less aggressively taxed States such as Victoria and Queensland, we have a

serious problem. Part of the problem with the Government is that whilst it has a review going on into various aspects of planning legislation, it has not seriously addressed the cost of bringing land to the market.

The Growth Centres Commission is, of course, working in both the northwest and southwest sectors. The Opposition welcomes the establishment of the commission, but that came after the Government had been in power for over a decade. That reflects the utter failure of the Government to address the substantive planning requirements for potential homeowners in New South Wales. In the northwest sector land packages selling for about \$570,000 attract taxes of approximately \$80,000 and State infrastructure charges of \$50,000 or more. That translates into land that is available to be developed not being developed.

Why is it not being developed? The land is not being developed because of the lousy policies of the Government on infrastructure charges and taxes. The developers and the property industry say that it is unreasonable in the current downturn market to place high charges on an industry that is simply trying to do what we want, that is, bring property to the market. Whilst I acknowledge that the Government works to some degree with the property industry, the Minister does not seem to trust anyone. At a recent forum held by the Department of Planning at the Australian Technology Park the Minister referred to property developers as "spivs". Unfortunately, there are unacceptable people in politics, in the property industry and in all sorts of areas of life. Minister Sartor and the Government should be working with the people who can bring this land to the market at a reasonable price.

In the southwest sector of Sydney land deals are unaffordable. An established house in and around the southwestern parts of Sydney costs about \$270,000. The property industry has clearly pointed out that it costs up to \$350,000 to develop a block of land, put a house on it, and bring it to market. In other words, it is plainly too expensive. The Government has to get serious about its current planning review. It has not seriously undertaken any public consultation. It held one public meeting, which was not a true public meeting because it cost \$250 a head to attend. At that meeting the Government basically said that it was looking at the issues and would release a draft bill in February. There was no interchange with the parties in attendance, nor, more importantly, has been any consultation with the vast numbers of constituents who would like a say about our planning laws.

Specifically, the Government has not indicated any willingness to revisit infrastructure charges—the raising, quantum and timing of such charges. This State, on all economic indicators, is now second to Tasmania in terms of its poor state of health. After 12 years of a State Labor Government, New South Wales—which was the powerhouse State of the nation's economy—has now become the second worst State in the country. Only Tasmania performs more poorly on economic indicators. It is about time the Government woke up and changed the way it does business. The Government has to acknowledge that the development and sale of property and the provision of property for young families is a critical driver of our economy.

The Liberal Party and The Nationals are telling the Government that it has to get serious about, first, appropriate public consultation on its planning review. Second, it must talk to the property industry about the issues that need to be addressed so that land can be delivered to the market; and, third, it must deal with the implementation of infrastructure levies. If the development industry is expected to provide infrastructure such as roads and lighting, one has to question the Government's purpose for raising huge amounts of money, tens of thousands of dollars, upfront. As a consequence, next to no land is coming to the market. The Government has failed for 12 years. It needs to get serious and talk to the industry—which wants to get on with the task—about delivering land at an affordable price. The Coalition wants the industry to get on with the task of delivering land at an affordable rate to the families of New South Wales. The Government needs to start listening.

**Mr WAYNE MERTON** (Baulkham Hills) [11.54 a.m.]: I am very pleased to support the amendment moved by my colleague the member for Wakehurst. In the speech by the member for Monaro I detected a note of frustration. He realises that since 1995 the number of properties released for residential subdivision under a Labor Government is totally inadequate. We live in a State that has the highest land prices in the Commonwealth. The reason for that is simply because of inadequate supply. We all know that supply and demand is the governing force that affects the price of land. New South Wales has a double whammy at the hands of the Government. Not only is supply restricted but the Government's taxes and charges are so high that in the northwest sector, which I am privileged to represent, it costs up to \$300,000 to develop a block of land.

Homebuyers are having difficulty meeting costs and there is an inadequate supply of land. First, people pay top dollar for land because there is not enough of it and, second, they pay high government charges. The Government is being hypocritical when it comes to the price structure of land. It has done nothing to make land and homes more affordable. The last little bleating effort by the Minister for Planning was the introduction of

infrastructure levies, which added \$50,000 to the cost of a block of land in the northwest sector. With other government charges, such as stamp duty, to be paid by the purchaser, and local government charges, it all adds up to about \$300,000.

In comparison, a residential lot just over the New South Wales border in Queensland costs \$150,000 to \$160,000. That includes sewerage, all services—everything. In New South Wales \$150,000 would not even cover the cost of the subdivision. That amount represents about half the cost of subdividing land in New South Wales. As I said, in Queensland the whole lot costs from \$150,000 to \$160,000. A similar situation applies in rural New South Wales—same sewerage, same roads, same electricity—yet blocks are available for \$140,000, \$150,000, \$200,000. I understand that in country towns a block can be subdivided and the services provided for about \$60,000. In the New South Wales metropolitan area it costs \$300,000. That is a disgrace.

The New South Wales Labor Government has destroyed the great Australian dream of home ownership. Government members seem to be indifferent. They talk about working Australians and ordinary Australians. They and their Federal masters like to use those great buzzwords. Yet they do nothing to help them. I refer to their track record. When the Federal Labor Party was last in government home loan interest rates reached 18 per cent. Thank God for John Howard. The member for Bathurst should wake up every morning and say, "Thank God for John Howard." If he does not agree with me now, in 12 months time if Rudd the dud gets elected he will know that I am right. If he is honest—and I believe he is honest—he will be the first person to come to me and say, "Wayne, you were right, we should never have voted for Rudd." Under the Federal Labor Government interest rates averaged 13 per cent and home loans interest rates peaked at 17 per cent plus. Under John Howard's Government the rate is 7 per cent. The northwest sector does not have adequate transport. In 1998 the Minister promised a new rail line by 2010. I am talking about land, infrastructure and subdivisions.

**Mr Steve Whan:** Point of order: Given that the Opposition took several points of order during my speech, I point out that the member for Baulkham Hills has ranged a long way from the scope of even the very broad amendment, let alone the original motion.

**ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer):** Order! The member's speaking time has expired.

*[Interruption]*

**ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer):** Order! The member for Baulkham Hills will resume his seat.

**Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE** (Bega) [11.59 a.m.]: Having listened to the debate this morning I believe it is important that we get some accountability from the member for Monaro on this issue. In his reply the member for Monaro should explain what was the advice of the Department of Planning in 2006 in relation to development under the flight path. That advice should be tabled in this place and then the member for Monaro should explain why the Government's decision is different from that advice. This morning the member for Monaro was very happy to attack The Nationals, but in the upcoming weeks we are going to see the electoral returns from the last State election. In any debate in which the member for Monaro participates in this place he should disclose the donations he received for not only the last campaign but also the campaign before. It is all about an open and transparent process.

**Mr Steve Whan:** It's all on the record.

**Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE:** It is not on the record yet. We are entitled to know how much money the member for Monaro received in political donations. The Labor Government has form on such issues. Time and again the Labor Government has made developers go through Sussex Street to get access to the Minister for Planning and, as a result, large coffers have swirled around during Labor Party election campaigns to pay for its advertising, its campaigns and the like.

If the member for Monaro wants to debate motions such as this he needs to be open and transparent with the Parliament. We need to know what those political donations were, and he needs to explain the situation in an open, accountable and transparent manner. Developers are not going to have a problem with this: the question is whether the member for Monaro has a problem with it. We want to see the Department of Planning advice in 2006. We want accountability from the member for Monaro. If new flight paths are involved, the matter should be handled very carefully. People in the Queanbeyan and Jerrabomberra region have legitimate concerns about the sharing of aircraft noise, and the issue could lead to community divisions in the next 20 years.

If there is a way forward I am happy to hear it. The bottom line is: Is the member for Monaro willing to disclose the Department of Planning advice in 2006 and then explain how the Government reached its decision? They are basic questions. The Labor Government should be condemned for its failure to adequately plan for housing and infrastructure requirements. Nowhere is that more evident than in country New South Wales, in electorates such as Monaro and Bega. The Government has constantly invested in areas in Western Sydney to the detriment of country New South Wales, and that is nowhere more evident than in relation to water and sewerage. Billions of dollars have been set aside for the desalination plant in Sydney at the expense of the Country Town Water and Sewerage Scheme, which provides local government authorities with the support they need in relation to local water supplies.

The member for Monaro has some very clear explaining to do in the next five minutes. Our side of the House just wants some openness and transparency in the process, nothing more. I do not think anyone would see that as unreasonable. We certainly support development and growth in Queanbeyan, but it needs to be done in an open and transparent way by the Labor Party. I, like everybody else, will be very intrigued to hear what the member for Monaro has to say in the next five minutes in relation to this issue.

**Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON** (Burrinjuck) [12.04 p.m.]: I speak in relation to the motion and the amendment. I was surprised that the member for Monaro did not enunciate to this place the level of donations he received from the property developers planning the Tralee development under the flight path for Canberra airport. Anybody supporting development under an existing flight path clearly does not have the full interests of the local community in mind. Anybody with any planning common sense would not endorse the development of a new neighbourhood right underneath a flight path, because it obviously will lead to grave problems in the future.

This type of development inevitably leads to noise sharing arrangements and a poor quality of life for people underneath the flight corridors. If new communities are going to be developed in a major regional city such as Queanbeyan surely it would be better to place the developments away from the flight path area. It is just common sense. It was interesting that Martin Ferguson, for the Federal Labor Party, and the Australian Capital Territory Labor Party strongly condemned the proposed residential developments that were being considered by the member for Monaro and the New South Wales Minister for Planning behind closed doors, claiming that it was a poor planning decision by New South Wales and a disaster.

I live in the electorate adjoining the electorate of Monaro and it was big news during the election campaign. The member for Monaro did not hide from the fact he was receiving donations from the property developers—he was all over ABC radio stating that he was receiving donations. I believe he should declare in this place during this debate the amount of funding he received for his election campaign from companies such as Village Building Company and other property developers in the area in the recent election campaign and, indeed, in the election campaign before that as well. Otherwise, all we will be able to see this as is a cash-for-comment sort of exercise.

It is very important that there is openness and transparency within this place and that the taxpayers of this State know that we are being open and honest when we participate in debates, particularly when they relate to property developments and donations that have been made to political campaigns. I do not think this matter can be stressed strongly enough, and that is why I am contributing to this debate today.

Speaking now to the amendment put forward by the member for Wakehurst, there are obviously many planning issues also within my electorate of Burrinjuck that have been imposed upon us, and the most recent one—and one which the Minister for Planning was skiting about so openly in question time yesterday and which has brought the wrath of the people of Burrinjuck down strongly upon him—is the proposed implementation of an unwanted industrial wind turbine area that will pollute the area surrounding Yass, something that was roundly criticised by members of the entire community. I gave numerous submissions to the Minister for Planning in relation to the proposal.

But, once again, Labor just comes in and smacks down something that the community does not want, with no community consultation being accepted by the Minister for Planning. The arrogant disregard he has for country communities is absolutely palpable. If the Minister wants these sorts of developments to take place, wonderful: he should put them up in Brighton-le-Sands, have a consultation with his local community and put them up somewhere where people want them. But he should not impose them on country communities that just do not want them. The arrogance of the Minister for Planning and the contempt in which the member for Monaro now holds this place by not declaring the financial contributions he obtained prior to this debate need to be explained by the member in his reply this afternoon.

**Mr Andrew Constance:** And for Martin Ferguson's comments too.

**Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON:** And in relation to the remarks of Martin Ferguson, as the member for Bega correctly interjects. Let us have it from him and let us have some openness and transparency in this place. [*Time expired.*]

**Mr JOHN WILLIAMS** (Murray-Darling) [12.09 p.m.]: I am amazed at the behaviour of the member for Monaro. He has talked about what a great job the Minister for Planning is doing in New South Wales. I attended a meeting with local government representatives and the member for Monaro in Wagga Wagga and we heard one single complaint—planning restrictions on development. It is a common problem and it is not going away. I am absolutely amazed that the Minister for Planning can build this huge empire and impose restrictions on the shires and get them involved in totally inappropriate local environment plans that provide no planning and development flexibility. It is the greatest vice that has ever been applied to local government and it is the biggest area of complaint.

The member for Monaro must agree that local government representatives at that meeting were vehemently opposed to the Government's planning policy. It is the number one problem and it is the one problem that we can fix. There is no doubt that planning legislation is one of the biggest problems in country New South Wales today. The member having the audacity to compliment the Minister for Planning on the great job he has done is an absolute disgrace. That man has done nothing more than grab every opportunity he can to be the king of New South Wales, to command everything and to put a vice-like hold on the State.

Shires in the western area are dealing with Queanbeyan people who know nothing about and who have never visited their regions to look at developments first hand. It is a closed book. There is no chance that development will go ahead in some areas of opportunity because this Minister for Planning has turned his back on the western area of New South Wales where opportunities exist. Berrigan Shire Council had an opportunity to develop an active retirement centre, but the planning process blocked the whole project. We could not get an answer for 3½ years and the project was moved to Victoria. That is happening consistently. It is hard to believe that any member can compliment the Department of Planning for doing a good job.

If the members of the committee conducting the inquiry with the Speaker were to listen to local government representatives they would know that they are very frustrated and that they have had enough. Planning is the biggest issue they confront. If we compliment the Minister for Planning on doing a great job and continually avoid the issues we will never resolve the problems. The shires are calling for change. They want flexibility and they want their problems recognised. They cannot even get a meeting with the Minister: his door is closed.

**Mr Gerard Martin:** I take my shires into meetings.

**Mr JOHN WILLIAMS:** The member might get preferential treatment.

**Mr Gerard Martin:** Because I don't kick him in the shins; I treat him with a bit of respect.

**Mr JOHN WILLIAMS:** Perhaps he does not treat our shires with respect.

**ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton):** Order! The member for Murray-Darling has the call and should not be disturbed.

**Mr JOHN WILLIAMS:** The door is closed. The shires have a problem and they want to talk to the Minister, but there is no access. They need that access and they do not want the door closed in their face. They want to see progress. We have problems associated with splitting up blocks in the Western Division around Balranald and block size limits have been imposed. If a grazier wants to buy an adjoining property and split off an area he cannot. There is no flexibility. We are imposing planning regulations on farmers that are restricting their opportunities to expand or reduce their farms. This program is being conducted from the city and it is not working in its current format. We must make changes. To suggest that the system is working is a joke—it is not working. Let us get it fixed. That is one issue that must be addressed if the Rural and Regional Taskforce is serious in its endeavours.

**Mr STEVE WHAN** (Monaro—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.14 p.m.], in reply: I have a number of issues to respond to, including the sleazy remarks made by the member for Bega—which are typical of him, and

people are starting to expect them. This motion was about the expansion of Queanbeyan until we were presented with a silly, broad amendment. Opposition members have missed the point in blaming the State Government for delays in supplying land. One of the key issues that has faced Queanbeyan over a number of years is the 2001 direction from the Federal Government that a cross-border agreement had to be in place before further land development could occur. That agreement had to be negotiated with the Australian Capital Territory Government. As I explained when I moved this motion, the Territory has an interest in maintaining a monopoly on land development and it has taken us a long time to overcome that. Interestingly, it was not until 2003, when I was elected, that we started to get movement. It was an interesting process.

I have declared at a number of public meetings, and of course officially on the record, any contributions I have received from developers. As the member for Burrinjuck said, I have acknowledged them on radio whenever I have been interviewed. I have supported development at Tralee and Jerrabomberra Valley since 2001, before the Village Building Company owned the site, and I have been on the public record supporting it since then. I have maintained a consistent position of supporting the community. That is the difference between members of the Coalition and me. State Coalition members have today bagged the position taken by the Jerrabomberra community—

**Mr Andrew Constance:** Point of order: I am a big believer in openness and transparency in this place. Just declare the figures.

**ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton):** Order! I do not think that is a point of order.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Every time the member for Bega speaks he demeans himself further by his comments and sleazy points of order. I have declared all my election contributions over the years. In fact, unlike the member for Bega and other members of the Liberal Party, I stand up in public meetings and declare my contributions. I have not heard members of the Liberal Party or The Nationals declare any of the contributions they have received from the operators of the Canberra International Airport.

I want to support the community that I represent, and that is clearly where the Opposition has failed. During the recent election campaign it ignored the wishes of the community as clearly expressed by the Jerrabomberra Residents Association and as documented. The association, the Queanbeyan City Council and the local community have strongly supported these developments and, as the local member, I represent their views. That is what being a local member is all about. I know that is a difficult concept for members of the Opposition to understand.

I reject the amendment. Some of the comments made are not justified. Interestingly, Premier Iemma this morning told the Housing Industry Association that New South Wales Treasury is reviewing the levies on developers, which have been an issue. I point out that 33,000 greenfield lots have already been zoned and serviced in Sydney, and the State Plan aims to secure a stock of 55,000 lots. Obviously, it is up to the developers how many of the blocks they release. However, the State Government is ensuring that housing sites are available in Sydney. Of course, the focus of my motion is the area that I represent. It is a shame that members of the Opposition cannot cope with talking about that. The member for Murray-Darling mentioned shire representatives. Interestingly, 14 mayors were involved in the land use review panel and all were pleased about their input into that process.

The member for Bega asked: Why is the 2006 advice from the planning department not available? He needs to visit the planning website on occasions. It is available on the Internet. The member for Bega, who consistently will not do his homework, could, like any member of the public, read what was not really departmental advice but advice from an independent panel. He could also go on and read the departmental advice relevant to this, which is on the Internet. I have it here. It is the document I quoted from in my contribution earlier. That document is the *Queanbeyan City Council Residential and Economic Strategy 2001* from the departmental review from the Department of Planning. I commend the motion to the House. [*Time expired.*]

**Question—That the words stand—put and resolved in the affirmative.**

**Amendment negated.**

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

**Motion agreed to.**

**CHAFFEY DAM ENHANCEMENT**

**Mr PETER DRAPER** (Tamworth) [12.21 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) notes Chaffey Dam has dropped to just above 15 per cent capacity and Tamworth will move to level 5 water restrictions on Monday 14 May 2007;
- (2) notes it took just 79 days for water levels to drop from 20 per cent to 15 per cent in Chaffey Dam;
- (3) welcomes the State Government's commitment to fund \$4.697 million to the dam enhancement, and calls on the Federal Government to expedite its \$6.545 million contribution;
- (4) welcomes the Government's election pledge to expand rainwater tank rebates statewide; and
- (5) calls on the Government to urgently release information on how Tamworth residents can access rebates to reduce pressure on the rapidly declining water supplies in Chaffey Dam.

Since I raised this issue the water level in Chaffey Dam, the primary supply of water for Tamworth City and Peel Valley irrigators, fell below 15 per cent and Tamworth was placed under level 5 water restrictions. Water levels fell to the extent that the riverbed of the old Peel River was clearly visible in the middle of the dam, and one could almost walk to the island that in good times is over 100 metres from the shore. Residents were limited to using grey water for outside uses, some sporting facilities had to stop operating because of insufficient water, local businesses worked with the regional council to reduce water consumption, and irrigators faced yet another season with zero water allocations. The regional council has already advised the community that water will become more expensive and that there will be less available. It is introducing a three-tier pricing system as mandated by the Department of Energy, Utilities and Sustainability to achieve best practice management, and it is estimated that average residential water bills will rise from \$408 a year to \$470 a year by 2009-2010.

There has been some rain recently in the Chaffey Dam catchment, and levels have risen to just over 40 per cent. Water restrictions have been eased slightly in Tamworth city, although many residents are critical of relaxing restrictions and remain conservative in their water usage. The outlook remains grim for irrigators, and climate experts are indicating we are a long way from breaking the drought. As I say in the motion, it took just 79 days for the level of Chaffey Dam to drop from 20 per cent to 15 per cent, and that left us with just over 10,000 megalitres, or less than a year's supply. Limited supplies remained in the much smaller Dungowan Dam but, with the help of State Government funding, the regional council is recommissioning wells in the city that can potentially deliver six megalitres to eight megalitres a day. While recent rains have increased capacity to 28,000 megalitres, safeguarding Tamworth city for the immediate future, the plight of irrigators remains dire. We must ensure that this period of grace does not detract from our most pressing infrastructure requirement, being the augmentation of Chaffey Dam.

I thank the New South Wales Government for its commitment to fund \$4.697 million of the estimated \$14.6 million to augment Chaffey Dam, which is in addition to the \$14.5 million already committed for the safety upgrade. At last the Federal Government has put aside its petty politics. It has committed \$6.545 million as recommended in the proposal put forward by the Chaffey Dam reference panel. This recommendation is based on the agreed approach of the national water initiative for cost sharing on such infrastructure programs. Unfortunately, there is still a great deal of uncertainty hanging over the Federal Government's contribution. The Deputy Prime Minister, Mark Vaile, has publicly indicated that it was an unconditional grant yet Malcolm Turnbull has come out saying that there are still many hurdles that have to be passed and a whole range of stipulations have to be met. Tony Windsor has recently involved the Prime Minister and called on him to clarify the situation. That is an excellent move because clearly the Liberal Party and The Nationals at the Federal level are not talking to each other on this issue.

Since at least 1990 plans have been on the table for Chaffey Dam's augmentation. In 2003 State Water established the reference panel, comprising members of the local community, including residents, the regional council, the water users association, Namoi Water, Namoi Catchment Management Authority, and all appropriate State Government agencies along with State Water. Its role was to determine the best solution to improve safety, to increase opportunities for improving flood control, and to advantage the environment and enable sustainable regional development. It quickly became apparent that unless Chaffey Dam is enlarged in the near future, with the average predicted town water demand increasing from 10 gegalitres per annum to 14 gegalitres per annum, it simply will not be able to cope with the demand.



That estimate takes into account a 15 per cent water efficiency saving over the next 25 years, but without augmentation of the dam the reliability of supply for irrigators, which is already 11 per cent below minimum acceptable levels, will drop further. The current reliability was determined by modelling over a hundred years of rainfall and river flow data. Basically, the irrigators are facing a drop to zero allocation within 10 years. This reduction in reliability means the current irrigation supply from the dam will become completely unviable within the next 10 years or so. Tamworth city's frequency of severe water supply restrictions is already less than the recommended 5/10/20 restriction rule and it will get worse.

The Centre for Agricultural and Regional Economics in its socioeconomic assessment of Namoi catchment action plan 2006 said, "Overall the Namoi region may be on the cusp of an era of economic growth unknown for at least two decades" and, "Agriculture has always been the core of the Namoi (including the Peel) economy. If this growth is to be maintained, a reliable water supply is essential for both direct consumptive supply, for irrigation and an acceptable restriction regime in Tamworth." This predicted reduction in water supply reliability makes it essential that Chaffey Dam is enlarged to a total capacity of 100 gigalitres as soon as possible.

There is no specific water sharing plan for the Peel Valley, but the existing Namoi water sharing plan, which includes the Peel as a tributary, has been developed so that the current Murray-Darling Basin cap for the total Namoi Valley system, including Chaffey Dam, is not breached and as Tamworth's demand increases over the next 25 years the percentage offset reduction to allocated irrigation supplies through efficiency gains in the order of 3 per cent is similar for both Namoi and Peel Valley irrigators. Unless Chaffey Dam is augmented all the offset reductions will come from Peel Valley irrigators. Resources modelling indicates that a 100-gigalitre storage will cover an acceptable level of reliability for the next 25 years or more. A CSIRO report released in 2006 predicts:

The future climate of the Namoi catchment is likely to be warmer and drier. Such trends would also increase evaporation, increase the number of days the catchment experiences extreme heat, extreme winds and fire risk. Nevertheless, despite this trend toward drier conditions, extreme rainfall events are also projected to increase.

The option presented by the reference panel was chosen because it blends the economic value of augmentation with the principles of cost sharing established under the national water initiative and the proposed national plan for water security by the Commonwealth Government and supported by the State Government. The breakdown of financial contributions to this proposal is the council putting in \$2.482 million or 17 per cent, the irrigators \$0.876 million or 6 per cent, the State Government \$4.697 million or 32.2 per cent and the Commonwealth Government \$6.545 million or 44.8 per cent.

This option is considered as an equitable way of sharing the benefits and costs against the key stakeholders who have an interest in regional water supply reliability, regional development, a sustainable environment and the water supply system. Prior to the last State election the Coalition was promising to fund the entire augmentation costs of \$14.6 million. Mark Vaile showed enormous interest and enthusiasm for this project but did not commit any funds and after the Coalition lost the election he seemed to completely lose interest in the project. He finally admitted the importance of the project on 3 September 2007 when he committed Federal funds, although, as I said earlier, the differing statements from his office and Malcolm Turnbull's office still cast serious doubts.

There were suggestions that Chaffey Dam's augmentation was just an urban water supply. The people who suggest that clearly have not spoken to the Peel Valley irrigators, who have gone five years now with zero supply to start their season and who will be decimated unless this dam is augmented. As Tony Windsor pointed out to the Federal Parliament the \$6.5 million breaks down to about \$165 a megalitre, yet on the current irrigation water market urban water is selling for up to \$7,000 a megalitre. In effect, the community has asked the Commonwealth for \$162 a megalitre for an asset that could be worth up to \$7,000. It is a bit of a no-brainer.

I commend the State Government for establishing the Climate Change Fund and for its commitment to give a rebate for the installation of water tanks, allowing individuals to harvest rain and take pressure off our dam supplies. I conclude by saying that Chaffey Dam's augmentation is the only long-term viable solution for the future of Tamworth and the irrigation industry. The Federal Government now needs to confirm that its money is on the table as the State Government has already done.

**Ms SONIA HORNERY** (Wallsend—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.31 p.m.]: I thank the member for Tamworth for the opportunity to speak on the motion. I move:

That the motion be amended by leaving out paragraphs (4) and (5) with a view to inserting instead:

- (4) calls on the Commonwealth Government to immediately clarify its funding so construction on this important upgrade can commence.

I commend the efforts of both the member for Tamworth and his Federal colleague the member for New England, Tony Windsor. They have both worked tirelessly to push the Commonwealth, the Federal Minister for the Environment and Water Resources and the Deputy Prime Minister on this issue. In fact, I have lost count of the numerous times that the Federal member for New England rose to his feet in Federal Parliament to pursue these senior Howard Government Ministers. Only with an election in the air do we see a change of heart, six months after the New South Wales Government committed to its share of funding the project.

Yesterday the statement was made in the House that it was pleasing that the Chaffey Dam water level has increased and is now at 44 per cent, up from 14.2 per cent as at 30 May. But like many areas around the State, Tamworth's storage system is still in a precarious situation due to the prolonged drought. The drought is severely testing the capacity of many storage systems around the State. That is happening in the Murray and the Murrumbidgee. Members may recall that before the State election the Iemma Government made a commitment to support the augmentation of Chaffey Dam. It followed the release of the Chaffey Dam upgrade community reference panel augmentation committee report. The reference panel committee included representations from State Water, the Peel Valley Users Association and other key stakeholders.

The panel's report recommended that augmentation go ahead in conjunction with the planned safety upgrade, to be funded by State Water. It concluded that the dam upgrade would see storage capacity increased from 62 gigalitres to 100 gigalitres, providing certainty and reliability for local irrigators. Even with the final capitulation by the Federal Government we are still left with conflicting stories about the meaning of that commitment. The Iemma Government is now seeking clarification on the Howard Government's announcement. Once we have received clarification from the Federal Government about its commitment, we will be in a position to commence preliminary investigations into the project works.

I add that the New South Wales Government has stood shoulder to shoulder with Tamworth Regional Council and with so many other councils in the face of this drought. The Minister for Water Utilities advises that under drought emergency assistance the New South Wales Government has committed more than \$45 million to more than 90 communities. This includes more than \$1.5 million for the re-commissioning of drift wells, which were the former water source for Tamworth. In addition, we have committed \$400,000 to assist the council to investigate a water reuse treatment plant for industry to offset potable water consumption.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI** (Murrumbidgee) [12.37 p.m.]: The raising of Chaffey Dam has been going on for a very long time and it has always been the responsibility of the State to upgrade and maintain dams. To suggest that somehow the many years of delay is the fault of the Commonwealth is a complete lie and merely an excuse by the State Government for not doing anything. I congratulate the Commonwealth Government on getting involved and offering funding for something that is ultimately a State Government responsibility.

The communities around Tamworth and Gunnedah have been working on these for years. For years a reference panel has been giving options to the State Government, yet the State Government has constantly delayed. The whole project costs about \$29 million but the people in those local communities have waited years for something to be done and for funding to be provided. The Commonwealth has had to step in and I congratulate it on doing so. It is only after the Commonwealth has stepped in that the State Government thinks it can use this as an excuse to constantly delay the matter. Ultimately the matter is a responsibility for the State.

The State Government could not find the \$29 million but it could find a couple of billion dollars at the drop of a hat to build a desalination plant here in Sydney, something that most people do not want, but it cannot find \$29 million for a project that the people of Tamworth want. The Government constantly makes excuses. Unfortunately, every time the Commonwealth takes on a State responsibility, the State Government uses it as an excuse to delay, so we have all this toing and froing. I agree that the matter needs to be resolved and implemented straightaway, but ultimately the State Government is responsible and should stop delaying this important project.

**Mr GERARD MARTIN** (Bathurst) [12.39 p.m.]: I support the amended motion and commend the member for Tamworth for moving the motion. The member for Murrumbidgee would be the only member of this Parliament and perhaps the only person in Australia who does not realise there has been a change in the water landscape of this country. We now have national water initiatives and the rules have been rewritten. The Federal Government, because of its financial backing, has now accepted greater responsibility for water. The Deputy Prime Minister big-noted himself, became involved in the project by making a statement, but has since withdrawn from it. The State Government has merely been following up on the initial offer from Mark Vaile to bring the Federal Government into the project. The State Government has not caused any delay.

The backdrop to this motion is the unprecedented drought, the worst drought in the history of New South Wales. The predictions are that climate change will lead to less rainfall in the future and more extreme weather events. Therefore, projects such as this will be even more important. There is no question that the New South Wales Government is standing behind rural communities. Indeed, the Minister for Primary Industries stated as recently as yesterday that our latest commitment to drought relief is close to \$350 million. The Government is committed to securing water supplies to rural and regional New South Wales as the drought continues to persist. So we are not walking away from our responsibility in relation to water security. About \$45 million has been committed to emergency works across the State and more than 90 communities have benefited from this, including Barraba, Bombala, Bourke, Deniliquin, Molong, Murrurundi, Ivanhoe, Yeoval, Young and Walgett.

The situation in Tamworth has improved but, as the member for Murrumbidgee would agree, challenging times are ahead. The demand for town water in Tamworth is expected to increase over the next 10 years, putting more pressure on irrigators' allocations. As honourable members have already stated, the Iemma Government announced in March that it would support plans to raise Chaffey Dam with \$4.6 million to be provided in funding. This followed the release of the Chaffey Dam upgrade community reference panel augmentation subcommittee report. Our funding commitment was in addition to the \$14.5 million already committed for the dam safety upgrade.

One would have thought the Commonwealth would have gladly come along at that time to deliver its financial share for the project—\$6.5 million, as recommended by the community reference group. But what have we seen from the Federal Government? Unlike the picture painted by the member for Murrumbidgee, we have seen a disgraceful contribution from the Federal Leader of The Nationals, Mark Vaile. As Tony Windsor, a former member of this House and now the Federal Independent member for New England, pointed out in March, The Nationals leader says one thing in Tamworth and another on the hustings.

When he was in Tamworth for the launch of the Country Music Festival alongside our Premier, Mr Vaile made positive noises about the upgrade. In fact, the *Northern Daily Leader* reported the visit at the time with the headline "Dam Green Light: support from Vaile, Iemma for Chaffey". Mr Vaile was then quick to wriggle out of his responsibility when he told Federal Parliament on 20 March that urban water responsibilities belong to the States. The member for Tamworth has pointed out why most people do not agree with that statement. Mark Vaile said simply, "Chaffey Dam supplies urban water to Tamworth." What a joke!

Chaffey Dam obviously must retain a certain level to ensure continued town water supply, but it also provides water for irrigators and other users in the Peel Valley. One would have thought that a pretty basic notion such as that would not have escaped the Leader of the Nationals and Deputy Prime Minister. It is simply wrong for Mark Vaile to suggest Chaffey Dam is only a supplier of urban water to Tamworth. It is a black and white issue; there cannot be any argument. Clearly, the Federal Government has now seen the light, although it is more likely due to the imminent election. We are getting this flurry of activity from the Federal Government on the issue as it sees itself sinking into the political mire. Even if that is the reason, and political expediency gets the job done for Chaffey Dam in Tamworth, it will be a good result. [*Time expired.*]

**Mr PETER DRAPER** (Tamworth) [12.44 p.m.], in reply: I have no objection to the amendment, which seeks that paragraphs (4) and (5) be omitted. Paragraphs (4) and (5) refer to rainwater tank rebates and information on accessing rebates. Both of those things have happened, which I welcome. The amendment inserts a new paragraph (4), which provides that the Commonwealth Government immediately clarify its funding so construction on the upgrade can commence. I fully support that. We need to have clarification from the Federal Government. One minute the Federal Government makes noises of support from one Minister's office and the next minute it makes noises of dissent from another Minister's office. Having the Prime Minister now involved to clarify the situation is a welcome development.

I thank the members for Wallsend, Murrumbidgee and Bathurst for their contributions to this important debate. All we have to do is look back to 1990. What the Chaffey Dam reference panel has recommended basically has not changed since 1990. The proposal that was put forward in 1990 under a Coalition State government was for the environmental impact statement and all the preparatory work to be done with a view to completing the dam by 1995. Had that happened, it would have cost the taxpayers of New South Wales some \$18 million. Today we are looking at the same proposal costing \$29 million, and rising by the day with the cost of construction.

I disagree with the member for Murrumbidgee's suggestion that this is not a Commonwealth responsibility, that it is solely a State responsibility. The Chaffey Dam reference panel undertook an exhaustive

examination of the process that needs to be undertaken. That examination came to a conclusion with the panel having very carefully investigated some five options. The only viable proposal, the one that would deliver the best outcome for the local community, was the upgrade of the dam. The Chaffey Dam reference panel was chaired by Phil Betts, the Deputy Mayor of Tamworth and The Nationals New England candidate in the upcoming Federal election. Mr Betts and his panel recognised that the Commonwealth most certainly had a role to play in this process. The Commonwealth was asked to contribute an amount of money, and now it has made a commitment to that, however hazy that commitment may be.

The State Government has already contributed about \$1.5 million to Tamworth Regional Council by way of a stopgap measure to try to assist us work through this difficult period. The purpose of the funding is to allow for the Scotts Road wells to be reopened, for a pipeline to be constructed to carry water from those wells across to the Calala treatment plants, and to give us a back-up service that will provide some six to eight megalitres of water a day to satisfy some of Tamworth's needs should we ever face the dire circumstances we faced under level 5 restrictions.

I applaud the fact that the member for Bathurst mentioned the Barraba water supply, a matter of critical importance. In the debate about Chaffey Dam, Barraba has often been overlooked. Barraba has been on almost constant, very high water restrictions for many years now. As a child going out there to visit my great grandparents and other relatives, I recall an extremely inadequate water supply where the community relied on tank water. There has been debate in that part of the world for many years about the need to provide a reliable water source. Industry has been interested in moving to that area and opening up job opportunities, but water is the major inhibitor.

Water is the big challenge for the entire electorate of Tamworth, along with threats to water being proposed through coal exploration on the Liverpool Plains. We cannot forget that, given that it is part of the Murray-Darling system, if we were to endanger underground aquifers and jeopardise water flowing into that system, it would be almost criminally negligent. I thank all the members who contributed to the debate, and I look forward to seeing progress from the Federal Government in clarifying exactly what is needed so construction on the upgrade can commence.

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

**Amendment agreed to.**

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

**Motion as amended agreed to.**

#### **PORT STEPHENS ELECTORATE POLICING**

**Mr CRAIG BAUMANN** (Port Stephens) [12.48 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) notes with concern the rising incidence of violent crime and malicious damage to property in the Port Stephens region;
- (2) calls on the Government to immediately provide for a dedicated Port Stephens Local Area Command, based in Raymond Terrace;
- (3) calls for a commitment to maintain numbers of local police at their post-election levels; and
- (4) calls for the resourcing of police stations in Nelson Bay, Raymond Terrace and Tanilba Bay to effectively provide 24-hour responses to those areas.

When Governor Lachlan Macquarie first arrived in Australia, almost 200 years ago, it is said he was struck by the chaotic, unruly nature of the New South Wales colony. It was Macquarie who made law and order a priority in those early years of Australia's history. It was also Governor Macquarie who, on an expedition to the Hunter in 1812, discovered a small patch of land on the east bank of the Hunter River suitable for a township. Raymond Terrace was named for a member of the expedition Macquarie led, but I hate to think what those early pioneers would think today if they saw Raymond Terrace with less of a law enforcement presence than the garrison it housed in 1837.

Raymond Terrace is a township with more than 12,000 people. Housing in Raymond Terrace is affordable, with ample employment opportunities. Raymond Terrace has attracted young families with its

confluence of educational, sporting and social facilities. The Department of Housing maintains many properties in Raymond Terrace, as does the Defence Housing Authority. This is a growing town. This is where the Port Stephens Council, with its many staff, chose to be headquartered, along with other State Government agencies. Raymond Terrace is the administrative hub of the electorate and local government area of Port Stephens.

Raymond Terrace lacks a meaningful police presence. It lacks a complex suitable for housing a police presence. It lacks the administrative support that would allow such a police presence to operate. This is not the fault of the fine men and women who enforce the law on the streets of this great little town. This is the fault of a State Government that in consecutive budgets has failed to allocate funds for the construction of a new police station and has made, after numerous political stunts involving new police recruits, only a token effort to increase staffing levels at Raymond Terrace police station.

We need 24-hour policing. The people of Port Stephens deserve to go to sleep at night knowing that should an emergency require police assistance, it is available in their shire. The current situation is this: If you wake up in the middle of the night to find your family's affordable Raymond Terrace home being burgled, you cannot call the Raymond Terrace police station. You might ask why? Because it closed at 8.00 p.m.! Your phone call will be diverted to Maitland, to the Lower Hunter Local Area Command. Once an operator answers your call, you will be informed that one of the two patrol cars servicing the 8,000 square kilometres of that command will be with you as soon as they can. Eight thousand square kilometres, two patrol cars and your windows have just been smashed. This is not rhetoric. This happens every day.

During the election campaign, my campaign office was located directly outside the Raymond Terrace Police Station. Nearly every night, my campaign staff and I would witness frightened, angry residents knock on the front door after 8.00 p.m. looking for assistance. They would call regarding anti-social behaviour. There would be scared mothers with children needing the protection of apprehended violence orders. There would be the victims of assaults. There was no help for them. These people had one of the biggest employers of young people, the Raymond Terrace McDonald's, burned to the ground. They have had nurses at an aged care facility assaulted. They have had a drunken rampage causing tens of thousands of dollars worth of damage to their main street.

Late last year an elderly couple in my quiet little hometown, Medowie, experienced an attack by a group of drug-addled thugs. She locked herself in the bathroom talking to the 000 operator, who managed to scramble a police car which was in the area—30 kilometres away—not knowing what had happened to her husband. When I was advised of this attack, I went around to comfort this elderly couple, to assure them that it was a one-off and I finished by saying: "If anything else happens call 000 and say fire. The Medowie Rural Fire service will be here within five minutes." Without appropriate policing we face the bizarre prospect of relying on community volunteers to protect us. Late last year a gang of youths went on a rampage on the Tilligerry Peninsula and caused hundreds of thousands of dollars damage. The Tilligerry has a police station based at Lemon Tree Passage. The station's strength is three. At the time one was on sick leave, one was on light duties and the third was off duty. Community members sickened by the senseless damage talk about taking matters into their own hands. In both cases, the assailants are well known in the community for their activities.

In June, vandals broke into the fifteenth and <sup>s</sup> sixteenth pumping stations that maintain the back-up water supply to Lemon Tree Passage. They smashed equipment and power supplies and did tens of thousands of dollars worth of damage. I spoke with the young electrician who was called out late in the evening to restore power to this vital piece of water infrastructure. Hunter Water supplied him with a security guard, because the police could not be at the scene for an hour. Nothing is sacred to these thugs, not even our most precious resource, water. I would have imagined that an attack on vital water infrastructure would be considered an act of terrorism. What does that say about the effectiveness of police response under this Government? Only last week, the Mallabula Sporting Complex was set alight in an arson attack, weeks after it re-opened following the reconstruction of the facility from an arson attack three years ago.

The community is outraged. We need a local police command. We need local police working in the local community. At present the most important piece of equipment in any police car is a street directory. Officers based in Maitland cannot know the geography of an 8,000 square kilometre area command. More importantly, they do not know the people who reside in that command. These people are angry. They were angry enough with this Government to deny the Labor Party a seat in this House and I echo that anger in this House today. But I say to the Government that they are willing to forgive. They will forgive the 12 years of neglect. They will forgive the sleepless nights after vandalism crippled their livelihoods. They will forgive, if they are provided with a local area command of their own, staffed with enough police to guarantee a response

24 hours a day. Local police, for local people! The people of Raymond Terrace are not just cynical about the earnestness of Government promises; they are terrified of them. If police levels drop, the violence and malicious damage will escalate. The vandals in Raymond Terrace are brazen. They know as well as I do, as well as every family in the area, that police resources are inadequate and they exploit this weakness on a nightly basis.

I am given to understand that the Government, in lieu of action, has initiated a working party to study the feasibility of a Port Stephens Local Area Command. During the election campaign, former police Minister John Watkins emphatically promised the establishment of such a command. In today's *Port Stephens Examiner* a transcript from one of his press conferences quotes his commitment to such a command nine times. It seemed the working party's only role was to examine and determine the shape, boundaries and personnel requirements of such a command. Now a new Minister for Police is claiming this never happened. He claims to not be aware of any such commitment, when the promise was splashed across the front page of Port Stephen's most prominent community newspaper.

The New South Wales Labor Government has failed to live up to its promise to the people of Port Stephens. I call on this Government to immediately provide for a dedicated Port Stephens Local Area Command, based in Raymond Terrace, and commit to maintaining numbers of local police at their post-election level. This local area command should be based in Raymond Terrace because it is the hub of the Port Stephens local government area, it is on the Pacific Highway and is able to access Nelson Bay and Hawks Nest-Tea Gardens. Last year, break and enters in the Port Stephens local government area occurred at a rate of 789.9 per 100,000 people. Malicious damage to property occurred at a rate of 1966 for every 100,000 people. Raymond Terrace is the most populous region of Port Stephens. The reports of residents back up the New South Wales Bureau of Crime Research and Statistics findings. We need a Raymond Terrace police station and 24-hour policing now. To do otherwise is a gross neglect of the people who call this town home.

**Debate adjourned on motion by Ms Sonia Hornery and set down as an order of the day for a future day.**

*[Acting-Speaker (Mr Wayne Merton) left the chair at 1.00 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]*

### NATIONAL RUGBY LEAGUE GRAND FINAL

**The SPEAKER:** I thank all members who have taken advantage of the relaxation in the dress code. It is fantastic to see. The Manly flag has been hung out the front of Parliament, much to the joy of most people. I note the ties worn by the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition. The member for Blacktown deserves a special award and, quite frankly, the member for Wakehurst just scares me. I take the opportunity to announce that I will kick off donations to the Layne Beachley Aim for the Stars Foundation with \$50. I hope every member participating will make a donation.

**Mr Adrian Piccoli:** On your salary you could make it twice that.

**The SPEAKER:** I will make it twice that if the member for Murrumbidgee matches it. Members can make contributions through the office of the member for Manly, who has kindly agreed to facilitate the process. Once again, I thank members for their participation. We all hope that the grand final result is great for New South Wales.

### QUESTION TIME

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### ROYAL NORTH SHORE HOSPITAL INQUIRY

**Mr BARRY O'FARRELL:** My question is addressed to the Minister for Health. Is the Minister's refusal to establish an open and independent inquiry into the repeated incidents at Royal North Shore Hospital and their consequences for patients and their families because, despite the hospital running over budget to the tune of \$20 million a year for the last two years, she slashed its budget by \$15 million this year, as revealed in a leaked document?

**Ms REBA MEAGHER:** The Leader of the Opposition made some allegations today in relation to additional cases. I urge the Opposition to forward the details of those cases to the Health Care Complaints Commission so that they can be properly investigated.

**Mr Barry O'Farrell:** Point of order: My point of order goes to Standing Order 129. My question was not about any new cases; it was about budget overruns at the hospital for the past two years and a slashing of its budget this year.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The Minister has only just commenced responding to the question. I will listen to a little more of her answer. The Minister has the call.

**Ms REBA MEAGHER:** The question related to the inquiry. The point I would like to make is that the inquiry that was announced yesterday was established under section 122 of the Health Services Act. That Act gives quite broad-ranging powers of inquiry to those experts of medicine who have been appointed to undertake the investigation—

*[Interruption]*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Members will stop interjecting.

**Ms REBA MEAGHER:** —and review the circumstances of the case of Mark and Jana that was discussed in this House yesterday and any other case of concern that patients or any member of the community want to bring forward.

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

**Ms REBA MEAGHER:** I have every confidence that these experts of medicine—

*[Interruption]*

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

**Ms REBA MEAGHER:** —are the most appropriate people to undertake this review and form the recommendations for changes that are needed to address issues with the hospital system and to make improvements so other families do not suffer in the same way.

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

#### **EPPING TO CHATSWOOD RAIL LINE**

**Ms SONIA HORNER:** My Knights supporter's question is directed to the Premier.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Coffs Harbour will stop assisting the member for Wallsend.

**Ms SONIA HORNER:** What is the latest information on delivering on our infrastructure commitments in public transport?

**Mr MORRIS IEMMA:** This morning the Deputy Premier and I inspected the completed underground section of Macquarie Park station, one of three new stations on the Epping to Chatswood rail line.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! It is early in question time and members are continually calling out. I intend to call members to order. Question time will be conducted in the appropriate manner.

**Mr MORRIS IEMMA:** Put simply, the station is world class, state-of-the-art and equipped with the latest technology.

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

**Mr MORRIS IEMMA:** It has the latest technology for passenger safety, it is passenger friendly and it has an open design with a modern concourse and platforms. It is the future of rail services. The completion of

the underground station demonstrates the Government's commitment to delivering improved infrastructure and providing new and expanding services for the people of New South Wales.

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

**Mr MORRIS IEMMA:** The \$2.29 billion Epping to Chatswood rail line is the largest and most complex public infrastructure project currently underway in New South Wales. It is also one of the most significant construction projects in Australia with a workforce that has peaked at around 10,000 during the construction period. The rail line includes 12½ kilometres of twin rail tunnels, three new stations and major upgrades to Epping and Chatswood stations. The new rail line will provide commuters who work in the area, who study at Macquarie University or who visit the Macquarie shopping centre with access to a safe, reliable and state-of-the-art rail system. It also means motorists will find it easier to leave their cars at home and use public transport—and that is one of the key goals of this project. Significantly, the line will provide rail access to Sydney's booming information technology corridor for the first time, another key objective of the rail project and the Government's economic strategy.

A development such as this is about building for the future and building infrastructure to help service Sydney's new jobs and education hubs. The Epping to Chatswood line will not only benefit the commuters of North Ryde but also provide overarching benefits for the CityRail network. It will increase the long-term capacity of the network by providing an alternative path to the central business district from the north. Importantly, it will also help reduce congestion on the busy section of the western line between Strathfield and the central business district. It will free up capacity, enabling an additional 18,000 passengers to travel on the western line each day. The Epping to Chatswood rail project is as much about boosting rail services in western Sydney and northwestern Sydney as it is about Epping to Chatswood on the northern line.

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

**Mr MORRIS IEMMA:** This line is also the first step towards linking Sydney's growing northwest with key destinations via the metropolitan rail expansion program. As the Minister for Planning told the House yesterday, he has granted planning concept approval for the southwest rail link, and submissions on the northwest rail link are being assessed. At the same time we are buying land to facilitate both links and undertaking further technical and geological studies to enable the projects to move forward.

In coming months we will see progressive completion of the fit-out of each of the new stations. Tunnel construction is now complete and track laying, overhead wiring and signalling systems are continuing through the design process. Once the systems are fully tested and staff are trained, passenger services on the Epping to Chatswood rail line can commence.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Baulkham Hills will remain silent.

**Mr MORRIS IEMMA:** We expect the line to open for passengers in the second half of 2008. The Epping to Chatswood rail line is just one part of an enormous investment in expanding rail services. The Government is undertaking an unprecedented level of investment in every facet of the rail system, including safety, new trains, new infrastructure, signalling and additional crewing and training across the rail portfolio.

**Mr David Campbell:** Comprehensive.

**Mr MORRIS IEMMA:** As the Minister for Police said, it is comprehensive. In this year's budget capital funding increased by \$382 million to nearly \$1.9 billion. We are spending \$15 billion over the next 15 years on new rail infrastructure and investing \$3.6 billion in 626 new rail carriages. That is part of a \$4 billion investment in new rolling stock for the CityRail network. We are also investing \$1.8 billion in the Clearways program to untangle the CityRail network and to minimise the risk of disruptions on one line affecting other lines. There are further plans for the expansion of the network with the northwest and southwest rail links and additional capacity. We are also investigating metro lines, as we said we would in the Urban Transport Statement released last year.

[Interruption]



It is a great plan. In fact, it received endorsement on 24 March at a certain event, unlike at the event on 14 March. On 14 March, in the lead-up to the 24 March event, the *Sydney Morning Herald* contained a statement that read:

The NSW Coalition will go to the election without an integrated transport vision for Sydney.

The then Leader of the Opposition dismissed it as not the number one issue and on the same day his transport spokesperson cancelled a high-powered policy lunch on that very topic. They were stumbling over their transport costings.

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

**Mr David Campbell:** No plan.

**Mr MORRIS IEMMA:** That is the contrast. This Government is making the biggest investment in the State's rail system ever; this is a record investment in State rail infrastructure.

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

**Mr MORRIS IEMMA:** Macquarie Park station is the future of rail transport, and it is one of the best stations in the world.

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

**Mr MORRIS IEMMA:** It is as good as anything members would see in London, Paris and New York, and it is part of the biggest investment in rail in the State's history. A crucial milestone was reached today with the completion of the construction stage and the move to the fit-out and commissioning stages in the Government's plan to modernise our rail system.

#### ROYAL NORTH SHORE HOSPITAL PATIENT CARE

**Mr ANDREW STONER:** My question is directed to the Minister for Health. Given that the Minister assured Mark Dreyer yesterday that the terms of reference of the inquiry into Royal North Shore Hospital will be extended to include any matter he wishes investigated, will she now give the same assurance to Therese MacKay from Port Macquarie, who is in the gallery and whose husband died in May, so that she can get answers to the serious questions she has about his treatment at Royal North Shore Hospital?

**Ms REBA MEAGHER:** First, I extend my most sincere condolences to Mrs MacKay. I am sorry that we meet under these circumstances and not outside this Chamber. The inquiry's terms of reference relate to the service provided to women presenting at Royal North Shore Hospital threatening miscarriage. However, if Mrs MacKay has concerns about the standard of care that her husband received—

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

**Ms REBA MEAGHER:** —by all means I will welcome and support her making a reference to the Health Care Complaints Commission for a thorough investigation.

#### OUTLAW MOTORCYCLE GANGS

**Mr ALAN ASHTON:** My question is directed to the Minister for Police. Can the Minister update the House on the progress of police efforts to crack down on outlaw motorcycle gangs?

**Mr DAVID CAMPBELL:** The question gives me the opportunity to advise the House of the Government's plans in regard to cracking down on serious crime. It also provides members and guests of the House today with the opportunity to contrast the Government's actions with the fact that members opposite have no plan. Outlaw motorcycle gangs are a major target for the New South Wales Police Force. Outlaw motorcycle gangs, or OMCGs as they are known to police, are responsible for a litany of serious crimes, including the manufacturing and trafficking of illicit drugs, money laundering, violent assaults, murders, standover tactics and protection rackets. The member for Coffs Harbour finds those crimes funny. Members on this side of the House do not find them or their impact on victims in the least bit funny.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I call the member for Coffs Harbour to order.

**Mr DAVID CAMPBELL:** In May this year I informed the House that police were embarking on a targeted crackdown on outlaw motorcycle gangs under Operation Ranmore, which is headed by the New South Wales State Crime Command's gang squad. I am pleased to inform the House that since its formation Operation Ranmore has had great results disrupting the activities of outlaw bikie gangs. In just four months the police involved in Operation Ranmore have arrested 192 bikie gang members and associates, charging them with 580 offences. The list of charges brought against these suspects include 152 charges for possession of drugs, 102 charges for assault, 47 charges for firearms offences, 24 charges for fraud, and two charges for sexual assault offences. In addition, 41 outstanding warrants and bail breaches were detected. Backed by the Government's tough anti-gang laws, New South Wales police officers have been targeting bikie gang members and clubhouses and licensed premises that are known haunts for these criminals.

This week marks one year since the Iemma Government's anti-gang legislation was passed by Parliament. That legislation sends a loud and clear message that criminal gangs are not above the law and that the Government will not tolerate criminal behaviour on our streets. These anti-gang laws have given police officers unprecedented powers to tackle the sophisticated crime networks of these motorcycle gangs. They allow police officers to smash down fortified clubhouses and to prosecute people who may not be members of a criminal gang but who are still associated with them. The Iemma Government's gangs package introduced Australia's most far-reaching anti-gang laws, including new aggravated offences, new police powers relating to public disorder and new offences relating to organised crime groups and their recruitment. These laws also provide police officers and their families with new protection from assault, intimidation and other harassment.

Today I am pleased to inform the House that our police officers have been using these tough new powers to great effect by bringing violent criminals to justice. In just 12 months of using these tough new powers, police have been able to lay 70 charges relating to the new offences. These include 48 charges of participating in a criminal group, 11 charges for recruiting a child to carry out or assist in a criminal activity, four charges of recruiting a person to carry out or assist in a criminal activity, six charges for assault while participating in the criminal activity of a gang and one charge of destroying or damaging property while participating in the criminal activity of a gang. Not only are police officers disrupting the operations of these motorcycle gangs, they are also collecting valuable intelligence and profiles on new gang members and associates.

The New South Wales Government is leading the way with tough laws to tackle the problem of outlaw motorcycle gangs and it is also working with the other States on a national approach. In the meantime, it is continuing to strive towards meeting the State Plan commitment to reduce violent crime. One year on from Parliament passing the Iemma Government's tough anti-gang laws, we are seeing outstanding results. Police tell me they estimate around 10 licensed premises in Sydney have affiliation with outlaw motorcycle gangs. It goes to show how deep the infiltration of outlaw motorcycle gangs has been in what on the surface appear to be legitimate businesses. We have been tightening up licensing in the security industry with more restrictions on those who enter into this business and those who want to work as guards. Those who hold or apply for liquor licences have strict guidelines they must adhere to. Now that association with criminal gangs is a particular offence, when the cases are built against these business owners they will be brought before the Licensing Court and the evidence will be used against them.

To hold a liquor licence, a person must be deemed "fit and proper" by the Licensing Court, in their own history and that of their associates. Essentially, police conduct probity checks on all holders of liquor licences. Operation Ranmore is all about identifying and building strong cases against criminals who hide behind business to launder their dirty money. These people should be in no doubt that police have them in their sights and as we speak police are building cases against them and the gangs they are associated with. Operation Ranmore is ongoing and this Government will continue to back New South Wales police with record numbers and a record-sized budget to support their strong work to drive down crime. This Government has a plan; those opposite have an invisible, incompetent nothing.

#### **ROYAL NORTH SHORE HOSPITAL INQUIRY**

**Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER:** My question is directed to the Minister for Health. With the account of Jana Hoska's miscarriage in a Royal North Shore Hospital toilet prompting a large number of patients and nurses to speak out about repeated incidents at the hospital—not just related to miscarriages—will the Minister now agree to an open, independent inquiry with broad terms of reference to investigate the systemic problems at the Royal North Shore Hospital?

**Ms REBA MEAGHER:** As I stated, the director general has authorised Professors Walters and Hughes to conduct an inquiry under section 122 of the Health Services Act, which establishes quite broad-ranging powers for those who have been appointed—Professors Walters and Hughes. As authorised officers those professors have powers, under section 125 of the Act, that include being able to enter the hospital, make such examination or inquiry that they think necessary; remove or make copies of records or other documents; and require any person to answer questions. The health department expects that all staff will fully cooperate with the inquiry, including by answering questions—

**Mrs Jillian Skinner:** Point of order: The terms of reference the Minister tabled here yesterday quite clearly spell out that this inquiry is limited to people who have had miscarriages. The Minister is not answering the question about a broad, open inquiry, independently conducted. She is talking about the terms of reference, which are too narrow.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The Minister's answer is relevant to the question asked. She may continue.

**Ms REBA MEAGHER:** As the Deputy Leader of the Opposition well knows, there is a standing inquiry into health in New South Wales. It is called the Health Care Complaints Commission. This body has broad-ranging powers that were reinvigorated after the Walker inquiry into Campbelltown and Camden hospitals. As I said at the start of question time, if the member opposite has any particular concerns in relation to cases—

**Mrs Jillian Skinner:** They are writing to me, I have correspondence.

**Ms REBA MEAGHER:** Well, Jillian, do not keep that information to yourself. That would be an abrogation of your responsibility.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will cease interjecting. The Minister will direct her comments through the Chair.

**Ms REBA MEAGHER:** I urge the member to take her information and initiate inquiries at the Health Care Complaints Commission.

### **METROPOLITAN WATER PLAN IMPLEMENTATION**

**Mr NINOS KHOSHABA:** My question is directed to be Minister for Water Utilities. What is the latest information on the Government's implementation of the Metropolitan Water Plan?

**Mr NATHAN REES:** I thank the member for his interest in this most important matter. We not only share a passion for the Eels but also borders on the Prospect Reservoir. We know that good policy is informed by a sound evidence base and we know that a good government continues to refine its policy frameworks as new research and evidence comes to light. A good government develops long-term policies that set our State and its \$300 billion economy up for the long term. A good government, like that led by Premier Iemma, makes the tough decisions, knowing that those decisions will allow us to build a stronger, more prosperous future. With regard to evidence and research, Australia's pre-eminent scientific research body, the CSIRO, has told us that we are heading to a period of more hot days, less rainfall and more frequent droughts. More recently, the head of the weather bureau's climate change centre, Michael Coughlan, said:

Australia is up there with much of the rest of the world and perhaps even ahead of the rest of the world in terms of the rate at which the temperature is rising.

Record warm temperatures, of course, exacerbate the dry conditions.

In addition, we know that Sydney will continue to grow, with as many as a million people coming over the next quarter of a century. In the light of these predictions from the foremost scientific experts in Australia, a "business as usual" approach would be a gross dereliction of duty for any government. That is why the Iemma Government has developed a comprehensive plan.

**Mr Chris Hartcher:** This is great rhetoric.

**Mr NATHAN REES:** I will come to rhetoric shortly. That is why the Iemma Government has developed a comprehensive plan to drought proof Sydney for the longer term, the Metropolitan Water Plan,

delivering 25 per cent more water for the people of Sydney over the next 25 years and delivering against our State Plan priority. That plan includes the three biggest recycling schemes in Australia—Bluescope Steel in the Illawarra, at Rouse Hill in Sydney's north-west and the \$250 million Western Sydney recycling project that will restore the Hawkesbury-Nepean River to good health and provide water for industry and agriculture.

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

**Mr NATHAN REES:** We also have the successful rainwater tank scheme, with 40,000 rebates now being taken up, and 70 stormwater harvesting projects across Sydney and the Central Coast.

**Mr Chris Hartcher:** We have heard all this before.

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

**Mr NATHAN REES:** And you are going to hear it again.

[Interruption]

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

**Mr NATHAN REES:** We have taken the sensible decision to implement long-term water saving rules that will save us about 3 per cent in volume each year when the current drought eases. Finally, we have commenced the desalination plant construction and we will be able to provide an additional 14 per cent of supply for Sydney, scalable up to 28 per cent. The Iemma Government's plan for securing Sydney's water supply relies on a range of measures, and that is what makes it the most robust, reliable and comprehensive water supply plan of any Australian capital city. The Metropolitan Water Plan is the cornerstone of the Government's long-term water plans for the Sydney Basin. But, a good government, a responsible government, must deliver its plans and put that delivery up for scrutiny. I can inform the House that the delivery of the Metropolitan Water Plan has been given a big tick by the toughest of markets.

Today I am releasing the official progress report on the Metropolitan Water Plan, a report card on the Iemma Government's water plan. The progress report has been reviewed and endorsed by a panel of independent experts headed by Professor Peter Cullen, a commissioner of the National Water Commission and member of the Wentworth group of scientists and an emeritus professor at the University of Canberra, and comprising Professor John Langford, former executive director of the Water Services Association of Australia, a professorial fellow at the University of Melbourne and director of the Melbourne Water Research Centre; Dr Ronnie Harding, Chair of the New South Wales Council on Environmental Education, and an expert in the field of environmental management; Mr Chris Davies, the chief executive officer of the Australian Water Association and Australia's representative to the World Water Forum; Mr Ross Chapman, an economist formerly with the Centre for International Economics; and Blair Nancarrow, an expert in social research and the director of the Australian Research Centre for Water in Society at the CSIRO. The independent review panel has found:

... progress with implementing the Sydney Metropolitan Water Plan is on track and [the panel] remains confident that the diverse range of measures contained in the planned provides a robust approach to securing Sydney's water supply.

That is from the experts. Since the plan was released, 31 plan actions have been completed with 44 well on their way to completion.

[Interruption]

It is more expert than what is on the member for Coffs Harbour's website, which I had a look at earlier this week. All of this is welcome news.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Coffs Harbour should not encourage the Minister.

**Mr NATHAN REES:** Go to the website and look for the Opposition policy. It says, "You must log in", so a member of the public cannot find it. All of this is welcome news and confirmation that the Government's policy framework is the right one. But the most telling comment of the independent review panel relates to the Iemma Government's decision to proceed with building the desalination plant. Last week I debated the Leader of the Opposition on *Stateline*.

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

**Mr NATHAN REES:** I told the House that three times during the course of that debate I challenged the Leader of the Opposition to outline his water plan and he dogged it, nothing, zip. In contrast the progress report states of our plan:

Implementation of the [Government's] Metropolitan Water Plan has ensured that Sydney's 4.2 million people, and its businesses, have secure water supplies even during extreme drought.

The Metropolitan Water Plan secures Sydney's water needs in the face of a growing population and will be adapted to reflect updated forecasts on population growth.

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

**Mr NATHAN REES:** The Iemma Government is making the tough decisions now. We are building the infrastructure now. We are securing our most precious resource, water, for a generation to come.

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

**Mr NATHAN REES:** This plan has been given a tick by the best water brains in the country.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Coffs Harbour will remain silent.

**Mr NATHAN REES:** Dam levels reached 32 per cent earlier this year. They would have been lower if we had not been pumping water from the Shoalhaven and had water restrictions in place. Some have said we should have delayed construction of the desalination plant until we hit 30 per cent.

**Mr Andrew Fraser:** You said it.

**Mr NATHAN REES:** And I reserve the right to change it in the face of expert advice. Here is what the expert advice says.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Coffs Harbour will stop defending the Premier.

**Mr NATHAN REES:** It said:

The panel urged commencing the desalination option a little earlier ... than the trigger point set out in the Metropolitan Water Plan, because of concerns about potential delays in building the desalination plant given the number of desalination plants under construction around the world ... The Panel believes that the desalination plant provides an important augmentation to the water supply that is not rainfall dependent ...

There you have it. The Opposition would stop the desalination plant against all the expert advice and against the advice of its own Federal Treasurer, who on Friday—inconvenient timing—said:

I think we should have a desalination plant for every capital city in Australia ... I think it's something that Australia will have to embrace.

I have a confession. On Monday this week I had a meeting.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I call the honourable member for Coffs Harbour to order for the second time. Confessions are within the standing orders.

**Mr NATHAN REES:** Earlier this week I neglected to mention another luminary who is becoming involved in the water debate, someone who has realised the sense in desalination and someone who may well be familiar to members opposite. On Monday this week I received a detailed briefing from a group wanting to build more desalination plants in Australia—and who briefed me? The Hon. Nick Greiner briefed me personally. The Leader of the Opposition should give up on this one. He should just surrender, as indeed he wants to. He should do as his Treasurer asks and embrace desalination. It is crystal clear: the dogs are barking that the caravan has moved on. It is time to send in the clowns.

#### PORT STEPHENS ELECTORATE POLICING

**Mr CRAIG BAUMANN:** My question is directed to the Minister for Police. Does the Minister continue to stand by his claim that no commitment ever was made by the Iemma Labor Government for a new

Port Stephens local area command when a transcript in today's *Port Stephens Examiner* has the Deputy Premier, John Watkins, stating nine times "There will be a new local area command for this area." That was in Raymond Terrace in March.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Terrigal will remain silent.

**Mr DAVID CAMPBELL:** Last year I remember a debate in this Chamber around a piece of legislation called the Charter of Budget Honesty for election commitments. The Government proposed it and, if I recall, proposed it somewhat based on a model out of Canberra, put up by Peter Costello and John Howard, the dream team. As I recall, the Opposition supported that legislation.

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

**Mr DAVID CAMPBELL:** As I recall, the Government subjected its formal election commitments and policies to that process for funding and verification. As I recall it, the Opposition refused to do that.

**Mr Adrian Piccoli:** Point of order: My point of order relates to relevance under Standing Order 129. We have waited patiently for the Minister to come to the leave of the question, which has nothing to do with the charter of budget honesty. It is about a promise made nine times by the former Minister for Police to have a local area command at Port Stephens, something that is refuted by the present Minister for Police. This is an important matter for the constituents of Port Stephens. They want an answer to this question. I ask that you bring the Minister back to the leave of the question so that the people of Port Stephens can have an answer.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I am confident that the Minister has made his introductory remarks and will now respond to the question.

**Mr DAVID CAMPBELL:** The question was about election commitments and so is the answer. Treasury costed all of the Government's published election promises and there was no election commitment as part of that documentation about providing a new local area command in the Port Stephens area. But there was an election commitment for a new police station to service the Port Stephens area. On 10 August, when I visited Raymond Terrace with the member for Maitland and Jim Arneman, I made an announcement that the Government would deliver on an election commitment and rebuild a new police station at Raymond Terrace to support the Port Stephens area—another example of how this Government improves services, delivers on its commitments and implements its plans.

#### MURRAY-DARLING BASIN

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** My question without notice is addressed to the Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Water. Can the Minister update the House on the situation in the Murray-Darling Basin?

**Mr PHILIP KOPERBERG:** I acknowledge the member's long interest in matters that so dramatically affect his constituents.

**Mr Chris Hartcher:** Getting re-elected.

**Mr PHILIP KOPERBERG:** I am sure the member for Monaro is motivated by other than that. For nigh on three decades I have travelled the State of New South Wales, principally in another guise, and I have been to just about every country town and village in the State. The journey on Tuesday was very sobering and very saddening. On Tuesday I visited Buronga and Dareton in the Sunraysia region to meet with local irrigators and other members of the community. This followed previous visits to Griffith, Deniliquin, Leeton, Albury, Young and Walgett, and the list goes on. Since taking on this portfolio six months ago I have seen it as vital to get an appreciation, first hand, of just how grim the situation is in the Murray-Darling Basin. It gives me absolutely no pleasure to report to the House that we continue to face a very, very serious situation in regard to water availability in the Murray-Darling Basin. I am sure that would not come as a surprise to anyone.

We are still in the grip of the worst drought in recorded history, and the situation in the Murray Valley is critical to say the least. On Tuesday I met with representatives from Western Murray Irrigation and various grower groups in the Euston, Coomealla and Mourquong districts. These communities are doing it tough, and without significant rainfall it will take many years to recover from the losses. On a slightly more positive note, the implementation of our critical water program—the effective management of the little water we have left, due

to the foresight of the Iemma Government in anticipating this crisis—has meant that we are able to provide survival water for permanent plantings for the next six to eight weeks. Whilst this may not yield a crop, in most cases the program has ensured the survival of the plants.

**Mr Andrew Fraser:** Why are you still charging them fixed water charges?

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I call the member for Coffs Harbour to order for the third time.

**Mr PHILIP KOPERBERG:** If members opposite have a better way of doing this, I would be delighted to hear from them.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Members will cease interjecting.

**Mr PHILIP KOPERBERG:** It is all very well to be critical of what we are doing, but we are managing the most severe crisis in country New South Wales in 100 years—and the way in which we are managing the crisis is being acknowledged by the very people that the drought affects.

**Mr Andrew Fraser:** No, it's not.

**Mr PHILIP KOPERBERG:** Yes, it is. And the reason we are not yet at the point of postponing fixed charges is that those fixed charges provide the wherewithal to maintain the infrastructure that is so vital to the delivery of the water. When this drought ends, that infrastructure will need to be in good order to enable us to deliver water to the people who are currently suffering from the effects of the drought.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I call the member for Wagga Wagga to order. I remind the member for Coffs Harbour that he is on three calls to order.

**Mr PHILIP KOPERBERG:** If the member for Coffs Harbour has a plan, or any ideas that will aid and abet our methodology for helping these people in trouble—other than just rhetoric—I would be delighted to hear it. So far he has put forward nothing. In the Murray Valley, as a consequence of prudent management of the little water we have left, 25 per cent of water entitlements suspended in accounts in 2006 have been repaid. Along with freeing up the trade rules around the natural restrictions of Barmah Choke, we have made more water available for sale in the valley. So at least the farmers, irrigators and horticulturalists who want to avail themselves of the market and sell entitlements to those who really need them at the moment are able to do so.

As part of our prudent management of the little water we have left, we have totally rejected the Commonwealth's proposal to put large amounts of water aside for some time in the future. That would simply bring on a crisis now, rather than in 6 or 12 months, by which time things may have improved. My visit to the Sunraysia region also provided an opportunity to increase the community input into the management of our scarce water resource. Very soon after I took on this portfolio I established a high-level advisory group that would look at the equity of water distribution, the trading regime, and the dire social issues associated with this drought. The Iemma Government's involvement in the decision-making process of the very people who are suffering is paying dividends.

We are in new territory here, and we need to consider new and innovative solutions to this crisis. As I told the media during my visit on Tuesday, we have to start thinking outside the box. I have begun working on new proposals to discuss with the Premier and my Cabinet colleagues. We need to consider things like borrowing or leasing water from the Murrumbidgee Valley or the Snowy Mountains Scheme. If necessary, we will see what measures are available to us to relieve the financial load in terms of the issues the member for Coffs Harbour has raised. However, that will be a decision for the Government, and it will be made in a proper, measured and calm way as part of managing this crisis—and it is a crisis.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Perhaps the member for Coffs Harbour could take up this matter with the Minister later. He will cease interjecting.

**Mr PHILIP KOPERBERG:** Over \$300 million will be made available by the Government to help these people deal with the crisis. These options, amongst other proposals, will be thoroughly investigated as we develop solid plans to respond to the crisis. There should be a bipartisan approach to this issue, and it should be above politics. This is what we are attempting to do. The Iemma Government is showing leadership on this most serious issue. If the Opposition has any sensible plans that have not previously been canvassed, we welcome the chance to consider them—and I mean that most sincerely.

There is no sign of this drought breaking, and it is reasonable to say that unless something happens very shortly the situation in the Murray-Darling Basin will become even more critical than it is now. What has been particularly disappointing is the Howard Government's complete failure to persuade the States and Territories to subscribe to the National Plan. The New South Wales Premier was the first Premier in all the jurisdictions, in keeping with the sound management of natural resources, to sign up to the National Plan. Months and months after New South Wales signed up to the plan, we still have nothing from the Federal Government. The Prime Minister has failed in his ambition to have a unified and cohesive plan for the Murray-Darling system—a system that is under greater threat than it has ever been in this country's history.

**Mr George Souris:** Gulp!

**Mr PHILIP KOPERBERG:** Yes, gulp! I hope that in the fullness of time the Federal Government is able to orchestrate a position whereby what it espouses to be necessary management of that system can actually be brought to fruition. I live in hope.

### **LOURDES HOSPITAL AND COMMUNITY HEALTH SERVICE, DUBBO, REHABILITATION SERVICES**

**Mrs DAWN FARDELL:** My question is directed to the Minister for Health. Will the Minister advise the House of the progress of negotiations with Catholic Healthcare in seeking New South Wales Government assistance for the redevelopment and continuation of vital rehabilitation services at the Lourdes Hospital and Community Health Service in Dubbo?

**Ms REBA MEAGHER:** The New South Wales Department of Health and the Greater Western Area Health Service are working with Catholic Healthcare to find a solution to the problems faced by Lourdes hospital.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Clarence will remain silent.

**Ms REBA MEAGHER:** The Lourdes Hospital and Community Health Service campus in Dubbo comprises a 30-bed sub-acute rehabilitation hospital, and community care and outreach services. The campus is part of a Dubbo health precinct, which also comprises a base hospital, a private hospital, aged care services, and nurse training facilities. Together these facilities help service the greater far west of New South Wales. Services at Lourdes hospital are provided through a service level agreement with the Greater Western Area Health Service, and Lourdes hospital works in partnership with Dubbo Base Hospital.

The Lourdes service is accredited by the Australian Council of Healthcare Standards, but I am advised that this accreditation only extends to 2009. Recommendations from the last survey indicate that progress needs to be made on the redevelopment of the infrastructure to improve amenities for patients and staff. In February this year Catholic Healthcare, New South Wales Health and the Greater Western Area Health Service met to consider the future accreditation of Lourdes hospital. The meeting concluded that all parties were committed to the ongoing delivery of appropriately accredited services in Dubbo. It was agreed that a joint services and capital investment study be undertaken. A consultant was engaged by the Greater Western Area Health Service to conduct a service procurement plan for the redevelopment of Lourdes hospital.

The area health service acknowledges that there has been a delay in receiving the draft plan from the consultant, and this has posed enormous frustrations for all parties concerned. The executive working group, comprising representatives from New South Wales Health, the Greater Western Area Health Service and Catholic Healthcare, met last week to discuss progress. Having received a second draft of the service procurement plan, the area health service is optimistic that this plan will be completed and reviewed within the next four weeks for release to stakeholders and the community.

The New South Wales Government understands the importance of this issue to the Dubbo community, and the local member has certainly made this clear. We will continue to proceed with the planning of future health services in Dubbo in a consultative and cooperative way. In 2007-08 the New South Wales Government is investing \$500 million to improve health services and hospital care for patients in the Greater Western Area Health Service. This year's health budget allocation for the Greater Western Area Health Service is \$42.4 million more than for last year. This represents a 9.3 per cent increase as part of a record statewide health budget. We are delivering on our commitment to provide improved health services for those living in the State's greater west through an additional 16 community-based bed equivalents, the continuation of the Bathurst and



Orange hospital redevelopments, establishment of after-hours general practice clinics at Dubbo and Broken Hill and improved radiotherapy services for the greater western area.

### **VOLUNTEERS**

**Mr TONY STEWART:** What is the Government doing to recognise the contribution of volunteers to the New South Wales community?

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** I know that every member of this House will agree that volunteers make a massive contribution to our community. You see them each day in your electorate and many of you in this Chamber are volunteers. The member for Baulkham Hills is involved with the Salvation Army; the member for Oatley is very involved in cricket; and the member for Kiama is involved in surf lifesaving. He has made a commitment to me that he will never do a press conference unless he is wearing board shorts. In New South Wales we are absolutely blessed to have a strong volunteering culture. When I was made the Minister for Volunteering a very experienced journalist asked me, "Why do we need a Minister for Volunteering?" My response was—

**Mr Brad Hazzard:** You volunteered—

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** I was going to be nice to you. When I looked at the website of the New South Wales Branch of the Liberal Party of Australia for volunteering there was a nought.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I ask members to direct their comments through the Chair.

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** In New South Wales there are 1.7 million volunteers. They give 235 million hours each year in volunteering. That equates to \$5 billion a year, an outstanding effort. In the State Plan the Iemma Government has identified volunteering as a very important issue. By 2016 we intend to increase volunteering by 10 per cent and also increase the diversity base of volunteers right across the State. We are near the end of question time but I want to thank those who have participated in the inaugural New South Wales Volunteer of the Year Award. It is a new award and I am patron. Members and others have submitted nominations.

There are 16 regional categories and a category to recognise corporate volunteering, which is becoming incredibly important to the business, community and civil society. The deadline is 15 October 2007. I ask members to include this information in their newsletters as it is a really important initiative. On 5 December 2007, on International Volunteers Day, the awards will be announced. The New South Wales Centre for Volunteering has 330 not-for-profit organisations. It runs the biggest volunteer referral service in the State and actively supports volunteering. Volunteering is a precious part of the Australian character. These awards provide us with an opportunity to honour some of the extraordinarily committed people, the heroes that we all know who, through volunteering, are making such a difference in Australian life.

Slightly off the topic, it is fitting that the Sea Eagles and the Storm are at the top as they have been the most consistent. I say to the House that 2008 will be a Bulldogs year.

**Question time concluded.**

### **PETITIONS**

#### **CountryLink Pensioner Booking Fee**

Petitions requesting the removal of booking fees charged to pensioners on CountryLink services, received from **Mr Greg Aplin, Mr Greg Piper, Mr George Souris, Mr Andrew Stoner and Mr John Williams.**

#### **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.**

#### **Hornsby and Berowra Railway Stations Parking Facilities**

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

**Hawkesbury River Railway Station Access**

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

**Bus Services 272 and 273**

Petition requesting that the Government reinstate bus services 272 and 273 to ensure reliable services in both peak and off-peak times, received from **Ms Gladys Berejiklian**.

**Bega West Public School**

Petition requesting an upgrade of facilities at Bega West Public School, received from **Mr Andrew Constance**.

**Daylight Saving**

Petition asking that the present daylight saving period remain, received from **Mr Greg Aplin**.

**Lismore Base Hospital**

Petitions requesting funding for stage 2 of the Lismore Base Hospital redevelopment and for rehabilitation beds to be maintained, received from **Mr Thomas George** and **Mr Donald Page**.

**Hornsby Palliative Care Beds**

Petition requesting funding for Hornsby's palliative care beds, 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**.

**Cancer Treatment Services**

Petition requesting that cancer treatment services in the Central and North West of New South Wales be maintained, received from **Mrs Dawn Fardell**.

**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**.

**Forster-Tuncurry Cycleways**

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

**Roadside Grazing Charges**

Petition opposing charges to farmers for roadside grazing of their stock, received from **Mr Greg Aplin**.

**Pet Shops**

Petition opposing the sale of animals in pet shops, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

**Pets on Public Transport**

Petition requesting that pets be allowed on public transport, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

**Genetically Modified Crop Trials**

Petition opposing genetically engineered canola trials, received from **Mr Greg Piper**.

### **Galston Sewerage Services**

Petition requesting that Galston households be connected to sewerage services, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

### **Liquor Licensing Process**

Petition asking that the liquor licensing process be amended to encourage and promote the development of small, local venues and a diversity of venues, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

## **CONSIDERATION OF MOTIONS TO BE ACCORDED PRIORITY**

### **Royal North Shore Hospital Patient Treatment**

**Mr BARRY O'FARRELL** (Ku-Ring-Gai—Leader Of The Opposition) [3.16 p.m.]: Yesterday the appalling episode involving Mark Dreyer and Jana Horska at Royal North Shore Hospital was unveiled to the public of New South Wales, and the reaction of people has been one of horror. In November 2005, as the member for Hornsby knows, it was the turn of the Anderson family to undergo trauma and distress as a result of an incident at that hospital. Today's media is full of other examples of people pointing to issues at that hospital. Before Question Time I spoke with Kathy Westall from the Northern Beaches, who, on 3 July 2005, went through an incredibly similar experience save one point; when she miscarried in a public toilet they brought in a bucket and told her to "put it all in there". Today the Assistant General Secretary of the Nurses Association made the point that resources are so low at the hospital that there is no time to attend to cases that are not life threatening. I quote:

We have some shifts on the wards there run without registered nurses—that's illegal.

An email from a nurse to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition said:

The recent incident ... is the tip of the iceberg there has been and [there] will be more of these incidents occurring all over the hospital.

Tony Joseph, the well-respected Director of Trauma, and an emergency clinician at the hospital, said:

Unless we can increase the number of inpatient beds in hospitals we are having trouble seeing patients who come into the emergency department because we have got nowhere to put them. This unfortunate case illustrates this very point.

That is why we are arguing for a full and independent enquiry into Royal North Shore Hospital. This is not one incident. These are not isolated incidents. As the shadow Minister for Health has demonstrated, these issues have arisen around North Shore hospital for years. That is why, instead of this Government seeking to deny the problem and investigate individual cases, we need an overarching inquiry. Such inquiry will get to the bottom of it and give comfort to staff who want to come forward, who want to blow the whistle and explain the incredible pressure that they are under.

We have a memo that shows that capital funds are being used for operational purposes. We have a memo today that shows that despite a blow-out in costs in the hospital over the past two years this year's budget has been cut by \$13 million. In 2005-06 there was a budget of \$310 million and \$328 million was spent. Last financial year there was a \$359 million budget and \$377 million was spent. This year's budget of \$346 million is \$13 million down on the budgeted figure last year but \$31 million down on what was actually spent the previous year. The pressure and stress that is creating is simply incredible. To add to that, bureaucrats in the area health service are telling directors and managers at the hospital that their performance will be assessed upon their meeting their budgets. Directors, managers and staff of the hospital have been told they must not go near the media for fear of losing their job.

It is a further example, if an example is needed, of the budget being put before the needs of patients. It explains why we are hearing this outpouring of incidents from clearly overstressed patients, their families and other affected people. The Coalition will not let up. People continue to come to us for assistance. The shadow Minister for Health will continue to argue their case. The Government cannot pretend that the trauma that people such as Kathy Westall, Jana and Mark have been through is not connected. The Government cannot allow the Anderson family to continually deal with matters that they would like to have behind them with still no answers as to what happened.

It is clearly incompetent to slash a hospital's budget, despite the fact that more resources, not fewer, are required. It is clearly stupid to use funds that have been set aside for capital works on equipment, building

works, salaries and operational activities. It is highly reckless of the Government to disregard the problems and the consequences of the wrongheaded priorities it has applied at Royal North Shore Hospital. For 12 years this Government has ignored the needs of Royal North Shore Hospital. I hope that has nothing to do with politics and the fact that the hospital is located on the North Shore. It is the last great unreconstructed hospital in our health infrastructure. The people from the Central Coast, the northern beaches and North Shore who use that hospital deserve exactly the same health care as people in other areas. They should be confident when they front up to the hospital they will get the best possible care. The hospital staff who work tirelessly and do an extraordinary job, despite the lack of resources, deserve support by way of additional resources. We will not see an end to this problem until there is a full, open and independent inquiry that will get to the bottom of the problems, set a path forward and provide guarantees of better care.

### **Cost of Living**

**Ms ALISON MEGARRITY** (Menai) [3.21 p.m.]: My motion should be accorded priority because the rising cost of living and the Howard Government's inaction are hurting the hardworking families of New South Wales. Apparently that is news to the Opposition.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! When the Leader of the Opposition spoke courtesy was extended to him. The same courtesy should be extended to the member for Menai.

**Ms ALISON MEGARRITY:** Today I ask the Opposition to finally stick up for the interests of the people of New South Wales. I invite them to join us in figuratively throwing open the window and, like Peter Finch in his famous 1970s movie, yell out at the top of their lungs, "We're as mad as hell and we're not going to take it anymore."

**Question—That the motion of the member for Ku-ring-gai be accorded priority—put.**

**The House divided.**

### **Ayes, 37**

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

### **Noes, 46**

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

**Pairs**

Mrs Hancock  
Mr J. H. Turner

Ms Judge  
Mr Terenzini

**Question resolved in the negative.**

**Question—That the motion of the member for Menai be accorded priority—put and resolved in the affirmative.**

**PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM****Personal Explanation**

**Mr ANDREW STONER**, by leave: Yesterday in the other place the Hon. Amanda Fazio launched into a disgraceful attack upon me, an attack that was full of falsehoods, done in true Labor style when I was not there to have the opportunity to respond to many of those lies. That is why I need to make this personal explanation to put the record straight. Firstly, the Hon. Amanda Fazio stated that I discriminate against families and students in the public education system. That is demonstrably false: I am a product of public education and my two daughters attend Wauchope Public School.

Secondly, the member made the absolutely wild and untrue claim that in a former career I tried to force staff to attend daily prayer meetings. That is an absolute falsehood: it did not happen. I attended, I think it was weekly, prayer meetings with the staff—just a small number of Christian staff. There was nothing compulsory about it whatsoever. The member went on to say that senior management removed me from my position as a result. That is also totally false. I was never removed from my position in relation to that or any other matter. I am forced to correct the record as a result of the disgraceful lies in the other place by the Hon. Amanda Fazio.

**COST OF LIVING****Motion Accorded Priority**

**Ms ALISON MEGARRITY** (Menai) [3.31 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that Kevin Rudd has practical plans to deliver real improvements for working families in New South Wales;
- (2) notes that despite John Howard's claim that people "have never been better off", working families are struggling with high mortgages and rents, as well as spiralling childcare, petrol and grocery costs; and
- (3) condemns the Federal Government for being out of touch with working families struggling with the high cost of living today.

The rising cost of living and the Howard Government's inaction is certainly hurting the working families of New South Wales and, I can say from first-hand experience, families in my electorate. Families with mortgages have suffered no fewer than nine consecutive interest rates rises—the same families for whom John Howard promised to keep rates low, only to break that promise repeatedly with five rises since he made it.

This is a Prime Minister who claims working families have never been better off. If the situation were not so dire I might suggest it was a joke. I suggest John Howard needs to spend less time wining and dining in Kirribilli House and more time in the supermarket queues and at the petrol bowsers of suburban Sydney and across this State. There he might see what working families in New South Wales really face: the compounding effects of the housing affordability crisis, rising rents, soaring grocery bills, petrol costs and the increasing cost of childcare. By contrast, Kevin Rudd and his Labor team are well aware of the challenges facing working families today and they have a plan to ease the financial burdens we face.

In relation to housing affordability, compared with 1996 the national average mortgage is now twice as large and the great Australian dream of owning one's own home is getting further and further out of the reach of first home buyers. While John Howard has delivered nothing more than a broken promise, Kevin Rudd has fresh ideas to provide some relief: he has a plan that includes establishing a \$500 million housing affordability fund, saving up to 50,000 new home buyers up to \$20,000 on their home, and a new national rental affordability

scheme to provide new rental housing to 50,000 middle- and low-income families at 20 per cent below market rate. [*Quorum called for.*]

[*The bells having been rung and a quorum having formed, business resumed.*]

Kevin Rudd knows that these plans must go hand-in-hand with responsible and disciplined economic management. That is why he has pledged to keep budget surpluses and taxes low. A Rudd Labor Government will also maintain the independence of the Reserve Bank. The Prime Minister may be happy to remain firmly ensconced in The Lodge, putting the final touches to his retirement plans, but Kevin Rudd knows that housing affordability is just one area impacting significantly on working families today. That is why he also plans to keep a permanent watch on petrol prices by appointing a new petrol commissioner to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission.

Time after time this side of the House has called on the Howard Government to do more on this issue. Yet, week after week one can set one's calendar and watch by the spiralling petrol prices on a Wednesday or, of course—the old favourite—just before a long weekend. Kevin Rudd's full-time petrol cop on the beat will have the sole focus of ensuring motorists are not paying a cent more than they should, giving them confidence that they are not being duddled at the bowser. A petrol cop would have the power to scrutinise documents in the petrol supply chain and report directly to the chairman of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission.

This is an improvement on the current situation with the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission having access only to publicly available information unless otherwise instructed by the Treasurer. So what has the Prime Minister-in-waiting, Mr Costello, done about this matter to date? Nothing. In his 11 years as Treasurer he has sat on his hands on this issue. He is more focused on getting into The Lodge than sticking up for the interests of working families. That is typical inaction from a stale Government and a stale leadership. And those opposite have done little to stick up for the interests of the people of New South Wales and to hold their Federal colleagues to account.

Under a Rudd Labor government the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's role will be extended to grocery prices also. The commission currently monitors other things that affect household budgets such as petrol and bank fees. So why should groceries not be added to the list? Under a Rudd Labor Government they will be added. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission will publish a periodic survey of grocery prices for items that would be included in a typical shopping trolley. Surveys will be conducted in all States and city and country areas and a dedicated website will be set up to publish the findings. When families get their supplies for the week they will be able to rest assured that inflated grocery prices are not adding extra pressure to their household budget. Again, the Howard Government has had 11 years to act on this issue but it has done nothing.

I constantly hear from my constituents about the spiralling cost of child care and the significant impact it is having on family life in this State. On this front a Rudd Labor Government will better inform people about childcare choices by establishing a new office of work and family. This office will publish local childcare fees, vacancy data and parental reviews. It will provide parents with more information about their childcare options.

Kevin Rudd and his Federal Labor colleagues have a series of practical proposals to ease the pressure on working families in New South Wales, to tackle the housing affordability crisis through a \$500-million housing affordability fund that will bring the dream of home ownership a step closer for thousands of homebuyers, to help provide for affordable rental accommodation for middle and low-income families through a national rental housing affordability scheme that will provide accommodation below market rates, and to keep a watch on petrol prices—something we have repeatedly begged the Federal Government to do—with the appointment of a petrol commissioner. These fresh ideas, combined with Kevin Rudd's strong commitment to sound economic management, will keep the budget in surplus, taxes low and the Reserve Bank independent.

Working families can have confidence that a Federal Labor Government will work hard to ease the pressure on the family budget. The difference between Kevin Rudd and John Howard could not be more apparent. Kevin Rudd has fresh ideas to ease the burden on working families. John Howard has let us down and broken his promise to keep interest rates low, not just once but five times since he made that promise—nine times in all. He forgets to mention the fact that when he was Treasurer in the 1980s interest rates were at an all-time high of 22 per cent. What have Howard and Costello done to rectify the situation? They have done nothing. They have no plans for the future, except John's retirement. It is time for a fresh approach and new leadership.

**Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS** (Lane Cove) [3.44 p.m.]: I move:

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

this House:

- (1) notes the constant "me-tooism" of Kevin Rudd and his failure to enunciate any policies; and
- (2) congratulates John Howard and his Government for bringing 11 years of record prosperity to Australia and to working families.

I have moved this amendment because I think that the member for Menai does not believe in her motion. It is obvious that the member is being directed by her Canberra union controllers. I love it when members opposite launch attacks on the Federal Government. It is the old chestnut of condemning the Federal Government about this, that and the other. They do it because there is yet another crisis in New South Wales. It is a diversion of focus from the health crisis, the transport crisis and the police crisis—the crises go on and on. I looked forward to the debate on this motion because there is nothing better than watching the New South Wales Government trying to attack the Federal Government's record. The poor member for Menai and her colleagues are sent on suicide missions by their colleagues in Canberra in an attempt to attack the Federal Government's record. It is a kamikaze mission because they know they will not get anywhere.

I must put some facts on the record. I realise that the member for Menai really did not want to move this motion, and that is why I moved my amendment. I will welcome her support for it when the vote is taken. Since 1996 the Federal Government has paid off almost \$96 billion of Labor debt. That is a saving to working families and the general Australian population of almost \$9 billion.

**Mr Daryl Maguire:** In tax cuts.

**Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS:** I will deal with tax cuts, which are very important for working families. The average mortgage rate under the Howard Government is about 7.2 per cent compared with an average of 12.75 per cent under Labor.

**Mr Daryl Maguire:** Under Keating my home loan was 18 per cent and my business loan was 24 per cent.

**Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS:** Those figures contrast with the figures under the Coalition. The member for Menai should write this down. Real wages have grown by 19.8 per cent under the Howard Government and they declined by almost 2 per cent while the Labor Party was in power. The member should also make a note of the fact that unemployment stands at 4.3 per cent—a 32-year low—and that in March 1996 under Labor it was 8.2 per cent. We are talking about the battlers that the Labor Party put out of work. Under the Howard Government they are back at work and they will vote for the Coalition. Unfortunately the Labor Party does not represent real workers. As a Liberal Party member I am proud to represent workers. The Liberal-Nationals Coalition is the only voice the workers have in this State. The member for Hawkesbury will confirm that. The member for Menai is merely the voice of the big union bosses. The member should not get excited, because I will come to that in a second.

Approximately 76,000 people are now classified as long-term unemployed. That is the lowest figure in more than 20 years. Since 1996 inflation has averaged just 2.5 per cent, which compares with an average of 5.2 per cent under the member's union-controlled mates in Canberra. Because the Federal Government has paid off the debt accrued by the Federal Labor Government through its financial mismanagement, those earning between \$30,000 and \$80,000 will pay only 30¢ in the dollar in tax as of July 2008. This compares with a tax of 34¢ in the dollar at \$38,000. From July 2008, the top tax rate of 45¢ in the dollar will kick in at \$180,000. That compares with the past rate of 47¢ in the dollar kicking in at \$54,000. The member should take a note of that and pass it on to Kevin Rudd because he does not seem to understand it.

I am astounded by the ingratitude displayed by members opposite in attacking the Federal Government for tax cuts. They should have a look at their pay packets. They are making money because of the experience, ability and economic management of the Federal Government. My heart breaks! They have also had superannuation tax cuts.

**Mr Daryl Maguire:** They didn't say no to that.

**Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS:** Perhaps we should contact the Australian Taxation Office to see whether they have sent the money back. There is even better news for Australian working families. As of March 2007, the Australian work force comprised more than 10.3 million workers compared with 8.3 million in 1996 under the Labor Government and its union mates.

**Mr Daryl Maguire:** There was an unemployment scrap heap of more than one million people.

**Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS:** There was an unemployment scrap heap thanks to their union mates and bosses. I hope the member for Menai is writing down the facts and figures I am providing. If she is not she can read them in *Hansard* tomorrow. Families have real net household wealth of about \$5.4 trillion. In March 1996 that figure was \$2.1 trillion—less than half. Australian families are now much better off. Australian exports grew 16 per cent in 2006 to reach a record \$210 billion, more than double that under the Labor Government. Because of the Federal Government's financial management, in the 2006-07 financial year it dedicated almost \$1 billion to medical research. That is a seven-fold increase on Labor's 1995 figure of only \$126 million.

**Mr Daryl Maguire:** The Labor States have got us \$70 billion into debt.

**Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS:** We will not start on the Labor States; there is not enough time. We are talking about working families. The number of apprentices increased by 161 per cent from 154,000 in March 1996 to 404,000 in September 2006. Despite the efforts of the State Labor Governments to destroy small business, a strongly managed economy has generated the establishment of almost two million small businesses across the country. My colleagues will find the question-and-answer exercise in the *Daily Telegraph* today interesting. We are talking about families being massacred and doing poorly, which is not right in Australia:

Question: Which Australian company under fire for its shabby treatment of workers in Australia fled overseas and is now in hot water for undercutting its competitors bids by escalating employment conditions designed to protect staff?

Answer: WorkDirections UK, Part of Ingeus—

And who is that run by? Would it be Therese Rein? She is the wife of?

**Mr Daryl Maguire:** Rudd!

**Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS:** Kevin Rudd, as the member says. The article continued:

Question: Which Australian company was found to have underpaid its workers by up to \$4000 and was forced to repay them after shifting them from awards to common law contracts?

Who owned this company?

**Mr Daryl Maguire:** Rudd!

**Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS:** Rudd's wife.

**Mr Daryl Maguire:** Mrs Rudd.

**Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS:** Well, Rein—

**The DEPUTY-SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Lane Cove does not need to conduct a dialogue with members behind him. I am sure he is capable of continuing his speech properly.

**Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS:** The article went on:

Question: Which Australian company sacked 300-400 workers after failing to meet the standards required by the Australian Government for employment agencies?

WorkDirections Australia, and who owns that? Kevin Rudd's wife! WorkChoices has been fantastic for this country and its level of competitiveness. We all know that the Australian Labor Party ran dead in the High Court on WorkChoices. It ran a heavy public campaign but the States ran dead in the High Court. Why? Because this Government's mates in Canberra secretly wanted it. Fess up now, Labor wanted it all along because it knows it is good for the country. It comes out and screams about it, but it ran dead in the High Court. Look at the legal arguments. I am proud to congratulate John Howard and his Government today on the wonderful 11 years, for



the record prosperity, particularly to working families. There are some wonderful Federal Government websites—even the Liberal Party website—that will show exactly how better off families are under this Government. This House also notes the "me-tooism" of Kevin Rudd and the failure of Federal Labor to enunciate any policies.

**Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO** (Penrith) [3.51 p.m.]: Is it not wonderful to see finger-pointing, accusations and threats from the Opposition? Members opposite just did not get it from the March election that electors need to be respected and listened to. The member for Lane Cove mentioned a kamikaze mission. The only kamikaze mission will be Federal election night 2007. I cannot wait to see the results in Lindsay and Bennelong.

**Mr Daryl Maguire**: I like the look on your face.

**Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO**: I liked the look on my face in March 2007. The member for Lane Cove was quoting headlines; I can quote headlines too, such as on 1 November 2005, "Fed up Families" and in September 2007, "Mortgage Despair". These are not from metropolitan newspapers; these are from newspapers people read, such as the *Penrith Press* and the *Penrith City Star*. Families in Lindsay knew ages ago that John Howard's claim that people have never been better off was wrong. Fed-up families were discussing petrol prices on 1 November 2005. They were talking about the proposed changes to the industrial relations legislation—it was proposed then; it is reality now. They were fed up then and did not vote for them then, and I cannot wait for their votes in 2007. These families were also talking about the Welfare to Work Scheme, and about childcare prices and the decrease in places available—a very important issue in Lindsay.

What are they talking about in 2007? They are talking about mortgages, mortgage despair and high prices, not only of petrol but of groceries. The member for Hawkesbury should agree with me. Recently vegetable growers in Hawkesbury were getting around \$1.20 per cabbage, but they went on to be sold locally at about a 400 per cent increase. The member for Hawkesbury is not standing up for his growers who are not getting what they should because of the mark-ups. Growers were being paid a dollar a bunch for spinach that was unsold at the supermarket for \$3.00—almost a 300 per cent mark-up for consumers to wear. Potatoes were being unsold to consumers at around \$2,000 per tonne, five times more than the \$400 per tonne growers were being paid at the farm gate. That is why Kevin Rudd has proposed that the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission be called on to keep watch on grocery prices and publishes regular price surveys.

I support the motion because the rising cost of living is something that is impacting on working families in my electorate of Penrith, which also covers people living within the Federal electorates of Lindsay and Macquarie. The Howard Government can no longer ignore these issues because the facts speak for themselves—the facts about those Hawkesbury growers getting \$1.20 for their cabbage when it is sold locally at a 400 per cent mark-up. Mortgage stress, which occurs when 30 per cent of family income goes on repayments, is suffered by more than one-third of home owners. The Opposition did not mention that, and that is what members on the other side will not tell you. They will quote all sorts of statistics but never mention the increasing percentage of weekly income that goes in repayments. Members opposite just do not get it! The number of homeowners who experience mortgage stress has gone up more than a quarter since 2001.

In the five years to 2006, the number of Sydney households experiencing mortgage stress rose by a massive 97 per cent—from around 64,000 households to more than 127,000 households. They are households in Macquarie, in Bathurst, in Lapstone, in Penrith, in Glenmore Park and in St Marys. Families in Australian capital cities today need an income of more than \$115,000 to service a mortgage on the average home. This is more than double the income of just over \$46,000 that was required back in 1996. Surely the alarm bells should be ringing for John Howard, but they are not. Meanwhile, Kevin Rudd and Federal Labor have practical plans and fresh ideas. The plan to deal with cost of living is a \$500 million housing affordability fund to help first home buyers with up to \$20,000 towards their home, and a national rental affordability scheme to help middle-income and low-income families to get accommodation below market rates. In addition to the mortgage stress there is the grocery stress I have mentioned. I will finish with the impacts of abolishing Australian workplace agreements, which a Kevin Rudd federal government will carry out.

**Mr RAY WILLIAMS** (Hawkesbury) [3.56 p.m.]: To get some sort of a fix on what Kevin Rudd plans to deliver to the working families of New South Wales, we need to look no further than what his Labor mates here have delivered on behalf of the families of New South Wales. If we take a long, hard look this week at their lack of commitment, their lack of care, and their lack of compassion in neglecting the motion put forward by the Leader of the Opposition to debate real health objectives on behalf of people who have to get their medical services from Royal North Shore Hospital, we see neglect by the Government.

I was physically sick at 6.20 on Wednesday morning when I heard, while travelling across the Sydney Harbour Bridge, a radio report of a lady at the Royal North Shore Hospital seeking medical assistance because she was pregnant and ill but who was told to just sit down and that if she was going to lose her child there was nothing the staff could do about it. An hour later the lady miscarried in a toilet. She had to hold her live foetus in her hands for another hour until she got some sort of service.

**Mrs Karyn Paluzzano:** Point of order: I seek your determination on the priority motion that the Leader of the Opposition put to the House.

**The DEPUTY-SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Hawkesbury is not addressing the issue before the House. I suggest that he focus his remarks on the subject matter of the debate.

**Mr RAY WILLIAMS:** The motion sets out the way in which Mr Rudd plans to deliver real improvements for the working families of New South Wales. I would like to know what Mr Rudd plans to do for people who are suffering a miscarriage in toilets and who cannot access health services. What will Mr Rudd do for those people when his Labor mates in New South Wales do nothing? They want debate on what Kevin Rudd will do for families in New South Wales. Kevin Rudd will not do anything for families in New South Wales. Kevin Rudd is going to "me-too" all the way up to the election until the electorate of Australia wakes up to his quirky little idea of following the shirt tail of John Howard, until they finally say, "No thanks, Kevin. Try again next time, but have a little bit of meat on the bone. Just don't keep feeding the electorate of New South Wales with this rubbish."

Kevin Rudd purports to be the next Prime Minister of Australia but when asked about the tax scales he said, "I think it starts around about \$75,000 and then it cascades down from there." The possible future Prime Minister of this country does not even know what the tax scale is. It is impossible to believe that. He does not even know that the top marginal rate is \$55,000. He took a stab in the dark and said it cascades down. Has Cascade beer befuddled his brain? The testament of what Mr Rudd plans for people of New South Wales with respect to service delivery is borne out by the track record of the State Government, and that is appalling. In contrast, in the past couple of weeks the Prime Minister has given \$132 million to clean up the Hawkesbury River. Has Kevin come to me and said that he would love to clean up the Hawkesbury River? I certainly appreciate that funding because the Hawkesbury is becoming a gutter for sewage. [*Time expired.*]

**Ms LYLEA McMAHON** (Shellharbour) [4.01 p.m.]: I speak in support of the motion because it is time for action to protect the hardworking families of New South Wales and the electorate of Shellharbour, who are doing it tough. I take note of the passion and animation exhibited by the member for Hawkesbury, particularly when he referred to Kevin Rudd as the future Prime Minister. How correct he was! An extra 5¢ a litre at the petrol bowser may not mean much to John Howard, but for some people it may mean one less loaf of bread in their shopping trolley each week. It was reported locally on ABC Illawarra that a woman, sitting in her car at the service station and waiting to fill up, watched the attendant increase the price by 20c per litre.

With over 35 per cent of households in Shellharbour paying off mortgages and after nine consecutive interest rate rises in a row, it is inevitable that there is an increase in the number of hardworking families feeling mortgage stress. Figures released in June show that housing sales have fallen across the Shellharbour and Wollongong local government areas by more than 13 per cent as fewer hardworking families can afford to enter the market. The Howard Government has caused this ongoing uncertainty to the hardworking families in my electorate, who are feeling the pinch from the compounded effects of nine consecutive interest rate rises, rising petrol prices, soaring grocery bills, and the list goes on.

John Howard deserves condemnation for his inaction on this issue, which smacks of being arrogant and being out of touch. We have had nothing but 11 years of inaction from the Howard Government, which is inexcusable, and those 11 years have been very difficult. John Howard's mind is clearly not on the job; it is on the golf course at Hawkes Nest. Members opposite have done nothing to pressure their Federal colleagues to act in the interests of the people of New South Wales. Working families want some relief, some certainty and a clear direction for the future. Instead, the response of the Howard Government has been to slap them with extreme workplace laws that have just made things much harder. As if nine interest rate rises in a row were not enough, John Howard's desperate flurry of promises to try to win votes before the next Federal election will only put more upward pressure on interest rates. This is economically reckless. Kevin Rudd and his Federal Labor team have a plan to combat the increasing cost of living.

This plan includes keeping the budget in surplus on average over the economic cycle and maintaining the independence of the Reserve Bank; not increasing taxation as a proportion of gross domestic product;

appointing a new petrol commissioner to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission and giving the commission the power to monitor grocery prices and to publish regular surveys—some relief for that poor woman who was sitting at the petrol station watching petrol prices going up; establishing a \$500 million housing affordability fund and a national rental housing affordability scheme; and creating an Office of Work and Family, which will publish local child care fees, vacancy data and parental reviews.

How can John Howard and Peter Costello ignore the data? How can members opposite wallow in their ineptitude while working families in New South Wales and in the Shellharbour electorate are doing it tough? Recent data by the Insolvency and Trustee Service reveal a disturbing picture—the highest level of personal insolvencies on record experienced across Australia were in the 2006-07 financial year. If the Prime Minister missed these figures surely he saw the Australian Bureau of Statistics household expenditure survey data confirming that the cost of living outpaced the consumer price index by 8 per cent in the five years between the 1998-99 financial year and 2003-04. After 11 painful years in the top job John Howard has clearly lost touch with working families and deserves to be held to account.

**Ms ALISON MEGARRITY** (Menai) [4.06 p.m.], in reply: It would be news to my constituents that the Howard Government's policies and inaction have delivered anything other than financial strain in so many areas of family life. I shall recap on the points I made earlier. There have been nine increases in interest rates, and five since the Prime Minister, hand on heart, promised to keep them low. If that is an example of keeping a commitment, I cannot imagine the situation we might otherwise face. Honourable members have mentioned the percentages of family income these days going into mortgage repayments. The price of petrol increases with no accountability. Time and again the State Government has called on the Howard Government to stop the predictable spike in prices on Wednesdays and before long weekends.

Grocery pricing is also not subjected to any accountability. Eating is not a luxury. Families forced to cut costs in this area live with the fact that they may well compromise the health and wellbeing of their families. Spiralling child-care costs and the uncertainty for families relying on two or more incomes just to make ends meet is an outrage. Speaking of child care, my constituents would like to know how an allegedly caring Howard Government could sell the land out from under the Holsworthy Occasional Care and Pre-School Centre, land owned by the Federal Government and frequented by more than 100 Defence Force families. Despite a surplus budget, the Federal Government still seeks to sell that land, disregarding any income derived from rent. Mothers or fathers might be serving our country overseas, but the Federal Government still wants its money.

Students who began kindergarten in 1995 and will sit the Higher School Certificate this year will complete their entire schooling without ever having experienced a real increase in public school education funding from the Howard Government. The recent Commonwealth budget was the twelfth in a row with no increase in funding, beyond cost indexation, for government schools. Yet we might hear the Coalition say occasionally that it is committed to public education. Ten years ago first home buyers were paying an average of just 18 per cent of their incomes in mortgage repayments. Today that figure is 30.7 per cent. The housing affordability crisis hits younger families the hardest. We are seeing a worrying increase in families struggling to make ends meet, and a decline in the proportion of young Australians buying a home.

Members opposite expressed outrage about health care. Appropriate funding for public hospitals is where John Howard has been most negligent. Despite a longstanding agreement of 50:50 funding of the public hospital system between State and Federal governments, since 2000 the Commonwealth's contribution for public hospitals has fallen to only 45 per cent. The Federal Government is short-changing the Australian public hospital system to the tune of \$1.1 billion every year. That is a massive figure. It represents thousands of surgical procedures and families kept waiting for health care because the Howard Government has deliberately starved our public hospital system of funds. The member for Hawkesbury wanted to know what Kevin Rudd's plan would be. He might like to check the website for Labor's national health and hospital reform plan. We have certainly welcomed it here in New South Wales, because it has taken the Rudd Labor government-in-waiting to do a proper apportionment of responsibility in our health care system. Let us wait to see this roll on.

The Howard Government has had 11 years to act on all the issues we have spoken about today. The Howard Government is stale. It looks and smells like the old, musty, moth-ridden coat in the hallway cupboard. If it looks like that, that is what it is. John Howard has lost touch with working families and he deserves condemnation for his action. I could not agree more with the member for Shellharbour. Why else would the Prime Minister suggest that working families in Australia have never been better off? I am not quite sure what Australia he is living in, but it is certainly not the one we are living in. Working families are struggling with huge mortgage payments and rents, soaring child care fees, and rising petrol and grocery costs. It is certainly

true that there is an election coming to a polling booth near you at a time of the Prime Minister's choosing. I agree with Julia Gillard, the Deputy Leader of the Federal Opposition, when she said:

In summary, Australian families are paying more to buy their homes, paying more as a proportion of their income, and doing it with less disposable income.

She put it eloquently. I can only agree, and say to the House that it is time for a fresh approach and new leadership.

**Question—That the words stand—put.**

**The House divided.**

**Ayes, 43**

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

**Noes, 34**

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

**Pairs**

Ms Judge	Mrs Hopwood
Mr Terenzini	Mr Stokes

**Question resolved in the affirmative.**

**Amendment negatived.**

**Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.**

**Division called for and Standing Order 185 applied.**

**The House divided.**

**Ayes, 43**

Mr Amery	Ms Gadiel	Mr Morris
Ms Andrews	Mr Gibson	Mrs Paluzzano
Mr Aquilina	Mr Greene	Mr Pearce
Ms Beamer	Mr Harris	Mrs Perry
Mr Borger	Ms Hornery	Mr Rees
Mr Brown	Ms Keneally	Mr Sartor
Ms Burney	Mr Khoshaba	Mr Shearan
Ms Burton	Mr Lynch	Ms Tebbutt
Mr Campbell	Mr McBride	Mr Tripodi
Mr Coombs	Dr McDonald	Mr West
Mr Corrigan	Ms McKay	Mr Whan
Mr Costa	Mr McLeay	
Mr Daley	Ms McMahan	<i>Tellers,</i>
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Mr Draper	Mr Page	Mr R. C. Williams
Mrs Fardell	Mr Piccoli	
Mr Fraser	Mr Piper	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Goward	Mr Provest	Mr George
Mr Hartcher	Mr Richardson	Mr Maguire

**Pairs**

Ms Judge	Mrs Hopwood
Mr Terenzini	Mr Stokes

**Question resolved in the affirmative.**

**Motion agreed to.**

**BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE****Notices of Motion**

**General Business Notices of Motion (General Notices) given.**

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS****MR BOB SIMMONS**

**Mr DAVID BORGER** (Granville) [4.27 p.m.]: I would like to note in this House the enormous contribution made to the electorate of Granville and the adjoining electorate of Fairfield of Mr Bob Simmons, who passed away on 31 August 2007, aged 71—an unremarkable event by an unremarkable man perhaps. Why then was there a minute's silence at the finals of the Parramatta Junior Rugby League and why did such a large crowd attend his funeral at Pine Grove cemetery? Bob Simmons grew up in Guildford Road, just off Woodville Road, at Guildford and spent his adult life there. He was a member of a family of seven; families of that size were typical of the era. He was a worker all his life, mainly in the transport industry. He married in 1967. His

wife, Barbara, his son, Jeff, his daughter, Jenny, and their children survive him. I offer them our sincere condolences.

What makes Bob's life memorable is his involvement with the Guildford Leagues Club, of which he was a member for more than 50 years. He and his family used the club socially. Bob was also a sportsman. I am sure the member for Fairfield, the Hon. Joe Tripodi, will agree with me that Bob has made a great contribution to the area for many years. In rugby league Bob was a winger in A grade and the A reserves, a good all-round player and prolific try scorer. In cricket he represented the local area for many years, again as an all-rounder but mainly as an opening bowler. As a golfer he had a long and successful career.

All of his family became highly involved in the sporting life of the Guildford Leagues Club. Barbara has kept a blazer from each of the sports in which Bob was involved. Bob was an important early member of the club. His involvement started with a meeting held among local footballers in the 1920s. This union of players strengthened both on and off the field and the desire to have a permanent home for the club resulted in a licence being applied for and granted in 1956. Since then the club has undergone major building programs improving and enlarging it to its present size. Bob's participation in sport was marked by two principles. Sportsmanship came first. He said:

You must play the game fairly and always take the effort to look like a sportsman. You need to prepare yourself and your gear.

He was only disappointed if he had performed below the high standards he had set. Bob also ensured that his kids followed these two rules in their own sporting careers at the club. Like so many club members throughout the State, Bob had a great involvement with his club, the Guildford Leagues Club. That is why he will be long remembered. The President of Guildford Leagues Club, Ken Hirst, noted that this was his sixtieth year of association with the club. After moving the club in 1950 to the present site, which was then virgin scrub, there has been continuous development. From a bare field and primitive dressing shed, the club now has a great development comprising a football field, a cricket field with a turf wicket, bowling greens, cricket practise nets, amenities blocks and a magnificent clubhouse servicing 15,000 members, who predominantly reside in the electorates of Granville and Fairfield.

The club caters for local children and adults and has 27 rugby league teams, 12 cricket teams, 8 hockey teams, 4 baseball teams and 23 netball teams and also has darts, snooker, squash, golf, fishing and euchre activities. The club encourages families like the Simmons family to get involved by playing, joining committees and becoming part of the club scene. It is an important part of the fabric of the community in my area. For over 50 years Guildford Leagues Club has enriched the lives of community members. My thanks go to Bob's nephew Steve Warren and Ken Hirst, the President of Guildford Leagues Club, for their insight into Bob's life. I again offer my sincere condolences and those of the member for Fairfield, Joe Tripodi, to Bob's wife, Barbara, to his son, Jeff, his daughter, Jenny, and their children.

### **EQUINE INFLUENZA ASSISTANCE**

**Mr RAY WILLIAMS** (Hawkesbury) [4.31 p.m.]: The electorate of Hawkesbury has been, and still is, synonymous with the thoroughbred racing industry and the recreational horse industry. The area provides a large number of horses to the racing industry through the many studs that adorn the rural areas. Apart from thoroughbreds and standardbreds, there is an enormous number of pleasure horses, equestrian horses, quarter horses, and warm bloods. There are even Clydesdales, which are used to pull a restaurant on wheels around the streets of Windsor. The restaurant is an icon in the area and a huge tourism attraction. While the Federal Government, to its great credit, provided immediate funding to the tune of \$110 million for businesses within the horse industry that are directly affected by the equine influenza virus, the State Government has been guilty of another shameful act of neglect by not providing assistance to those whose lives have been severely affected by the virus.

I am not talking about the so-called rich owners of racing horses—they are a figment of the State Government's imagination—but rather the hardworking people across my electorate who make the horse industry the wonderful institution it is. Many people work in this industry for little to no reward, and they do so because of a passionate obsession with horses. Sadly, I handed in my own thoroughbred licence only two years ago. I now look at all my friends who are going through a most distressing time as their businesses take a beating from the most devastating impact ever suffered by the racing industry. These people are coming to terms with not only how to feed their horses but, indeed, how to feed their families.

I would like to talk about some of the little people in the industry in the electorate of Hornsby. They are small in stature but huge in guts and their great love of horses. I refer to track work riders. They get up at 3.30 a.m. to carve out a meagre existence, sometimes receiving only \$10 a ride, rushing from trainer to trainer to ride as many horses as they can between the opening hours of 4.30 a.m. and closing time of 9.00 a.m. They are one of the most essential elements in the horseracing industry apart from the horses. Without those people, horses would not be worked or educated and racing would most certainly come to a standstill. Alongside the track work riders are the transport providers. Without horse transport, horses would not arrive at the respective racecourses and, again, racing would not continue. Those groups are only two of the participants so vital to the racing industry.

The New South Wales Government receives \$150 million every year in revenue from gambling associated with the horseracing industry in this State. I will say that again: the State Government receives \$150 million dollars every year in gambling revenue from the horseracing industry. The only race meeting held in the last month in Sydney was at Warwick Farm, with the only horses partaking in that meeting being those trained at Warwick Farm. The State Government received no less than \$450,000 from the revenue raised on that day from the proceeds of gambling. Without horseracing, this State would be deprived of a massive amount of funding. So the question is: Why does the New South Wales Government not do something on behalf of the people most important to the industry?

The longer the equine influenza continues, more of these essential people will leave and never return to racing. The Federal Government is to be applauded for acting and providing funding to the tune of \$110 million in the shortest possible time. The Queensland Government, to its credit, has acted immediately. I refer to excerpts from today's *Daily Telegraph* in relation to Anna Bligh, the new Premier of Queensland. It appears that at least one Labor member in this country has an ounce of commonsense when it comes to assessing the issues relating to equine influenza. The article, headed "Horse flu: shame falls on Premier", states:

Premier Morris Iemma has been shamed by his Queensland counterpart after the northern state unlocked a compensation package for horse flu victims while NSW has dithered for more than a month.

The article quotes Premier Anna Bligh:

While it may not be a sudden overnight disaster like a cyclone it has a more smouldering nature ... it will continue to have a long-term effect for a number of months.

The Queensland Government declared a state of emergency immediately after the virus was detected in that State. For a month New South Wales Racing has requested the New South Wales Government to do the same. The Government has refused to do so, and it will be to its detriment. The Minister for Gaming and Racing, as we witnessed at his first press conference, might now be feeling a little faint. Let me tell him that at this point the racing industry is on life support.

**Mr JOHN AQUILINA** (Riverstone—Leader of the House) [4.36 p.m.]: I do not often agree with the sentiments of the member for Hawkesbury, but on this occasion I join with him in expressing concern about the people involved in the horseracing industry, particularly throughout the Hawkesbury area. My electorate constitutes about one-third of the Hawkesbury area. My colleague the member for Londonderry and I are extremely concerned about the welfare and plight of those people. I have listened to the comments of the member for Hawkesbury. Whilst he is somewhat judgmental and critical of the Government's response, the comments he expressed about the difficulties being experienced by those involved in the industry in the area are valid. Both the member for Londonderry and I have been instrumental in making sure that the relevant Ministers have been made aware of the plight of these people.

At this very minute the member for Londonderry is taking a deputation to the Minister for Lands, Tony Kelly. Accompanying him is the Chief Executive Officer of the Hawkesbury Racing Club, Brian Fletcher, as well as a prominent director of the club, Mr Sid Kelly. They are talking through the issues affecting the club. I know that other Ministers have responded positively. For example, the Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Water recently announced a \$740,000 boon to Hawkesbury Racing Club as a way of alleviating some of the problems experienced by the club. I understand that assistance does not help the little people who live off the horseracing industry from week to week. We also need to do something positive for them. I very much feel for those people. I am confident that the Government will come up with a response sooner rather than later.

**BANKSTOWN CANCER COUNCIL RELAY FOR LIFE**

**Mr TONY STEWART** (Bankstown) [4.38 p.m.]: Yesterday I referred in the House to the Bankstown Relay for Life, which was held in Bankstown over the past weekend. The event is conducted under the auspices of the Cancer Council of New South Wales. As I explained to the House, this year's event was a tremendous success, raising more than \$82,000. Last year we raised around \$30,000. This money is a tremendous boost to cancer research and to saving lives in the future. Today I want to particularly mention a very special person who has participated in the Bankstown Relay for Life for many years and has made it the success it is today.

Wayne Trotman has been the Bankstown Relay for Life chairperson for several years and last weekend he stood down and passed the role on to Trent Engisch, who is now the new chairperson for 2008. This man has done tremendous work and has been a real beacon for the community at large in helping people to understand what needs to be done to take care of those suffering the terrible, insidious affliction and what needs to be done to save lives in the future. Wayne and his wife experienced the trauma of cancer in their own lives some 12 years ago. Their beautiful 18-month-old son died tragically from cancer and that brought to the forefront of Wayne's family the need to deal with a family crisis when cancer sneaks up and taps you on the shoulder, and the horrific consequences it can leave behind. I will just put on record some things Wayne said at the close of the Relay for Life event. They are special words with meaning to all members and the community at large. He said:

Like all of you when I hear the word "cancer", I don't think of statistics, I see faces. We have all seen what cancer does.

Cancer doesn't discriminate. It transcends age, race and gender.

We have all known someone that has lost the battle against cancer and we are gathered here now to remember them.

As we were—hundreds of people in Bankstown coming together on that evening last Sunday. He went on to say:

These moments of remembrance are ones that I share with you. It is never easy to lose that which is precious to you. It is not easy to say goodbye to someone you love.

However, I want you to remember that cancer is so limited. Because:

It cannot cripple love.  
It cannot shatter hope.  
It cannot corrode faith.  
It cannot eat away peace.  
It cannot destroy confidence.  
It cannot kill friendship.  
It cannot shut out memories.  
It cannot silence courage.  
It cannot invade the soul.  
It cannot reduce eternal life.  
It cannot quench the spirit.

They were beautiful words from a man who has been an inspiration to Bankstown and the surrounding region. But it is important to note that the focus of his inspiration is on saving lives in the future. He concluded that night by saying:

It is my dream that we can defeat cancer and turn a dream into reality.

That day is not yet here, but with each passing year we are getting much closer and with each passing day, the pace of progress is accelerating.

I believe that one day the empty chairs behind me—

which signified his missing son and other family members—

will not be empty because a cure for cancer will be found because of the efforts of people like you.

Together we must join in the battle against cancer, never giving up and always believing in hope.

Hope that is represented by cancer survivors.

Hope that a cure is discovered as a result of the work of the medical profession made able through people like you who raise funds through relay for life.



He was referring to the people who were gathered in Bankstown and who raised more than \$82,000 over the weekend. I know many other communities do exactly the same for the Cancer Council throughout the year. He finished by saying:

Tonight as I look out from this stage I see a group of wonderful people, people that display courage, courage in taking a step forward against cancer without a solution, yet feeling that victory is ahead.

I see faces that show faith, hope and love:

Faith which is sure and certain that a cure for cancer can be found

Faith which is loyal to the memory of loved ones lost.

It is a credit to the man who spoke those words that we have moved forward to do really great things for the Cancer Council such as the Bankstown Relay for Life. I applaud Wayne Trotman as a person of great spirit and a person who I know has made a difference to many lives.

**Mr STEVE WHAN** (Monaro—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.43 p.m.]: On behalf of the Government I join the member for Bankstown in congratulating Wayne Trotman and his organising team on the Bankstown Relay for Life on raising \$82,000 plus and, as a result, providing hope for cancer sufferers and their families. The organisation is doing a terrific job. Also, congratulations to the member for Bankstown on his continuing efforts on behalf of terrific charitable organisations in the whole region.

### NORTH COAST HOSPITALS

**Mr STEVE CANSDELL** (Clarence) [4.44 p.m.]: This is not the first time I have raised alarm in this place over the Sydney Labor Government's neglect of North Coast hospitals in general and those serving the Clarence electorate in particular. Sadly, it is unlikely to be the last time I raise this issue as the message is not getting through. The message is not getting through to the out-of-town, out-of-touch and out-of-control bureaucrats who manage North Coast hospitals and cause misery for doctors, nurses and patients. The message is certainly not getting through to this Labor Government, which has given up on health outside its cherished Sydney Basin. And after the incidents of the past few days it is obvious that it is struggling in Sydney as well.

If members want the truth about hospitals on the North Coast—I doubt this Labor Government can handle the truth, but here it is—let us start with the latest hospital waiting lists published by the New South Wales Department of Health. Between June last year and June this year the number of people waiting for surgery at the 12 hospitals managed by the North Coast Area Health Service has risen from 6,652 to 7,496. Over the same period the waiting lists for elective surgery have increased by 83 per cent in Grafton and 63 per cent in Casino.

I have some bad news for those Independent members in this House who think grovelling to the Government will deliver results for their electorates. The biggest increase in waiting lists was at Port Macquarie, where the number went up by 223 patients to top the 1,000 mark. At Lismore Base Hospital, which serves many residents in my electorate, more than 1,000 people are waiting for elective surgery. Some of the consequences of Labor's neglect of North Coast hospitals are as follows. On 12 September the Grafton Base Hospital Medical Staff Council was forced to suspend many surgical services at the hospital. This was because the Government downgraded the hospital to category 3 from 3-4, resulting in the loss of liability insurance coverage. As usual, the Government's loyal mouthpiece, North Coast Health top bureaucrat Chris Crawford, blamed the doctors. Happy birthday, Chris, for last Tuesday. I hope you enjoyed the day. There were many people on the North Coast waiting for operations that did not enjoy that day and that were waiting in pain. On 13 September Chris Crawford told the *Daily Examiner*:

Procedures will resume when the doctors decide.

As shocking as these facts and figures are, they do not always show the human cost of Labor's neglect of our hospitals. On 13 September the *Daily Examiner* reported that a four-year-old child was denied surgery at Grafton Base Hospital. The little boy's mum told the *Daily Examiner* she was devastated. She said:

I feel really bad for my baby because he can't get his ears fixed like we were promised.

On the same day a lady came to see me and said she had been told that the surgery on her son's adenoids—he had trouble breathing and eating—had to be postponed as well because of the liability crisis and the downgrading of the hospital. Last month Federal Labor had the nerve to show up in Grafton and promise that

Labor might rescue our hospitals from who? Labor. The words "promise" and "might" do not go together, but it is probably like an election promise. This is literally a sick hoax. No sane person outside the Labor Party believes we will get a better deal for North Coast hospitals from Canberra Labor and Sydney Labor.

A far better plan is one put forward by The Nationals candidate for Page, Chris Gulaptis. He wants the Federal Government to insert a new clause into the next Australian Health Care Agreement that would compel State governments to spend Federal health dollars more fairly across the State rather than putting all the money into Sydney Labor electorates. The Federal Government provides the New South Wales Government with approximately \$14 million a day to run the State's hospitals. These are our taxes and we are entitled to have a fair share of our money invested into our local hospitals.

In the meantime I ask the Sydney Labor Minister for Health to get off her backside and do something for the long-suffering North Coast patients. I do not blame her personally—not at this stage anyway. But most of the rot had already set in under her predecessors—Craig Knowles and, of course, Morris Iemma, who is now Premier. I clearly remember seeing Craig Knowles dressed up in an operating gown, mask and gloves two days before the 2003 elections promising \$7 million for the upgrade of the operating theatres at Grafton Base Hospital. We are still waiting for that and we are still waiting for the promised health service at Yamba. We are still waiting for the many other promises that might happen but never do happen—more broken election promises. New South Wales Labor, the Minister for Health and the Premier should start thinking about the patients and our health services in the country.

### **CARER ASSIST, NEWCASTLE**

**Ms JODI McKAY** (Newcastle) [4.49 p.m.]: Last week I was honoured to open the Newcastle office of Carer Assist, which is an innovative service that provides the carers of people living with mental illnesses with support and assistance in their role as carers. We are all aware of the invaluable contribution made to our communities by the many thousands of unpaid carers in New South Wales who provide essential care to their loved ones living with illnesses and disabilities. The New South Wales Labor Government is committed to supporting carers. Carer Assist has a great team of carer advocates who provide support services for carers in regional areas of New South Wales, including in the Hunter New England Area Health Service catchment. The carer advocates work together with non government organisations, area health services, community health and other organisations or groups involved in a carer's life. We know that one in five Australians will experience a mental illness in their lifetime. Coming to terms with the realisation that a friend or relative has a mental illness is tough, particularly in the first stages.

It is vital that the friends and relatives of a person emerging with a mental illness gain access to information about the illness and advice about the availability of support services. These earlier days are often steeped in crisis that can hamper accessing information on where to find diagnostic and treatment services. That is where Carer Assist comes in. The diagnosis of mental illness often comes as a shock. Carer Assist not only provides information on support services available for the person with the mental illness but also supports friends and family members in coping with grief and facilitates learning how to live with someone who has a mental illness: carers must set boundaries and also care for themselves.

Carer Assist is a program of the Schizophrenia Fellowship, which is funded by the New South Wales Government's Family and Carer Mental Health Program, to provide support to people with a mental illness and their families and carers. The Government has recognised the importance of providing support and services to families and carers of people with mental illness. The \$3 million investment by the Government has underpinned the rollout of the New South Wales Family and Carer Mental Health Program across the State.

The program is unique in Australia and provides specific funding to all area health services and to four specialist non government organisations, including Carer Assist. The area mental health services receive funding to develop family-friendly mental health services. This involves building the capacity of frontline clinical staff to ensure families and carers are recognised, supported and included in treatment planning and service provision.

The non-government organisations are funded to provide education and training to build family and carer coping skills, resilience and knowledge about mental illness, as well as support services including direct provision of individual support, information, advocacy and peer support. In June 2006 the Government announced a major package worth almost \$1 billion over the next five years to take the delivery of mental health services in a new direction. These programs focus on prevention, promotion and early intervention, improving

and integrating the health system, increasing participation in the community and employment and building our workforce. It included \$338 million in new funding with \$279 million for community care. For the first time funding for community care will outstrip spending on hospital-based initiatives. This funding will go towards substantial new programs like the Family and Carer Mental Health program. In addition, \$51.4 million will be invested over five years for out-of-hours emergency and acute community responses.

As well, the Government is investing an additional \$6.5 million in community mental health teams to provide specialist treatment and support for people with a mental illness in contact with the criminal justice system. Other programs underpinned by increased funding include additional specialist assessment and treatment services for older people. For younger people, one-stop shops are being developed to meet their overall health needs and improve early intervention and prevention programs at the earliest stages of illness. The New South Wales Labor Government has matched its words with actions. Innovative measures are at the forefront of this Government's response to mental illness. Programs such as the Family and Carer Mental Health Program, with funds for Carer Assist, show that this Government is committed to the care of people with mental illnesses.

### **RUTH MCCLELLAND**

### **MARGARET COOPER BOOTH**

### **EDNA CANE**

**Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD** (Hornsby) [4.54 p.m.]: I am a trained nurse and I completed my education at Royal North Shore Hospital. In that capacity I will tell the House about three dedicated, compassionate and expert nurses who have died this year. I acknowledge Una Sullivan, President of the RNS Graduate Nurses' Association for her help with this. Ruth Rister, who was known as Ruth McClelland, and was the director of nursing when I did my training, sadly died this year at 87 and is greatly missed. She passed away at Nepean Hospital after a relatively short illness. She had a remarkable career in nursing. Her death notice in the *Sydney Morning Herald* was very poignant and stated that she was the beloved wife of Allan, much-loved stepmother of Susan, a gentle, loving lady, a renowned nurse of compassion who will be forever in our hearts.

Ruth McClelland was Director of Nursing at Royal North Shore Hospital for 21 years and retired in January 1981 after a long, dedicated and distinguished career. She trained at Marrickville District Hospital, where she subsequently worked as a ward sister and a theatre sister. She did her midwifery training at Royal North Shore Hospital before going to the Royal Hobart Hospital as sister in charge of theatres. She returned to Royal North Shore Hospital in 1948 as sister in charge of labour wards and was later appointed as assistant matron in charge of the obstetric unit. She was appointed matron and superintendent of nursing in 1960. She was active in all spheres of nursing and was a fellow and president of the Institute of Nursing Administration, a fellow of the New South Wales College of Nursing and an associate fellow of the Australian Institute of Management. She served as member of the Nurses Registration Board and held posts as a council member of the Australian Trained Nurses Association, the Royal Australian Trained Nurses Association and the Royal Australian Nursing Federation. I remember her with great fondness. I appreciate advice given to me by this amazing women.

Margaret Cooper Booth also passed away this year, at the age of 81. She was born in Sydney and was the daughter of a doctor. She was educated at Abbotsleigh School, where she was school captain. In 1944 she began four years of nursing training at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital. She then completed her midwifery training at Royal North Shore Hospital. She became assistant matron at the Royal North Shore Hospital and in 1962 was appointed deputy matron. She formed an excellent partnership with the then matron, Ruth McClelland, and the pair became life-long friends.

Over the next two decades Margaret played a major role in the significant changes that shaped nursing practice and education. Team nursing was introduced, training was reduced to three years, male nurses were employed, a pilot program was established to integrate hospital training and university education and trainee nurses were no longer required to live in hospital residences. She became the director of nursing—the new title for matrons—of Royal North Shore Hospital in 1981. As a manager she was firm and resolute and demanded high standards. However, any staff member who went to her for either professional or private help was treated with warm respect. She also held a number of very high and well-respected positions in the nursing fraternity.

I met Edna Cane, who died on 10 July, when I worked as an assistant in nursing at the Royal North Shore Hospital outpatients department, where she was the charge sister and where she worked for many years. Edna Cane also completed her general training at Royal North Shore Hospital. I lost contact with her for many

years and in 1972 rediscovered her after she had retired for a number of years and was a resident at Wesley Gardens in Belrose, where she spent many happy times. I then kept in close contact with her. When I started my training in October 1972 I was given her teacup and original nursing dictionary, which I treasure. I will always remember her with great fondness. These three women presided over and worked in Royal North Shore Hospital, which was once a great hospital. I feel some sadness about recent incidents that reflect on the care provided there. I remember these very strong nurses with great fondness.

#### AUSTRALIAN MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT INAUGURAL CONFERENCE

**Mr GEOFF CORRIGAN** (Camden) [4.59 p.m.]: Today I congratulate the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Victoria Branch, on its organisation of the inaugural conference of Australian members of Parliament held at the Parliament of Victoria from 22 to 24 July 2007. Since my election in 2003 I have despaired at the lack of professional development opportunities available to parliamentarians. It became evident at the conference wrap-up session that this is a view shared by parliamentarians across all jurisdictions. One member, a veterinarian by profession, told us of his continuing professional development requirements, as did a solicitor and an accountant. All expressed their delight at the conference agenda, the quality of speakers and the diversity of views presented. The conference theme, Environment and Industry, was contemporary and relevant to government and community concerns over climate change.

Before I outline some of the issues dealt with I should indicate that the New South Wales Parliament was represented by members from the major parties—the Australian Labor Party, the Liberal Party and The Nationals. In my view it was a real disappointment that the Greens did not attend as it would have contributed significantly to their body of knowledge—both for and against. All other States and Territories attended, as did the Federal Government, which had two representatives there to report back to the Federal Government on whether it should continue to support the conference. I am sure it will in future.

If I outline some of the presenters and their topics other members who were reluctant to attend might take the opportunity to come to the next conference. The keynote presenters and their topics were: Clean coal: snake in the Garden of Eden, presented by Dr Nicole Williams, Chief Executive Officer of the New South Wales Minerals Council—we can probably take that as pro-development; Renewable Australia: innovation, competitiveness and environment in the 21st century, presented by Professor Peter Droege, Chair, World Council for Renewable Energy, Asia Pacific; Global warming and the role of nuclear power, by Dr Ziggy Switkowski, Chairman, Australian Nuclear Science Technology Organisation—that was a very interesting address; and Working with passion and commitment to create a climate of change, by Peter Malcolm, Director of an organisation called CoolGlobe. He gave a really wonderful presentation and showed us photos of the Antarctic, where he goes, and the work they do there and how global warming is affecting the ice caps. These interesting speakers sparked lively debate.

The workshop sessions were excellent. I have to say that two particularly stood out to me. One was the session on getting to grips with population ageing by Associate Professor Natalie Jackson, Director—Demographic Analytical Services, University of Tasmania. The changing demographics of the Australian population and how this will impact on public policy have been an interest of mine for some time and one that I raised in my inaugural speech. Time prevents my covering this; however I was delighted to attend a parliamentary consultation this week called Ageing 2030, a New South Wales Government initiative to address key issues for government policy. I congratulate the Minister for Ageing on this work.

The other workshop that I found excellent was that on parliamentary privilege and something called effective repetition by the Hon. Fred Reibling, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Western Australia. Until I attended Fred Reibling's talk I thought that I had total parliamentary privilege. However, a recent case in New Zealand, *Buchanan v Jennings*, upheld by the Privy Council—of course New Zealanders still have right of appeal to the Privy Council—shows that parliamentarians can be subject to defamation action if they are not careful in what they say outside Parliament. If the member merely repeats what he or she said in Parliament that can be regarded to have been "effectively repeated" and the member can be liable for action for defamation. This is a matter all members should be made aware of.

As with all conferences, the opportunity to mix with your peers and compare notes on how matters are handled was one of the highlights. I pay particular tribute to the Hon. John Pandazopoulos, member for Dandenong, a former Minister, who took the New South Wales delegation under his wing and made sure we were well looked after. I also thank John Eren, member for Lara, Chair of Victoria's Staysafe Committee, who took time to meet me and go through the work that Victoria's Staysafe Committee is doing. On John's behalf

I wish Geelong all the best in this weekend's grand final in Melbourne. I know we have covered the local game but I will certainly be going for Geelong. Also, the next day I was able to meet with the Victorian Transport Accident Commission [TAC] and see its award-winning advertising campaigns and the strategies in place in Victoria to make roads safer. Both Queensland and the Northern Territory have put up their hands to host the next conference—we do not know if it will be next year or the year after—and I simply urge members to support this worthwhile initiative of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

### **TWEED HEADS HOSPITAL**

**Mr GEOFF PROVEST** (Tweed) [5.04 p.m.]: Once again I inform the House, and in particular the Minister for Health, of actions the Tweed community is taking to solve the Tweed Heads hospital crisis. We need to reverse the Labor Government's neglect of the Tweed Heads hospital that has resulted in a lack of beds, a lack of radiation therapy services and a lack of dentists. On 18 September I convened a public forum in Tweed Heads South to seek an innovative and locally based means of solving these problems. This was a forum about giving Tweed locals a say on the future of their hospital. That also included many health professionals—and we have some very fine health professionals in the Tweed—Tweed patients and the general Tweed public. More than 100 local residents participated, and I thank them for their time and their constructive input. The audience included medical staff, patients, community leaders and other concerned citizens. Although the Tweed is entitled to be angry about the condition of its hospital, this was more than just a protest rally. We have formed a Tweed Heads hospital cancer task force, which is looking at all means available to secure radiation therapy services for Tweed Heads hospital. The composition of the task force includes local Tweed medical professionals. Unlike other regional areas, we are quite blessed in that respect. We have some of the country's leading oncologists and urologists, and so on. So we have the staff; we just lack the facility.

Some of the Tweed patients are friends of mine who have suffered the ravages and the evil of cancer. I refer to Jo Payne and Ros Proud. I applaud them because they are two strong-willed individuals who have survived their first bout of cancer and they both have families who dearly love them and support them. I will give the House a brief summary of the issues, the causes and the actions we have identified. The first issue was a lack of ward beds. Labor's failure so far to implement its election promise of 30 new general ward beds at Tweed Heads hospital following earlier delays in implementing the stage four redevelopment is causing a growing number of Tweed patients to suffer. In at least one case, unfortunately, one of the patients died.

The second issue is the lack of radiation therapy services. There are currently about 3,500 cancer patients in the Tweed, but this figure swells to 6,000 when sufferers in the southern Gold Coast catchment area of the Tweed Heads hospital are included. Tweed patients have to travel to either Coffs Harbour or Brisbane for radiation therapy treatment. It is a three-hour trip to Brisbane involving three buses and one train. It is a terrible impost on people suffering the terrible affliction of cancer. We have some public patient time at John Flynn Private Hospital, but the demand massively outstrips the supply and many patients face fairly significant out-of-pocket expenses.

The third issue in the town is the lack of dentists. The waiting list for public dental treatment at Tweed Heads hospital is four years. While the Tweed Heads hospital has a notional allocation of four full-time dentists and 2½ dental therapists, there are currently only two dentists and one therapist. Believe it or not, Northern Rivers Area Health Service has transferred funding for one dentist out of our electorate to somewhere else, causing further pain and suffering to the people of the Tweed. The senior Tweed Heads dentist has finally resigned in protest over the lack of resources.

I turn now to the actions we resolved to take at the Tweed Heads hospital forum. First, we have formed a panel of local experts to advise the Government of these problems. Secondly, we have started a massive local campaign to force Labor to act in response to people power. We are trying to come up with some innovative and different ideas that ultimately will see some great benefits to the people of the Tweed. It is the Tweed people I care deeply about because I am 100 per cent for the Tweed.

### **ST THERESE PRIMARY SCHOOL, PADSTOW HEIGHTS**

**Mr ALAN ASHTON** (East Hills) [5.09 p.m.]: I am proud to acknowledge a wonderful function that I attended on Sunday 16 September 2007. It was the blessing and official opening of the new buildings and facilities at St Therese Primary School at Padstow Heights. It was a beautiful day and an outstanding celebration of education and faith. I congratulate the staff, students and parents on the work they did, not only at the opening and the blessing of the new buildings, but also in the years that it must have taken to bring the vision of the new facilities to reality.

Construction of St Therese Primary School at Padstow Heights and the church commenced in 1959. In 1960 Cardinal Gilroy laid the foundation stone of the church building. In 1962 the new parish of St Therese of Padstow was created with Father Timothy O'Carroll as parish priest, and the school began in the same year. In 1969 two new classrooms were constructed and in 1991 a new library and kindergarten classroom opened. In 2005 construction work began on the new building and facilities at the school. I note that the students, parent body and teachers made great sacrifices in continuing to successfully operate while the work was undertaken. Anyone who has ever had renovations or major work done to their home while still living there knows how difficult that can be. While the work was being done at St Therese, students and teachers, who were in demountable buildings and classrooms, had to put up with a fair degree of discomfort, physically and probably emotionally, as they continued to work. But they did so happily, knowing that the outcome would be worthwhile.

Bishop David Cremin conducted the celebration of the Eucharist, blessed the school and declared the new facilities open. I acknowledge Bishop Cremin for his humanity, his devotion to the Catholic Church and its worshippers, and his unique sense of humour, which I believe is a vital element of his enthusiastic ministrations to the faithful. I have seen Bishop Cremin attend many functions over the years in my electorate, the wider electorates of Bankstown, Georges River and the like, and although he would be embarrassed by my saying this, he brings such great compassion and humour to whatever he says and does on these important occasions that one cannot help but be immensely impressed by the personal quality of the man. If a few more people in all the churches possessed the same qualities as Bishop Cremin, there would be larger attendances at those churches.

Father Stephen De Bono is the parish priest at St Therese and I know he was thrilled at the huge attendance of churchgoers, parents, students, teachers, local dignitaries and others who were not regular churchgoers but who knew that this was an important occasion in the Padstow Heights area. Also, I congratulate Mr Allan Fagerstrom, the school principal, who should be extremely proud of his school, staff, students and especially the school choir. The school choir must have practised for hundreds of hours, as most school choirs do, but this choir was exceptional. The school captains, Joanna McSweeney and Sebastian Stefani, were also outstanding in the way they carried out their duties. I want to thank the parents and friends of the school who assisted in so many aspects towards the success of the day, not the least being the excellent morning tea provided to guests and those in attendance.

Mrs Gail Reus, assistant principal, should be congratulated also on her role in making the blessing and opening so successful. I was particularly pleased to see the banners representing the school's various teachings. I also note the important attendance of Brother Kelvin Canavan, who is an excellent leader in education for the Catholic Church. His recognition of the role of governments and various political representatives in assisting the schools under his care is deeply appreciated by me and other members of Parliament.

### **BLUE GUM HIGH FOREST, ST IVES**

**Mr JONATHAN O'DEA** (Davidson) [5.14 p.m.]: The Blue Gum High Forest in St Ives is an important natural history asset in my electorate of Davidson. It is the last intact remnant sustaining a complete forest balance that remains from the mighty forests that once stretched from Lane Cove to Waitara on the Wianamatta shale soils. Governor Phillip discovered these forests on his exploration through the area in 1788. These were the only forests in the Sydney region with suitable timber for construction in the infant colony. So the forests containing blue gum, blackbutt and ironbark trees were plundered to advance the colony. The Lane Cove River was used to float the logs to Sydney. Today I expect the timber still survives in some of our built heritage in Sydney such as Hyde Park Barracks, our wharfs and it might even be in this New South Wales Parliament House.

The remnant forest at St Ives is made up of the Dalrymple-Hay Nature Reserve, established in 1934, Browns Forest and an area of Sydney Water land. In total there are 17.7 hectares. This ecologically balanced area comprises a high canopy of bluegum, blackbutt and ironbark trees up to 30 metres high. Below the gums is a mid-level storey of native shrubs and then a ground cover level. This area contains over 200 species of plants, many birds and small animals. This forest, as the largest remaining remnant of the mighty blue gums, has been declared a "critically endangered ecological community" under the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act. The National Trust has listed the forest for nomination in Australia's top 10 "heritage most at risk" items; and the New South Wales Land and Environment Court has stated:

The Blue Gum High Forest needs to be afforded the maximum protection given its perilous remnant state and spatial coverage.

The forest is accessible and continues to be a place of walking tracks to escape the stresses of life and a place for younger people to be instructed in our natural heritage. It is planned to have log seating placed in a small partially cleared area for delivering forest talks to schoolchildren and adults. A number of different organisations have cooperated to manage the forest and work for its ongoing preservation. In the Government arena I would like to acknowledge the efforts of Ku-ring-gai Council, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and Sydney Water. Community groups have also worked tirelessly to preserve the forest, carry out bushcare weeding and conduct awareness walks. These include the Blue Gum High Forest Group, the National Trust, Friends of Kuring-gai Environment [FOKE] and a community-based environment group called STEP.

While we have seen wonderful cooperation between government and community groups to preserve this important State and national forest asset, there is more to do. It is vitally important that the only privately owned vacant land adjoining the forest be purchased to maintain the forest as a complete entity. Local community groups have undertaken fundraising activity and Ku-ring-gai Council has allocated a substantial sum of money for purchasing this land. The Federal Government has also indicated it will contribute financially.

The New South Wales Government should liaise with Ku-ring-gai Council and provide some financial support towards its public purchase of Lot 102, Rosedale Road, St Ives. I have made representations to the Minister for the Environment in this regard and hope that the Government seriously considers providing financial assistance towards transferring the land into public ownership. A recent response from the New South Wales Minister for Planning to one of my written questions on notice indicated that the New South Wales Heritage Office has commenced an assessment regarding the nomination of the St Ives Blue Gum High Forest. I have previously urged that the site be the subject of a State heritage listing, and I now do so again.

#### **EMBROIDERERS GUILD NEW SOUTH WALES FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY**

**Ms ANGELA D'AMORE** (Drummoyne) [5.19 p.m.]: This evening I wish to acknowledge the launch of the fiftieth anniversary of the Embroiderers Guild and display exhibition at the New South Wales Parliament House on 1 August 2007. The exhibition was held between 1 and 31 August and was named "Reflections on a Golden Age journey: A selection of original works". The exhibition celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the Embroiderers Guild New South Wales, showcasing a selection of contemporary works of original design representing a distillation of styles, techniques and life experience from the guild's current membership.

The exhibition was officially opened by the Patron, Professor Marie Bashir, Governor of New South Wales. The display was a major part of the guild's fiftieth anniversary celebrations and featured original designs worked to a very high standard by embroiderers from all areas of New South Wales. The Governor was presented with a monogrammed handkerchief, beautifully worked by Helen Parsons, with sprigs of wattle and a needle-lace edging. The official opening was followed by a morning tea. I was delighted to support the event and meet the guild members. The works in the exhibition comprised a selection of original textiles by guild members, treated as works of art. The works were characterised by self-expression, creativity and originality. The exhibition reflected on the last 50 years, how stitch textiles have developed, and their origins.

The exhibition included 57 pieces displaying the skills of women. Embroidery through our history has given women an opportunity not only to display their skill but also to tell a story. The 57 pieces displayed in the exhibition all tell a different story. For example, Averil Purkis from Abbotsford chose to depict a display comprising different canvas work stitches to show the variety of traditional stitchery using canvas work with wool thread. Christene Boseley from Dulwich Hill named her display "The Murray River". She used hand-made felt, Australian merino wool, machine and hand embroidery and beading to depict a scene showing the Murray River in the golden light of the morning. She explained that her inspiration for the display was that to her a river implies an ongoing journey of growth and change, while reflecting the Australian countryside as it flows on its way.

Tanya Coxsedg from Gilgandra named her display "love is the thread that binds", to represent her son turning 12 years of age and the joy he brings her. She used a photograph on fabric partially obscured by hand-dyed pleats attached to a quilt. Yvonne Chapman from Valley Heights called her display "Global Robe", to acknowledge that textile design is a celebration of the diversity of cultures around the world. The global robe represents a homage to all women who have been weaving cloth, felting, knitting, colouring, decorating and embroidering textiles for millennia. Some may think that the skill of embroidery is a diminishing skill, but enrolments in TAFE classes show otherwise.

The Embroiderers Guild New South Wales was formed in 1957 as a branch of the Embroiderers Guild London. The New South Wales guild became autonomous in 1971. Membership across the State now stands at

more than 2,000. The guild aims to encourage embroidery throughout New South Wales and Australia generally, while maintaining a high standard of design and technique in embroidery. The guild is a not-for-profit and voluntary organisation whose objectives promote the teaching, learning and development of embroidery as a skill and a hobby for all to enjoy. The guild rooms are situated in the State seat of Drummoyne, in Queen Street, Concord, and branches are located across the Sydney area and throughout the State. I have visited the guild's head office, and I must say it has a most impressive display of embroidered items.

The guild rooms are also home to an excellent lending service, as well as a museum and shop for members. The guild collection carries over 3,000 books on all aspects of embroidery and more than 1,000 items of embroidery and lace—absolutely exquisite pieces, from all different backgrounds and from women of many different cultures. The guild's young textile and fibre group was formed in 1995 for children aged between 5 and 18 years. The emphasis is on creativity and fun, rather than on the formal learning of techniques. I would like to acknowledge the work carried out by the members of the committee who work in a voluntary capacity. In particular I thank the President, Wendy Schmid, Vice-Presidents Susan Gower and Helen Parsons, and committee members Sandy Bell, Donna Caffrey, Diane Edwards, Geraldine Hill and Margaret Smith for the fantastic work they do for the guild. As the State member for Drummoyne I look forward to working closely with this wonderful group. I have a close affiliation with embroidery. Whilst I do not have the skill, my mother, my grandmother and my great-grandmother have all passed on to me many embroidered items, which now lie in my glory box to be passed on to future generations in my family.

### **CHATSWOOD WEST REZONING PROPOSAL**

**Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN** (Willoughby) [5.24 p.m.]: The issue I raise today has caused much angst for constituents in the Willoughby electorate, particularly those who reside in the Chatswood West area. I refer to the proposed rezoning of 126 Greville Street, Chatswood, from its current uses to medium density. The site has been the home of the National Acoustics laboratory, which has provided a wonderful service to the wider community. The site is set within a delicately balanced bush environment. Most dwellings immediately surrounding the site are currently zoned 2 (a2)—scenic protection zone, including those on Greville Street and both sides of Millwood Avenue. This is consistent with the existing Land and Environment Plan of 1995, and it aims to protect the scenic landscape in an area bordering the Lane Cove National Park.

It is important to note that during the 1994 bushfires the firefighting facilities and the buffer the site provided to nearby residents were invaluable. The site attracts extra traffic on weekdays, but currently evenings and weekends offer a reprieve from this congestion. The nearby streets are relatively narrow and experience high volumes of through traffic during peak times. There are already safety concerns on the stretch of Fullers Road adjoining Greville Street, and these safety concerns would be exacerbated with increased traffic that the development would generate.

Residents of the area note that no public consultation was undertaken as part of the sale process that resulted in the property passing to the current lessees. The residents argue that objections to rezoning to medium density would have been evident at that time. The residents are extremely upset that they were not consulted prior to plans for rezoning being drawn up and were given little time to make their own submissions, given that they believe the developers have had up to four years to draw up their plans. Initial proposals presented to local residents indicated a development bringing an additional 500 residents onto the site, which, understandably, is totally unacceptable to the local community. Residents have also highlighted what they believe to be anomalies in the various consultants' reports that have been carried out, which resulted in an under-reporting of the impact the proposed development would have on the environment, local traffic conditions and general residential amenity. There is also concern that the developers have been reticent in acknowledging concerns highlighted by local residents.

Local residents are not opposed to changes at the site, but these changes must be in harmony with the local environment and must not substantially impact the lifestyle of local residents. I sincerely thank the many local residents, the Greville Street Development Concerned Residents Group and the West Ward Progress Association for bringing to my attention their concerns about the proposed rezoning and development. I assure them that they have my support in preventing any proposal that is not in keeping with the unique suburban environment that exists in Chatswood West.

The concerns that have been raised in relation to the impact of the rezoning on the environment, the loss of residential amenity due to increased traffic, residents' loss of privacy, and pressure on existing infrastructure are entirely valid. I will continue to work with the local community and my parliamentary



colleague the member for Lane Cove, Anthony Roberts, to bring these concerns to the attention of the relevant authorities. It is vitally important that we ensure Chatswood West retains its unique character, both now and in the future.

### **WINDALE COMMUNITY FESTIVAL DAY**

**Mr MATTHEW MORRIS** (Charlestown) [5.29 p.m.]: Last Sunday I had the pleasure of attending the Windale Community Festival Day, which again this year was a huge success. The festival included many performances, ranging from rock bands through to school students performing in choirs, as well as stalls and static displays. One of the favourite displays for the children was the local fire officers display. The officers were quite happy to participate in the festival day by allowing the kids to climb through their fire vehicles. Children were also offered face painting and a variety of children's programs.

During the course of the day the festival was attended by many people, not only from the Windale community but also from the surrounding community. I place on record my sincere appreciation to the Windale Community Group, a not-for-profit group that operates on a voluntary basis, which spent many hours planning and coordinating activities to ensure another successful festival day. I particularly thank Roger, Don, Linda and Craig. I must also acknowledge the support of the local Department of Housing, under the leadership of Dallas Hicks, which was certainly instrumental in allowing the festival to come together and be such a great success.

I also pay tribute to Mr Michael Murray, who acted as master of ceremonies on the day and continually offers his services during these festival events in support of the Windale community.

I do, however, have a great concern regarding the attitude and actions of one of our more popular local radio stations, namely NXFM. This station, which aims its programs at young listeners from early teenage years through to the mid-20s, has overstepped the mark in my view. Consistently over many months now this station has been running segments and skits reflecting on the people of Windale. This has done nothing other than to degrade that community.

On one hand we have the Windale Festival bringing together, uniting and building community, while on the other local radio station runs a very negative campaign against the very same people in Windale. These statements made by a person known as Wayne from Windale and the Windale Hurricane are highly defamatory to every person in that community. The people of Windale are highly offended by the station's actions. Given that these segments have been running for some time now, one would have expected that with approaches by community members and myself directly to the station they would have ceased. One would also expect that a responsible radio station would be supporting those in our community who are less fortunate than ourselves. Rather, NXFM continues telling one community member that these segments are their second most popular program. The effect on those residents in Windale is not of concern to them. It is about ratings and entertaining their audience.

I want NXFM to know that their programs are completely irresponsible, highly degrading to the community, unwarranted and extremely unprofessional. Given NXFM are strong supporters of the community and community events, their actions have been quite disgraceful. In fact any station, including NXFM, whose future ratings and success rely on the practice of degrading individuals and communities should have a good hard look at themselves and their future in broadcasting. I will be referring this matter to my local Federal colleague to investigate NXFM's compliance with the Federal broadcasting laws. Windale is a community that does have its social issues, and this in fact makes it no different to any other suburb or community of the Hunter. Why does this station think it is all right to degrade this community? These programs must end immediately and I would expect a public apology from NXFM to every resident in the community of Windale.

**Ms LINDA BURNEY** (Canterbury—Minister for Fair Trading, Minister for Youth, and Minister for Volunteering) [5.33 p.m.], in reply: I want to make a response to the member for Charlestown's private member's statement. The Windale community features high in the Vincent Report, and communities such as this need support, recognition and encouragement from both sides of the House. I concur with the comments of the member for Charlestown. I recognise that he has painted a fabulous picture of good people, volunteers in the main, who put on community events in Windale, in juxtaposition with a radio station that does not seem to understand community building issues. I thank the member for Charlestown for bringing this issue to the attention of the House.

### **HEINER DOCUMENTS SHREDDING AND KEVIN RUDD**

**Mr GREG SMITH** (Epping) [5.34 p.m.]: The most important question in the matter I am going to discuss is whether the Federal Leader of the Opposition, Kevin Rudd, is fit to become the Prime Minister of Australia. The matter is the Heiner affair and the question is what role did Kevin Rudd play—

**Mr Alan Ashton:** Point of order: This private member's statements should relate to the member for Epping's electorate or something specific that has been brought to his attention by someone within his electorate. It is not a chance to embark upon a discussion of the leadership of the Federal Labor Party. I ask that you bring the member back to what he should be talking about, his electorate, and that he not digress in that way. I would also ask that you alert him to the tactic of saying someone rang him up and complained about Kevin Rudd. That will not wash either.

**ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarrity):** Order! I uphold the point of order. Private members' statements are specifically for electorate-based—

**Mr GREG SMITH:** A number of members of my electorate and a number of voters in my electorate, including Zorica Kaye-Smith, have asked that I raise this important issue which not only goes to the government of this country but affects all its citizens and taxpayers, including citizens of this State. There are people in Epping who are very concerned about the integrity of Kevin Rudd.

**Mr Alan Ashton:** Further to the point of order. I refer the member for Epping to the standing orders, which make very clear that private members' statements are just that, private members' statements. He is shadow spokesman but he is not referring to his area. He cannot stand up here and attack the Federal Leader of the Opposition, just as we cannot use our private member's statement to abuse John Howard. There are other chances to do that in the course of the parliamentary debate. I actually tipped him off by telling him that he could talk about something in his electorate, but he cannot talk about a Minister in another place or in the Federal Government. This is the first time I can remember points of order being taken in private members' statements. I ask you to make it clear to Mr Smith, otherwise I will continue to take points of order and then seek a ruling from Mr Speaker.

**Mr GREG SMITH:** Further to the point of order: Mr Rudd has visited our area in recent times and has been speaking in support of his candidacy and the candidacy of Maxine McKew, who lives in my electorate and is a constituent of mine. I submit I am entitled to talk about matters dealing with his integrity. If the Government of this State does not think the integrity of the so-called future Prime Minister is an important issue, then one wonders what the Government of this State is in office for. He is visiting my electorate, he is a man about whom constituents of mine have complained, and he is asking people from my area to support him in his endeavours. If he wants their support, he should persuade them that he stands for truth and integrity. It is most important that the integrity of Kevin Rudd to run this country be examined.

**ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarrity):** Order! Whilst I understand the point the member for Epping is endeavouring to make, private members' statements are electorate based and should specifically address matters relating to the member's electorate. Earlier in this House today there was a debate on the broader issue. What the member for Epping has said about Kevin Rudd visiting the electorate confirms that what he intends to say relates to a national debate or a national campaign. He should confine his remarks to an issue specifically related to his electorate, mentioning the name of his electorate or an issue that pertains to it.

**Mr GREG SMITH:** The Leader of the Opposition when coming to our electorate has talked about local issues, as has Maxine McKew, matters that affect my electorate: the north-west rail link, Epping Station, Weemala, health and other issues that are relevant to our area. I submit that his integrity—

**Mr Alan Ashton:** Point of order. You have ruled correctly, as far as we are concerned, three times. The Acting Speaker concurs and the Clerk has already given similar advice to the Assistant Speaker. I have been in this place eight years. The honourable member is a better lawyer than I am, but I know the standing orders pretty well and he should not be giving us the wink, like Melbourne players. The point is that the member for Epping has wasted five minutes when he could have been talking about an important issue in the Epping electorate rather than the potential loss of the seat of Bennelong to the Labor Party in the forthcoming election.

**ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarrity):** Order! I uphold the point of order taken by the member for East Hills and subsequently repeated. The rulings of former Speakers are clear. When making a private member's statement the member should refer to matters of general concern pertaining to his electorate. There should be specific reference to events, organisations or people in his electorate.

#### **WARILLA NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRE CALENDAR AND INFORMATION PACK**

**Ms LYLEA McMAHON** (Shellharbour) [5.39 p.m.]: I recently attended Warilla Neighbourhood Centre to launch a calendar and information pack which was funded by the New South Wales Government in

conjunction with the centre. The pack was developed by community development workers Michelle Kent and Beatriz Ogunbona under the guidance of Marlene Callega. The 12-month project is designed to increase residents' awareness of the local government and community services that are available to assist them. Michelle and Beatriz came up with a novel idea. They wanted to get the information out to the community in a useable form. In addition to the information pack and disk, which contained information on a range of service providers, they designed an 18-month calendar. The calendar, which was distributed free of charge to local residents, forms part of a resource kit containing practical tools such as a document filing system and a service contact record book.

The calendar also contains artworks that were sourced from an arts competition run by the Warilla Neighbourhood Centre. Local students from years 3 to 6 were asked to participate by creating artworks that depicted elements of the local community. Of the 265 entries received, 18 were chosen. Choosing those 18 artworks from the 265 entries was a mammoth and difficult task. The schools that participated were Albion Park Rail Public School, Albion Park Rail Youth Links Program, Barrack Heights Public School, Illawarra Sule College, Lake Illawarra South Public School, Warilla Public School and Warilla North Public School. The calendar also contains a very useful home budget worksheet and mini-telephone directory. Each page contains a full artwork created by one of the students and, in a column down the side, information about community events and services.

The students whose artwork appears in the calendar are Ryan, aged 10, from Warilla Public School; Thomas, aged 12, from Albion Park Rail Public School; Ceyda, aged 11, from Illawarra Sule College; Sevinc, aged 11, from Illawarra Sule College; Hatice, aged 11, from Illawarra Sule College; Shelley, aged 11, from Albion Park Rail Public School; Zeynep, aged 9, from Illawarra Sule College; Sarah, aged 11, from Albion Park Rail Public School; Maddison, aged 10, from Warilla Public School; Suzan, aged 9, from Illawarra Sule College; Ebru, aged 5, from Lake Illawarra South Public School; Chantel, aged 10, from Albion Park Rail Public School; Claudia, aged 9, from Albion Park Rail Public School; Nathan, aged 9, from Albion Park Rail Public School; Hanna, aged 8, from Lake Illawarra South Public School; Tori, aged 10, from Albion Park Rail Public School; Morgan of year 5 from Lake Illawarra South Public School; Gemma, aged 9, from Albion Park Rail Public School; and Amanda, aged 9, from Albion Park Rail Public School.

The artwork prepared by the students was truly beautiful and depicted scenes of the local area, including the lake and pelicans. I am informed by Marlene Callega, the community officer for the Warilla Neighbourhood Centre, that no sooner had the calendar been produced than one of the young students stated it was out of date because he had turned 10 and the calendar noted his age as 9. I again commend Michelle Kent and Beatriz Ogunbona for their excellent and professional effort and the students for their beautiful pieces of artwork. I encourage them to do it again in the future. I also encourage other communities to look to the fine example that Warilla Neighbourhood Centre has set and to follow suit.

#### **GARY POIDEVIN, COROWA SHIRE MAYOR**

**Mr GREG APLIN** (Albury) [5.43 p.m.]: Over the years many civic-minded residents of the Albury electorate have contributed greatly to the progress of their local community. Few have been as identifiable over such a long period as the indefatigable mayor of the Corowa shire, Gary Poidevin, who was re-elected last week to serve a record eleventh term as mayor. Councillor Poidevin is now the longest serving mayor of Corowa shire, surpassing the ten-year record of Councillor Dave Lewis. A lifelong resident of Corowa, Councillor Poidevin was first elected to the local council in 1980 at the age of 28, becoming the youngest councillor to serve Corowa shire. He has now served 27 unbroken years on council. His local government role has included four terms as deputy mayor and now eleven terms as mayor. Councillor Poidevin was first elected mayor on 19 September 1995 and was re-elected each year until 2002, when Councillor Bill Gorman took over the role. Since his re-election in 2004 he has been unchallenged and will serve the next 12 months with new deputy mayor, Councillor Fred Longmire.

Anyone who knows Gary Poidevin recognises that he is totally committed to the shire he loves. His passion for promoting Corowa's interests and contributing to its progress is evident in almost every field—whether it is sporting, tourism, business, the environment or education. He is a powerful advocate for his region and has been instrumental in securing major infrastructure projects, such as the ADI redevelopment at Mulwala and the \$21 million Federation Bridge across the Murray River at Corowa. Councillor Poidevin played a key role in retaining the ADI Mulwala facility, which sustains around 350 jobs in the region. When the facility was facing an uncertain future he led vigorous representations to gain a \$264 million upgrade and, alongside Prime Minister John Howard, signed the commitment to redevelop the site. He has since been closely involved with that undertaking, which has led to the contract for design and construction of the facility earlier this year.

Gary is one of those enthusiastic individuals who initiates and then participates. He not only has acted as a marshal at the National Bilycart Championships in the main street of Corowa but has raced a visiting Irish television show host—to the delight of the huge crowd and for a good bit of publicity for this part of New South Wales. He waved the flag when the Queen's baton relay passed through Corowa for last year's Commonwealth Games in Melbourne. He has contributed greatly over the years to the Corowa Federation Festival, having served as president of the festival committee and been heavily involved with celebrations for the Centenary of Federation in the town that prides itself on being known as the "Birthplace of Federation". Civic projects such as the restoration of the historic Oddfellows Hall and the redevelopment of Sanger Street in Corowa have been hallmarks of Gary Poidevin's tenure. Current projects include the Mulwala sewerage treatment works to be completed in the next 12 months, the Howlong Community Resource Centre to service Howlong and surrounding rural areas and the conversion of the old Corowa Sports Club to a multipurpose civic centre.

A project that differs markedly from these structural developments is the sister city relationship that was established with the City of Miki in Hyogo prefecture in Japan. Councillor Poidevin actively fostered this relationship since he visited Japan in 1995 with the general manager of Corowa Shire Council. The council applied to the Council of Local Government Authorities for International Relations to establish a sister city relationship and was subsequently invited to participate at a conference in Tokyo. Councillor Poidevin addressed the conference on behalf of the 12 countries participating. That resulted in the establishment of the relationship, which has promoted mutual exchange in education, culture and industry and the cultivation of personal links and greater understanding. Corowa Shire Council promotes student exchanges between the two countries with between five and ten students alternating annual visits for short home-stay periods and attendance at the local secondary school. The next exchange is in October this year and Corowa council is actively assisting parents and students with preparations.

Members of the Poidevin family have long been pillars of the Corowa community. Gary's father, Gordon George Poidevin, an ex-serviceman, prisoner of war and local businessman, was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia for his service to the community. Gary is a life member of the Corowa Swimming and Lifesaving Club and a long-term member of the Corowa Volunteer Rescue Association. His contribution to the community was recognised in 1986, when he was named Corowa's Citizen of the Year, and in 2001, when he was awarded the Centenary Medal. Gary has a passion for horseracing and one of his horses was a grey, appropriately named His Worship. In his roles as mayor, councillor and local businessman, Gary has been strongly supported by his wife, Christine, and his children, Stacey, Josh and Laura. The Corowa shire community has been well served by Gary Poidevin over the past 27 years. I thank him for his outstanding leadership and commitment.

## **DUBBO ELECTORATE WAR SERVICE MEMORIALS**

### **EVELYN MARION WILSON**

**Mrs DAWN FARDELL** (Dubbo) [5.48 p.m.]: I wish to inform the House today of efforts that are under way throughout the electorate of Dubbo to pay tribute to our fallen service men and women. Towns and cities throughout Australia paid a huge price during war. The difference for country communities was that the loss of even a few left a gaping hole for generations. For example, the community of Parkes has seen more than its fair share of young men and women answer the call, never to return. It was here that ideas took shape, and Mr Ray Dunford produced a book containing photographs and details of those who have fallen. For many years Ray has devoted much of his time, talent and money to helping people and organisations throughout the Parkes district. As well as being a recipient of the Order of Australia medal this year, Ray was also named as Parkes Citizen of the Year in 2004.

The foundations for Ray's interest in the history of Parkes' involvement in wartime were laid some years ago when he was researching the stories of those from the Parkes area who made the ultimate sacrifice. The result of these efforts was a chronicle of men and women from the Parkes district who fell during the Second World War and the Korean and Vietnam wars. Part of his work started in 1995, when Ray contributed to a special edition of the Parkes *Champion Post*, published on Monday 14 August, which, like other publications at that time, reported on the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War. I commend Ray for continuing his onerous and often difficult task of tracking down even more details and service records of those men and women who had fought and fallen.

While reading through the detailed stories of the service men and women collected by Ray Dunford and Mr Miller, I was struck by their dedication to the project. I was reminded of the constant and

painstaking work carried out by such organisations as the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, the Australian War Memorial and the Imperial War Museum. Stringing together small pieces of wartime history can often be a thankless and difficult task, but it is these pieces of information, written or otherwise, that must be preserved for future generations.

I recently met with Mr Frank Dunne from Eumungerie, north of Dubbo, who is planning to construct a memorial dedicated to those who served from the district. Mr Dunne has gathered an impressive group of supporters who are all committed to having a memorial erected in local parkland, the centrepiece of which will be a field gun. Another project is in the planning stage in the Bruie Plains district, which encompasses the communities of Trundle, Tullamore and Peak Hill. The three rural hamlets in my electorate also have a very proud record of service in times of conflict.

I remind the House of a significant anniversary in Australia's wartime history that is steadily approaching. The Australian Light Horse Association has organised a pilgrimage to celebrate the ninetieth anniversary of the now infamous Light Horse charge at Beersheba. John Bogie from Goonumbla, near Alectown, is one member of the Australian Light Horse Association who is planning to travel to and take part in a re-enactment of the charge on the very plains where 500 Australian horsemen rode 90 years before. As we all know, each year more than 10,000 Australians and New Zealanders trek to Gallipoli for the Anzac Day service. The now modern-day electorate of Dubbo supplied more than its fair share of volunteers during World War I and I understand that 1,200 men, as well as nurses, enlisted.

The famous Cooee recruiting march, which originated from Gilgandra, passed through Dubbo in 1915. A band of 35 men soon swelled the numbers as farmers, labourers and tradesmen joined the Cooees. Such efforts by my constituents, with pen or bricks and mortar, to honour the memory of those service men and women who made the supreme sacrifice are not empty gestures. They are the rightful marks of respect to a legacy we can never repay. Enlightening new generations of Australians about the sacrifices made and the national character that has been forged in wars is commendable indeed.

It is also fitting that I mention Mrs Evelyn Marion Wilson, known as Evie, who was born on 5 November 1904 and passed away, aged 102, on 20 September 2007, six weeks before her 103rd birthday. Evie, the mother of Parkes Mayor Robert Wilson, was a wonderful woman with an active mind who lived in her own home for at least 101 years of her life. At her funeral service, which was held at Peak Hill Presbyterian Church on Saturday 22 September, her grandson Ben Wilson delivered the eulogy, which detailed her commitment to her family and community.

Ben recalled his grandmother delivering meals on wheels to those much younger than her. She was a golden volunteer to all organisations in Peak Hill and an inspiring matriarch to her family. Mrs Wilson would have known many of the young men and women detailed by Mr Ray Dunford who sailed overseas, some never returning. Two years ago I recall her saying to me, "The only regret is not having any of my childhood friends around to talk to—those who knew me when I was a young girl. The young ones", meaning those in their eighties, "did not know me as a young girl." Mrs Evelyn Wilson was a loyal servant to God, her family and her community.

**Ms LINDA BURNEY** (Canterbury—Minister for Fair Trading, Minister for Youth, and Minister for Volunteering) [5.53 p.m.]: Coming from a small country town I know that memorials to the fallen are important to country towns. I remember the memorial gates of the park in Whitton, the little town in which I grew up, where there was a marble plaque to honour the fallen from World War I and World War II. I am very familiar with all the little towns the member for Dubbo mentioned throughout her electorate and hearing about them touched my heart. I thank the member for reminding us about the ninetieth anniversary of the Australian Light Horse charge. I also thank her for relating the story of Mrs Evie Wilson, who lived for 102 years and was obviously a very loved and important individual in the western part of this State. On behalf of the Parliament I express our condolences to Mrs Wilson's family and acknowledge the celebration of a great life. I finish by noting that the member for Dubbo said something very important about those who have served this country and paid the ultimate price. It is a legacy we cannot repay.

#### **NATIVE ANIMAL TRUST FUND**

**Mr GREG PIPER** (Lake Macquarie) [5.55 p.m.]: I bring to the attention of the House the efforts of the Native Animal Trust Fund in the wake of the June long weekend storm that devastated much of the Hunter region. This matter has relevance to the members for Newcastle, Swansea, Charlestown, Maitland, Cessnock

and Port Stephens, but I will explain its particular relevance to Lake Macquarie. The Native Animal Trust Fund started 33 years ago as the first volunteer wildlife rescue group in New South Wales. It is a registered charity operating under licence from the National Parks and Wildlife Service. The group is involved in the rescue, rehabilitation and release of sick, injured and orphaned native fauna. Members are volunteers with a variety of backgrounds and interests. The Native Animal Trust Fund's activities are mostly based around the rescue, rehabilitation and release of individual animals in need, but they also extend to public education and lobbying for protection of habitat.

Participation in the Native Animal Trust Fund takes a variety of forms, from financial members to rescuers, foster carers and a small and passionate core of leaders. Members involved in the rescue, care and release of orphaned and injured animals report their tremendous satisfaction in seeing animals returned to the wild. Animals are rescued from a variety of misadventures: fire, flood, storms, road injuries, attacks by domestic and feral animals and straying into human-dominated environments. The storm of 8 June this year resulted in the region declared a disaster area because of the impacts on people and infrastructure. The impacts on native animals were also extensive. Many animals were drowned by floodwaters or stranded without shelter or food. Thousands of trees were downed, with the loss of many nesting hollows. Thankfully, the Native Animal Trust Fund was there to help.

Animals that came into care included 10 wombats, 11 kangaroos, 19 blue-tongue lizards, black snakes, turtles, birds, echidnas, bandicoots, possums, koalas, native water rats—a whole range of animals. Certainly there would have been mortalities that went unrecorded. The Native Animal Trust Fund was active in the wake of the storm until mid-August, monitoring and feeding wildlife where habitat was affected. This included erecting 100 boxes and placing numerous hollow logs on the ground and in trees. Properties of a number of members of the Native Animal Trust Fund were affected by the storm. Management of animals already in care was complicated by storm and flood damage and power outages lasting many days. Some carers' homes were flooded and many lost food, heating materials, cages and fencing necessary for animal care.

The beaching of the *Pasha Bulker* was a spectacle that captured the public's attention. Behind the scenes of that incident, however, was once again the Native Animal Trust Fund, having been approached through the Department of Environment and Climate Change to provide assistance in planning a response to a possible disaster for marine life. The group established an emergency centre at Newcastle to allow a rapid response to oil-affected fauna. If the ship had released fuel oil there would have been an immediate response, albeit limited by the group's resources. Any large-scale emergency would have invoked a cooperative response involving the Department of Environment and Climate Change and the Taronga wildlife emergency team. Thankfully, the shipwreck disaster did not eventuate, but marine life taken into care included an albatross, a giant petrel, a gannet, four adult sea turtles, six green sea turtle hatchlings and 10 penguins. Notably, the albatross was rescued five kilometres inland at Mount Hutton in Lake Macquarie. The Native Animal Trust Fund was pleased to receive a \$5,000 disaster grant from the International Fund for Animal Welfare through ongoing support that began with the severe bushfires of 1994.

The Native Animal Trust Fund operates across the region, but I must particularly acknowledge the efforts of Audrey Koosmen, who lives in the Lake Macquarie electorate. Audrey is president of the group and undertook the role of disaster coordinator in the wake of the 8 June storm. I regret that nominations for the Premier's awards for selfless actions during the storm were not open to the heroes who gave so much to protect our wildlife. I am pleased, as I am sure all members are, to give this group some of the recognition it deserves, and I look forward to continuing my support for its efforts.

**Private members' statements noted.**

**The House adjourned at 6.00 p.m. until Tuesday 16 October 2007 at 2.15 p.m.**

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