

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Wednesday 19 May 2010

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

The Speaker read the Prayer and acknowledgement of country.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of Motions

General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) given.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ILLEGAL BOARDING HOUSES

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO (Ryde) [10.03 a.m.]: About 11 weeks ago, on 25 February 2010, I addressed this Chamber about the problems associated with the proliferation of illegal boarding houses in Ryde. At that time a residents' action group today known as Marsfield Against Residential Suffocation [MARS] was in its infancy. Today MARS is a well-organised and passionate group led by local Marsfield resident Alan Patrick. I would like to make special mention of Peter Groenestyn, Gloria Dartnell, Neil Yakalis, Sylvain Flore, and Rodney and Helen Simmons, who are just some of the hardworking members of the MARS team. The MARS action group is calling on all governments to work together to provide increased student housing capacity in the short term and to plan innovatively for the long-term housing needs of the increasing number of international students at Macquarie University and international workers employed by businesses within the Macquarie Park business precinct.

In addition, the group wants to see unscrupulous boarding house operators punished with significant financial penalties and enforcement orders brought against them. Shortly I will be presented with a petition from the MARS action group spokesman Alan Patrick on the steps of the Parliament. The petition contains, I am led to believe, over 1,000 signatures from concerned residents calling on Premier Kristina Keneally and her State Labor Government to act immediately to get rid of the boarding house provisions of the Affordable Rental Housing State Environmental Planning Policy, and to take decisive action to give local councils the power they need to inspect illegal boarding houses and make enforcement orders against their proprietors.

The MARS action group has made it clear that its complaint lies squarely against the unscrupulous investors running the boarding houses and not against the unsuspecting students, who for the most part are well behaved and hardworking, and go about their studies quietly and pleasantly. Despite these noble objectives, some local representatives have sought to misrepresent the concerns of the MARS action group. Last week a Ryde councillor accused Marsfield residents of not caring about the welfare of international students and wanting to kick them out on the street. This claim is, of course, incorrect. The residents of Marsfield have lived peacefully amongst university students for many years. The overwhelming majority of the residents are most happy to share their neighbourhood with the students.

What has galvanised the residents is not the run-of-the-mill activities of students sharing a suburban house; it is the exploitation of students herded into partitioned rooms. It is 14 or 15 people living in one house with insufficient kitchen, bathroom and waste facilities. It is the stories of students being ripped off by their landlords, with no tenancy agreement and virtually no legal rights. Boarders and lodgers have no legal rights under the Residential Tenancies Act. They have nowhere to turn in the event of a dispute with a landlord. Often they speak poor English and have little knowledge of their legal rights. The Marsfield Against Residential Suffocation action group is fighting to preserve the fabric of our local community, where many have lived for over 40 years, and to ensure the welfare of international students many of whom we know have been subjected to financial exploitation at the hands of unscrupulous boarding house operators.

As Australians we have a responsibility to educate and look after our international guests. We all have families, and if our loved ones were to travel to a foreign country to study, spending several years away from home, we would hope they would be well looked after. International students contribute so much to our economy. In 2008 the international student sector contributed \$15.5 billion to the Australian economy. In New South Wales the figure was \$5.8 billion. The tremendous growth in the international education sector in recent years has been well documented. The Federal Government has a major role to play in all aspects of policy concerning international student welfare and the regulation of universities.

The Federal Government ultimately determines the number of international student visas granted each year. That Government must also play a major role in ensuring there are sufficient services and amenities to facilitate the rapid increase in international student numbers. One of the main causes of the increase in illegal boarding house operations in recent years is the lack of supply and over demand. In 2000, Macquarie University had a student population of 21,500, of which 2,800, or 13 per cent, were international students. According to Macquarie University's 2009 annual report, the international student population has increased to 12,396, 35 per cent of a total enrolment of just over 35,000. Revenue from international student fees was \$161 million, a 14 per cent increase on the previous year.

Currently Macquarie University provides around 1,800 accommodation places on and off site, including at Dunmore Lang College and Robert Menzies College, as well as serviced apartments. This means that currently over 12,000 international students are competing amongst 35,000 students for just 1,800 student accommodation places. According to Macquarie University's master plan, the university wants to increase its capacity by an additional 5,000 accommodation places by 2031. If current trends continue Macquarie University's international student population will be approximately 30,000 by 2031.

We need urgent action to address this problem. I again call on the New South Wales Labor Government to, first, make more campus accommodation for overseas students available as a matter of urgent priority; second, immediately repeal the Affordable Rental Housing State Environmental Planning Policy and return power to local councils; and, third, give councils the power to inspect suspected illegal boarding houses without notice, improve prosecution mechanisms, and impose significant fines on operators who continue to flout the law.

CESSNOCK PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Mr KERRY HICKEY (Cessnock) [10.08 a.m.]: A very important issue in my community concerns planning and development decisions of the Cessnock City Council. Approximately 18 months ago the council published statistical data showing that its planning performance was comparable to the performance of other councils. Out of 126 statistical sets that could have been published, the council published four. The other 122 showed how badly the council is performing. The council was ranked in the bottom 10 of councils in the State, even though it has 17 staff members in its planning department, which places it in the top 20 councils of the State as far as staffing levels are concerned.

The issues associated with the council's decisions are long and varied. One has only to examine the voting practices of certain councillors to see just how poorly they are performing. They are doing everything they can to stop development in the community. The Hunter Economic Zone [HEZ] is a prime example. It was implemented in 2002 yet the council continually tries to stymie development. Any development proposal submitted under the Hunter Economic Zone is met with rescission motions and stymieing tactics. Developers are becoming very annoyed. As a matter of fact, they have walked: they are submitting their development proposals to neighbouring councils.

An example of the council's approach to planning is the kookaburra statue. The Kurri Kurri community was told by council staff that the statue could not be erected on the roundabout at Kurri Kurri, which is where they wanted to put it, but that it had to be erected in Rotary Park. The council staff told the community that a development application would have to be submitted. When that was submitted, council staff recommended refusal of the development application. Another example is Lazy Lads, which operates a laundromat. It moved from a class 6 building in Kurri Kurri and went to another class 6 building in Kurri Kurri that had not been vacated for more than a few months.

The company was forced to submit a development application at a cost of \$993. The council has done not one thing to progress the development application. The company was told that it had to move to the building it currently occupies within a couple of months or the business would fold. Lazy Lads moved in without the

proper certificates, and the council threatened to impose fines—even though the council had done nothing to progress the development application or refund the application fee. The council has provided no answers to the community.

Another example is the Wendy Bishop matter. Ms Bishop purchased a block of land that was surveyed and auctioned by the Cessnock City Council. She spent \$170,000 on trying to obtain access to her block of land. She has become bankrupt trying to build a home in Cessnock and has moved to a shed in Toowoomba where she is living with her son. There are many similar cases I could mention. Noel Constable from Northville inherited his family's block of land and tried to obtain approval to build a house on that block of land. Over a period of 15 years, approval was refused continually. He sold the land to people from Sydney. They tried for 12 months to obtain approval to build a house on the land, but they too were unsuccessful. They on-sold the land to the manager of WesTrac at Singleton, and that person was given building application approval within a week.

Something is wrong with the Cessnock City Council. As the member of Parliament representing Cessnock, I am concerned that the council is holding the community to ransom and is costing the community jobs. If we cannot facilitate development in the community and arrange approval for developments, we will not have economic growth in the community. That will cost the community its economy and it will cost the youth of our community jobs. When the Minister for Planning issued a notice to the council, giving it 21 days to explain why planning approval should not be withdrawn, the general manager said that no-one had complained. Duncan Hardie tried to get a hotel built at the airport. There was an illegal fuel dump on adjacent land, and its fumes were pervading the hotel. That prevented guests from staying there. His guests were actually leaving. The council said that that was not an issue. If anyone else had been involved, the council would have closed down the dump or the owners of the land would have been forced to move the illegal fuel dump to another area of the 100-acre lot. The decisions of the Cessnock City Council really need to be examined.

Justice Cripps from the Independent Commission Against Corruption found that although there is no corruption at the council, there is a great deal of incompetence. The issues really need to be addressed. A report in the newspaper says that another developer in the area, Mr Wallace, is walking away because, in his words, "it is just too hard to deal with the Cessnock City Council". Something must be done. The council must change its attitude to ensure that it does not allow development to occur just for the sake of development, but allows development that is needed for the sake and benefit of the community.

Ms JODI McKAY (Newcastle—Minister for Tourism, Minister for the Hunter, Minister for Science and Medical Research, and Minister for Women) [10.13 a.m.]: I thank the member for Cessnock for bringing his concerns to the attention of Parliament. As the Minister for the Hunter, I have only to read the local paper to understand the focus on the council and the concern that the community feels about the council's ability to do its job properly. As the Minister for Tourism, I can assure the House of the importance of the Cessnock area, not only to New South Wales tourism but also to tourism in the wider Hunter Valley. Tourism earns the Hunter region approximately \$1.5 billion. A significant proportion of that amount is generated in the Cessnock-Pokolbin area. It is a matter of great concern that the Cessnock City Council is not pro jobs and is not pro investment. I thank the member for Cessnock for highlighting the community's concerns about the Cessnock City Council's performance.

AMBULANCE SCHOOL COVER SCHEME

Mr THOMAS GEORGE (Lismore) [10.14 a.m.]: I draw to the attention of the House very serious concerns that I have expressed in representations I have made to the Minister for Education and Training. I have begun to wonder what the Department of Education and Training has been doing to get the message out about the Ambulance School Cover Scheme. I received an email from Ralph Taylor, the principal of Wyrallah Road Public School, in which he refers to his concerns about students who undertake school excursions interstate. When a problem arises and students have to be transported by ambulance, the ambulance transportation is the responsibility of the student. When students are interstate, they are not covered under the public education system when they require ambulance transportation. I made representations to the Minister for Health, Carmel Tebbutt, who stated in part:

... the Ambulance School Cover Scheme (ASCS) ... [was withdrawn] with the withdrawal of South Australia in 1998 and Queensland in 2003 from these arrangements and advice from the ACT Ambulance Service that it did not recognise reciprocal arrangements in respect to the ASCA, the Ambulance Service of NSW has restricted the cover it offered.

I am also advised that insurance coverage can be obtained to cover ambulance services when travelling outside NSW.

The situation had to be highlighted by a school principal's inquiry, otherwise nobody would have known. I call on the Department of Education and Training to make that information available to parents and schools, especially those in areas near the Queensland-New South Wales border. Parents should be informed about the interstate ambulance service arrangements before they allow their children to undertake excursions so that they are in a position to ensure that their children are covered, should a problem arise.

In this context I made representations on behalf of Lehman Espley, who is 17 years of age. He participated in the North Coast soccer trials and represented Wollumbin High School, which he attends as a year 12 student. During the soccer game he damaged his right knee when he tackled another player. An ambulance was called and Lehman was taken to the Tweed Heads hospital. On Monday 15 March, he attended the King Street Medical Centre, Murwillumbah, and received a diagnosis of substantial ligament damage to the knee. Later a magnetic resonance image [MRI] showed that there was cruciate ligament damage. Reconstructive surgery on Lehman's knee is the only way for him to achieve full movement of his knee and leg and restore him to his active life.

Lehman's parents were advised that the surgery might be done in either the public or private hospital system. The waiting list for the private hospital is two to three weeks at a cost of \$8,300 and the waiting list in the public hospital system is approximately 12 months. Lehman's mother approached Karen Connell, who is the highly respected principal of Wollumbin High School, regarding the cost of the surgery. Lehman's mother was informed that she was required to pay the expenses, and then write a letter to the school requesting payment, and the letter would be forwarded to the legal department of the Department of Education and Training in Sydney, which would consider the application. Lehman's mother states:

Although I work full time, as a single parent I am unable to afford the \$8,300.00 necessary to have Lehman's operation ... The Principal [Karen Connell] suggested she understood my situation but nothing more could be done.

After discussions with my solicitor ... I contacted the Department of Education in Sydney who confirmed the information given to me by the Principal [was correct].

Lehman's mother was informed that she could make an approach, and if the Department of Education and Training was found to be at fault, the out-of-pocket expenses for Lehman's operation would be paid, but only if negligence was involved. This young bloke was representing his school in soccer trials when he was injured—I will not go over that again—but it was not until after he was injured that he found out that he had no insurance when representing his school. If there is no coverage then that should be made very clear to the students and their parents before students represent their schools in sporting activities. I am sure this problem is occurring right across the State. What is the Department of Education and Training doing about highlighting the shortcomings of students representing their schools in sporting activities? I call on the Department of Education and Training to inform parents of exactly what coverage their children are entitled to when they are representing their schools in sporting activities.

FAIRFIELD FORUM CAR PARKING

Mr JOSEPH TRIPODI (Fairfield) [10.19 a.m.]: The management by Australian National Car Parks of car parks in the Fairfield electorate is causing great concern. As a condition of entry to the Fairfield Forum car park, patrons are required to obtain and display a valid ticket on the dashboard of their vehicles at all times whilst located on the site. Ticket machines are located throughout the car park, with signage indicating free parking for the first three hours and a fee to be charged thereafter. If shoppers are in a hurry and do not pay attention to the signs, or have difficulty with the wordy English displayed on these signs, they will enter the shopping centre without reading them. The problem is that these signs state a ticket must be obtained, even if patrons only plan on being on the site for a matter of minutes and will not be exceeding the free limit.

Practically all the constituents who have approached my office feel this signage is unclear and misleading, in that it is not sufficiently clear that tickets must be obtained regardless of whether the free parking will be exceeded. The real problem is that the ticketing and payment arrangements practically invite the error to be made and the error could be avoided by the use of the traditional boom gate system that people are familiar with. If shoppers do not comply with these unique parking regulations, they are issued with payment notices for \$88—curiously, this is discounted to \$66 if payment is made within 14 days. Failure to take any action in response to these notices results in the issue of a Notice of Intention to Sue. The matter then progresses to enforcement action via a debt collection agency.

Most people opt to finalise payment rather than risk the commencement of legal action, which will end up costing them more. People do not know that they are well within their rights to question the issue of the

payment notice in the first instance. The practice of Australian National Car Parks of forcing shoppers to obtain tickets began at the Fairfield Forum car park in 2006. Unfortunately, more recently, this operation has extended to include the Aldi car park at Fairfield. Prior to the management of these sites by Australian National Car Parks, shoppers were able to park for free and the time limit was not restricted.

Whilst it is clearly understood and appreciated that customer car parks must be monitored to ensure that the sites are only used for purposes for which they were intended, the manner in which Australian National Car Parks operates is unconscionable. Staff aggressively patrol these car parks to ensure that these facilities are used in accordance with the, often unexpected, regulations of the operator. In most cases payment notices are issued for three main offences: a valid ticket is not clearly displayed on the dashboard of a vehicle, which is the most common offence; a vehicle is parked in a designated disabled bay not displaying a current authorised disabled permit; and parking in a loading zone for an excessive period of time, or not engaged in setting down or loading goods.

Upon receiving an infringement countless constituents have approached my electorate office and the company has been extremely cooperative, often agreeing to withdraw payment notices after I have made written representations on behalf of my constituents. My concern is for those potential thousands of shoppers that have not refused to pay the infringements. It is important to note that not one of the complaints by my constituents related to a person being infringed for being in a car park in excess of three hours.

My constituents are very concerned as to how new parking arrangements, under the management of Australian National Car Parks, have seemingly popped up overnight at a second car park in Fairfield. Parking conditions changed overnight and shoppers were caught out. People who have been using the same car park for years were suddenly expected to adopt the practices of Australian National Car Parks. This has been a problem especially in my electorate because of the high proportion of people from a non-English speaking background. With many of my constituents having only a basic understanding of the English language, and therefore unable to comprehend the requirements imposed by Australian National Car Parks, it is no surprise that many shoppers are now parking in a car park that was previously unrestricted.

Many people in the community have no alternative but to use these car parks to access the shopping centres because of their age, their physical condition or because they care for small children. For these people parking in an alternative location and walking a distance to avoid the risk of receiving a fine is simply not an option. I understand these arrangements need to be put in place to ensure that these car parking spaces are properly used but, unfortunately, this has resulted in many unsuspecting customers being punished. As a consequence, I believe this is unconscionable and that Australian National Car Parks should improve its practices to ensure that shoppers are forewarned of their obligations when entering these car parks.

Ms JODI McKAY (Newcastle—Minister for Tourism, Minister for the Hunter, Minister for Science and Medical Research, and Minister for Women) [10.24 a.m.]: The New South Wales Government shares the concerns of the member for Fairfield as to unclear contract terms, and is investigating how that conduct can be remedied or addressed using the current Fair Trading laws. Nationally, unfair contract terms legislation comes into effect on 1 July, and matters such as these will be assessed to ensure that consumers are protected.

Consumers who are concerned about any payment notice they have received are encouraged to raise it with the car park operator in the first instance. However, should that prove to be unsuccessful, consumers can contact NSW Fair Trading on 13 32 20 for further assistance. NSW Fair Trading is currently investigating the activities of the company to ensure that it is compliant with Fair Trading laws. More generally, NSW Fair Trading will continue to monitor the operation of all privately operated car parks to ensure that consumers are being fairly treated.

FORESTS NSW REDUNDANCIES

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS (Murray-Darling) [10.25 a.m.]: On 29 April I received a letter from the Australian Workers Union dated 27 April, which I quote in part:

Dear Mr Williams,

I write in relation to my members who work in front line services for Forests NSW. I am compelled to inform you that the NSW Government is proposing to slash at least 20% of the workforce. These workers have direct responsibility of ensuring the ecological sustainability of our forests.

The proposal calls for voluntary redundancies and this breaches Government policy. To-date, under successive premiers, front line positions have been excluded from voluntary redundancies. Recently, a call for voluntary redundancies amongst staff positions in the Department of Industry and Investment specifically excluded front line positions.

I support the sentiments of the Australian Workers Union. I am opposed to any reduction of forestry positions in the Murray-Darling electorate. I continue to quote from the last paragraph of that letter:

I write to you as the elected person in your community who has the responsibility to make sure NSW Forests are maintained and kept safe. This outrageous decision by your Government has to be overturned and I call on you to **stand up for your community** as your constituents would expect you to, and insist this redundancy proposal for front line employees be withdrawn.

I find that very insulting. As a fellow colleague in this House says, these people are in a parallel universe. Where are they when out in the real world we are seeing a conversion of State forests into national parks? I will now read on to the record my response to that letter:

I refer to your recent correspondence dated 27 April 2010.

I am fully aware of this Government's wish to reduce forestry positions across the State.

In the electorate of Murray-Darling, we are experiencing the greatest injustice of all with the conversion of State Forests into National Parks.

It is my belief that if this Government decided not to respond to Green demands and left things as they are, not only would the forestry jobs and the milling operations stay, but your State forest department jobs would stay.

I am sure your Union could apply some pressure to this State Government and allow the continuing of all jobs in the region.

I can only say that in my electorate I value every job and the communities value the income these jobs provide.

Coming from Broken Hill, I know that Barham Industrial Council would not stand by and let the Government introduce legislation to knock out 1,300 forestry jobs and destroy the economies of four towns in my electorate—Deniliquin, Mathoura, Barham and Balranald—where forestry jobs are important. Many forestry milling positions are filled by indigenous people who would not normally get a job anywhere. These jobs provide indigenous workers and their families with good, solid incomes, but they will be driven out by this legislation.

I hear much talk in this House about the unions and the Labor Government supporting workers. I am talking about people at the grassroots level, the battlers in our country who fill basic positions and work hard in the true Labor tradition. Traditionally, the Australian Labor Party would support these people. But where is the Australian Labor Party today? It has shifted sideways. It is heading into Liberal territory, with the upwardly mobile yuppies, and it is forgetting the grassroots people it represents, that is, the workers, the people who battle every day to put food on the table. As I said, these indigenous workers will now see no opportunity for the future, yet the Australian Workers Union will stand by and let it happen.

NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK

Mr DAVID HARRIS (Wyong—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.30 a.m.]: National Volunteer Week is the largest celebration of volunteers and volunteerism in Australia. It provides an opportunity to highlight the role of volunteers in our communities and to say thank you to the more than five million Australians who volunteer. Australian volunteers are essential to society; many charities would struggle to survive without the support of their volunteers. Volunteers donate their time and energy to help others and in doing so contribute more than 700 million hours of community service to many different areas of society each year. In my electorate I know of many wonderful volunteers. Whilst it would be impossible to list all their names here today, I will mention a couple of outstanding people and acknowledge the positive impact their wonderful contributions have had on their community.

The first is Margaret Thirlwall from San Remo. Recently I had the privilege of presenting Margaret with the Community Service Award from our State Government in a ceremony held at San Remo Neighbourhood Centre. Margaret was nominated for this award because of her long and outstanding service to the community via her work at San Remo Neighbourhood Centre. Margaret has been volunteering at the centre for nearly 22 years. Prior to this Margaret was a private secretary for number of chief executive officers of major companies in Sydney and later for Laurie Maher from Gosford City Council. When she retired she wanted to do something worthwhile in her free time. Luckily for the San Remo Neighbourhood Centre, Margaret answered an advertisement in a local newsletter calling for volunteers. She began volunteering using her stenography skills in the office of the centre and then joined its management committee. She has been the secretary of the committee ever since.

Margaret enjoys her job immensely. Not only does it keep her brain active it also allows her to help others and give something back to the community. Margaret has made good friends with a lot of the people who

work at and attend the centre. They appreciate her dedication and tireless support as both secretary and as a volunteer at many of the events run by the centre, as well as her famous egg sandwiches! The manager of the San Remo centre, Jill Hogan, applied for the award and wanted to ensure that Margaret was acknowledged, and she was pleased that that happened earlier this year. We have all heard the adage "Actions speak louder than words".

The next person I will speak about is someone who has taken this to the next level. Emma Ward, a resident of Wyongah, got sick and tired of all the graffiti that was creating an eyesore in her local area. So she armed herself with a brush and some chemicals and started doing something about it. Ted Bickford, also known as Super Ted or Mr Sheen, from Forster-Tuncurry, inspired Emma. Having read about Ted in a magazine, she contacted him by phone and in person and soon learnt the best, most effective ways of removing graffiti from all different surfaces. Emma and Ted have one main thing in common—pride in their local area.

People driving through Lake Haven on any Saturday morning or some afternoons are likely to see Emma, and on many occasions her husband, Dave, working away, removing graffiti. Emma believes in the rapid removal policy; that is, clean the graffiti off as soon as possible to discourage further vandalism. She is heartened by people who appreciate her efforts and encourage her with positive comments, support and the occasional donation to help towards the cost of the chemicals. Emma is becoming well known in the area, having been featured in the local paper, and she recently coordinated the Graffiti Action Day in San Remo. She was pleased with the number of people who came to help, especially the number of young people. I was also happy to lend a hand on that day, though I must admit I found it quite hard work, especially removing paint from brickwork. I think we spent about three hours cleaning it off. It was a lot of hard work, and it was very heart-warming to see people from the area, particularly older people, getting out and having a go at cleaning off the graffiti.

Emma has commented on the fact that her fitness level has improved since she started taking action more than 12 months ago to remove graffiti. She jokes that it has become quite an obsession with her but she will not give up now. She said, "I just do my best and hope to keep raising awareness on how we can make a difference and easily remove the graffiti that spoils our local area." Well done, Emma! You are an inspiration to others and I commend you on your positive action. In conclusion, I congratulate all volunteers, not only in my electorate but also across New South Wales. Their unselfish efforts to ensure that the community is a more effective place do not go unappreciated by members in this place.

Ms JODI McKAY (Newcastle—Minister for Tourism, Minister for the Hunter, Minister for Science and Medical Research, and Minister for Women) [10.35 a.m.]: I thank the member for Wyong for drawing to the attention of the House the importance of National Volunteer Week. Considering that more than five million Australians volunteer and contribute more than 700 million hours of community service, their contribution is truly staggering. It is important that individuals are recognised, although obviously when they volunteer they do not seek that recognition. I congratulate Margaret Thirlwall and Emma Ward on contributing so much to the Wyong community.

MURRAY-RIVERINA RED CROSS

Mr GREG APLIN (Albury) [10.36 a.m.]: Last week I attended the Country Zone 20 annual conference of the Australian Red Cross at Henty and heard of members' concerns at the imminent closure of the regional office at Albury. Several delegates have subsequently written to me to express dissatisfaction with the reasons for closure given by the Red Cross Executive Director for New South Wales. Among these long-time and dedicated volunteers there is a sense of deliberate abandonment by a centralist bureaucracy driving an agenda not shared with or by the members. In fact, members told me that cherished principles such as impartiality and neutrality were now merely lip-service slogans for the well-paid hierarchy.

The President of the Jindera Red Cross branch, Elizabeth Healey, says the branch is completely shattered by the decision to close the Murray-Riverina regional office, which is strategically placed to service both southern New South Wales and northern Victoria. She contends that the decision runs counter to the national strategy, which has forcefully advocated closer liaison over recent years. Like so many other members, she extols the work of the Regional Manager, David Clark, who has had a unique perspective of the organisation, working first as a volunteer and then as staff. Along with most staff at Albury, he was retrenched and members understand that staff members were not initially offered any positions.

Mrs Healey states that there was no consultation with stakeholders. This is most alarming, given the written advice from the Executive Director, Lewis Kaplan, that outlines a new national strategy establishing a

central structure for marketing, fundraising and communications previously delivered from regional offices. The Henty branch members were so appalled at the decision and lack of consultation that they wrote to the Chairman of the Australian Red Cross, Greg Vickery. Their dismay at the closure is pertinent as Henty is located midway between Albury and Wagga Wagga, where a new regional office is to be opened once suitable premises and staff are found, according to Mr Kaplan. The Henty members are also concerned about the new direction of the Red Cross—that is, focusing on social welfare delivery, which is already the domain of the Federal and State governments and many other non-government organisations. Their letter states:

We would like a little more of the impartiality that we recite in the principles of Red Cross.

As one of the main aims of Red Cross members and volunteers is to raise funds, it was not surprising that the question of money cropped up at the conference. The Henty branch secretary writes that Mr Kaplan told delegates that the present cost of raising funds stands at 46¢ in the dollar and it is the aim of the board of the Red Cross to get this down to 20¢ in the dollar. Members felt that the current level of overheads was excessive for a so-called charity. So they conducted some research and found that the Melbourne-based Chief Executive Officer, Robert Tickner, had a salary in 2008 of between \$340,000 and \$349,999 plus perks and that one board member received upwards of \$480,000. The article used as a source apparently referred to the Australian Red Cross as the charity equivalent of Wall Street.

The worrying thing about this letter is that the members and tireless volunteers who have dedicated so much to the Red Cross are now questioning where the money goes. They are becoming disillusioned by the articles they read that advise donors to check the annual report financials before donating to make sure donations go where they are intended. In this context, the closure of the Albury office is seen as just another cost-cutting measure designed to swell the coffers. The letter to the chairman continues:

We received a letter signed by you dated the 29th March 2010, saying that for a very long time members of Red Cross in local communities across Australia have been striving to reverse the decline in membership, and that membership has declined by 92.5% in the last 50 years. It states that you have been consulting widely about ways to build our membership and better support our existing and longstanding wonderful membership base. Why not ask us?

Further down in that letter you state that the Red Cross National Board has been at great pains to ensure that the wishes and interests of our existing membership remain protected. Towards the end of your letter you acknowledge the valuable role the Branches and their members play in building community connectedness. Item 10 states that Red Cross members should play a vital role in the governance of Red Cross.

With respect, Mr Vickery, I would like to suggest that all of the above is just lip service to appease us and make us feel that we are valuable to you, and as the rest of the letter talks of the increased fees for membership, it is once more just another money grabbing exercise.

The decisions taken by the Board of funding focus and closing offices show us by your actions that the Branches and members don't matter. You arbitrarily make decisions that affect us, and you take away from us what matters to us, all the while asking for more and more money.

The branch concludes that the good reputation of the Red Cross is being lost and that the iconic branding symbol itself has been replaced by smiling faces on advertising material. The final sentence is a call for action:

We in the country need to feel we matter and that we are consulted on affairs that concern us, or just use professional marketers to collect the funds and disband the branches altogether.

Ms JODI McKAY (Newcastle—Minister for Tourism, Minister for the Hunter, Minister for Science and Medical Research, and Minister for Women) [10.41 a.m.]: I thank the member for Albury for bringing to the attention of the House his concerns about the downgrading of the Australian Red Cross in his local area. All members of the House understand the important role that the Australian Red Cross plays within our communities, particularly in regional and rural areas of New South Wales. It is a matter of concern if the Red Cross is looking at downgrading its operations in areas such as Albury.

Mr Thomas George: And Lismore.

Ms JODI McKAY: The member for Lismore says Lismore as well. I thank the member for Albury and the member for Lismore for the advice they have given to the House today and wish them luck in the work they do to support the Red Cross members in their communities.

CABRAMATTA LAO COMMUNITY NEW YEAR CELEBRATIONS

Mr NICK LALICH (Cabramatta) [10.42 a.m.]: On 25 April 2010 at Wetherill Park Community Centre I had the pleasure of attending the Lao New Year celebration of the Year of the Tiger, which was

organised by the Lao Community Advancement Cooperative Ltd and the management committee of the Lao Buddhist Society of New South Wales Incorporated. The function was also attended by the Hon. Joe Tripodi, the member for Fairfield; my parliamentary colleague Mr Ninos Khoshaba, member for Smithfield; the Hon. Paul Lynch, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Disability Services and member for Liverpool; and the Hon. Laurie Ferguson, Federal member for Reid.

I always enjoy attending events such as this one, which involves community groups from my electorate of Cabramatta who play a vital and important role in showcasing and celebrating the diversity of our community. I particularly thank the Lao Community Advancement Cooperative and the Lao Buddhist Society of New South Wales for hosting this event. The celebration demonstrated my electorate's ability to embrace our diversity. It is great to see organisations such as the Lao Community Advancement Cooperative Ltd and the management committee of the Lao Buddhist Society of New South Wales Incorporated striving to achieve a community that supports one another and to raise cultural awareness.

It is reassuring to have the Lao Community Advancement Cooperative Ltd and the management committee of the Lao Buddhist Society working to promote friendship and understanding between the Lao community and other ethnic communities in my electorate of Cabramatta and the wider Australian community, a goal that is shared by this Labor Government. So many great initiatives are carried out and organised by the Lao Community Advancement Cooperative Ltd and the management committee of the Lao Buddhist Society. Some of these include the development of the Lao Cultural Centre and the 18 public housing units that the Lao Community Advancement Cooperative is currently managing.

It is important that members of this place get involved and show our support to organisations of this type in order for their initiatives to be promoted and for their efforts to continue to grow. Again, I congratulate the Lao Community Advancement Cooperative Ltd and the management committee of the Lao Buddhist Society on the care and assistance they provide to the Lao community and on bringing the friendship of diversity to my electorate of Cabramatta and its people. The efforts of the Lao Community Advancement Cooperative Ltd and the management committee of the Lao Buddhist Society play a significant role in the betterment of our community and in keeping Lao and Buddhist traditions and culture alive and well.

At the celebration it was mentioned that the Year of the Tiger brings good health, prosperity and happiness. I wish everyone in this place all the best for the Year of the Tiger and hope that it brings you all of those benefits in 2010. I also thank Mr Deth Sysengrath, President of the Lao Community Advancement Cooperative Ltd and the management committee, and Mr Mahachay Khamlu, President of the Lao Buddhist Society. I look forward to a long association and working relationship with them in the future in my electorate of Cabramatta.

BALLINA LADY JOCKEYS RACING MUSEUM

Mr DONALD PAGE (Ballina) [10.46 a.m.]: Horseracing holds a special place in Australia's history. It is a sport full of stories of fair dinkum Aussie characters and larrikins all linked by their love of horses, the exhilaration of a race, the thrill of a win and the disappointment of a loss. I am proud, therefore, to advise Parliament of plans by the Ballina Jockey Club to honour the contribution of female jockeys to the Australian racing industry. The Ballina Jockey Club considers itself to be one of the most innovative race clubs in the country. The racetrack on the Richmond River has been operating for more than 100 years. In the early days of racing in the Northern Rivers, the Ballina Jockey Club used to pay for horses to be transported by steamer from Sydney to Ballina to compete in the Ballina Cup. It is now working on developing an Australian Lady Jockeys Racing Museum to document the contribution that women have made to the industry and their struggle to compete with their male counterparts.

The Ballina Jockey Club recently announced its plans, noting that the official story of lady riders in Australia has a rich history. There was a tradition of amateur "ladies only" picnic races in Victoria as early as the 1850s, but ladies were excluded from full professional competition until 1979. The Ballina Jockey Club has advised that the first professional lady jockey was probably a woman called Wilhemena Smith. Wilhemena apparently called herself "Bill" and rode as a man on Queensland country racetracks during the 1940s and 1950s, keeping her gender a secret. The Ballina Jockey Club has already taken the initiative to recognise lady jockeys by establishing the Iris Nielsen Memorial Race, an invitation-only race for lady jockeys. It is a significant race that is worth \$50,000, and the majority of senior lady jockeys in Australia are invited to ride and take part.

The race is not simply a celebration of the contribution of lady jockeys to professional racing, but a tribute to the late Iris Nielsen, who died in a race fall in Lismore in 1988—the first woman jockey in Australia to be killed in such circumstances. Iris Nielsen was based in Ballina. The Ballina Jockey Club feels that it is the spiritual home of lady jockeys and is well aware of their struggles and triumphs in achieving their goals in the competitive sport of thoroughbred racing. The Lady Jockeys Racing Museum will primarily record the achievements of both Australian and New Zealand lady jockeys and will also incorporate a section to celebrate the achievements of female jockeys on the international stage. The Ballina Jockey Club is planning a major upgrade of its facilities to incorporate the museum and to ensure that it caters properly for visitors, as well as racegoers and jockeys.

It is planning to build a two-storey facility to house the Lady Jockeys Racing Museum, a restaurant, rooms for female and male jockeys, a stewards' room, a media control centre, a creche, a first-aid room, a snack bar and a room for the course veterinary surgeon. It is intended that the restaurant will provide funding for the maintenance and upkeep of the museum. It is expected that money will be generated from licence fees, admission fees and proceeds from the sale of souvenirs. The Ballina Jockey Club is seeking funding from the State and Federal governments of \$3.1 million to build the Australian Lady Jockeys Racing Museum. This outlay, however, is expected to reap many millions of dollars every year from visitors, the racing fraternity and general public who are interested in the history of horseracing.

The jockey club has considered trying to raise private equity to fund its plans but this is not a feasible option given that the land on which the racetrack and facilities are built is owned by the Crown and leased by the Ballina Jockey Club. The Ballina Jockey Club is a major contributor to the region's economy, injecting approximately \$25 million into the local economy each year and providing dozens of jobs. This is expected to increase significantly with the development of the complex that will house the Lady Jockeys Racing Museum. I urge the New South Wales Labor Government to support projects such as this in regional New South Wales. Premier Keneally talks about ensuring that New South Wales is regarded as the number one State in Australia for business and tourism. Here is a project that can deliver both those benefits to a regional centre.

Investing in the Lady Jockeys Racing Museum will create short- and long-term employment, attract tourists and contribute to the local economy. The creation of this museum is a vision of the Ballina Jockey Club that will be recognised on a national and an international level. This is a project that needs the backing of the New South Wales Government. So I ask Premier Keneally and her racing Minister, Kevin Greene, to have a punt. Unlike a horse race, this project is a sure bet—you cannot lose. I look forward to their support for this worthy project. I am delighted that the Minister for Tourism is at the table and I am sure that, from a tourism perspective, she would support such an exciting project that seeks to honour the great contribution that lady jockeys have made to thoroughbred racing.

Ms JODI MCKAY (Newcastle—Minister for Tourism, Minister for the Hunter, Minister for Science and Medical Research, and Minister for Women) [10.51 a.m.]: I thank the member for Ballina for bringing this matter to the attention of the House. Before I comment from a tourism perspective, it is important to remind the member that I am also the Minister for Women so this issue is relevant to another of my portfolio responsibilities. There is still a gender imbalance in many sectors and racing is certainly one of them, despite the advancements that women have made. I commend the Ballina Jockey Club for honouring the contribution of female jockeys and for developing a museum to acknowledge women. It is a great idea that has great tourism potential. I am sure that the Minister for Gaming and Racing will be happy to hear about this proposal.

MARY IMMACULATE PRIMARY SCHOOL 500 STEPS TO SCHOOL PROGRAM

Mr NINOS KHOSHABA (Smithfield) [10.52 a.m.]: Obesity has now overtaken smoking as the leading cause of premature death and illness in Australia. Recent statistics suggest that more than 25 per cent of Australian children are overweight or obese. It is with that in mind that I inform the House of a great initiative undertaken by Fairfield City Council and Mary Immaculate Primary School to tackle the problem of child obesity. I had the privilege of joining both councillors and the school community at the recent launch of the 500 Steps to School program. The 500 Steps to School program is an initiative that seeks to reintroduce walking as a key means of getting to and from school. The program aims to reduce the number of motor vehicles used to transport children, as having more motor vehicles on our roads creates traffic congestion and impedes pedestrian safety.

In essence, the program will build strong community links in an attempt to address traffic congestion, road safety and to remind us of our past walking habits. In initiating the program, students from Mary

Immaculate Primary School have marked with flags 500 steps from their school in north, south, east, and west directions. Throughout the school year students, accompanied by their parents, will walk at the very least 500 steps to and from school, thereby improving their fitness and at the same time reducing the number of cars on our roads. In a bid to promote the program, students, parents, teachers and community members gathered at Terone Park, where the children formed the phrase "500 STEPS" while a photographer in a helicopter took aerial photographs of the site. One photo will be the centrepiece of a campaign to promote the program to other schools, thereby improving health outcomes across Smithfield and the State. The program is popular with both parents and students, and this popularity is revealed through testimonials from students such as Joseph Roppolo, who said:

I think it's important because walking makes people healthy and helps them stay healthy and it is also good for the environment.

Alyssa Daniele said:

500 steps is a good idea because it improves health and it gets everyone in the mood to walk.

Samuel Laria said:

Walking is important because it makes kids fit and is good exercise and it stops people polluting the area by driving.

Carina Abseil said:

You need to be healthy and get exercise and keep moving instead of just staying home and not going out and walking.

I view this program as particularly important given that in New South Wales each school day one million children make the journey to and from school. By making that extra effort to walk instead of driving on our journeys we can improve health, community and environmental outcomes. This benefits both present and future generations, as healthy children and a healthy environment improve our quality of life—something we all strive for. I commend all those people and organisations that have assisted in making this program a success. They include: the member for Cabramatta and Mayor of Fairfield City Council, who is in the Chamber; the Principal of Mary Immaculate Primary School, Jeanne Pestana; Leading Senior Constable Martine Prosser and Fairfield police, whom I thank for their attendance and continued support; teachers from Mary Immaculate Primary School; and Road Safety Officer Alison Mortimer from Fairfield City Council. Alison also looks after Fairfield council's child restraint program.

Once a month the council pays a professional company to install baby seats for members of the community free of charge. Alison is a very hardworking and committed person who always puts the community's interests first. I also thank all the parents for supporting this program and WSFM radio station, which broadcasts live from the school. Last but not least, I thank all the students for their participation. I encourage all school principals to incorporate the 500 Steps to School program in their respective schools, and I look forward to walking my children to and from school regularly.

Ms JODI MCKAY (Newcastle—Minister for Tourism, Minister for the Hunter, Minister for Science and Medical Research, and Minister for Women) [10.57 a.m.]: I thank the member for Smithfield for bringing this matter to the attention of the House. It is important to do everything we can to encourage physical activity at an early age, and the 500 Steps to School program sounds like a great way to do that. It has obviously involved a lot of work by many organisations, as outlined by the member for Smithfield. I echo his congratulations and thank him for his support of this program.

LIQUOR TRADING HOURS REDUCTION

Mr MIKE BAIRD (Manly) [10.58 a.m.]: I share the determination of my community of Manly to see pubs closing earlier than they do currently. We need to change the culture not only in Manly but across this State from one where violence on our streets is seen as the norm to one where entertainment and the community lifestyle is preserved and people can safely enjoy a night out. I note that hotels are an important part of the local economy and the community lifestyle that we enjoy, particularly in Manly. Revelations about the influence of donations and lobbyists have been a regular feature of this debate, and this has fuelled community cynicism. I understand that.

In my inaugural speech I said proudly that I would always put my community first and that it would guide every step that I made in this Chamber. The community certainly guides every step of my working life as

I try to represent it, and I speak for it, first and foremost, on this matter. I also spoke strongly about donation reform. That is why I am proud that the Leader of the Opposition, Barry O'Farrell, has put forward a detailed, comprehensive campaign finance reform package. Should the Coalition be elected, changes will be made to address much of the community cynicism that has fuelled not just this debate but also other debates across various issues. Under Barry O'Farrell, things will change.

Today I ask the industry and the Government to listen to what my community has to say about pub closing times. The community has put forward a petition, which has been supported across the political spectrum. The petition calls for support for the joint effort of Manly police and Manly council to require pubs to cease serving alcohol no later than 2.00 a.m. and to close no later than 2.30 a.m. This follows a trial that was undertaken about 15 or 16 months ago for three or four months, which resulted in a plummet in assault rates. We want to return to that position and see the rates of assaults continue to fall in a dramatic fashion. The petition was initiated by committee member Richard Hewitt and Tim Fiddes, and it is backed by my good friend the Mayor of Manly, Jean Hay, and Greens, Labor and Independent councillors Cathy Griffin, Craig Whitting and Peter Macdonald.

The Manly Safety Committee meeting was told last week that the Government's latest initiative, the Manly Community Safety Partnership Committee, has fizzled. The Minister launched the Manly Community Safety Partnership Committee in the Corso with much fanfare for Gaming and Racing, but a Manly Precinct Liquor Accord has replaced it. The meeting was called at very short notice with no agenda and no plan and the council was asked by the Government to adhere to actions that it had been implementing already—in fact, many of them have been in place for many years.

Yesterday I spoke on the Appropriation (Budget Variations) Bill 2010. The Government has asked for an additional \$1.48 billion it has spent outside the budget, and part of that amount, \$444,000, is for its Hassle Free Nights campaign, with big glossy brochures and postcards about the Manly Precinct Liquor Accord. But they are token measures that do not address the real issues. There is silence in relation to closing times. Indeed, a closing time of 3.00 a.m. has been recommended, which is not what the community wants. The community wants a 2.00 a.m. finish for the serving of alcohol and a 2.30 a.m. closing time. We do not need token brochures at taxpayers' expense to make it look as though the Government is doing something about closing times when it is doing very little. There is nothing new in this campaign that has not been done in the Manly community for a considerable period, and we are sick to death of the spin that goes with it.

The police have asked for the changes and the council and all political persuasions support them. We are asking the Government to listen to what the community is saying. In the past year there has been a reduction in assaults, but the dramatic reduction during the trial of the earlier closing time is what we want to replicate. We say give it 12 months to see if that has the sort of impact in the community that we want to see. We also note that a section 79 submission was put in a year ago and that we are yet to see any action from the department. I acknowledge that there are good local hoteliers and that, for the most part, they listen to the community at every opportunity. Some of the local hotels have new ownership. Here is an opportunity for them to join in and listen to what the community is saying.

Last Sunday the Leader of the Opposition announced the Making Our Streets Safe Again plan. We support strengthening existing move-on powers, introducing a new offence of drunk and disorderly conduct and piloting sobering-up centres. But is the Government listening to the community? We have put forward some practical plans and, in the case of Manly, we are calling for earlier closing times to supplement all the initiatives that are underway. I believe that will deliver real community outcomes.

NEWCASTLE CITY DEVELOPMENT

Ms JODI McKAY (Newcastle—Minister for Tourism, Minister for the Hunter, Minister for Science and Medical Research, and Minister for Women) [11.03 a.m.]: Today I update the House on the revitalisation of Newcastle. That is important, particularly given that Newcastle is the second city of New South Wales. The Lower Hunter Regional Strategy, released a couple of years ago by the New South Wales Government, confirmed Newcastle as the regional city for the Hunter region. It is important that the Government makes a concerted effort to ensure that the city reflects its status as the second city of New South Wales.

A number of initiatives have been fulfilled out of the Hunter Development Corporation's City Centre Renewal report, which I instigated. It is an important blueprint for the revitalisation of Newcastle over the next 10 to 15 years. It is important to acknowledge that that will not happen overnight; a lot of work has to be done to

make sure that we work together as a community to bring about change within the central business district. The Hunter Development Corporation's renewal report outlines a number of capitalist projects, which the Government has been delivering.

Acknowledging the significant tourism potential of the cruise industry in the broader Hunter region, the New South Wales Government recently invested around \$2.55 million in a temporary cruise terminal at Dyke Point, and 15 cruise ships have been confirmed for Newcastle over the next 12 months. Cruise Hunter, which operates out of the Port of Newcastle, has played an enormous role in attracting those ships, but the investment that this Government has made has given a reason for cruise ships to want to come to the city. Carnival also has confirmed that it will be locating a cruise ship within the Port of Newcastle for three years, even though its original commitment was for six months.

Another catalyst project is an investment in the city centre by the University of Newcastle. The university has committed to building an education campus and bringing about 7,500 students and 1,000 staff into the central business district over the next 10 years. The Government has supported that effort by handing over a piece of land to the university worth about \$4 million. Expressions of interest closed for that piece of land last week. We were very pleased with the response as 15 expressions of interest were received, and they are being evaluated. The first stage of the education precinct, around 2,500 students, will be brought into the inner city.

Also, we have handed over Wickham School and \$1.6 million to the University of Newcastle. Wickham School is an historic building, whose ownership rested with Newcastle council. We want to build a dedicated education precinct and Wickham School will be part of it. We have handed over money also for Renew Newcastle, a wonderful initiative that Marcus Westbury started, which is using some of the 90 or so derelict buildings in the Newcastle central business district. Those buildings needed revitalising and a new use and now they are being utilised for cultural and art purposes.

We have handed over some money to Newcastle City Council for the employment of an economic development manager, and we are very keen to see that position filled. I am hopeful also that in the budget we will see some money for a new justice precinct, because the operation of core facilities in Newcastle East is no longer appropriate and we need a new court facility within Newcastle. We also have the Coastal Master Plan, which is on public display for another couple of days, and I encourage residents to have their say on that. It is the blueprint for the development of 11 kilometres of coast from Stockton through to Merewether, with infrastructure, green space, parking, and pedestrian and cycle facilities. The master plan is also about supporting our surf clubs.

This week Surf House was demolished. That building has been derelict for around 10 years and it is fantastic that work has now started on it. I am hopeful also that we will soon see the demolition of the Newcastle Bowling Club, which is also derelict. The Government has completed the demolition of the round building on the James Fletcher site—another commitment from this Government to the city of Newcastle.

INDIGENOUS SUPPORT OFFICERS

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE (Bega) [11.08 a.m.]: Today I speak on a matter of significant importance for not only Bega High School but also other schools on the far South Coast, and it relates to the appointment of indigenous support officers in schools. For many months now the Bega High School Parents and Citizens Association has lobbied the education Minister to address the inequality around funding for the appointment of a full-time indigenous support officer at the school. Bega High School currently has about 51 Aboriginal students at the school, which, of course, can fluctuate from year to year. Anywhere between 49 and 56 Aboriginal students meet the eligibility requirements for these positions at the school.

What is disappointing is that it seems that the methodology of the Department of Education and Training in using a cap is restricting the availability of funding for such a position at Bega High School. The appointment of an indigenous support officer is critical for the students at the school because some obvious and very serious consequences flow from not having an officer appointed. Bega High School parents and citizens association has written to the Minister for Education and Training on a number of occasions, but the response to date has been somewhat disappointing. The parents and citizens association stated:

We are in no doubt as to the positive difference that the Indigenous Support Officer, Mark Rose, is making to the performance of our Indigenous students. It is our understanding that the results for the students in Year 7-9 are showing improvements and we invite you to contact the school directly for more detailed information. Yet the challenges remain significant given the high mobility and attendance patterns associated with these students. If we were to lose this position, then the situation can only deteriorate which is unacceptable to our school and the Bega community.

We know from submissions to the NSW Government's Inquiry Into Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage in NSW that "... every additional year of education also reduces the risk of Aboriginal infant mortality by 7-10%" ... Furthermore, the NSW Government has given a commitment to better support Aboriginal children and families following Justice Wood's report of the Inquiry into Child Protection in NSW.

I am very keen to see the Minister for Education and Training take note of the parents and citizens association and the school community and ensure the appointment of a full-time indigenous support officer at the school. That appointment is vital for these students. The indigenous support officer goes beyond the call of duty in understanding the challenges and difficulties faced by indigenous families and students. The officer follows up students who are not attending school or who are experiencing problems within the school environment. The Minister must address this issue and ensure that funding is made available for this full-time position. Under the current funding arrangements the school has been able to scrape by using a piecemeal approach. That situation is no longer tenable. The "New South Wales Interagency Plan to Tackle Child Sexual Assault in Aboriginal Communities" is an important report because it identifies a number of key recommendations for the education sector. It points out the importance of a focus on Aboriginal education outcomes and attendance and states:

This will have the dual benefit of ensuring the healthy development and wellbeing of Aboriginal children, and providing a safe environment for children in which abuse and neglect can be detected and addressed more effectively.

Not having these indigenous officer support positions in schools is having a serious impact on Aboriginal children on the far South Coast. I hope that the Minister will see fit to overturn the strict methodology used in the department with regard to the cap. It is important to acknowledge the Bega High School parents and citizens association for the work it is doing to rectify this situation. Concerns have also been raised in Eden about such appointments. It is vital that the Minister respond and make the funding for the position available as of the middle of this year so that the school has this vitally important officer available for its 51 indigenous students.

BLACKTOWN YOUTH ACTIVITIES

Mr PAUL GIBSON (Blacktown) [11.13 a.m.]: I would like to speak about a group of people in my electorate of Blacktown. We all want to live in a city where young people are safe, healthy, happy and included in all aspects of social, civil and economic life. This is the vision of a Blacktown group called Com4Unity, and its motto is "Connecting our minds 4 unity". The group has already had a positive impact on the Blacktown area. Blacktown police have had a significant presence in Blacktown Westpoint Shopping Centre and the railway station throughout 2008-09, monitoring the large numbers of young people who gather there. However, it was determined that that commitment of resources could not be sustained indefinitely. As a result, the police engaged community elders to talk with the young people and security guards to develop a strategy to reduce the incidence of crime.

Under the direction of Detective Superintendent Mark Wright, who has done a wonderful job, officers from the Blacktown Local Area Command gathered together a number of non-government organisations, including senior management representatives of the Westpoint Shopping Centre. The target was young people in and around the centre and the Blacktown railway station. The first meeting was held in September 2009 and an action plan was drawn up and implemented. The group engaged with more than 1,500 young people in Blacktown over a short period to discuss what the young people wanted in the area and to develop an understanding of why they were hanging around the station and the shopping centre. A meeting was convened in November 2009 at which the data collected was discussed and a plan was developed. A meeting was held in December 2009 to review the data collected by the youth workers and volunteers and a strategy was developed.

Young people aged 12 to 24 years are significant consumers and regularly use the shopping centre. However, they are often perceived as a problem group and are targeted by security guards. Young people gather at shopping centres for a range of reasons, including accessing entertainment, attending movies, playing arcade games, engaging in low-cost recreation and buying from fast food outlets. They are also a meeting place and a venue for youth-specific shopping. Unfortunately, conflict often arises. Detective Superintendent Wright convened a group, including Breakthrough Church, representatives of the Westpoint Shopping Centre, Father Chris Riley's Youth Off the Streets, Rotary International, the NSW Police, SydWest Multicultural Services Incorporated, Blacktown City Council, Human Services NSW, Marist Youth Care and Hillsong City Care.

Together they chose a group of people and with the help of Marist Youth Care they gave them a chance by putting them through a course at the shopping centre. As part of the project, Marist Youth Care, in partnership with Bridgeworks Employment and Training, has been delivering a retail operation course for 14 young people. The course, which has been very successful, includes the development of skills in customer

service, advising customers on products, cash handling and using cash registers. On completion of the course, participants receive a statement of attainment. It was with pleasure that I presented the 14 young people who undertook the course with their certificates of attainment in mid-April.

Blacktown today is home to people from a myriad of cultures. Blacktown has the largest number of refugees, including many Sudanese, settled in any New South Wales city. In fact, of the local Sudanese residents 48 per cent are under 19 years of age and 74 per cent are under 29 years of age. Blacktown local government area also has the highest proportion of indigenous people in the State. We must do more than has been done in the past to get on top of these problems and to ensure that young people get the best opportunities available. Detective Superintendent Mark Wright is not only a wonderful policeman but also a fine human being. He has done a fabulous job in addressing this issue.

Six months to 12 months ago the shopping centre was intimidating on a Thursday night or a Saturday. However, because of what the Com4Unity group has done it is now a pleasure to go there. All many of these young people need is a bit of encouragement and an opportunity. Those opportunities mean the difference between a young person going off the rails or having a good and decent life. I commend Detective Superintendent Wright and everyone else involved in this project.

MEN'S SHEDS

Mr RICHARD TORBAY (Northern Tablelands—Speaker) [11.18 a.m.]: One of the most positive aspects of the Men's Shed movement in Australia is that it is not run by well-intentioned agencies but by the men themselves. It began as a way of tackling some of the well-known disorders of our time: depression, social isolation, disengagement and poor health management in older men. It is achieving well beyond those original aspirations. Four Men's Sheds have been established in my Northern Tablelands electorate, at Armidale, Inverell, Glen Innes and Warialda. Although each group is autonomous, they have features in common. The operation of the sheds involves learning or practising skills such as woodworking, welding, concrete work and computing. They all contribute to the community and have a strong social component.

Shed members have told me that regular smokos, long lunches and time for a yarn are essential elements. The Armidale Men's Shed runs a self-sustaining business, a training organisation and a social club, and it also allows women to be involved in a session one afternoon a week. It began when a local timber and joinery business, Col Harris Timbers, was up for sale three years ago. Former academic and regional economist Roy Powell and a group of local men decided to take over the business and its large industrial premises to start the shed. They continue to operate the timber and joinery business to fund their operations, which include training men in these crafts. Some funding has recently been received to provide training for a group of men with moderate disability.

Most of the 75 members are men who have retired or are semi-retired. They come with a wide range of skills and backgrounds, and from their ranks six instructors now teach newcomers how to operate the equipment at the workshop. The men work on their own projects and also undertake repairs and community work such as mending and making toys for preschools and the local toy library, and repairing furniture for charity groups and people in need. The shed is building its social and men's health program around the weekly lunch for members and visitors. There are regular sessions provided by health workers on issues such as diet and better health practices and the men are offered access to the Pit Stop program.

The Inverell group started its Men's Shed in an old wool store in the town's industrial estate in 2008. Three mental health workers, Carol Mitchell, Patsy Armstrong and Rhonda Davis, and TAFE teacher Deb McMahon were behind the move because of their concern with the level of depression in many older men in the community. It took off very quickly and the shed, which operates on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings, has been an outstanding success with 44 members involved. The men can learn and pursue woodworking, metalwork and concrete work with member supervisors showing them the ropes. Some men also visit the shed each session to play cards, read the papers and have a chat over a cup of tea. Members support community organisations by making toys, undertaking repairs and carrying out other work as requested.

In Glen Innes the local Lions Club started the Men's Shed by calling a meeting. The response was enthusiastic and 77 members have joined up since it began. The Glen Innes Severn Council provides a space, which the shed group uses on Tuesdays and Thursdays. They also undertake woodworking, learn about computers, help local charities with repair work on donated items and have even assisted with building sets for a local arts council production. The demand is so high they are now looking to establish a larger purpose-built workshop at the Glen Innes Showground.

Warialda's Community Men's Shed was also set up three years ago. It shares premises with automotive study students from the local high school, with eight members meeting regularly on Tuesdays. The shed activities are auspiced by the Gwydir Shire Council and the men have produced park benches, mobile planter boxes for the aged care unit at the local hospital, bat roosting boxes for the local Catchment Management Authority, and barbecue tables for the school and in the central business district. They have made benches for the workshop for the high school students and are making tourist signs around the shire. Their work is in such demand from the private sector that they have become virtually self-supporting.

This brief sketch of the Men's Shed activities in my electorate does not cover the full extent of the activities and the involvement of service clubs, councils, health workers and community members. But one aspect is absolutely clear—the sheds are achieving well beyond their original purpose of engaging men who are still active, resourceful and skilful and who can and do make a great contribution to their communities.

ONCOLOGY SERVICES

Mr JOHN TURNER (Myall Lakes) [11.23 a.m.]: I discuss the need for oncology services on a permanent basis and for enhancement of oncology treatments in the Manning-Great Lakes region. The region needs these improvements particularly to be located in the Manning Rural Referral Hospital at Taree. The area includes the city of Taree and the towns and villages of Forster, Tuncurry, Nabiac, Krambach, Bulahdelah, Hallidays Point, Old Bar, Cundletown, Wingham and Mount George, and it certainly feeds into Gloucester in the electorate of my colleague the member for Upper Hunter. The area has one of the biggest aged populations in New South Wales and accordingly improved cancer treatment services are essential. I note the "Tackling Cancer with Radiotherapy" report of the Audit Office of New South Wales released in mid-2009 mentioned that significant improvements are needed when providing radiotherapy services to combat the rising incidence of cancer. In particular, that report also refers to strategic placement of radiotherapy services, including in the Hunter-New England area.

Many cancer sufferers in the Great Lakes area, particularly the elderly, have to travel for treatment, with many facing out-of-pocket expenses or perhaps having to forgo treatment. Unfortunately, too often constituents inform me of cancelled or repeatedly delayed appointments for oncology services. Members should bear in mind that all we have at the moment is an outreach service from Newcastle providing 45 visits a year. Even the Minister for Health has admitted there have been some delays in relation to that service. In a recent letter to me, dated 6 May 2010, she said there had been some impact on service delivery to the Manning Rural Referral Hospital in relation to oncology services and advised that an advanced trainee has been assigned to assist the medical oncologists. As I mentioned, there are only 45 visits a year. Mrs Pam Sutherland is one of the sufferers who wrote to me about how upset she is with the situation. She said:

Since I was first diagnosed I have been forced to travel to Newcastle many times for follow up treatment and to access oncology specialists.

The travel when one is not feeling well is an added and unwelcome burden and I feel country patients deserve better.

I agree with her. I know there is difficulty in having services on every street corner but the fact is that this is a large regional area and, although linear accelerators are being installed at Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour, I am somewhat aggrieved that there is a "hole in the middle" because a fifth linear accelerator is to be commissioned at the Calvary Mater Hospital in Newcastle. We should be looking to put one in Taree. I notice that the latest issue of *Health Matters* from Hunter New England Area Health Service acknowledges what some of the people in my electorate are going through. The article is in relation to advanced cancer care at Tamworth. It states:

It's a lonely experience to have to leave home when you're so sick, and having cancer is not a cheap experience particularly if you have to travel for treatment.

That happens every day in my electorate with people who have to travel down to Newcastle or up to Port Macquarie. The bureaucrats seem to lose their orientation when looking at the map. It is 160 kilometres from my electorate to Newcastle and about 105 kilometres up to Port Macquarie. That is a great deal of travel when people are not feeling well and up to travelling. I seek the Government's further input into providing proper oncology services. The letter I received from the Minister earlier this month says that Dr Nigel Lyons, the Chief Executive of the Hunter New England Area Health Service, who wrote the article in *Health Matters*, "is pleased to advise of the approaching commissioning of a fifth Linear Accelerator at the Calvary Mater Newcastle Hospital". The letter goes on to say:

This additional Linear Accelerator will greatly enhance radiotherapy services for people living in the Newcastle and the Great Lakes-Manning region.

The fact that Newcastle and the Great Lakes-Manning region can be lumped together in one sentence is quite astounding. As I said, the distance between those two communities is 160 kilometres. It is time the Government looked sympathetically at the needs of the Great –Lakes-Manning area and the overflow into the Gloucester area and provided the services people need. It is a very debilitating and worrying time for cancer sufferers. I have met with the Cancer Council and they have great concerns about the level of services that are being provided. It is not good enough in this day and age that people suffering anxiety as a result of having cancer can only access an outreach clinic in which an advanced trainee is helping out.

ST GEORGE AND SUTHERLAND MEDICAL RESEARCH FOUNDATION

Ms CHERIE BURTON (Kogarah) [11.28 a.m.]: I acknowledge and place on the record my support for a unique local initiative in the St George community. In 2010 the *St George and Sutherland Shire Leader* will celebrate its fiftieth anniversary. This is a significant milestone for the newspaper, which is one of Australia's biggest and most widely read publications, with a twice weekly, Tuesday and Thursday, circulation of more than 150,000 copies. To celebrate its fiftieth birthday milestone the newspaper has announced that it will run a 12-month appeal to raise \$750,000 for medical research projects in the St George and Sutherland shire communities. The funds raised will be directed in full to the St George and Sutherland Medical Research Foundation. The foundation will use the money raised through the appeal to fund new research projects at St George Hospital.

St George Hospital is one of the leading hospitals in New South Wales. It serves the growing population of St George and Sutherland shire and is a primary teaching hospital of the University of New South Wales. It is also one of the State's primary trauma units. The St George and Sutherland Medical Research Foundation was established in August 2007 with the financial assistance of St George Bank. As part of the bank's longstanding and ongoing support of the St George community the foundation's small administrative office is hosted and funded by the bank. I am extremely grateful to the bank's chief executive, Greg Bartlett, for his recognition of the importance of this community initiative.

The foundation is independent and not for profit and is managed by a dedicated board made up of senior medical staff and local community leaders. The chairman of the board, Professor John Edmond, and his board executive, Professor George Skowronski, Ian Cook, Kate Moore and Dr Greg Davis, have worked tirelessly over the past three years to get the new foundation up and running. The foundation supports medical research projects in areas such as emergency medicine and trauma, cancer, women's health, gut and liver disease and immunity and infection. So far the foundation has directly funded \$250,000 in new research projects at St George Hospital, received funding applications totalling more than \$1.3 million, provided start-up funding for 10 new research projects and provided a seed grant to Dr Phil Dinning that has led to his receiving national funding of \$500,000 for the continuation of his project.

The *St George and Sutherland Shire Leader's* fiftieth anniversary appeal for medical research was announced at the foundation's third annual reception at New South Wales Government House on Friday 23 April. This reception was hosted by the New South Wales Premier, the Hon. Kristina Keneally, and was attended by guests of both the foundation and the *St George and Sutherland Shire Leader* newspaper. The original target of the appeal was to raise \$500,000 but during the reception a total of \$200,000 was pledged to the appeal, and this led the General Manager of Fairfax Community Newspapers, Mr Peter Christopher, to announce the increase of the appeal target to \$750,000. Mr Brian McCarthy, the Managing Director of Fairfax Newspapers, supported this appeal increase on the night. Also at the reception the Premier kicked off proceedings by announcing a donation of \$20,000.

Following the reception the *St George and Sutherland Shire Leader* published a four-page wrap of its Thursday edition to launch the appeal to the St George and Sutherland communities. This launch has seen \$80,000 donated to the appeal by the local community. I express my support for this appeal and for the St George and Sutherland Medical Research Foundation and my thanks to the local St George and Sutherland shire communities for their generosity.

I take this opportunity to say also that it has been a great honour to be a member of the board since its inception. Local clinicians, supported by the local community and local business, put it together. It is fantastic to see our local newspaper, the *St George and Sutherland Shire Leader*, get behind such an important initiative. St George Hospital never had a foundation before. It started from scratch and it has been magnificent to watch over this time how it has become such a wonderful organisation and how it has assisted people to get funding for its research, which is greatly needed into all types of diseases. It is a great honour for me to be the local member but it is also a great honour for me to be a part of such a worthwhile cause.

Ms LYLEA McMAHON (Shellharbour—Parliamentary Secretary) [11.33 a.m.]: I commend the member for Kogarah for bringing to the attention of the House both the fiftieth anniversary of the *St George and Sutherland Shire Leader* and the great record that the St George and Sutherland Medical Research Foundation has in raising funds for medical research. The member for Kogarah is a passionate advocate for the St George and Sutherland Medical Research Foundation and a committed fundraiser for that foundation. I commend her for her activities and for bringing the foundation to the attention of the House.

TRIBUTE TO ROSEMARY CAMPBELL

Mr DARYL MAGUIRE (Wagga Wagga) [11.34 a.m.]: In my working life I have met many people whom I genuinely like and admire. Today I pay tribute to an outstanding individual, Ms Rosemary Campbell, director of TAFE New South Wales, Riverina Institute. Rosemary Campbell has announced that she will be leaving her position on 12 July and I felt it appropriate that I express to the House my appreciation of the efforts Rosemary Campbell has made on behalf of our community since she was appointed in 1997 as the institute's director. I had the great honour of nominating Rosemary Campbell for the meritorious service in public education and training award. In part, the nomination read:

Her vision of the social and economic role of Technical and Further Education in society has led to significant changes in the way TAFE NSW Riverina Institute relates to, and serves, its communities. As the educational leader of the organisation she has driven changes which have resulted in greatly increased support for, and involvement in, technical education and training by industry and the communities across the Riverina and Murray regions. To achieve the current level of enthusiasm for, and the take-up of, education and training has required considerable effort and skill to achieve the cultural changes required in the way TAFE Institute staff see their role as well as the way students and employers view the organisation.

Whilst it is reasonable to expect all educational leaders to possess drive and lead change in their organisation and the attitudes of the communities it serves, I believe Ms Campbell's achievements demonstrate a level of commitment and drive which go well beyond the ordinary.

Her meritorious contributions can be grouped into four categories, namely:

1. strong collaboration with the Secondary and Tertiary education sectors
2. strengthening links with employers and delivering innovative off-Campus programs
3. effecting cultural change within the Institute, making staff more outward looking
4. establishing a system for maintaining contact with alumni and having them provide advice to, and become role models for, current students.

Again, all of the above are strategies that should be part of a Chief Executive Officer's tool kit. However, what makes Rosemary Campbell's contribution to public education outstanding, particularly through the strategies, is the fact that she was an initiator of many of these strategies.

Rosemary Campbell did receive acknowledgement with a Meritorious Service to Public Education and Training Award in 2008. The citation records part of what I have said:

Rosemary Campbell has demonstrated exceptional leadership of the TAFE NSW—Riverina Institute over the past eleven (11) years.

It noted her outstanding contributions and named them. It said:

She combines invaluable leadership skills with the unique ability to nurture the talents of others and empower them to deliver excellent educational outcomes.

She has been a champion for the education sector and our community of Wagga Wagga and the Riverina. In the *Daily Advertiser*, which broke the news and, dare I say, shocked many about Rosemary's departure, she said:

But I have things I want to do which are not possible while I am in such an all-absorbing position, and many miles to ride before I sleep.

It is well known that Rosemary had some health challenges, which she overcame to the relief of us all. She is a keen cyclist and, with her husband, Paul Gordon Smith, I imagine Rosemary will be continuing her passion of riding rail trails and visiting interesting places where she has not been. She has had an interesting career. She began her career in Victoria as a high school teacher and has worked her way to the top of the TAFE organisation, delivering wonderful outcomes for students. She has had a passion for indigenous studies and indigenous students in particular. As a regular participant at TAFE functions, I have seen the results of that hard

work, where there is an increase in indigenous students uptake, participation and outstanding results. I attribute part of that success to Rosemary Campbell. In wishing Rosemary and Paul Gordon Smith well, I say to them: I wish you well on the ride on the road of life now and in the future, in good health and happiness.

Ms LYLEA McMAHON (Shellharbour—Parliamentary Secretary) [11.39 a.m.]: I thank the member for Wagga Wagga for bringing to the attention of the House the amazing life contribution of Rosemary Campbell to public education and, in particular, her role as Riverina TAFE institute director. TAFE education leaders perform important work in our local communities and, in particular, in regional communities. Rosemary Campbell has such an exceptional public service record that it is worthy of note in this House prior to her retirement. I wish her all the best.

WARATAH WEST PUBLIC SCHOOL

Ms SONIA HORNERY (Wallsend) [11.40 a.m.]: Nestled in a quiet suburban street, deceptively close to the city centre and in the shadow of bushland, is the lovely Waratah West Public School. It is a typical Aussie school setting with wattle and gum trees. Last year the school celebrated 50 years of proud public education. Waratah West Public School is a small school that has a smidge fewer than 80 students. The school is worthy of note not only for its size but also for other reasons. Waratah West Public School has had its share of adversity but, typically, it has not only survived its ordeals—it has thrived. The strength, determination and closeness of the school community have been reflected in recent events.

At the commencement of the school year the school was threatened with the imminent loss of one of its four teachers because of the rigid staffing formula due to a slight decline in student numbers. That would have meant the loss of one-quarter of the teaching population to a school already reeling from having eight principals at the helm over just two years, coupled with the unexpected death of one of those principals, causing feelings of grief and loss, and further disruption and instability to students and staff. After vigorous lobbying from the school community there was a brief respite when the department advised it would re-examine the situation. However, it soon confirmed that Waratah West Public School would lose one of its four teachers at the commencement of term two, after Easter, and that, alas, the principal would have to make Sophie's choice of which teacher the school would lose, leaving students with no time to farewell the teacher.

So the kids at Waratah West will now be forced into composite classes covering three levels. Given that the school has a population of over 30 per cent of Aboriginal students, a 30 per cent mobility rate, and poor results in State and national tests, it hardly seemed fair to rob the kids of a teacher. After this devastating news was flagged it did not seem as though there was any further negotiation. But that did not deter the hardy souls in the school community, including staff, students, Teachers Federation representatives, parents, families and friends, all of whom conducted a vigorous and proactive campaign to have a teacher retained in that position. Mr Ian McGregor, a parent at the school, deserves special credit for his efforts to retain the teacher. The campaign finally resulted in what was described in the local media as an eleventh hour reprieve when the New South Wales Government made the right and proper decision to allow the school to retain the extra classroom teacher.

The community campaign has provided an opportunity to highlight some of the school's specific needs and its unique demography to the rest of the community and to the Department of Education and Training. I inform members in this place that I made many phone calls to many bureaucrats, I made many visits to the school, and I had many discussions with the ministry before I could convince them that we were disadvantaging our already disadvantaged children by removing a teacher. I wanted a guarantee that a teacher would be returned to Waratah West. The community and I have embarked on an awareness campaign to enlist volunteers for the school for the breakfast program and for canteen assistants.

It is common knowledge that our disadvantaged schools struggle to get community volunteers, yet these kids need nurturing so much more than their middle-class counterparts. I am proud to have Waratah West Public School in my Wallsend electorate because it lives up to the motto, "Whatever you do, do well." I know that one day the students at Waratah West will thank the small, but active troop of parents and unionists who had the guts to stand up for them publicly.

Ms LYLEA McMAHON (Shellharbour—Parliamentary Secretary) [11.45 a.m.]: I congratulate the hardworking member for Wallsend on her community campaign and on her representations on behalf of the students, parents and teachers of Waratah West Public School. I congratulate her on her success and the success of the community in retaining that additional teacher. I look forward to the member reporting to the House on the future successful outcomes of students at that school.

GOULBURN ELECTORATE GAS SUPPLY

Ms PRU GOWARD (Goulburn) [11.46 a.m.]: In the early hours of 6 May many residents in the Bowral, Mittagong, Colo Vale and Burradoo areas in my electorate had a rude awakening. At around 2.30 a.m. telephones around the area beeped, hummed and buzzed and, when answered, emitted an ear-piercing heehaw sound that was designed to terrify. All members would be aware that a telephone call in the middle of the night is renowned for heralding bad news unless, of course, it is the birth of a baby. This time it was no exception. After the siren had sounded a recorded voice informed residents that, due to a gas outage, they should turn off their gas supply at the mains—at 2.30 a.m. That announcement affected more than 9,000 homes and businesses and was the start of up to five days without gas due to a failure at a pressure regulating station on Kangaloon Road in Bowral. On Friday night Bowral hospital was reconnected, as were a couple of nursing homes. Others were not so fortunate.

With a minimum temperature of three degrees recorded on Friday, residents, fresh from cold showers, huddled around hastily bought electric heaters. While there is an exciting element to this saga of hunkering down and making do, for many, such as the elderly or infirm, it was not a pleasant time, nor was it exciting or entertaining for business owners, especially restaurants, cafes and takeaway shops, some of which had no option other than to shut their front doors until the gas was switched back on. Tourists were turned away. The provision of information was so poor that rumours and fears spread rapidly. Who can blame anyone after a siren had been sounded in the area at 2.30 a.m. Singapore-owned company Jemena is the gas distributor to the Southern Highlands area. I understand that the company has no maintenance staff in New South Wales, so technicians were flown from Victoria to deal with the crisis.

Other local plumbers offered to help but were denied the possibility of doing so. They were then joined in the field by hundreds of representatives from the New South Wales Police Force, New South Wales Fire Brigades, the Rural Fire Service [RFS] and the State Emergency Services [SES], who established a control centre at Wingecarribee Shire Council chambers in Moss Vale and formed the local management community. SES and RFS workers helped by doorknocking residents to ensure that everyone knew what was going on and that all gas facilities were switched off. No doubt this problem cost the State, local businesses and residents hundreds of thousands of dollars and inconvenience—and probably more. I have written to the managing director of Jemena, Mr Paul Adams, to represent residents' concerns, not the least of which is a fear that this failure occurred due to a lack of maintenance, and that the outage was the start of a slippery slope towards regular gas failures.

They might have been stoic in the face of a single incident in the Southern Highlands, but I very much doubt whether their stoicism would endure a repeat. I have no message for the troubled residents who want to know whether such a gas outage will be reprised. I would appreciate some information from someone. I can only assume that the Minister similarly is being kept in the dark. To add insult to injury, currently residents and businesses are receiving gas bills from AGL that include a supply charge that covers the period of four or five days when no gas was supplied. I believe that allowances should be made for this and I would be grateful for a show of support from the Minister for Energy. The lesson of the story for public administration in New South Wales is also clear: Domestic utility contracts must include timely emergency responses.

Locals are at least as capable as contractors brought in from Melbourne of restoring gas supplies. I was concerned that Jemena did not contact my office to ensure that my staff and I knew the circumstances of the gas failure to enable us to advise constituents when they rang—and everyone in this place would be aware that inevitably they do. It seems to me that, as part of the emergency arrangements, people in positions such as ours should be advised about what is going on. If the Minister for Energy supports an energy supply that is not local, the moral of the story is that the least he could do is insist on communication, and I hope remuneration, for all the hours spent by members of the local emergency management committee in saving people in the Southern Highlands from further disruption.

BUSH TUCKER DAY, TRUNDLE

AUTHOR PAUL WENZ

Mrs DAWN FARDELL (Dubbo) [11.51 a.m.]: I speak in the House today to recognise the enterprise and sheer ingeniousness of country people. As I travel throughout my electorate, the resilience and self-reliance of people living in regional New South Wales never ceases to amaze me. This latest observation follows a Community Economic Development Conference held at Broken Hill, at which delegates from the small town of

Trundle in my electorate spoke on their Bush Tucker Day and the benefits it provides to the township and surrounding districts of Trundle. The presentation was held in conjunction with that of Professor John Connell from the University of Sydney, who has co-written a report on "Reinventing Rural Places; the extent and impact of festivals in rural and regional Australia".

The delegates from Bush Tucker Day were rightly proud to give an overview of the festival, which is now in its twenty-third year, and outline the importance of community support in ensuring the success of this event. Indeed, many people at the conference were quite envious when they heard of the number of groups, local business houses and organisations involved in the sponsorship, coordination and running of Bush Tucker Day. This cooperation and community spirit is extremely valuable to Trundle in ensuring the longevity and success of the event. Delegates were also very generous in sharing with other delegates the keys to raising valuable funds for local and national charities and organisations.

Situated approximately 65 kilometres north-west of Parkes, Trundle has a population of 600 people. It is a rural community, with production consisting mostly of wheat, sheep and cattle farming. It is an ideal alternative route to get away from the hustle and bustle of the Newell Highway and experience the unique Australian bush, fair dinkum Aussie hospitality and the leisurely way of doing things. The heritage-listed Trundle Hotel was built in 1909 in three stages, over three years. It has two storeys, is built out of pisé and then rendered with cement. As a matter of interest, the hotel has the longest wooden verandah in Australia. Trundle is also home to the widest main street in Australia, which means motorists should not have any problems with angle parking! The twenty-third Bush Tucker Day will be held at Trundle Showground on Saturday 4 September 2010. It will provide entertainment for the whole family, including music, camp food cooking, damper tasting and old swag stories.

At the other end of the cultural spectrum we have the emerging cultural exchange between the Lachlan division of Mitchell Conservatorium of Music and Reim Conservatorium in Northern France to share the legacy of French-Australian writer Paul Wenz. Wenz memorabilia, including a century-old certificate issue for the fiftieth anniversary of Wenz and Company, the wool-buying firm co-founded by Paul Wenz's father, Emile, in Reims in 1859, was recently presented to the Forbes Historical Society's museum. Nicole Wenz, widow of one of Paul's great-nephews, Denis Wenz, gave the museum the historic certificate. Forbes-based writer Merrill Findlay, who met the Wenz family and visited many of the places associated with their famous relative during her recent sojourn in France, presented it. The certificate is of special relevance to Forbes shire, not only because of its connection to writer Paul Wenz, but also because his family purchased wool from the region up until the 1960s.

The museum is committed to perpetuating the memory of Paul Wenz through its collection and public displays. The proposed cultural exchange is a visionary way to re-establish the links between Reims and Forbes. Margaret Willmott, director of the Lachlan division of the Conservatorium of Music, will be coordinating the cultural exchange from the Australian end. She hopes to send the first three musicians from the Central West to Reims in October. The group will include a didgeridoo player. The musicians will spend three weeks in Reims as guests of the Reims conservatoire to participate in master classes and other activities in the city. A similar number of young Reims musicians will visit Australia the following year, 2012, as guests of the Mitchell Conservatorium.

For Merrill Findlay, who conceived the project with Cecile Wenz-Bolbach, a viola professor at the Reims Conservatoire, the Paul Wenz Cultural Exchange will represent the fulfilment of a long-held dream to build on the cultural legacy of a fellow writer. Amongst the gifts she presented to the museum was a collector's edition of Wenz's travel writings, published in Paris in 2009 by Jean-Paul Delamotte, who first introduced her to the work of Paul Wenz in 2002 on one of his many visits to Forbes. This publication includes several of Wenz's essays about life in Australia, including an article about building his Nanima homestead in the 1890s.

The other book presented to the museum was a first edition of *Chose D'Hier*—Things from Yesterday—published in France in 1919 and donated by Nicole Wenz. This fragile volume is a collection of Wenz's early short stories, some of which were written during the First World War when Paul and Hettie were stranded in Europe and witnessed the destruction of their beloved Reims and the horror of the Western Front. I commend the community of Trundle for its support of Bush Tucker Day. I commend also the organisers of the cultural exchange between the Lachlan division of Mitchell Conservatorium and Reim conservatorium in north France for building upon the shared legacy of French-Australian writer, Paul Wenz.

YASS POLICING

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck) [11.56 a.m.]: Earlier this year I received a letter from the Yass Chamber of Commerce signed by a cross-section of the business community. In fact, almost every

business community in Yass signed the letter. It related to vandalism in the immediate area of the Yass central business district. The business community—indeed, the entire Yass community—is of the strong view that action must be taken to improve the safety and wellbeing of the community. The author of the letter, Laurie Ann Columb from Anthony Rose Gallery in Yass, said that when she was gathering signatures it was evident to her that everyone has been affected by vandalism in some way, shape and form and businesses were concerned at the increasing cost to their businesses of that behaviour.

She said the consensus among business owners was that a proactive approach would be better than a reactive approach and they would like to see 24-hour policing in the Yass community. The letter sent to me signed by so many businesses in Yass reiterated the views expressed by Laurie Columb in her letter to me—that is, the need for more proactive policing in Yass. Business communities want to prevent this behaviour from occurring. They consider that random street patrols can achieve positive results, in the same way that random breath testing has succeeded in reducing the incidence of drink-driving. They acknowledge that adequate police resources are required to undertake this action and call on me to make representations on behalf of the people of Yass to have the local police station upgraded to a 24-hour service.

Following receipt of that letter, I wrote to all the businesses that signed the letter outlining what action I had taken to date. I wrote also to Chief Superintendent Peter Gillam from Goulburn Local Area Command highlighting the problem of vandalism and theft in Yass. In January 2010 I also wrote to Lisa Carr, the officer in charge of Yass police station, raising those concerns and asking whether it was possible to increase police patrols of the Cooma Street business precinct during the hours when the incidents usually occur. By the time I wrote to Chief Superintendent Peter Gillam, I had not yet received a reply from Lisa Carr. I said to Chief Superintendent Peter Gillam that I recognised the limits he faced on the level of policing due to the limited support received from the State Labor Government.

I reinforced the significant concern in the Yass business community about the continuing problem of vandalism and theft. I said it was important that additional resources to combat this problem be allocated for the Yass district. I have raised concerns on this matter since 2001 when the shotgun bandit, as he was known, held up the ANZ bank branch agency. Indeed, he held up a number of ANZ bank agencies. It was particularly pertinent to me because my mother was behind the counter at that time, as she owned the agency. There is nothing quite like having a family member held up with a man brandishing a sawn-off shotgun to scare the life out of you. It was at that time that I first called for 24-hour policing for Yass, and the business community of Yass is reinforcing that at local level, month in, month out. Many articles on the subject have appeared in the *Yass Tribune*, a fine publication that is truly local, from February right through to the current day.

I place on record some of the people who signed the correspondence, and the list is comprehensive. They include Yass Art and Craft Cooperative, Kidz Blitz, Yass Jewellers, Galutzi Café, Narelle's Hair, Yass Newsagency, Comur House, DJ's Family Butchery, Yass Outdoor Sports and Camping, King Charcoal Chicken, Yass Windscreens and Glass, Yass Retravision, NRMA Yass, B & G Plumbing and Hardware, Hume Dry Cleaners, Café Dolcetto, Millers Pharmacy, Yass and District Printing, Firth Furnishings, Country Charm, Australia Post, Patrick's Butchery, Yass Outdoor Power Centre, Chic Monkey, Autopro Yass, the Image Photography, Blyssful Hair Design, Yass Pharmacy, Club Polo Clothing Store, Phillip's Hair Studio, Yass Country Kitchen, Yass Computers, the Sports Shed, Jennique Hair and Beauty, Commonwealth Bank, Little Dog Bookshop, Westpac Bank, First National Bank, Liberty Café, Scissors With Style, Yass Tribune, Yass Real Estate, Maher Automotive, Firth Furnishings, Bob Roger Clothing Company. That is a comprehensive list of businesses calling for the urgent introduction of 24-hour policing. [*Time expired.*]

ST VINCENT'S PRIVATE HOSPITAL, BATHURST

Mr GERARD MARTIN (Bathurst) [12.01 p.m.]: A recent decision that has caused some consternation within the Bathurst community is the announcement by Catholic Healthcare that it will close St Vincent's Private Hospital in Bathurst with plans to redevelop the premises into an aged care facility. The decision was announced on 3 March in a press release issued by Catholic Healthcare:

After an extensive review, Catholic Healthcare announce that St Vincent's Private Hospital Bathurst cannot continue to operate viably into the future, and will close on 1 June 2010. Catholic Healthcare will convert St Vincent's Private Hospital into an aged care facility to satisfy the growing needs of the region's ageing population. St Vincent's Outreach Service will continue to provide services from its current location.

Catholic Healthcare General Manager, David Maher says: "Over the past five years St Vincent's has recorded substantial losses and requires significant capital investment to continue current services. The small size of the hospital means it cannot generate sufficient funds to meet these or ongoing capital requirements, and past reliance upon Commonwealth Government grant funding has not been able to be sustained".

The press release went on to state that after 90 years of Catholic service provision from the site, Catholic Healthcare has been desperately keen to continue the service, but it has assessed all possible options over many years, including approaching other Catholic Healthcare providers to manage the site, unfortunately, without success. St Vincent's Private Hospital, Bathurst, employs just over 100 permanent and casual staff, some of whom will have the opportunity to transfer to Catholic Healthcare locally or elsewhere in New South Wales. Of the 100 staff, more than 60 are clinical medical staff and the remainder are allied staff such as catering, maintenance, et cetera. As one could imagine, losing 100 jobs in a local health environment creates problems.

Once the decision was announced I asked Chris Rigby, chief executive officer of Catholic Healthcare, what help he wanted from the State Government. He was quite emphatic that there was nothing the State Government could do. The decision had been made to close because of the mounting losses of the hospital, the fact it was too small to be viable and was operating only 24 of its total 35 beds per day. To say that the decision was a shock to the Bathurst community would be an understatement. St Vincent's in one form or another has been part of the health infrastructure in Bathurst for over 90 years. The question that remains is how does the Bathurst community cope with this decision? A city the size of Bathurst, one of the fastest growing regional centres in Australia, needs a private healthcare system.

I am pleased that Catholic Healthcare has deferred the closure date of St Vincent's Private Hospital from 1 June to 1 September, but the decision to close remains. Since the announcement, I have been involved in a number of meetings. The Mayor of Bathurst Regional Council, Paul Toole, and I met with Carmel Tebbutt, the Minister for Health, to discuss issues and options surrounding the decision to close the hospital. The Minister gave an undertaking that the Greater Western Area Health Service through the Department of Health would provide an option to ensure Bathurst Base Hospital would be able to accommodate patients as needed. That plan is being worked on at the moment.

Recently I held a meeting with a group of stakeholders, including my Federal colleague Bob Debus, who has worked very hard on this issue, the Nurses Association of New South Wales, the local area health service senior executives, the chair of the local health advisory council and representatives of nursing staff, particularly those at St Vincent's and Bathurst Base Hospital. On 7 June we will meet again to consider a proposal that has been put forward about the effect of this decision on Bathurst Base Hospital. Clearly, and quite rightly, the State Government will not fund a private hospital.

An organisation called Day Surgery Australia, which operates in Orange, is considering setting up day surgery at St Vincent's but, of course, without providing post-operative services for people undergoing orthopaedic treatment, et cetera. Resolution of this matter has a long way to go. I hope the private sector will be able to come up with a viable model that works. In the meantime, I am committed, along with the New South Wales Government, to make sure the assets of Bathurst Base Hospital will ensure that healthcare in Bathurst remains at a high standard.

SOLAR BONUS SCHEME

Mr WAYNE MERTON (Baulkham Hills) [12.06 p.m.]: Yesterday I received a letter from Lillian Schmidt, a somewhat concerned resident of Baulkham Hills. She wrote to me about an important matter, which certainly needs urgent clarification by the responsible Minister. The letter concerns renewable energy, about which we are all concerned, and the effect of the Government's solar feed-in tariff plan on residents. Already I have envisaged certain problems arising. I can put it no better than to read Lillian Schmidt's letter. She stated:

The NSW Solar Bonus Scheme, for a gross feed-in tariff of 60 cents/KW commenced on 1st January this year, and is planned to close off once the scheme reaches 50 MW. Due to a flood of applications (I applied in mid-February and only got a site inspection today)—

that is, Tuesday 18 May—

no-one, including the sellers or the installers, knows...

How many megawatts have already been installed?

Will systems which have been ordered but not yet installed be included in the scheme in chronological order?

Will the government announce when the scheme is fully subscribed?

If a system which was ordered before the 50 megawatts was reached, is installed after the 50 megawatts is reached, will they extend the scheme to include these households?

Basically this has been so successful a scheme that suppliers and installers have been swamped. But households deserve to know whether they will get their promised 60 cents per kilowatt gross feed-in tariff or not, and what will happen to the literally thousands of homes awaiting installation, if they aren't entitled to the gross feed-in tariff.

You are welcome to use me as an example if you wish.

Lillian Schmidt placed her order on 15 January 2010 through her supplier Origin Energy. This is an important issue because many people read the newspaper advertisements that promote a very good scheme. As I recall, the Opposition supported the scheme, but was concerned about the somewhat abrupt cut-off period. Lillian's letter is an example of someone who, having ordered an installation in February, had a site inspection three months later because this good scheme is attracting many people to subscribe to it. The reality is that many people will be in the system, about which Ms Schmidt talks, who, having lodged an application and signed a contract believing they will receive 60 cents per kilowatt, may be greeted with the bad news by the New South Wales Government that the scheme is closed because it has reached 50 megawatts. I hope that is not the result.

I do not know the scheme's present situation. People have committed to buy into the scheme, obtained solar panels and other equipment necessary, but may suddenly find they are not eligible to join the gross feed-in tariff scheme of 60 cents per kilowatt. Of course, that will have enormous financial ramifications for many people. I would hate the Solar Bonus Scheme to come off the rails because, as I said, the Opposition supports it. Together with the Leader of the Opposition, Barry O'Farrell, I inspected a solar panel installer's operation at Castle Hill and it is a great scheme.

But I implore the Government to look at the scheme to ensure that we do not have the dilemma the Government's Federal counterpart had with another scheme—which probably was implemented with the best of intentions at the time but was badly administered. I ask the Minister to look into the matters I have raised on behalf of Ms Schmidt. I ask the Minister to let the public know what the situation is with regard to the scheme and where the Government is going with it, and to at least advise how much electricity has been subscribed to date as far as gross feed-in tariff is concerned.

GLENWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOL READING RECOVERY PROGRAM

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.11 p.m.]: Great things happen every day in our public school system. I recently witnessed a minor miracle. A delightful young lady, Grace Cook, who is in year one at Glenwood Public School, read to me and the Minister for Education and Training, the Hon. Verity Firth, a book. Grace is on the Reading Recovery program. Grace commenced on level four of the program, is now on level 16, and is soon to move to level 18 after only 12 weeks on the program. This is a minor miracle and it has revolutionised Grace's life and her future.

I bring this matter to the attention of the House because one of the reasons this miracle has happened is because of a program used at Glenwood Public School called ALERT, which is Activate Links for Engaged Reception of Teaching Techniques. The ALERT program is a new way of teaching phonics, phonemic awareness, spelling, reading, comprehension, grammar and writing—all the aspects of literacy that young children need to become able to read for work and pleasure.

Grace's life has been transformed, but every child at Glenwood school, the entire 261 of them, grow through this program. Sharon Wellard developed ALERT. As one of the teachers said about the ALERT program, "It has taught me how to read." Everyone knows how to read, but the ALERT program gives teachers and students a structure and a way of teaching literacy that helps everyone learn. Recently at Chipping Norton Public School when I was there with the member for Menai and the Minister for Education and Training, I met Dr Les Vozzo from the University of Western Sydney, who has also been involved in the program.

The Principal of Glenwood Public School, Mr Anthony Friedrich, has told me that the school introduced this program in 2008. The results from the program are already obvious. Indeed, its National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy [NAPLAN] results in year 5 are the highest in the school's history. As Mr Friedrich says, this is due to the systematic implementation of the ALERT program throughout all K-6 classes at Glenwood Public School.

The major successes of the program are improved teacher knowledge of all aspects of literacy. The program allows students, especially boys, to have a logical and sequential framework to follow when learning literacy. ALERT has generated parent involvement in the education of their children, by helping parents to understand how to support their child in the early years of schooling. I met a few of the parents who were there

on the day I attended the school. The program has been funded from within the budget of Glenwood Public School; however, it costs about \$20,000 a year to run. I will be making representations to the Minister for Education and Training for her to consider enhancements to make this program sustainable in the long term.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the staff at Glenwood Public School, who are led by their excellent principal, Anthony Friedrich, and assistant principals Michael Darmody and Charmaine Harper. The school has an active and involved parents and citizens association, and it cares for its pupils as a community. Many of our community leaders received their education at Glenwood Public School. For example, Julieanne Horsemann, one of our local journalists, dates her interest in media from her time being taught by Tom Gough, one of the leading teachers at Glenwood Public School.

The success for Grace Cook has been a team effort. However, I would like to conclude by acknowledging assistant principal Jennifer McInerney. Quiet and unassuming, and far too often unacknowledged by those in high places, Jennifer has done more good for our area than any number of politicians. With her techniques in reading recovery, she revolutionises the lives of our pupils every day. I am extremely proud to commend her to the House.

Private members' statements concluded.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): It being almost 12.30 p.m., the House will now proceed with Government business.

WEAPONS AND FIREARMS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2010

Agreement in Principle

Debate resumed from 18 March 2010.

Mr GEOFF CORRIGAN (Camden) [12.16 p.m.]: I support the Weapons and Firearms Legislation Amendment Bill 2010. In large part, the proposals outlined in this bill represent the outcome of a review of both the Weapons Prohibition Act 1998 and the Weapons Prohibition Regulation. The review included extensive consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, including the RSL, historical re-enactment enthusiasts, weapons collectors, and other government agencies.

One of the main objectives of the bill is to update and strengthen the Schedule of Prohibited Weapons, which is referred to in schedule 1 of the Weapons Prohibition Act. This is a dynamic list of items that private individuals can own only if they have a permit, and the schedule sets out the probity checks that that entails. Currently the schedule includes items such as mace, flick knives, crossbows and spear guns. It is essential that every precaution is taken to ensure these items are not carried on the streets of New South Wales and, more importantly, that police have the necessary powers and offences available to them to charge anyone found to be unlawfully possessing or using these items.

Through the bill a series of important amendments will be made to the schedule of prohibited weapons. For example, improvised explosive devices, or IEDs, are specifically proscribed as a type of bomb. These are the homemade bombs typically made from easily accessible materials. Including improvised explosive devices in the schedule will strengthen the existing legislative definition and will mean that anyone found in possession of an IED will risk a maximum penalty of 14 years imprisonment.

Through the bill tasers, taser cartridges and taser-proof clothing will also be specifically proscribed as prohibited weapons. Tasers represent a different technology to stun guns, as already defined in the schedule, and it is important that they are specifically regulated in the legislative definition. The bill ensures that tasers and their cartridges are effectively captured as prohibited weapons through specifically listing them in the schedule. Amendments are also made with respect to a number of other items already listed on the schedule, such as handguns, to clarify that children's toys are exempted from these definitions. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr BARRY COLLIER (Miranda—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.19 p.m.]: I support the Weapons and Firearms Legislation Amendment Bill 2010. Specifically I highlight the important change being made through this bill in relation to the regulation of imitation firearms. What is meant by "imitation firearm"? Until now, even though these items were regulated as both prohibited weapons and prohibited firearms, no statutory definition was provided as to what this term meant. The term "imitation firearm" was used interchangeably with

"replica firearm". The bill inserts new section 4D in the Firearms Act 1996 and specifically relates to imitation firearms. An imitation firearm will be defined as an object that, regardless of its colour weight or composition, or the presence or absence of any moveable parts, substantially duplicates in appearance a firearm, but is not a firearm. The bill also makes clear that any object that is produced and identified as a children's toy is not captured by the definition.

Imitation firearms fall below the threshold of a firearm in that they cannot fire a projectile. However, their often extremely realistic appearance may mean that they are able to instil fear in victims, and therefore are useful tools in the commission of a crime. This means that they need to be regulated effectively. For example, in September 2009 in Kellyville a woman who had made an appointment to purchase a chihuahua puppy arrived at the residence with an imitation Glock pistol and attempted to steal the animal. In late 2008 a man pointed an imitation firearm at police following a siege in suburban Adelaide and was shot dead. Although people do not have to register imitation firearms to lawfully own one, they must have a permit and they must store the imitation firearm safely, as is the case for all firearms. The bill also clarifies that imitation and replica firearms will no longer be regulated as prohibited weapons. Instead they will be regulated under new section 4D of the Firearms Act 1996.

The bill also provides that in the case of high-risk firearms, such as pistols, an imitation of such a firearm is treated as the real thing under the Act. Replica firearms will be defined as working copies of established firearms and will therefore be regulated as such. For example, if someone produced a working copy of a firearm used by Ned Kelly and it meets the threshold test for a firearm and can fire a projectile, it needs to be registered and a licence is required to lawfully own it. I understand that the Government will move amendments to this bill in the Legislative Council, in consultation with the Opposition and the Shooters Party. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr GREG SMITH (Epping) [12.22 p.m.]: The Weapons and Firearms Legislation Amendment Bill 2010 formalises recommendations arising from a substantive review of the Weapons Prohibition Act 1998 that was tabled in the Legislative Assembly in June 2009. The bill will amend and modernise the Weapons Prohibition Act by broadening the range of offences and penalties to ensure continual control of prohibited weapons. At this stage the Opposition does not oppose the bill. I understand that amendments will be moved in the other place. The Opposition reserves its position in relation to the amendments.

The major part of the bill amends definitions of a number of items that have already been scheduled as prohibited in consultation with the police. The amendments reflect the changing nature of the weapons and the proliferation of use. The bill introduces a separate schedule for prohibited military-style weapons and an associated higher level of control, including a presumption against bail for offences involving such weapons. The bill changes the regulatory model governing the lawful possession and use of imitation firearms and brings New South Wales prohibited weapons legislation into line with other States and Territories. The bill also includes provisions for the Commissioner of Police to take into account intelligence relating to criminal matters when issuing a licence or a permit for a prohibited weapon.

The majority of the prohibited weapons identified by the new provisions are highly dangerous and highly sought-after by organised criminals for use in their core business of defending drug-related activities, and by terrorist groups for carrying out violent attacks. Therefore the community expects a high level of state control surrounding access to such weapons. Changes to the regulatory model concerning imitation and replica weapons simplify the licensing process. They make clear the difference between an imitation weapon, which is able to be licensed for a collection or other purpose, and weapons that should remain prohibited owing to their dangerous nature. Police have identified a need to take into account intelligence relating to criminal activity when issuing a prohibited weapons licence. It is hoped that the new ability of the Commissioner of Police will contribute to keeping dangerous weapons out of dangerous hands. As I have stated, the Liberal-Nationals do not oppose the bill.

Ms ANGELA D'AMORE (Drummoyne—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.24 p.m.], in reply: I thank all members who contributed to debate on the Weapons and Firearms Legislation Amendment Bill 2010. The bill amends the Weapons Prohibition Act 1998 to ensure the effective regulation and control of prohibited weapons within the community. The proposals outlined in the bill reflect stakeholder feedback received during the substantive review that was undertaken of both the Weapons Prohibition Act and the Weapons Prohibition Regulation over the past few years.

The bill also provides police with clear offences and penalties to facilitate prosecution of offences for unlawful possession and misuse of the broad range of prohibited weapons that are listed in the Act. The

Opposition spokesperson foreshadowed amendments in the other House. I take this opportunity to state that the Government will move amendments to the bill in the Legislative Council, in consultation with the Opposition and the Shooters Party. I commend the bill to the House.

Question—That this bill be now agreed to in principle—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Passing of the Bill

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

TRANSPORT ADMINISTRATION AMENDMENT BILL 2010

Agreement in Principle

Debate resumed from 13 May 2010.

Mr DARYL MAGUIRE (Wagga Wagga) [12.26 p.m.]: At the outset I make the point that I do not lead for the Opposition in debate on the Transport Administration Amendment Bill 2010. As I speak, the shadow Minister is hurriedly making her way to the Chamber. The Opposition detects a slight problem with the Government's legislative program today. The bill states in part:

The object of this Bill is to establish a new framework for the administration and governance of the delivery of transport services and infrastructure by public transport agencies (such as RailCorp, RTA, the State Transit Authority and Sydney Ferries) under the general direction of the Director-General of Transport NSW. For that purpose, the Bill:

- (a) confers on the Director-General of Transport NSW (which is currently known as the Department of Transport and Infrastructure) specific functions in relation to such matters as transport planning and policy, the administration of the allocation of public funding for public transport agencies, transport infrastructure, contracting for the delivery of public transport services, transport services co-ordination, incident management and the provision and deployment of staff to public transport agencies, and
- (b) enables the Director-General, for the purposes of exercising his or her functions, to give directions to public transport agencies and provides that the chief executive of a public transport agency is to manage the affairs of the agency in accordance with any directions of the Director-General ...

The bill also sets out details of a number of consequential amendments. There can be no doubt that in Sydney and in regional areas, such as in the Wagga Wagga electorate that I represent, the State Government has managed public transport very badly. Access to public transport and public transport services constitute a major problem. A properly integrated and properly functioning public transport system is uppermost in the minds of people from rural and regional areas of New South Wales. For example, CountryLink provides an important service, and interlocking timetables are integral to the proper functioning of that service. The shadow Minister for Transport has talked about the importance of this, and she will lead for the Opposition on this bill.

I place on record the great value of CountryLink to country people. It is the hope of regional and rural communities that this bill will go some way to improving the present dysfunction in our transport system and improve on-time running, which is presently about 70 per cent for CountryLink. We have all heard all sorts of horrendous stories about people trying to get to Sydney or Melbourne on CountryLink services only to be left waiting on stations and denied access to locked public toilet facilities. I sheet that back to the conga line of responsible Ministers for the maladministration of transport since this Government has been in power.

I also point to the need for community transport, which is an important issue for the disabled, those who have lost their driver's licences, or those who are ill and infirmed, and who need to get from isolated areas to towns and villages to be able to access important medical appointments, do their basic shopping or visit places of service. There is no doubt that the people who provide that community transport, the managers and the administrators, do a fantastic job and are highly regarded in our community. Community transport in Tumut, Batlow, Wagga Wagga—

Ms Angela D'Amore: Point of order: My point of order goes to relevance. We are debating the Transport Administration Amendment Bill, which deals with the establishment of a new framework for the administration and governance of the delivery of transport services and infrastructure by public transport agencies. I ask the member opposite be brought back to the leave of the bill.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! While the ambit of the bill is wide ranging, I ask the member for Wagga Wagga to return to the leave of the bill.

Mr DARYL MAGUIRE: I acknowledge that I was being very broad in my introduction. However, I was making an important point about CountryLink, which is included under the auspices of this bill, and about community transport, both of which the Government provides for. This bill indirectly affects community transport, which is provided by a non-government organisation. The transport systems need to integrate, which is what the bill is about. Community transport needs to be assured that CountryLink trains will arrive on time and that buses that provide regional transport will integrate to allow community transport to mesh.

The Parliamentary Secretary at the table represents a city-based electorate in a wonderful part of Sydney, but her constituents do not rely on community transport in the same way as regional communities do, which was the point I was making. I am disappointed that the member for Drummoyne did not let me finish my contribution without interruption. The intent of this bill will affect regional and rural people. The intent of this bill is to create an overarching structure to give the director general the ability to make decisions that ultimately will affect the community. I will leave the explanation of the finer details of this bill to the shadow Minister for Transport.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN (Willoughby) [12.33 p.m.]: I thank the member for Wagga Wagga for his strong contribution to this important debate. I speak to the Transport Administration Amendment Bill 2010. I do so noting that the intent of the bill is sound; however, the way in which the Government has executed its provisions lacks competence and integrity, and demonstrates that it has no firm direction in public transport. I will pick up on some of comments made by the Minister for Transport and Roads in his agreement in principle speech that are relevant to this debate. The Minister listed four main objectives, which he purported to be the central focus of the bill. The first was "... to create an integrated approach to the delivery of transport services and infrastructure that results in a greater effort by public sector agencies around what is best for the community rather than their own set of priorities". That is a noble objective, which the Opposition supports. In fact, in February 2008 the Opposition led the debate by putting out a document titled "Towards One Network", which highlighted this very objective and how the Opposition would go about achieving it.

The second was "... to better coordinate the delivery of transport services to ensure that budgets and resources are allocated to community priorities and can be shifted effectively to meet community needs". That is also a noble objective. I ask the Minister what his Government has been doing for the past 15 years, if not to direct transport funding to where it is needed? The third was "...to enhance the accountability of public sector agencies to deliver the transport services and infrastructure the community deserves through prioritisation of strategic targets and commitments of the portfolio". Again a noble objective, but I ask the Minister why did he, or his predecessor, not apply that?

For instance, when it was found that the Sydney Ferries Corporation had not had any set targets or objectives for many years, they should have been set by the government of the day. The fourth was "... a greater focus on the customer and a more 'results driven' culture ...". I would have thought that would be the central focus of any government committed to public transport. Why has the Government not addressed these issues for the past 15 years? I continue "... to ensure that safety—for our passengers, our employees and our community as a whole—remains the top priority by enabling the independent safety regulator to assist the director general in relation to the regulation of bus safety and maintaining a strong emphasis on rail safety".

They are all noble objectives and no-one in this House, nor anywhere else, would disagree with any of them. The Opposition does not oppose them. However, the Opposition is concerned at the way in which the Government thinks those objectives can be achieved—and that is the major difference between the two sides of this House. The Opposition is also concerned that it has taken the Government more than 15 years to realise that those objectives should somehow be enshrined in legislation. For too long the commuters of this State have suffered because of the incompetence of the State Government when it comes to public transport.

I turn to the provisions of the bill. The first provision is that the director general is given unprecedented power to determine policy and funding allocations across all transport agencies. I expect that is to ensure that all

agencies have a common purpose and that there is a strategy between the flow of agencies. But, regrettably, the State Government seems a little confused as to where it is going. When legislation was passed in this place last year reverting Sydney Ferries and RailCorp from State-owned corporations to statutory authorities, the Minister justified doing that so that he could have direct intervention in those statutory authorities. Under this bill, that power is now being shifted to the director general. I therefore ask the Minister which is it? Is it what the Minister said in this House last year or is what this bill is trying to do with the power it is giving the director general?

Notwithstanding how one thinks the intent of the bill should be implemented, the Government is not consistent in what it is saying. Last year the House was told that reverting Sydney Ferries and RailCorp to statutory authorities from State-owned corporations would give the Minister direct control of those bodies. Now this bill is transferring those responsibilities to the director general. The Minister is totally inconsistent on this point. Secondly, the bill abolishes the boards of RailCorp, the State Transit Authority and Sydney Ferries. I appreciate the philosophy of the Government is to revert those bodies to statutory bodies from State-owned corporations; however, I remain concerned that transport agencies with a combined annual turnover of billions of dollars should not have some form of accountability.

The Government has said it will replace all those boards with one advisory council, but how can one advisory council maintain and oversight 13 agencies? The Government is asking one advisory council to maintain and oversight over 13 transport agencies without the existence of any board. I find this both a concern and a governance problem. Whilst we all want to see reduced bureaucracy in public transport, we do not want to see reduced accountability. The Government has an obligation to explain more thoroughly how it intends to make accountability a key issue as part of this process. Having read the legislation, and the Minister's agreement in principle speech, and having read what the Government has been saying on this issue, this bill appears to be taking away accountability and not enhancing it.

The next provision in the bill is that the Roads and Traffic Authority will come under the responsibility of the Minister for Transport and Roads. The Opposition does not oppose that provision. The Coalition has been arguing for some time that roads and transport planning should be done together. However, the Opposition has a fundamental difference in opinion on separating the planning provisions from operations. The Opposition does not believe the same bodies that plan public transport should also implement the regulation and the services. We believe the planning function should be separated from the operations function, which would allow for the streamlining of transport services.

The bill provides for the Transport Infrastructure Development Corporation [TIDC] and the Rail Infrastructure Corporation [RIC] to revert from State-owned corporations to statutory authorities. We do not support this concept. We do not believe that bodies that function as State-owned corporations, with their own corporate governance structures and targets and objectives, should revert to statutory authorities in this way. It is a step backwards. However, we accept that that is the Government's philosophy. The Government likes big government and big bureaucracy, and it likes to expand the bureaucracy. It does not care about the services it provides. We accept that that is the Government's philosophy, but I put on record that it is not the Coalition's philosophy.

State-owned corporations deliver transport services more efficiently than big bureaucratic statutory authorities. That is a philosophical difference between the Labor Party and the Liberal Party. The bill also renames the Independent Transport Safety and Reliability Regulator [ITSRR] the Independent Transport Safety Regulator. The Minister argued in his agreement in principle speech that some of these functions are being separated, but ITSRR in its new form will remain independent. The Minister must explain more clearly how ITSRR will remain independent when Transport NSW will absorb some of its functions. On that front, the Minister has an obligation to explain how he intends that responsibility to remain independent while giving some functions to Transport NSW.

The Minister in his agreement in principle speech spoke about streamlining government services and arrangements—again, on the point of abolishing existing boards within the portfolio—but he did not say how he intends to entrench accountability across government departments and agencies. Agencies that have a combined turnover of billions of dollars a year will no longer have boards and will revert to statutory authorities, but there is no mention of what accountability exists in those agencies except for a new Transport Advisory Council. One council will supposedly look after 13 separate government agencies. I believe this is a huge corporate governance and accountability issue.

The Government has an obligation to explain how the ministerial advisory council is supposed to be across the briefs of 13 separate transport agencies. The Minister argued that the Metropolitan Transport Plan is an example of the Government announcing a review of integrated and coordinated services with land use and infrastructure priorities, but unfortunately that is not the case. If the Government regards its recently released transport plan as an example of integration between land use and public transport, that is a symbolic demonstration of its incompetence and lack of understanding of what land use and public transport mean.

Ms Angela D'Amore: What's your policy?

Ms GLADYS BEREJKLIAN: The Coalition released its policy, "Towards one network: an integrated transport strategy", in February 2008. Unfortunately, the member for Drummoyne is either naïve or ignorant; obviously she has not read that useful document. The Minister for Transport and Roads in his agreement in principle speech said:

... this bill supports the implementation of robust service delivery contracts between Transport New South Wales and the public sector providers such as RailCorp, Sydney Ferries and Sydney Buses that are based on specific performance standards and will be monitored centrally to ensure that taxpayers' money is being used to deliver a quality service.

That is a noble objective. However, I remind members that only recently—there was much public commentary on this issue—the Government was faced with a number of bids, both private sector bids and a bid from Sydney Ferries Corporation, relating to the future of Sydney Ferries and how the ferries should be run in the future. The Coalition supports the proposed franchise model. We support the Government retaining ownership of the vessels and routes, and determining fares. The Government should have those obligations. However, who operates the service should be dependent upon who can provide best value not only for commuters using the services but also for taxpayers.

I understand that three different bids were submitted, including one from Sydney Ferries. There were at least two other serious bids from the private sector. Sydney Ferries came last in terms of what is proposed, yet the State Government accepts the bid. So the rhetoric about ensuring that commuters and taxpayers get the best value for money is simply rhetoric, because when the Government had the opportunity to put its words into action it failed the test. That is an abysmal response to an important issue.

[Interruption]

I am concerned that the member for Drummoyne cannot understand how her constituents would benefit from better ferry services. She does not understand the concepts associated with franchising a service. The Minister in his agreement in principle speech said:

Agencies will also be expected to ensure that the services they provide are in alignment with the key strategic goals and priorities of the broader portfolio as outlined through the Metropolitan Transport Plan and the New South Wales State Plan. The community expects its public servants and elected officials to be accountable for the services and infrastructure they pay for through their taxes. That is why this bill will see the removal of statutory boards that exist within the portfolio down to a single statutory Transport Advisory Council.

Again, the Minister is arguing that the advisory council is the measure of accountability within the network across 13 agencies. However, he should explain how the advisory council will oversee billions of dollars going in and out of the Transport portfolio every year across 13 agencies, given that the agencies will no longer have boards, which the Government is abolishing through this bill. The Minister also said:

I will not be a Minister who abdicates my accountability to a so-called independent board who have not been elected by the broader community simply as a way of avoiding making the tough decisions that will enhance the way transport services and infrastructure are delivered.

Yet he reneged on his responsibility in relation to Sydney Ferries. That is one example. In this bill the Minister is making a dramatic seismic shift from himself to the director general. Under this bill, the director general will have enhanced responsibilities and powers. I return to my point about lack of consistency. Previously when Sydney Ferries and RailCorp reverted from State-owned corporations to statutory authorities, the Minister's justification was that he should have direct control over those bodies. Notwithstanding the Government's rhetoric, in this bill enormous powers will be transferred from the Minister to the director general. This morning I have outlined the Coalition's many concerns about the bill. We appreciate that we have very different philosophies and attitudes as to how public transport should be delivered in this State.

The Coalition believes in accountability and a truly integrated approach. We believe that the planning functions need to be separated from the operations functions of public transport. We believe the Government

should principally ensure that people in the community who do not have services are provided with services, and that people in the community who have services have the reliable, safe services they deserve. Only a truly integrated transport network can deliver this. Unfortunately, this bill takes a step backwards by reverting State-owned corporations to statutory authorities.

That will result in the public service growing and services being removed at the coalface, as we have seen in the past. In 2004 there were 400 more daily rail services than we have today. In 2006 there were 1,500 more weekly bus services than we have today. So while the State Government keeps bloating the bureaucracy and reverting State-owned corporations to statutory authorities, it is removing services from the front line, and that is a difference in philosophy. For many years the Coalition has been arguing for an integrated transport authority, for the need to separate the planning functions from the operations functions, and for accountability.

The Opposition is very concerned about the Government's lack of adoption of recommendations in relation to the operation of transport agencies, which were put forward by the Auditor-General and the Independent Commission Against Corruption. The Government has not fully adopted those recommendations. We support the noble objectives of this bill. We all want commuters to have better services. We all want the Transport portfolio to run more efficiently. We all want to see taxpayer money not wasted, particularly in light of the at least half a billion dollars that was wasted on the Rozelle metro and the at least \$100 million wasted on the Tcard, with nothing to show for it. The Government has wasted taxpayers' money on so many projects. Whilst the objectives of this bill are noble, the Government's view is very different from that of the Liberals and The Nationals about the best way to implement an integrated transport authority.

I reiterate the Coalition's position on the need to establish an integrated transport authority, to streamline the decision-making process, and to make sure that those vital resources are dedicated to the front line, not to a bloated bureaucracy. Whilst the objectives of this bill are noble, the Government is flawed and incompetent in the way it delivers its intended achievements. We believe the bill and many of its provisions are flawed. Unfortunately, this is symbolic of a State Government that is confused and incompetent when delivering a public transport planning strategy.

Mr MATTHEW MORRIS (Charlestown—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.51 p.m.]: I am pleased to support the Transport Administration Amendment Bill 2010. The bill represents an opportunity to improve the administration of transport in New South Wales. As has already been stressed today, it is clear that the ordinary person in the street expects us to deliver a transport system that includes an integrated and coordinated approach; has a high standard of reliability and cleanliness; has coordinated timetables that effectively link trains, buses and ferries; has easy-to-navigate transport interchanges; manages incidents when they occur in an efficient and coordinated way; has the appropriate resources in place to deliver improved services; continues to expand to cater for the future in a timely and coordinated way; has a single person in charge who is accountable for improved integrated services; has improved multiple transport providers focusing on their particular transport mode; and has a focus on reducing congestion through both immediate network improvements and integrated long-term strategies and infrastructure investment. Most importantly, the transport system must be safe.

This bill strengthens the role of Transport NSW, giving it direct accountability for the delivery of transport infrastructure, transport policy, planning and service coordination, and timetabling and incident management, and responsibility for administering a single transport budget across rail, buses, ferries, cycle, roads and freight. As I have already said, this bill means better integration and coordination. That is the key focus. It will ensure that a single agency has accountability for administration of the transport budget and the delivery of transport infrastructure, policy and planning, service coordination and timetabling. The bill gives Transport NSW the responsibility of driving better services under a single director general with the power to direct transport agencies. The bill means that the agencies that actually deliver the transport services—RailCorp, State Transit, Sydney Ferries, which, interestingly, the Opposition seems to want to privatise, and the Roads and Traffic Authority—will report to the Director General of Transport NSW. The agencies will work together to deliver a better-coordinated multimodal transport system.

The Transport and Roads budget will be managed on an holistic, multimodal basis, with funds prioritised where they are most needed, in consideration of the whole transport system. As has already been clearly stated, the bill does not affect the working conditions of front-line staff. That is an important element. Expert strategic policy and planning staff will be able to relocate to areas where they are needed the most to deliver the best-coordinated transport outcomes for the people of New South Wales. I understand that we have

already seen the results of this in action. We are getting on with the job of providing immediate improvements to transport infrastructure and services, all with the aim of ensuring a better, more coordinated transport and roads network.

I am advised that a premier source of transport data for New South Wales has already been established. The Transport Data Centre will play a key role in developing and maintaining the data, models and standards required for evidence-based policy and planning. A single, coordinated Infrastructure Division has been created to lead infrastructure programming and project management and technical services, as well as to provide strategic direction and leadership in relation to the infrastructure objectives outlined in the Metropolitan Transport Plan. I understand that the new Infrastructure Division is already managing three major projects. They are the recently announced light rail extension to Dulwich Hill and into the central business district, the new Western Express-City Relief Line, and the Barangaroo pedestrian link to Wynyard station.

As to infrastructure programming, I am advised that this new, integrated Infrastructure Division will have a major role in achieving the maximum outcome from the single Transport budget by overseeing the capital programs of RailCorp and the Roads and Traffic Authority. In addition, a multi-agency Transport Coordination Group has been formed, bringing together operational experts from RailCorp, the Roads and Traffic Authority, Sydney Ferries and Sydney Buses to better coordinate the response to incidents during the peak travelling periods and keep Sydney moving.

The Transport Coordination Group builds on the highly successful joint operations centres, which were established for major events such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation conference and World Youth Day. In addition, a single Centre for Transport Planning has been created to coordinate the implementation of the recently announced Metropolitan Transport Plan. The coordination and integration of the strategic planning and delivery of our multimodal transport services under a single agency and a single director general is the key, and the Transport Administration Amendment Bill 2010 is essential to achieving this goal.

I can relate many examples of the Government's affirmative action to improve the State's transport services. It is always refreshing to talk about recent success stories. One such success story was announced a couple of weeks ago at Cardiff Railway Station in the Charlestown electorate. For some time, people who need to use lifts and ramps were precluded from accessing this station, which is an essential part of the rail network in the Hunter. With the installation of improved access facilities, those people will be able to use our great rail network in the Hunter. The bill brings the transport agencies together and provides a single focus. In the future we will see better delivery of our transport services across New South Wales. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr ROB STOKES (Pittwater) [12.58 p.m.]: I want to make a brief contribution to the Transport Administration Amendment Bill 2010. I will start by getting to the bottom of what this bill is about. It is ostensibly about improving transport. Previous speakers have talked about the technicalities of bureaucratic reshuffling. Ultimately, the bill should be about providing a better service to the long-suffering commuters of Sydney and regional New South Wales. I note that last night people from my community of Pittwater had to wait 35 minutes on buses before they got to the first set of traffic lights on the way to the Harbour Bridge to make their journey home. Clearly, congestion in the city is a massive problem.

Ms Angela D'Amore: Are you going to stick to the bill or do you want me to take a point of order?

Mr ROB STOKES: The member for Drummoyne says she will take a point of order because I am stating what should be the ultimate aim of this bill. Like all legislation in this State, this bill should be about providing better services to the people who pay for them—that is, the taxpayers of New South Wales.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! The member for Pittwater will direct his comments through the Chair, not to the Parliamentary Secretary.

Mr ROB STOKES: As I explained, the member for Drummoyne said I should not talk about what this bill is all about, that is, providing better services to the taxpayers of New South Wales.

Ms Angela D'Amore: You're easily revved up!

Mr ROB STOKES: The member for Drummoyne says I am easily revved up. I am easily revved up when I talk about the needs of the long suffering commuters of Pittwater who pay good money to get buses into their places of work in the central business district and return home to Pittwater of an evening.

Ms Angela D'Amore: Point of order: My point of order is relevance. The member's comments would be better directed by a private member's statement. I note that he is not addressing the objects of the bill or discussing the Transport Administration Amendment Bill. I ask you to draw him back to the content of the bill.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! The member for Pittwater is entitled to make introductory remarks.

Mr ROB STOKES: This bill should be about providing a better standard of administration to transport services to ensure there are better transport services for the people of New South Wales, including those in Pittwater. So that is why it is important to say that commuters are waiting a long time to get buses from the central business district, to get onto the Sydney Harbour Bridge, before they proceed to Pittwater. This Government needs to be reminded that while we can have bureaucratic reshuffles, renaming of departments, which is what this bill addresses, fundamentally it is all about providing better services to the people who pay for it, that is, the taxpayers and commuters of New South Wales.

Some members in this debate have referred to the need for better integration of transport services. I make the observation that lumping everything together does not necessarily make for integration. Just collapsing structures into a centralised structure does not necessarily make things work more efficiently or in a more integrated fashion. While this bill provides for these sorts of restructures and for existing statutory corporations to be collapsed into a more centralised control by the Director General of Transport, that by itself does not necessarily make the system work any better. Collapsing management structures also does not by itself enhance transparency and accountability. It is important to address the culture of a bureaucracy to make sure that the bureaucratic structures are somehow better organised and they are actually focussed on the need to provide better public transport services to the people of New South Wales. In schedule 1.1 [5], proposed subsection 3C (1) (j) states:

(j) **Precinct land planning**

Assisting the Minister for Planning and other relevant agencies with the preparation of precinct plans for the development of land for, or in the vicinity of, public transport stations or wharves and transport interchanges.

Assisting is a very broad objective and I would like some clarification of what "assistance" means. Assistance by itself does not allow for real integration, and for many years a fundamental problem with the planning of transport services in New South Wales has been the effective integration of land use and planning. I recall a plan in 2002 to introduce a draft State environmental planning policy for integrating land use and transport. As I recall, it never went beyond the draft stage, and this issue needs to be dealt with. I believe proposed subsection 3C (1) (j) is central to ensuring transport is delivered to where people want to live and do live, rather than the Department of Planning telling people where they must live, where there is existing transport.

One of the problems with the planning processes and urban consolidation policy in this State has been the development of land close to public transport hubs on the assumption that there is excess capacity in existing public transport services. Sadly, far too often there is no surplus capacity in existing services to support the assumption that underpins urban consolidation policy. That is why it is crucial to properly plan land use with transport delivery, particularly the delivery of public transport. Pittwater community groups are alarmed, and doubtless members on both sides of this Chamber have community groups coming to them who are scared, alarmed and concerned about urban consolidation proposals that will bring massive increases in density.

Their main concern is that there is not the infrastructure, particularly transport, to ensure that increases in densities can be properly accommodated. I remember only last year a bill being debated in this House about the establishment of the Sydney Metro Authority—and now we are debating a bill that dissolves the metro authority. The underlying theme of my comments on this bill is that we are debating administration and bureaucratic structures in this bill yet nothing is being delivered.

Mr FRANK TERENCEZINI (Maitland) [1.06 p.m.]: I support the Transport Administration Amendment Bill 2010. I have great pleasure in allaying the fears and concerns of the member for Pittwater about delivering infrastructure and transport services, because this bill will go a long way towards doing that. This bill includes key reforms to ensure the effectiveness of ongoing investment in and maintenance of transport services. In 2009-10 the Government spent a record \$7.1 billion in operating and expanding the New South Wales public transport system. In addition, it is putting \$4.4 billion towards maintaining and upgrading the New South Wales road network, the benefits of which many members on both sides of the Chamber have enjoyed.

This bill, through the establishment of the overarching super agency Transport NSW, provides an essential platform for ensuring better integrated and coordinated transport delivery. It will ensure that the services that the operational transport agencies provide are in alignment with the key strategic goals and priorities of the broader transport agenda as outlined through the Metropolitan Transport Plan and the New South Wales State Plan. In the longer term there is \$50.2 billion over ten years in the Metropolitan Transport Plan to provide for better integrated land and transport planning to support Sydney's urban growth. This is supported by a ten-year funding guarantee consistent with maintaining the State's triple-A credit rating and delivering value for the taxpayers. The objectives of the State Plan are: improving the public transport system; providing reliable public transport; improving the road network; maintaining road infrastructure; improving road safety; and increasing walking and cycling.

The targets clearly set out in the State Plan include these important priorities: increasing the share of commuter trips made by public transport commuters—the Sydney central business district peak hour target is approximately 80 per cent by 2016; increasing the proportion of total journeys to work by public transport in the Sydney metropolitan region to 28 per cent by 2016; increasing the proportion of total journeys to work by public transport in key cities including Parramatta, Newcastle, Wollongong, Liverpool, and Penrith; providing reliable public transport—the CityRail network on-time running target is 92 per cent; responding to congestion through efficient clearance of road incidents and maintaining traffic speeds; increasing the proportion of container freight moved by rail out of Port Botany to 40 per cent; improving the quality of urban and rural State roads; reducing road fatalities; and increasing the proportion of bicycle trips made in the Greater Sydney region. This bill, through establishing an overarching agency Transport NSW, is essential to ensuring the coordination necessary to achieve these goals across a number of different strategies.

The objectives of the Transport Administration Amendment Bill 2010 are clear: to create an integrated approach to the delivery of transport services and infrastructure, with transport agencies focussed on what is best for the community overall rather than for their own agency priorities; to better coordinate the delivery of transport services, ensuring budgets and resources are allocated to community priorities and can be managed effectively to meet changing demands across transport modes—a key feature of the bill, which ensures that we do not separate departments and agencies and that funds are allocated according to community needs; to enhance the accountability of public sector agencies delivering the transport services and infrastructure the community needs through prioritisation on a portfolio-wide basis of strategic targets and commitments; and to ensure that safety for passengers, employees and the community as a whole remains the top priority. Safety is, of course, always a priority, and this bill ensures that that remains the case.

The bill clearly sets out that the independent safety regulator will assist the director general in relation to the regulation of bus safety, whilst still maintaining a strong emphasis on rail safety. Safety should never be taken for granted. The bill provides for the reliability functions of the Independent Transport Safety and Reliability Regulator to be transferred to Transport NSW. This will better align the overall strategic management of transport services with transport reliability functions. It is clear that people not only want a safe transport network, they also want a reliable one. The Independent Transport Safety and Reliability Regulator will retain its safety regulation functions under the Transport Administration Act.

A future expansion of the role of the Independent Transport Safety and Reliability Regulator also is clearly contemplated in the bill, which amends the Passenger Transport Act to allow the Director General of Transport NSW to ask the Independent Transport Safety and Reliability Regulator to assist in the exercise of the director general's functions in relation to the regulation of bus safety under the Passenger Transport Act. This bill provides the foundations for a more integrated, better coordinated, strategically managed multimodal transport network, which is still independently audited by the Independent Transport Safety and Reliability Regulator. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms CLOVER MOORE (Sydney) [1.12 p.m.]: I strongly welcome the Transport Administration Amendment Bill, which will provide urgently needed coordination of all transport planning in New South Wales. For years I have felt like a broken record repeating over and over again that Sydney needs a single State transport authority to coordinate services of all modes of transport, including roads, as part of a planned and well-integrated transport network. I congratulate the Government for taking this important step to achieve this outcome.

The bill strengthens the role of Transport NSW by making the director general responsible for the delivery of all transport infrastructure, policy, planning, service coordination, timetabling, and incident management. The director general will have one transport budget for rail, bus, ferry, cycling, roads and freight.

Transport NSW will have a coordination division, and a single statutory Transport Advisory Council, which will replace all existing public transport statutory boards. For too long State Government transport agencies have been working independently, sometimes at cross-purposes and with competing priorities and agendas. When the City of Sydney has had a transport proposal, it has had to negotiate separately with numerous agencies including the Roads and Traffic Authority, the State Transit Authority, the Ministry of Transport, the New South Wales Police Force, RailCorp, CityRail, private light rail and bus operators, the Department of Planning, and many others.

This bill renews the opportunity for better planning and delivery of public transport programs and puts an end to narrow modal thinking. Coordinated planning could maximise operational efficiency, reduce journey times, allow easy interchange and help restore the pedestrian environment of the city centre. Replacing statutory boards with a single Transport Advisory Council is welcome and I call for representatives from pedestrian and cycling bodies to ensure adequate planning for their needs. I welcome overarching objectives within the legislation that will underpin the work of Transport NSW, including service and infrastructure integration, to achieve community benefit and the coordination of budget and resources to reflect community priorities.

Sustainability should drive planning and budget, and the legislated objectives should also reflect the green transportation hierarchy, which is the basic concept behind transportation reform across the world. The hierarchy puts pedestrians and cyclists first, rewarding their low cost, space efficiency and zero environmental impact. Public mass transit comes next; with single occupancy private vehicles last in the hierarchy. It is an essential hierarchy in this era of global warming and peak oil impacts.

I have also called repeatedly for an integrated transport plan that gives priority to sustainable transport and provides the right mode in the right location, including inner-city light rail and safe cycling and walking routes. I welcome the Government's Metropolitan Transport Plan as a first step, particularly its commitment for inner-city light rail. However, the budget still gives priority to road expansions, major rail projects will not start for years and commitments beyond 10 years are vague. I hope that the Government will continue to build on this plan and urgently finalises integration with the revised Metropolitan Strategy to deliver a coordinated approach to planning in this State. Significant detailed planning and modelling are required to underpin the principles set out in this document and to determine time frames, budgets and responsibilities.

The City of Sydney is taking this approach to identifying transport needs with our detailed planning work for urban renewal areas such as Green Square. Our Sustainable Sydney 2030 plan includes transport, public domain and land use planning proposals, designed to secure Sydney's future as a driver of the State and national economy, as a vibrant, liveable and sustainable city, and as one of the world's greenest cities. An effective transport system is a key to securing our economic future. If people run late or if goods cannot be delivered on time, there is an economic cost. Congestion in Sydney in 2005 cost \$3.6 billion per annum, and the cost is much greater now. Without action it will rise to \$8 billion per year in 2020.

The City of Sydney local government area generated a gross domestic product of about \$80 billion in 2007-08—one-twelfth of the national economy and one-quarter the gross domestic product of New South Wales. If the city's local government area were a sovereign State it would be the world's fiftieth largest economy. On a typical day 365,000 people work in the city and an estimated 100,000 people visit shops or attend recreational and cultural activities. Ensuring residents, workers, shoppers, visitors and tourists get safely and easily into and around central Sydney is of significance for Sydney and Australia.

I welcome partnerships with the State Government to improve the quality of transport to and within our city, and I welcome the Premier's commitment to immediate action through a memorandum of understanding with the Council of the City of Sydney. If future transport plans are to have credibility and rebuild public trust there must be legislative guarantees with clear targets that are regularly reported on to ensure continuity by future governments. There are numerous international models for this type of legislative framework that can secure commitment to a comprehensive long-term transport plan that guarantees future funding. This is a time to be bold and visionary and to make responsible long-term decisions that leave a legacy for future generations. Convenient, reliable and efficient public transport is critical to reduce congestion, cut emissions, ensure sustainable development and keep our city and State liveable. I look forward to better outcomes from a strengthened single authority.

Mr DAVID HARRIS (Wyong—Parliamentary Secretary) [1.17 p.m.]: I fail to see how anyone could not support the Transport Administration Amendment Bill 2010. I know the Assistant-Speaker in the chair, the member for The Entrance, would agree that the Central Coast is a hub for commuters, and this legislation is

certainly a win for commuters. We thank the Minister for bringing this bill to the House and for his support of the Central Coast, which has resulted in upgrades to all of our local railway stations, more commuter car parks, more buses, greater road funding and more projects on the books that will commence soon.

Across Sydney more people are using public transport to get to and from work than in any other Australian city. As we know, that creates great challenges. We also know that patronage is on the rise. People are voting with their feet and they are using public transport. It is encouraging to see that trips to and from the Sydney central business district by public transport during peak hours have increased to 77 per cent. Sydney is growing by approximately 1,000 people a week and the Government is not focused just on the central business district. The public transport share of total journeys to work in the Sydney metropolitan region is 24 per cent—well on the way to the State Plan target of 28 per cent by 2016. This reflects greater confidence in our public transport services by the people of New South Wales.

However, we must keep ensuring that we are delivering the services people need in a strategically coordinated and integrated way. The Transport Administration Amendment Bill will allow for that. The bill will also achieve something that I have long supported, that is, the creation of a single agency strategically overseeing the administration of the combined transport and road budgets. That will allow funds to be best directed to where the people of New South Wales need them in both the short and longer term. Instead of budgeting simply by transport mode, the new agency will have a strategic, multimodal, overall transport network focus.

This bill significantly reforms the way in which transport will be managed in New South Wales through the creation of Transport NSW. It will bring together strategic transport policy, transport planning, transport budget coordination, public transport services procurement, transport services coordination and coordination of capital works expenditure. The new agency also includes the premier source of transport data for New South Wales—the Transport Data Centre. The centre will play a key role in developing and maintaining the data, models and standards required for evidence-based policy making and planning. The new agency will take the lead on all policy and planning functions of the former Ministry of Transport, RailCorp, the Roads and Traffic Authority, the State Transit Authority, Sydney Ferries and the Public Transport Ticketing Corporation. These changes will improve transport in New South Wales with the funding of transport projects being driven by the best overall transport outcome rather than by a mode-by-mode funding approach.

This bill also supports the implementation of robust service delivery contracts between Transport NSW and transport agency providers such as RailCorp, Sydney Ferries and Sydney Buses with contracts based on a concrete agreed performance standard that will be monitored centrally to ensure that taxpayers' money is being used to deliver quality services in line with overall transport priorities. This builds on the performance contract arrangements that have already been introduced with the private bus industry. It is clearly evident in clause 3C of the draft bill that the director general of Transport NSW will be able to enter into these service delivery contracts with public sector transport agencies. Under this new model agencies must ensure that the services they provide are in alignment with the key strategic goals and priorities of the broader portfolio as outlined in the Metropolitan Transport Plan and the State Plan. This integrated approach is the fundamental basis of the Government's Metropolitan Transport Plan and the more recently announced Sydney Metropolitan Strategy Review and will ensure an alignment of land-use development and infrastructure priorities.

Effective transport plans achieve a number of significant things; namely, setting the agenda of projects, initiatives and policies to be delivered and laying out a plan for all to see detailing how projects and policies work together to achieve effective transport outcomes. They also demonstrate how transport systems support land-use development and reinforce that transport plays a significant role in shaping cities. Of course, they also detail the challenges we face. One need look only at the \$50.2-billion Metropolitan Transport Plan to see how it builds on the integrated transport planning and reform measures already in place designed to achieve real service improvement. The agency created by this bill—Transport NSW—will play a significant role in the implementation of the Metropolitan Transport Plan and in ensuring that the Government achieves its State Plan goals.

The implementation of the Metropolitan Transport Plan has already commenced and it has been announced that an order for the first 100 of the 1,000 buses will be placed for delivery by the private sector as soon as possible in the next financial year. I again point out that the Central Coast will be a significant beneficiary of the Metropolitan Transport Plan and the purchase of these additional buses. We eagerly await the budget to see how many buses we will get. The Central Coast local bus network is a big issue; people want improved services.

Mr David Campbell: It is under review.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That is correct. We are confident that we will get a good outcome from that review. In addition, we are now working on a blueprint for Central Coast transport for the next 10 years. The Minister might be interested to know that we reviewed the last 10-year plan and note that the Government has been able to deliver 95 per cent of the projects in the plan. Despite criticism from members opposite, year after year, budget after budget this Government has been delivering on that plan for people on the Central Coast. Those projects include the Tuggerah rail and bus interchange project, which has seen not only the construction of the interchange but also the provision of 100 new car park spaces, bringing the capacity to 500 spaces, and new CCTV coverage.

The Government has announced only in the past two weeks that new canopies will be erected at the railway station to ensure that commuters can leave their cars confident that they will be safe and also wait more safely on the platforms. That demonstrates the Metropolitan Transport Plan in action and it is evidence of money being spent on transport facilities on the Central Coast. The station car park in the Acting-Speaker's electorate of The Entrance is also about to be upgraded, as is a station in the electorate of Woy Woy. There will also be a major upgrade of the Woy Woy station commuter car park.

Mr Paul Gibson: What about Blacktown?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: This Government has not forgot Blacktown. It is a little remote from the Central Coast, but it is just as important. People say that all this Government does is roll out plans. However, we can demonstrate that the projects in those plans are being delivered. The buses that will stop at the new interchange are being purchased as part of the Growth Bus Program. Those new buses will be provided to private companies using government funds to increase services in local areas. We look forward to the Central Coast transport blueprint for the next 10 years being finalised.

The Premier announced another good initiative on the weekend. The New South Wales Bike Plan details how the Metropolitan Transport Plan will commit \$158 million to improve Sydney's strategic cycling network and how that will be delivered. Implementation of the bike plan infrastructure programs has already commenced, with feasibility studies and planning and design concepts being finalised for the priority projects due to be delivered over the next two years. Our railway stations will also have bike lockers installed so that commuters can safely leave their bikes at the station and travel to the CBD and other parts of Sydney. The member for Terrigal said that people on the Central Coast would not benefit from the Metropolitan Transport Plan. That is clearly not true.

Mr Jonathan O'Dea: Point of order: We have heard a lot about the member's electorate rather than the bill. I note that we have not heard about the car park created on the F3. I ask the member to return to the leave of the bill rather than talk about his electorate. If he does want to talk about his electorate, he should tell us about the problems on the F3.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! The member for Davidson will take a point of order, not debate the issue. That is not a point of order.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I am talking about how having one coordinating agency will improve the delivery of the Metropolitan Transport Plan, which clearly relates to the bill. All of the things I have mentioned relate to that plan. As we all know, the New South Wales Government allocated funds to widen the southern end of the F3 to three lanes, which has improved traffic flow. The New South Wales Government spent \$28 million on the infrastructure for the contra flow. We are spending the money and we are doing what our constituents are asking us to do by providing better transport outcomes.

As well as that, on 17 May the Government released the draft report of the Sydney Light Rail Inner West Extension Study and public submissions were invited up to 7 June. I have visited the light rail and the monorail in the city; many people from the Central Coast use that system. They had lobbied me to work towards getting extensions to the light rail system and I am very pleased that the Minister and the Government have now put forward a plan. It is something the city needs and it will enable more people from the Central Coast to use that system to get to work.

On 9 March the Minister for Planning declared all of the rail projects identified in the Metropolitan Transport Plan to be critical infrastructure under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, enabling the

transport agencies to proceed towards preparing environmental assessments and obtaining the necessary planning approvals to commence construction of the projects. I understand that network planning for the rollout of the 1,000 extra buses that I mentioned earlier has commenced and work is significantly underway on developing a 25-year freight strategy. That strategy will help Central Coast commuters because making a clearway for freight trains will ensure commuter trains can operate without being held up. All these things are linked together and they produce good outcomes for commuters. We know that we cannot click our fingers and make them happen overnight; they have to fit into the overall priorities, such as the Government's rebuilding of every hospital in the State as it has done with Wyong and Gosford hospitals.

Mr Jonathan O'Dea: Tell us about the maternity unit. Is the maternity unit working?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, there is a maternity unit at Gosford and at Wyong and they are operating quite well within the midwifery system.

Mr Jonathan O'Dea: How long did it take to work?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It was closed for only about two months. We got it done very quickly.

Mr David Campbell: And the cancer care centre.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That is right. We are also getting a cancer care centre with a radiotherapy facility. The Government is delivering on all these things. The reason we should commend the bill is that the powers and responsibilities accorded to Transport NSW in the Transport Administration Amendment Bill 2010 underpin the successful strategic implementation of significant improvements to transport services for the people of New South Wales. I know that Central Coast commuters are enjoying using the new facilities and the new trains. A lot more new OSCar carriages were recently announced and they will be operating on the line. I commend the bill to the House.

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

[The Assistant-Speaker (Mr Grant McBride) left the chair at 1.30 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]

DEATH OF THE HONOURABLE DONALD DAY, A FORMER MINISTER OF THE CROWN

The SPEAKER: It is with regret that I inform the House of the death, on 18 May 2010, of the Hon. Donald Day, a former Minister of the Crown. On behalf of the House I extend to the family the deep sympathy of the Legislative Assembly in the loss sustained. His death will be the subject of a motion of sympathy on a future day. I ask members to stand as a mark of respect.

Members and officers of the House stood in their places as a mark of respect.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of Motions

Government Business Notices of Motions (for Bills) given.

QUESTION TIME

[Question time commenced at 2.22 p.m.]

TILLEGRA DAM

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: My question is directed to the Minister for the Hunter. Given the 2007 election announcement to build Tillegra Dam was never about water security but an attempt to divert attention away from the scandal surrounding Labor's paedophile member of Parliament, will the Minister now listen to the local community and scrap the project or will it be a repeat for taxpayers of the \$500 million Rozelle metro fiasco?

Ms JODI McKAY: What I can say to the House is that I support the Keneally Government's commitment to securing the water supply for the Hunter region for generations to come. I have read the Lower Hunter Regional Strategy, unlike members of the Opposition, so I know the figures that are mentioned in the strategy: 160,000 residents in the Hunter region over the next 25 to 30 years. That will mean an extra 6,500 people and an extra 10,000 jobs in my electorate. This Government's commitment to the Hunter region is in complete contrast to that of the Opposition. My electorate is incredibly relevant to what happens with Hunter's water supply.

The SPEAKER: Order! Opposition members will cease interjecting. They will allow the Minister to respond to the question.

Ms JODI McKAY: I refer to a recent radio interview that the Leader of the Opposition gave in the Hunter region—he will remember this radio interview very well. After 12 minutes and 26 seconds we were no closer to understanding what the Opposition's policy was in respect of the Newcastle central business district. Again, the central business district is relevant because it is about the growth of the Hunter region when it comes to Tillegra Dam. The Leader of the Opposition failed to give any indication about whether he supported the revitalisation of the Newcastle central business district.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: That is not true.

Ms JODI McKAY: It is completely true.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting. The Minister will direct her remarks through the Chair.

Ms JODI McKAY: I am happy to respond through the Chair. This is important in understanding why the Government is committed to securing the Hunter's water supply. After 12 minutes and 26 seconds we were no closer to understanding what the Opposition stood for. This issue is of critical importance to the people of the Hunter region. To say that that interview was a shambles is a complete understatement. To prove it, I quote the Chief Executive Officer of the Hunter Business Chamber, Peter Shinnick. Mr Shinnick called into that radio station and said:

I really had difficulty understanding what Barry was saying. I mean I listened to him on radio this morning and he went on about this issue for probably 5 minutes and at the end I was really no clearer on what the Liberals position is with respect to this issue.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129, relevance.

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind the Minister of the question before the House.

Ms JODI McKAY: The question was about Tillegra Dam, an issue that is relevant to the revitalisation of the Newcastle central business district because it is about securing the growth of the Hunter region for generations to come; it is about securing the water supply for the Hunter region. So concerned was the business community at Newcastle that it invited the Leader of the Opposition to the city to explain what he was on about, to actually get some idea about what he stood for. Members of the business community met with the Leader of the Opposition; I believe that the member for Port Stephens was at that meeting. I can tell the House that after that meeting the business community was not happy because the Leader of the Opposition failed to support the Hunter Development Corporation renewal report. He failed to support the catalyst projects in Newcastle.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: Mr Speaker, I refer you to Standing Order 129 and your previous ruling. I note that the Minister is canvassing your previous ruling.

The SPEAKER: Order! I have already reminded the Minister of the question before the House.

Ms JODI McKAY: As I said, a merit-based planning assessment process is underway in regard to Tillegra Dam. I support the Keneally Government's commitment to securing the Hunter's water supply for generations to come, which is why I have highlighted how important it is in terms of the revitalisation of Newcastle, and the complete inaction of the Opposition in dealing with that issue. The Tillegra Dam proposal is currently undergoing a merit-based assessment process. I believe that will deliver the most appropriate outcome for the community, the most appropriate outcome for the environment and, importantly, the most appropriate outcome for the future of the Hunter's water supply. The Opposition is showing complete contempt for this merit-based assessment process.

The SPEAKER: Order! Opposition members will cease interjecting. I call the member for Willoughby to order.

Ms JODI McKAY: The Opposition is showing complete contempt for the merit-based planning process and once again the Opposition is showing that it has no policy whatsoever to support growth in the Hunter region.

TILLEGRA DAM

Mr FRANK TERENCE: My question is addressed to the Premier. What is the latest information on the assessment of the Tillegra Dam proposal?

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Wakehurst will contain himself. The Premier has the call.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: I thank the member for Maitland for his question. I know he is concerned about securing water supplies in the Hunter and about supporting the local community. Hunter Water's environmental assessment report for Tillegra Dam was on public display for 60 days, double the usual exhibition period, providing all interested parties an opportunity to comment on the proposal. I can advise the House that 2,669 submissions were received. However, opponents of the proposal prepared more than 90 per cent of these form letters and postcards.

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

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: Hunter Water has recently prepared and lodged the response to submissions with the Department of Planning for consideration. The report is publicly available on the websites of the Department of Planning and Hunter Water. The planning process for Tillegra is well underway, and the community deserves a decision made on merit, not politics. The proposal for Tillegra Dam is currently subject to independent merit assessment by the New South Wales Department of Planning under State legislation and the Federal Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts under Federal legislation. I will not pre-empt any independent merit assessment into this proposal.

Less than a week after his robust defence of independent, merit-based planning assessment, the Leader of the Opposition has now dumped the principle altogether. It took just 24 hours for the Leader of the Opposition to dump the principle of supporting independent, merit-based planning assessment processes. The Leader of the Opposition has been on Newcastle radio today pre-empting the assessment process. Importantly, when asked why Opposition members have taken so long to come out and voice their opinion, the Leader of the Opposition had this to say:

We've been out talking to the community, we've been talking to the wilderness society and other groups about this proposal.

We've been talking to the councils, we've been talking to local NSW Liberals and Nationals in the Hunter ...

The Leader of the Opposition has been consulting far and wide to reach this position! But, clearly, he has not consulted far enough. It gives me no pleasure at all to advise the House that the Liberal-Nationals' "Drought Proof the Central Coast" policy includes the construction of Tillegra Dam! I have the policy here in my hand. The Leader of the Opposition has left the Chamber. He cannot stand it any longer. If the Leader of the Opposition, in all his consultation, had taken the time to walk a few steps and talk to the member for Terrigal—

The SPEAKER: Order! Government members will come to order.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: I refer you to Standing Order 129, relevance. When that document was produced the Premier was still living in Alabama.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murrumbidgee will resume his seat. Clearly, that is not a point of order. The House will come to order. The Premier has the call.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: I shall quote from the New South Wales Liberal-Nationals Central Coast Water Policy—if you can call this a policy!

Mr Chris Hartcher: Point of order: Under the standing orders members are required to cite the date of all documents they quote from.

The SPEAKER: Order! I put that to the Premier.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: Apparently, this Liberal Party follows the same policy as its Federal counterpart.

Mr Chris Hartcher: Point of order: The Premier is not referring—

The SPEAKER: Order! I have ruled on the point of order. The Premier may continue.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: Apparently, the New South Wales Liberal Party follows the same approach as the Federal Liberal Leader of the Opposition. There are some things that are gospel truth, and then there are other things that are just taken with a grain of salt—

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

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: Apparently, a policy document is one of those things you just take with a grain of salt when it comes from the Leader of the Opposition and those opposite—

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129, relevance. A Government member asked the question, yet the Premier is having difficulty answering it. It simply proves her lack of substance—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murrumbidgee will resume his seat.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: —that she can only speak for about 30 seconds without referring to the Opposition.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murrumbidgee will resume his seat. I call the member for Murrumbidgee to order. The Premier has the call.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: There are clearly core promises and non-core promises. There are clearly things you take as gospel truth and things that you do not. Perhaps the Opposition should start putting a use-by date on its policies. Let me quote from the document, "Libs announce Central Coast Water Plan, written by Chris Hartcher, MP, on 22 January 2007"—hardly the distant past! The Coalition's policy states:

In addition to the Tillegra Dam, the New South Wales Liberal-Nationals Coalition will deliver a comprehensive \$132 million Central Coast Water plan ...

That is the Coalition's policy.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129. It is a shame that there is not a standing order relating to substance.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murrumbidgee will resume his seat.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: I can invent one if you like, Mr Speaker—

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

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: Isn't it good to see the representative of ruosexual New South Wales up on his feet again! It is a big day in New South Wales for ruosexuals. On 2 June *Sex and the City II* premieres in Australia. I was invited to attend the premiere of that movie. Unfortunately, I cannot go. I am happy to donate my tickets to the member for Murrumbidgee. He can come to my office later and collect them. This is a disturbing trend in Opposition policy—

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

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: Last week the Leader of the Opposition undercut the member for Manly on electoral costings and ad valorem.

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

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: The Leader of the Opposition also undercut the member for Wakehurst on planning assessment—

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

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: I said I would give the member for Murrumbidgee the tickets. He should stop interrupting me. He could buy a new suit to go to the premiere!

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: I take great offence at constantly being sexualised by the Premier. If it is not my suit, it is my hair or the words I invent. I take great offence at being sexualised. I take great pride in my hair and my clothes. I ask you to do something about it.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murrumbidgee will resume his seat. I have been the Speaker for a little over three years and that is the worst point of order I have ever heard! The Premier will note the concerns of the member for Murrumbidgee.

MINING SUPER PROFITS TAX

Mr ANDREW STONER: I direct my question to the Minister for the Hunter. Why has the Minister not displayed even one shred of public concern about the impact of Kevin Rudd's great big new mining tax on jobs in Maitland, Cessnock and Newcastle, given the concern of premiers in Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia for their States' workers and economies, or is her deathly silence just another example of New South Wales Labor putting Kevin Rudd's election plans ahead of the interests of this State?

Ms JODI McKAY: When I took over the role as Minister for the Hunter I set up what is called the Upper Hunter Directions Forum and I know that the member for the Upper Hunter has participated in that. That is where we get all the local mayors and general managers together and we work through the issues that are of importance to them. I have told them, and I have said publicly a number of times, that I support coalmining in the Hunter region.

Mr Andrew Stoner: Do you support the tax?

Ms JODI McKAY: Let me finish. I support coalmining and I support the jobs and investment that coalmining brings. But I certainly realise that there has been an imbalance when it comes to supporting those communities in the upper Hunter—

Mr Andrew Stoner: So you want to tax them!

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

Ms JODI McKAY: As you know full well, that tax is about supporting communities in Australia.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members who continue to interject will be called to order and removed from the Chamber.

Ms JODI McKAY: As I said, I support coalmining in the Hunter Valley but I recognise, and I have said publicly a number of times, that there is an imbalance that needs to be corrected. The decision this Government made in regard to the Bickham Coalmine last week has been well received by the residents of the upper Hunter. They have realised that a merit-based planning assessment process actually works.

[*Interruption*]

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Upper Hunter to order. The Minister has the call.

Ms JODI McKAY: I would love to have George as the shadow Minister for the Hunter. Instead, whom do we have as the shadow Minister for the Hunter?

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

Ms JODI McKAY: We have someone who lives on the Central Coast, because those opposite will not support George Souris as the shadow Minister.

Mr Greg Smith: Point of order: My point of order is under Standing Order No. 129, relevance. The Minister is getting off the point of the question and trying to debate the interjection.

The SPEAKER: Order! If there were fewer interjections, the Minister would not respond to them. The Minister will direct her remarks through the Chair. The Minister has the call.

Ms JODI McKAY: As I said when I started answering this question, we established the Upper Hunter Directions Forum to work with the communities of the Hunter Valley, and I will continue to do that through that forum.

MYZONE TICKETING SYSTEM

Mr ALLAN SHEARAN: I address my question to the Premier. Will the Premier update the House on the progress of the MyZone ticketing system after its first month of operation?

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: I thank the member for his question and his advocacy on behalf of his constituents for a cheap and easy fare system. Today marks a month of MyZone, the integrated ticketing system that has delivered cheaper and fairer fares for Sydneysiders. It is terrific to see just how much Sydneysiders have embraced MyZone. Thousands of passengers are taking the opportunity to pre-purchase tickets. More than two million tickets have been distributed to more than 1,400 retailers.

The Government has simplified the fare system, ensuring that almost 94 per cent of journeys will be at the same price or cheaper. The Opposition has neither welcomed MyZone, nor has it endorsed it, despite the fact that the vast majority of Sydneysiders are getting a better and cheaper deal. Indeed, some of the biggest winners are the people of the Penrith area. In fact, as I caught the 8.05 train this morning from Emu Plains to Central—

[Interruption]

The SPEAKER: Order!

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: Mr Speaker, do you think anyone noticed I have an accent? As I was saying, as I caught the train this morning it was great to join commuters who are saving \$7 every week as a result of MyZone. It is a shame that members opposite do not endorse it nor welcome it.

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

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: Transition to the new fares has gone very smoothly, which is no mean feat in a system that provides more than 1.5 million passenger journeys every weekday. A lot of effort went into preparing for the new fares. This included allocating around \$500,000 to establish 21 MyZone information stands at key stations and shopping centres. Again, this was something that the Opposition was highly critical of—

Mr David Campbell: Customer service!

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: Customer service, as the Minister for Transport and Roads points out. The Government makes no apology for making it easier for commuters to get to work. The next step for our public system will be the introduction of the electronic integrated ticketing system. Earlier this month the Government signed a contract with the Pearl Consortium to deliver this electronic ticketing system for greater Sydney. The new system will allow commuters to tap on and tap off from different modes of transport: trains, government and private buses, and government ferries. It will be rolled out across the greater Sydney network, including in Newcastle and the Hunter region, as well as Wollongong, the Illawarra and the Blue Mountains.

There has been great support for this decision from both sides of politics. Indeed, conservatives have embraced the decision—admittedly not the conservatives on the other side but, wait for it—half a world away in London! In fact, one Mr Boris Johnson, who happens to be—for the information of those opposite—the mayor of the Greater London Authority, wrote to me on 6 May and said:

Dear Mrs Keneally,

Can I salute your decision to purchase an Oyster-style system for Sydney? Our integrated smartcard system is one of the jewels in the—

I am quoting from one of the great conservatives in the world at the moment and the Opposition does not want to hear about it. The Liberal Party of New South Wales does not want to hear about it. I continue:

Dear Mrs Keneally,

Can I salute your decision to purchase an Oyster-style system for Sydney? Our integrated smartcard system is one of the jewels in London's transportation crown, and I am delighted to see it taken up by another world city. You are to be commended on a splendid effort.

There you have robust endorsement by a leading light of conservative politics. London maybe 10 hours behind Sydney but their mayor is 10 years ahead of the New South Wales Opposition and the Government welcomes that endorsement. MyZone has been a great success. The public has been voting with their feet. I thank our communities for their support and cooperation in bringing this practical improvement to Sydney's transport system. I also ask for their input into the new initiatives that the Government will be bringing, and I can assure them that there is much more to come.

TILLEGRA DAM

Mr GEORGE SOURIS: I direct my question to the Minister for the Hunter. In view of the refusal by the Premier and the Minister in their previous answers to scrap the Tillegra Dam project, will the Minister guarantee that taxpayers will not be locked into any contracts before the election that will require costly Rozelle-style compensation?

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

Ms JODI McKAY: I would love to say that I refer to my first answer but the opportunity to speak again is too great. I thank the member for Upper Hunter for his question. As I said in my previous answer, I would support him as the shadow Minister for the Hunter because he lives in the Hunter region and knows where the Hunter region is.

Mr Chris Hartcher: You can't talk.

Ms JODI McKAY: You are on the Central Coast with Mike Gallacher; you have no idea.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Terrigal will cease interjecting. The Minister will direct her comments through the Chair.

Ms JODI McKAY: I would support the member for Upper Hunter taking on the role of shadow Minister for the Hunter. I refer to a speech that the present shadow Minister for the Hunter gave at a recent Urban Development Institute of Australia [UDIA] conference in Newcastle. It is pertinent to answering this question. He gave his speech to 67 people who turned up to hear his speech.

Mr Andrew Stoner: Point of order: I refer to Standing Order 129. The question is about the signing of contracts in relation to Tillegra Dam.

The SPEAKER: Order! I will hear further from the Minister. However, I remind her of the question before the House.

Ms JODI McKAY: All 67 people who attended the function were highly anticipating the shadow Minister for the Hunter—

Mr Steve Cansdell: More information.

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

Ms JODI McKAY: They were highly anticipating the speech of the shadow Minister for the Hunter in relation to the Coalition's priorities for the Hunter region, including Tillegra Dam. What did the shadow Minister for the Hunter commit to at this UDIA conference in the Hunter region?

The SPEAKER: Order! Members on both sides of the House will cease interjecting.

Ms JODI McKAY: Clearly embarrassed about a lack of policy on anything in Newcastle and the Hunter region, the shadow Minister resorted to an address entirely about the Liberal Party.

Mr Steve Whan: What?

Ms JODI McKAY: The Liberal Party. Have you heard of them?

Mr Chris Hartcher: Point of order: Mr Speaker, you have had the opportunity to hear from the Minister. She is a long way from any relevance to the question that was asked, which was about signing contracts on Tillegra Dam.

The SPEAKER: Order! I direct the Minister's attention to the question before the House.

Ms JODI McKAY: I look forward to updating the House on the UDIA conference when I get the next question. I am really looking forward to it. As I said in a previous answer, there is a merit-based planning assessment process that will determine the outcome of Tillegra Dam, which is about securing the Hunter's water supply for generations to come.

SOUTH WEST RAIL LINK

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: My question is addressed to the Minister for Transport and Roads. Would the Minister update the House on the progress of the South West Rail Link?

Ms Gladys Berejiklian: You can talk about this in a priority motion.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Willoughby might let the Minister actually start his answer.

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: I thank the member for Macquarie Fields for his question. This morning the member and I inspected the South West Rail Link, which is under construction, right now, today. We visited the South West Rail Link community information office at Glenfield to launch the environmental assessment for the Leppington to Glenfield part of this very important project. This is the latest milestone in the New South Wales Government's \$2.1 billion investment in public transport for south-western Sydney commuters. The South West Rail Link project involves the construction of more than 11 kilometres of new twin track from Glenfield to Leppington.

As well, it involves a major upgrade to facilities on the current line, including brand new stations and commuter car parks at Leppington and Edmondson Park and a new train stabling facility at Leppington; a major transport interchange upgrade to Glenfield Station, including a new platform, a new pedestrian footbridge, an easy access to lift facilities, and an upgrade to the bus-rail interchange in Railway Parade; rail flyovers to the north and south of Glenfield Station; and an additional 570 commuter car parking spaces at Glenfield.

Work is underway on the rail flyover north of Glenfield station. Today we saw work being undertaken at the Glenfield transport interchange. In addition, Seddon Park car park is open and providing 112 spaces to the public. The commuter car park at Glenfield is being built, right now, today. The South West Rail Link is a \$2.1 billion investment in south-western Sydney. It will deliver new public transport services to an entire region of Sydney, servicing more than 110,000 homes in the South West Growth Centre and the new Leppington town centre. The South West Rail Link is just one project that the New South Wales Government is delivering for the south-west of Sydney. I was pleased to see construction on the site this morning.

[Interruption]

The Opposition should not talk about photos. I note the Leader of The Nationals is not here, but he has a special on photos. A few weeks ago I invited the Leader of the Opposition to inspect the construction that is underway on the South West Rail Link. I am a bit concerned about Mr Barry O'Farrell. Indeed, everyone is concerned about him. He is under pressure to deliver policies, instead of writing questions from the front page of the newspaper. When it comes to the South West Rail Link, Mr O'Farrell has form. One of the Opposition's key election promises is to start—yes, start—work on the South West Rail Link. It has been under construction since August last year! I was there today with the member for Macquarie Fields.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members on both sides of the House will cease interjecting.

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: The commuters, constituents of the member for Macquarie Fields, see that the work is underway.

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

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: The member for Willoughby should not chime in. She set Mr O'Farrell up. He cannot find his way out to south-west Sydney. He has refused an invitation to inspect the project.

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

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: The member for Willoughby winds him up and tells him to say that the Opposition will start this project. The work is underway and it commenced in August last year. The Leader of the Opposition is having a Tony Abbot moment. I am sure we will see more of that.

[Interruption]

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind the member for Willoughby that she is on two calls to order.

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: The members of the community with whom the member for Macquarie Fields and I spoke today know that Barry is kidding himself. They know construction when they see it. I suggest that Mr O'Farrell goes there and has a look at the work that is underway. He will be able to see and touch the infrastructure that the Government is building in this rail corridor. He should go there in June when work on the flyover continues, as part of the next possession. Rather than announcing he will start work on this project, he can go out there and see it and touch it. As the member for Macquarie Fields knows, work is under construction. The members who represent electorates in the area, such as the member for Clarence, know that work is under construction. Their constituents know that work is under construction. Certainly, those people who are employed on the project know that it is under construction.

UNFLUED SCHOOL HEATERS

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: My question is directed to the Minister for Education and Training. Why has it taken six years since Professor Pillotto's report in 2004 warning against unflued gas heaters and three years since a NSW Health publication said, "Be very careful about using unflued gas heaters, especially if the people likely to be exposed to it are children", for the Minister to announce that she will stop installing unflued gas heaters in our schools?

Ms VERITY FIRTH: The New South Wales Government is already committed to providing safe and comfortable learning environments for all our students and staff. The gas heaters currently used in government schools were specifically designed for school use and are low-emission. The heaters are maintained annually in accordance with the manufacturer's advice and every year as the cooler months approach the Department of Education and Training issues a reminder to schools on ventilation guidelines and appropriate procedures for using gas heaters.

I reassure the House that the Department of Education and Training always takes the advice of NSW Health and to date that advice has been that unflued gas heaters with proper ventilation in a room present no risk to children's health or the health of staff. That has been the advice of NSW Health and that has been followed to the letter. However, we are aware that there are differing views in the community about this issue, which is why we commissioned the Woolcock Institute of Medical Research to carry out an independent scientific study, because at the end of the day we want to be guided by the science.

The Woolcock Institute is one of Australia's leading independent respiratory health research organisations. Although the department funded the study, the Woolcock Institute designed and ran the study. I am advised that the completion and publication of the study is scheduled for mid 2010. The research is being peer-reviewed prior to publication in a scientific journal. While the report from the Woolcock Institute is being finalised I have ordered that all installations of unflued gas heaters be put on hold. For those projects under the Building the Education Revolution program that need to install some kind of heating immediately, the department will work through the most suitable alternative option with the school and the contractor involved. The department will continue to monitor the safe use of gas heaters and provide advice to schools, as appropriate, to ensure the health, safety and comfort of our students and teachers in New South Wales.

INTENSIVE SUPERVISION PROGRAM FOR YOUNG OFFENDERS

Ms DIANE BEAMER: My question is directed to the Minister for Juvenile Justice. Will the Minister update the House on the progress of the Intensive Supervision Program for young offenders?

Mr GRAHAM WEST: Before I begin speaking about the Intensive Supervision Program—a \$5.5 million project in Newcastle and western Sydney—I draw to the attention of the House an important matter I became aware of before question time. We are all aware of Oxfam and the incredible work that organisation does. There is now an opportunity for the House to right two wrongs. In particular, the Minister for Health, the Minister for Community Services, and I am sure the member for Mulgoa, will be interested to know that not only can they raise money for Oxfam's work in reducing poverty, but they can also bring about the end of the moustache of Peter Muir, the chief executive officer of Juvenile Justice, by donating \$2,000 to Oxfam. I encourage all members to donate, and I thank Mr Muir for his contribution.

Mr Andrew Fraser: Can we do anything about your tie?

Mr GRAHAM WEST: If you give \$2,000 for Oxfam I will change the tie as well. Serious young offenders in New South Wales and their families are taking part in an internationally renowned program based on multisystemic therapy. The program targets serious repeat juvenile offenders. As part of the program, teams of professionals go into the homes, schools and communities of these young people, and they are available to young offenders and their families 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for up to six months. These professionals look at the factors associated with juvenile reoffending, including substance abuse, housing needs, community disadvantage, family conflict, negative peer pressure and financial instability.

Eighty-seven New South Wales families have signed up to the program since May 2008, and 90 per cent have completed it successfully. Preliminary research has shown a 60 per cent drop in offending by young people during the program and 74 per cent during the six months after completing the program. Further, preliminary data collected by the Multisystemic Therapy Institute as of December 2009 shows that 87 per cent of caregivers had acquired the appropriate parenting skills necessary to handle future problems; 78 per cent had improved family relations; and 70 per cent had improved support networks. This demonstrates that the program is working. It also demonstrates that families and communities matter and they hold the key to reducing crime. One caregiver of a chronic re-offender who had completed the Intensive Supervision Program recently sent a message saying:

Hi ... this is Sally ... just letting you know Billy started an apprenticeship today – how good's that. Billy said to say he is proud and thanks for everything.

The New South Wales Government's Intensive Supervision Program is experiencing remarkable success. The teams of professionals from this program are leaving no stone unturned as they work with these young people and their families. I congratulate Michael Szyjan, who is in the gallery today, and his team on their success.

SYDNEY HARBOUR MARINA DEVELOPMENT

Ms CLOVER MOORE: My question is directed to the Premier. Will the Premier put a moratorium on marina development in Sydney Harbour in order to prepare a master plan with full public consultation, given that consent powers were removed from councils to enable Government to have a holistic approach to planning for our harbour but which is resulting in continuing inappropriate overdevelopment such as the current proposal for a 40-berth marina at Elizabeth Bay?

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: As the member for Sydney is aware, the proposal that she refers to is subject to the part 3A process and will need to be determined through our independent merit assessment process, which is something the New South Wales Opposition either supports or does not support depending on the day and the project. In terms of the broader issues regarding the harbour itself that the member for Sydney refers to, as she would be aware, there are many aspects to Sydney Harbour. Currently the New South Wales Government is undertaking, for example, a master plan process for the Bays Precinct, and through the community reference group the city of Sydney is involved in that process.

We are also undertaking the project at Barangaroo, which, again, the city of Sydney is part of because it is a determination of me and of my Government that we work in partnership with local councils, particularly on projects that have significant impacts for the State as well as important impacts for local communities. There are

many examples of where we are working with the city of Sydney on a number of key projects. Indeed, the Lord Mayor and I are involved in the process of a memorandum of understanding, which was announced as part of the Metropolitan Transport Plan.

On the specific project the member for Sydney raises, in 2008 NSW Maritime gave its permission for a proposal to be launched to upgrade the Elizabeth Bay marina. That consent expired last year. The proponent applied to renew the consent and that has been granted. On 25 February 2010 NSW Maritime informed the proponents that their proposal had passed a safe navigation assessment. Permission to lodge an application does not indicate the authority is for or against the development, only that it has passed basic navigation and commercial leasing tests. Planning approval is a matter for the consent authority and it is done in accordance with the Sydney Regional Environmental Plan. We will continue to work through the merits of this assessment, and we will, of course, work with local government, as we always do.

ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES

Ms MARIE ANDREWS: My question is directed to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. How is the New South Wales Government revitalising and protecting Aboriginal languages?

Mr PAUL LYNCH: The maintenance and celebration of Aboriginal culture is central to identity, self-esteem and resilience—

[Interruption]

I note the predictable interjections from The Nationals. Their attitude towards Aboriginal Affairs is notorious. As I was saying, cultural resilience is a prerequisite of closing the gap. But you cannot have a strong culture without a language. That is why the New South Wales Government was the first in Australia to adopt a formal languages policy. Before the arrival of Europeans, at least 70 Aboriginal languages and dialects were spoken in what we now call New South Wales. Now there are remnants of only about 20 of these. That is why the New South Wales Government is working with communities to protect and revitalise languages.

Aboriginal languages are being taught in schools, recorded on DVD and revitalised through the Aboriginal Languages Research and Resource Centre. In particular, we provide a community languages grants program. In the past five years we have provided more than \$1 million to support 60 Aboriginal language projects across the State. These grants have paid for learning materials, multimedia dictionaries, teaching resources and training in language teaching and language speaking. In schools in the Central West more people are connecting with the Wiradjuri language.

In the north-west we can now hear more people using Gamilaraay and on the South Coast people are using Dhuruge. In Menindee, Wentworth, Broken Hill, Wilcannia, Bourke and Brewarrina, Aboriginal people are hearing the language of Paakantyi and Ngiyampaa. On the Central Coast the Guringai Tribal Link Aboriginal Corporation has produced two books in the Guringai language targeted at schools and pre-schools. On the mid North Coast, Gumbayngirr is flourishing thanks to the excellent work of community leaders and the Muurbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Corporation. In addition, last year 367 students studied certificate-level courses in Aboriginal languages at TAFE.

This Government's Community Grants Program is reaching out to Aboriginal people in communities who are passionate about the protection and revitalisation of Aboriginal languages. That is in stark contrast to the approach taken by members opposite. The Gujaga Aboriginal Corporation at La Perouse received funding under the Community Languages Grants Program to produce a range of teaching materials in Dharawal, such as flash cards, songs, language posters and a series of storybooks. Local Aboriginal community member Ray Ingrey said that as a result of the program:

... the community has been able to carry out research and develop language resources for use by the community. It has given staff at Gujaga the confidence to teach the local language to the students there. The language program has allowed us to reclaim our language and has instilled cultural pride in our identity.

This year the Government is increasing its commitment to community language grants to \$300,000. That consists of a \$100,000 Small Grants Program of up to \$5,000 per project and \$200,000 for larger one-off grants. I encourage Aboriginal organisations to lodge applications. The deadline is Friday 11 June. In addition, the Government is entering into a \$100,000 partnership with the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group to hold a

statewide Aboriginal languages forum and a number of regional workshops. Teaching Aboriginal languages is an important tool in helping to close the gap in a range of areas. Teaching Aboriginal languages in schools can improve school attendance rates and education outcomes.

I have seen that from Dunheved to Lightning Ridge. It encourages more Aboriginal students to excel in literacy and to feel more confident in the school environment, which is a similar philosophy to that followed by Chris Sara. Language for Aboriginal people is a direct link to their identity, land and country. It reflects a unique cultural concept. In the words of Wiradjuri elder Uncle Stan Grant Senior, who initiated the Wiradjuri language TAFE course:

Since running these courses to teach and revitalise our Wiradjuri language, we can see our students adopting important elements of our culture that we call Yindyamarra which means to show patience, respect and honour and to be courteous.

That is in direct contrast to the continual interjections from the member for Terrigal, who demonstrates his racist undertones.

Mr Chris Hartcher: Point of order—

Mr PAUL LYNCH: I heard your interjections, Chris.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Terrigal will rise in his place and seek the call to take a point of order. He will not rush to the lectern while the Minister is still on his feet

Mr Chris Hartcher: I take objection to the Minister's comment. Mr Speaker, I draw your attention to the standing order stating that objectionable comments are not allowed to be made in this House.

The SPEAKER: Order! A member may ask that a comment be withdrawn. I put that to the Minister.

Mr PAUL LYNCH: I respond to interjections. As I was saying, the success of this Government's commitment to Aboriginal languages—

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order. The member for Wakehurst will cease interjecting.

Mr PAUL LYNCH: Until I made that last comment no member opposite was listening to what I was saying. Of course, that is apart from the member for Terrigal, who was interjecting.

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

Mr PAUL LYNCH: As I was saying, the success of this Government's commitment to Aboriginal languages is testament to the tenacity of the elders who held on to their Aboriginal language and culture so that it could be passed on to these students, who will now become the new teachers of culture and language for future generations.

Question time concluded at 3.13 p.m.

PETITIONS

The Clerk announced that the following petitions signed by fewer than 500 persons were lodged for presentation:

Hornsby Ku-ring-gai Hospital

Petition requesting the rebuilding of the Hornsby Ku-ring-gai Hospital, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

Wagga Wagga Base Hospital

Petition requesting funding for and the commencement of construction of a new Wagga Wagga Base Hospital in this parliamentary term, received from **Mr Daryl Maguire**.

Tumut Renal Dialysis Service

Petition asking that the House support the establishment of a satellite renal dialysis service in Tumut, received from **Mr Daryl Maguire**.

Tumut Hospital and Batlow Multiple Purpose Service

Petition asking that vital equipment be provided immediately to both Tumut Hospital and Batlow Multiple Purpose Service, received from **Mr Daryl Maguire**.

Wagga Wagga Respite Services

Petition requesting funding for a second respite house and the provision of accessible access to the existing respite premises in the Wagga Wagga electorate, received from **Mr Daryl Maguire**.

South Coast Rail Services

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

South Coast Rail Line Staffing

Petition opposing the reallocation of and reduction in staff on the South Coast Illawarra rail line, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

Princes Highway Rest Areas

Petition requesting adequate toilet facilities on the corner of the Princes Highway and Sussex Road, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

Hawkesbury River Railway Station Access

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

Bus Service 311

Petition praying that the Government urgently improve bus service 311 to make it more frequent and more reliable, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Religious Education and School Ethics Classes

Petitions opposing the proposed ethics classes and requesting continuation of the scripture classes, received from **Mr Peter Draper** and **Mr Thomas George**.

TAFE Employee Negotiations

Petition requesting fair negotiations with TAFE teachers, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

Tuckurimba Quarry Expansion

Petition opposing the proposed expansion of sandstone quarry operations at Champions Quarry in Tuckurimba northern New South Wales, received from **Mr Thomas George**.

Shoalhaven Police Station

Petition requesting funding for the establishment of a new police station in the central Shoalhaven area, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

Eastwood Electricity Supply

Petition requesting improved electricity supply in the Eastwood area, received from **Mr Victor Dominello**.

Retail Electricity Pricing

Petition objecting to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal recommendations to increase retail electricity prices, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

Drought Relief Worker Job Protection

Petition requesting that the jobs of drought relief workers be protected, received from **Mr Greg Aplin**.

Pet Shops

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

Shire of Eurabodalla Rate Variation

Petition opposing the council's application for a special rate variation in the shire of Eurabodalla, received from **Mr Andrew Constance**.

Burrill Lake

Petition requesting the opening of Burrill Lake, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

The Clerk announced that the following petition signed by more than 500 persons was lodged for presentation:

Yurammie State Forest

Petition opposing harvesting operations in part of Yurammie State Forest No. 133 and requesting permanent reservation of this area by including it in New South Wales National Park Estate, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

The Clerk announced that the following Minister had lodged a response to a petition signed by more than 500 persons:

The Hon. Tony Kelly—Former HMAS *Adelaide*—lodged 19 March 2010 (Mr Chris Hartcher)

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Reordering of General Business

Mr GEORGE SOURIS (Upper Hunter) [3.15 p.m.]: I move:

That the General Business Notice of Motion (General Notice) given by me this day [Tillegra Dam] have precedence on Thursday 20 May 2010.

In view of the answers provided today by both the Minister for the Hunter and the Premier, their refusal to halt the Tillegra Dam planning process and the advance towards the signing of Crown contracts, and the potential exposure of New South Wales to at least \$500 million in compensation for the Rozelle metro, this matter has become very urgent. Now is the time for members opposite, particularly the members for Maitland, Charlestown and Newcastle, to state where they stand on the Tillegra Dam project.

The answer the Premier gave today opened a backdoor and left it gaping. She said that the Government was assigning all consideration of the dam project to an independent, merit-based assessment panel. These are code words for the Government's opening of the backdoor to get out of the project. We need to know whether that is the Government's intention. Where do the local members stand? Everyone knows where I stand, where the Hon. Robyn Parker in another place stands and where the member for Port Stephens stands. In fact, everyone knows where the Coalition stands on this project, which will involve a loss of farmland, a loss of employment and a decline in the local rate base.

The SPEAKER: Order! Government members will cease interjecting.

Mr GEORGE SOURIS: It also represents a number of betrayals of promises made regarding compensation to substitute industry, replacement of lost rates of some \$350,000 a year—which is a large amount of money for a council the size of the Dungog Shire Council—and the so-called \$20 million promise to upgrade a major arterial road, which was really a \$1 million announcement and a complete betrayal of the local community. Where do members opposite stand on this project? Are they for it or against it? They will have an opportunity at the conclusion of my very wise remarks to indicate where they stand.

The dam project has served its purpose as a paedophilia diversion from a couple of years ago. It was never in the State Plan and Hunter Water knew nothing about it until a couple of days before Premier Iemma announced it. It was never included in any strategic planning and it was never mentioned in any budget or forward estimates. It was certainly not in the State Plan that members opposite spent \$7 million running around the State promoting. Premier Iemma's announcement was designed to be a base political diversion.

It is crunch time for members opposite; it is time for them to indicate whether they are for or against the construction of the Tillegra Dam. It is time for us to know whether they intend to plunge the State into a potential debt of \$500 million for compensation for renegeing on the construction of an unnecessary dam that they said would secure water supplies for the Hunter. The board of Hunter Water had secured the local water supply. In fact, there was no doubt in the Hunter about future water supplies until Premier Iemma started looking for a political diversion from the holocaust that had descended on the New South Wales Labor Party. Most members opposite were here at the time and they knew exactly what was going on.

However, the announcement took everyone in the Hunter and the rest of the State by surprise because it had never been included in any of the Government's plans. It was an obsolete project gathering dust on the shelf, but when the Labor Party needed a quick diversion it was taken down and Morris Iemma made an announcement. The Chief Executive Officer and the board of Hunter Water said, "Did we hear something about Hunter Water?" Of course, they soon realised that it was another announcement about Tillegra Dam. Time is up; it has served its purpose. We need to know where members opposite stand on this vital topic in the Hunter Valley.

Mr JOHN AQUILINA (Riverstone—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.20 p.m.]: We may not yet have Tillegra Dam but the member for Upper Hunter has definitely been thrown in at the deep end on this occasion. It appears that the member for Upper Hunter spends more time looking at the State Plan than he spends looking at Opposition policy. Had he taken the time to look at Opposition policy dated 22 January 2007, just before the last election, he would have known that Tillegra Dam was part of the policy members opposite took to the election. Tillegra Dam is in the Opposition policy, which states:

In addition to Tillegra Dam, the NSW Liberal/Nationals coalition will deliver a comprehensive \$132 million Central Coast Water plan.

That is in addition to the Tillegra Dam. There it is. The member for Upper Hunter should spend more time reading his own policies, few as they are. It should not take him very long. If he spent one or two hours a week from now he would be able to come across a policy. If he looks at his own policies he may be able to discover what is in them and save himself the embarrassment of making a fool of himself and fools of members of the Opposition in the Chamber. Let us look at the issues. Hunter Water's environmental assessment report for Tillegra Dam was on display for 60 days—double the usual exhibition period—providing all interested parties with the opportunity to comment on the proposal.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: There would be an opportunity to debate this—

The SPEAKER: Order! What is the member's point of order?

Mr Adrian Piccoli: The point of order is that this is a motion about reordering, whether the general notice should be reordered. This is not to debate—

The SPEAKER: Order! Earlier in the debate I extended a considerable degree of latitude to the member for Upper Hunter. I intend to extend the same latitude to the Leader of the House.

Mr JOHN AQUILINA: Members of the Opposition are obviously embarrassed by the fact that they do not know their own policies. I make this point, and this is vital to the issue we are debating today: There is a process, which must be outlined today to show why debate on this matter in the House tomorrow would be premature and how it would undermine the entire process we are going through. There was an exhibition period

of 60 days—double the usual exhibition period—providing all interested parties with an opportunity to comment on the proposal. The Opposition wants to debate this motion tomorrow, but it did not put up a proposition when the proposal was on display. Not one submission came from the Opposition, despite the fact that 2,669 submissions were received.

Hunter Water has recently prepared and lodged the response to submissions with the Department of Planning for consideration. The report is publicly available on the Department of Planning and Hunter Water's websites. Another reason why debate tomorrow is premature is that this proposal is currently being examined by the Department of Planning. We had a period of display, we had a period requesting submissions, we had receipt of the submissions and then we had Hunter Water's assessment of the submissions, putting forward a report to the Department of Planning. We are now at the stage of having the Department of Planning assess the submissions. This is a proper and appropriate planning process. The planning process for Tillegra Dam is well underway and the community deserves a decision based on merit, not on politics, which is what members opposite want to achieve today.

The proposal for Tillegra Dam is currently subject to independent merit assessment by both the New South Wales Department of Planning under State legislation and the Federal Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts under Federal legislation. We are still going through the analysis. Therefore, to have a political show in Parliament today, pre-empting all of those submissions, would be grossly inappropriate and would be selling short the people who went to the trouble of making those 2,668 submissions when the proposal was on public display. As I said, the Opposition could not be bothered to put in a submission at that time. Members opposite want to debate this matter now but they could not be bothered putting forward a submission, even though it was part of their policy that they took to the election in 2007.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 38

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

Noes, 47

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

Pairs

Mr Roberts	Mr Daley
Mr J. H. Turner	Mr Koperberg

Question resolved in the negative.

Motion negatived.

ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES**Personal Explanation**

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER, by leave: I make a personal explanation. Earlier in question time the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Mr Paul Lynch, used the term "racist" in respect of me. That is an attempt to impugn my character. It is untrue. I reject the allegation. It has no basis at all. The Minister has made a cheap and grubby remark, which reflects badly upon him.

NATIONAL PARK ESTATE (RIVERINA RED GUM RESERVATIONS) BILL 2010**Discharge of Order of the Day and Withdrawal of Bill**

Order of the day discharged and bill withdrawn on motion by Mr John Aquilina, on behalf of Mr Frank Sartor.

TRANSPORT ADMINISTRATION AMENDMENT (RAIL TRAILS) BILL 2009**Discharge of Order of the Day and Withdrawal of Bill**

Order of the day discharged and bill withdrawn on motion by Mr John Aquilina, on behalf of Mr David Campbell.

CARERS RECOGNITION BILL 2010**Discharge of Order of the Day and Withdrawal of Bill**

Order of the day discharged and bill withdrawn on motion by Mr Andrew Constance.

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

Mr JOHN AQUILINA (Riverstone—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.33 p.m.]: I move:

That standing orders be suspended to permit the introduction without notice, and passage through all stages at this sitting of the National Park Estate (Riverina Red Gum Reservations) Bill (No. 2).

I move this motion because the National Park Estate (Riverina Red Gum Reservations) Bill has been the subject of a substantial amount of public consultation. The Government has substantially altered the original bill introduced into this House some time ago. It may be noted that I have withdrawn the first bill and it is the Government's wish that the second bill be introduced and debated through all stages in this Chamber this evening.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI (Murrumbidgee—Deputy Leader of The Nationals) [3.34 p.m.]: There is no way that the Opposition will support this motion to suspend standing orders. The Government has scrapped the first bill and is seeking to reintroduce another bill, which will be even worse for communities in southern New

South Wales. This is a disgrace. If there has been any consultation, it has been between the Labor Party and the Greens, and it is about saving the Minister for Health and the Minister for Education and Training. This motion is about two jobs; it has never been about anything else in New South Wales.

[*Interruption*]

When was the last time the member for Sydney went to Deniliquin, Mathoura or Barham?

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

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: To Minister Sartor's credit, he has been to those places. These communities have been doing it tougher than probably any community in Australia—they have been through 10 years of drought, government reform and water reform, and now they will lose an undisclosed number of jobs. I believe the Minister cannot say how many jobs will be lost. The member for Sydney is a decent member of Parliament, but she reflects what is wrong with this entire debate on red gums. The people who protest about red gums do not have a stake in the game. They do not live in the area or have families and children in the area. It is easy to stand in Sydney, to protest out the front of Parliament and say that other people should carry the can and bear the cost of environmental reform. I once proudly represented Deniliquin, Mathoura, Barham and other places along the New South Wales border that will be directly affected by this legislation. The Government has announced that the new legislation will not have a five-year transition period. As of 1 July this year these people will be out of a job, despite Labor always talking about representing blue-collar workers.

Mr John Aquilina: Point of order: The member for Murrumbidgee has not advanced one single argument as to why the House should suspend standing and sessional orders. He is debating the bill. If he wants to debate the bill, he should agree to suspend standing and sessional orders; then he will have plenty of opportunity to debate the merits of the bill.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: We do not support the suspension of standing and sessional orders because there should be an opportunity for genuine consultation. The Leader of the House has said that the bill will be brought on immediately. He has withdrawn the first bill and seeks to introduce the second bill and have it pass through all stages tonight. That is the end of the consultation. The passage of this bill will directly affect hundreds of jobs in southern New South Wales. By six o'clock tonight the bill will have passed this House. That is not consultation. It is an example of how far the Labor Party has moved away from its grassroots, a party that historically talked about the lot on the hill, blue-collar workers, people who struggle to make a living, people who work hard. If there is one group of people in New South Wales that encapsulates what the Labor Party should stand for it is timber workers and mill workers. These are the very people that the Government is going to put out of work on 1 July 2010 in order to save two jobs—two jobs not worth saving—the jobs of the Minister for Health and the Minister for Education and Training.

This motion is typical of disgusting Labor Party tactics—wrecking jobs in country New South Wales and subverting the processes of Parliament, without consultation, in order to serve its political purposes. The Labor Party and the Greens will be drinking champagne tonight when the bill goes through the House; that is the most disgusting thing about it. Families, communities and kids in southern New South Wales will not be drinking champagne tonight; they will be condemning the Government, like the rest of New South Wales will condemn the Government next March.

Mr JOHN AQUILINA (Riverstone—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.38 p.m.], in reply: Given the fact that the member for Murrumbidgee spent most of his time debating the bill as opposed to debating the merits or otherwise of the motion, he has contradicted his statements about lack of consultation. The Government has withdrawn the first bill, which has been in the House for more than four weeks, and introduced the new bill because there has been extensive consultation.

The Government has listened to the responses, and the Minister has now chosen to withdraw the original bill and introduce a new bill, which provides for the interests that were claimed during that consultation process. Most of the contribution of the member for Murrumbidgee in this debate attacked the detail of the legislation we are about to introduce. So there is no way he can say that this bill is taking him, or anybody else in this State for that matter, by surprise.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 45

Mr Amery	Ms Gadiel	Mr Pearce
Ms Andrews	Mr Greene	Mrs Perry
Mr Aquilina	Mr Harris	Mr Rees
Ms Beamer	Ms Hay	Mr Sartor
Mr Borger	Ms Horner	Mr Shearan
Mr Brown	Ms Judge	Mr Stewart
Ms Burney	Mr Khoshaba	Ms Tebbutt
Ms Burton	Mr Lalich	Mr Terenzini
Mr Campbell	Mr Lynch	Mr Tripodi
Mr Collier	Mr McBride	Mr West
Mr Coombs	Dr McDonald	Mr Whan
Mr Corrigan	Ms McKay	
Mr Costa	Mr McLeay	
Ms D'Amore	Ms McMahan	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Firth	Ms Megarrity	Mr Ashton
Mr Furolo	Mr Morris	Mr Hickey

Noes, 39

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

Pairs

Mr Daley	Mr Roberts
Mr Koperberg	Mr J. H. Turner

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

CONSIDERATION OF MOTIONS TO BE ACCORDED PRIORITY**South West Rail Link**

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.48 p.m.]: The \$2.1 billion South West Rail Link is pivotal to the future of south-western Sydney. It is an outstanding example of the transport infrastructure this Government is building for the people of south-western Sydney. The South West Rail Link has been under construction since August 2009. However, I am told that members opposite have committed to commence something that has already been built. That is why we need to debate this motion today. It is not just the South West Rail Link that is being built; it is Liverpool Hospital, and major road and education works. However, at a cost of \$2.1 billion, the South West Rail Link is the biggest piece of infrastructure in south-western Sydney.

Every day is a good day in south-west Sydney; but today when I was at Glenfield with the Minister I saw the heavy equipment and workers on site building the South West Rail Link. I did not see any black

Hondas—there are not a lot of black Hondas in Glenfield. If we were standing at Glenfield now we would be witnessing the scale of construction taking place on the rail line, the Glenfield transport interchange, the car park and the rail flyovers north and south of Glenfield station.

The South West Rail Link will deliver new public transport services for the people of south-west Sydney, and will provide links to major employment centres, including Liverpool, Parramatta and the Sydney central business district. It is infrastructure such as this that we need to discuss today. The South West Rail Link is a key feature of the New South Wales Government \$50.2 billion Metropolitan Transport Plan and, most importantly, the South West Rail Link demonstrates how the Government is preparing New South Wales to meet the challenges of our growing population. As Craig Emerson said of our opponents, "Look not at what they say but look at what they do." That is why we need to discuss this issue today.

Sobering-up Rooms

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI (Murrumbidgee—Deputy Leader of The Nationals) [3.50 p.m.]: It is very important that the continued incompetence of the New South Wales Labor Government be debated this afternoon. Most of the incompetence of this Government is significant but its more trivial incompetence is often displayed in this place. Last Sunday the Liberals-Nationals Coalition announced a very well-considered policy, which was very well received by police and communities, on dealing with drunken behaviour on our streets, particularly on Friday and Saturday nights. However, we got to see how the Labor Government handles most matters—that is, very badly. On Sunday night the Government said that it was a good idea but, in fact, it already happens. That was great: it is always great to see an endorsement of Liberals-Nationals Coalition policy. But, as I said yesterday, Labor has had a lot of policies lately. Very few of them have been its own but a policy is a policy nonetheless.

Yesterday the member for Wyong, who is present in the Chamber, moved a motion saying that it was a terrible idea that would cost \$5,000 per person. Not five minutes later the Premier claimed it was a terrible idea that would cost \$1,200 per person. The Opposition is still waiting for clarification from the Government as to whether it is a good idea, a bad idea or how much it thinks it will cost. And the Government wonders why the Opposition does not want Treasury to cost its promises! Kristina Keneally promised during a debate that she would agree to the independent costing of election promises—

Dr Andrew McDonald: Point of order: The member for Murrumbidgee is meant to be debating why his motion should be accorded priority. He is not doing that. The member for Murrumbidgee is actually debating his motion.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! I will hear further from the member for Murrumbidgee as his motion is wide ranging. However, I remind the member for Murrumbidgee that he should be establishing why his motion should be accorded priority.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: This is the kind of incompetency that the Opposition wants to debate in its motion if it is accorded priority today. The Premier gave a promise and the Opposition introduced legislation to reflect that promise—which was given over a handshake at the completion of the debate—to have independent costing of election promises. But, no, the Government wants Treasury to cost it. We had a figure of \$5,000 and a figure of \$1,200 within the space of five minutes. Is it any wonder the Opposition does not want Treasury to cost it? Even Labor Party members are starting to understand that their public perception is being put at risk. All members are aware of the importance of taking their notes with them during a division when Coalition and Government members change sides—members hate for their notes to get into the wrong hands. During the last division when members changed sides in this place somebody found a note on the other side that said, "Gee, I'm going to miss you guys next year", which was written by a Labor member during question time. That note was found near where the members for the electorates of Macquarie Fields and Blue Mountains sit.

Dr Andrew McDonald: Point of order: The member for Murrumbidgee is meant to be debating why his motion should be accorded priority. But I point out that if I had written the note he would not have been able to read my handwriting.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. However, members appreciate having a laugh.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: I appreciate that the member for Macquarie Fields has ruled himself out so it must have been the member for Blue Mountains who said—I am happy to show this note to anyone who wishes to have a look—"Gee, I am going to miss you guys next year". Clearly that is because he can see that the Labor Party will no longer hold his seat.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! The *Votes and Proceedings* will record that the member for Blue Mountains is not here today.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: Government members can also see the difficulties their own electorates are in. The Minister for Transport and Roads always gets up. Today he talked about the South West Rail Link—I will talk about the South West Rail Link—but he is the great metro man. For two years he has stood in this Chamber telling us what a great idea the metro was, how fantastic it was, and despite the criticisms of the Liberals-Nationals Coalition the Government was committed to the metro.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: He was not talking about the South West Rail Link.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: That is right. He was not talking about the South West Rail Link; he was talking about the metro. The metro man could not help himself. This constant flip-flopping, indecisiveness and confusion will cost the Government dearly in March next year.

Dr Andrew McDonald: Point of order: I was going to point out again that the member for Murrumbidgee should be speaking on why his motion should be accorded priority, which he has not done, but his time has expired.

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

The House divided.

Ayes, 46

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

Noes, 39

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

Pairs

Mr Daley
Mr Koperberg

Mr Roberts
Mr J. H. Turner

Question resolved in the affirmative.

SOUTH WEST RAIL LINK**Motion Accorded Priority**

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.03 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) congratulates the Government on the ongoing construction of the South West Rail Link;
- (2) notes that today's release of the environmental assessment for the Glenfield to Leppington rail line is the latest milestone in this \$2.1 billion project; and
- (3) calls on the Opposition to offer its bipartisan support for improved public transport services in south-western Sydney.

It is with great pride that I speak about the South West Rail Link. I was at the site today with the Minister for Transport and Roads to launch the environmental assessment for the extension of the rail line between Leppington and Glenfield. As we speak, the South West Rail Link is under construction. The delivery of the South West Rail Link has been co-ordinated with the release of new land for homes in the South West Growth Centre. This region will eventually house 110,000 new homes and hundreds and thousands of western Sydney residents in a new city the size of Canberra. The development of this region will generate billions of dollars of investment and thousands of jobs. As these new homes are built, the families that move into them will benefit immediately from the new rail line that will connect them directly to the entire CityRail network.

The \$2.1 billion South West Rail Link project is impressive by any standard. It will have 11 kilometres of new track from Glenfield to Leppington, as well as a major upgrade of facilities on the current line. This upgrade will include brand new stations at Leppington and Edmondson Park, including 1,250 new commuter car parking spaces at these locations; a new train stabling facility at Rossmore to support the operation of the new line; and a major upgrade to Glenfield station including a new platform, a new pedestrian footbridge, and easy-access lift facilities. I spoke about the need for these facilities in my inaugural speech. Also to be constructed are an extra 570 commuter car parking spaces at Glenfield, a rail flyover to the north and south of Glenfield station, and an upgrade of the existing bus-rail interchange in Railway Parade, Glenfield.

Work on the South West Rail Link is surging ahead. The first stage of this rail link, the Glenfield transport interchange, received planning approval in April 2009. The construction of 112 new commuter car parking spaces at Seddon Park has been completed already. I use this car park and I have always been able to get a spot. Major construction work is well underway at Glenfield station and on the transport interchange. This will mean a refurbished Glenfield station and easy access facilities in operation when the project is complete. Construction is well underway also on the Glenfield multideck commuter car park. When complete this will deliver more than 900 commuter car parking spaces, improved lighting and closed-circuit television. Throughout May levels three and four of the commuter car park will be constructed. The entire project is due to be completed later this year.

Work is proceeding on the two rail flyovers north and south of Glenfield station, which will connect the South West Rail Link to the broader CityRail network. The northern rail flyover will avoid the East Hills line crossing the south line. This significant change will considerably expand the operational capacity of the rail network. Preparation works are underway to commence pilings for the construction of the northern flyover in early June, including vegetation and tree removal and civil works. The southern rail flyover provides the infrastructure for the Glenfield to Leppington rail link to be connected to the East Hills line. The main structure will be positioned within land opposite Seddon Park at Glenfield. In May construction activities will include earthworks and civil works, the removal of vegetation and trees along Railway Parade south of Glenfield station, and the temporary relocation of power poles and overhead wires from the rail corridor to the eastern side of Railway Parade.

The next important phase for the delivery of the South West Rail Link is an exhibition of the environmental assessment of the Glenfield to Leppington rail line. The public exhibition of the Glenfield to

Leppington environmental assessment will give the community the opportunity to have their say on this key component of the South West Rail Link. The exhibition period runs from Wednesday 19 May 2010 until Monday 21 June 2010. I encourage anyone interested, including the member for Willoughby in her black Honda, to attend one of the sessions or visit the office at Glenfield to have a say.

The Transport Infrastructure Development Corporation, in conjunction with the rail links project team, is running community information sessions at both Leppington and Glenfield over the coming weeks. Community information sessions will be held on Tuesday 25 May at Leppington Progress Hall and at Glenfield's South West Rail Link community information office on Saturday 29 May and Wednesday 2 June. The Cafe Affinity at Glenfield is near the South West Rail Link community information office. I invite anyone who attends on Saturday 29 May, including the member for Willoughby, to have a coffee with me at the cafe. I am proud of the South West Rail Link. It is an enormous investment in the new transport infrastructure for New South Wales and a \$2.1 billion investment in the future of the people of south-west Sydney. It is infrastructure the community needs, and it is infrastructure the New South Wales Government is building right now.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN (Willoughby) [4.10 p.m.]: I thank Government members for kicking an own goal this afternoon. It is my absolute pleasure to speak in this House about the South West Rail Link and the Coalition's ongoing commitment to that project—the exact opposite of what the Labor Party can state on this issue. I move the following amendment to the motion:

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

this House condemns the Government for failing to deliver the South West rail line having first promised completion by 2010, having re-announced the project nine times and for its failure to deliver any transport projects.

As I foreshadowed in my opening remarks, the Labor Party first promised that the South West Rail Link would be completed by 2010. In the past 15 years the residents of the south-west have had to put up with re-announcement after re-announcement and axed project after axed project. I feel for the members in this place who represent that part of Sydney because they have been unable to convince their leaders that the community needs this project. As a result, residents in the south-west have been let down time and again.

I will briefly outline the sad and sorry saga that residents have endured under this Labor Government. On 9 December 2004 the project was first announced at a cost of \$688 million and was supposed to be completed by 2010. On 9 June 2005 the project was re-announced by Bob Carr. On 1 July 2005 it was re-announced with a video concept plan. The project was re-announced on 18 February 2006 and again on 25 May 2006, when a land acquisitions strategy was announced. On 23 July 2006 the project was re-announced with an environmental planning commencement. On 25 May 2007 it was re-announced, with approval sought for a concept plan. On 3 September 2007 it was re-announced with a concept plan approved. On 6 March 2008 the project was re-announced, but at a cost of \$1.3 billion. In 2004 the project was first announced at a cost of \$688 million; in 2008—eight announcements later—it was costed at \$1.3 billion. Then, in the mini-budget at the end of 2008, the State Government officially dumped the South West Rail Link in favour of the Rozelle metro.

Mr Geoff Corrigan: It wasn't dumped.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: This State Government dumped the South West Rail Link in favour of the Rozelle metro. That is a fact.

Mr Geoff Corrigan: No, it's not.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: That is a fact, and members opposite are too embarrassed to highlight that as a fact. Some \$5 billion was taken out of money for the south-west and the north-west for the Rozelle metro. The State Government decided that building a metro from the Sydney central business district to Rozelle was more important than building the South West Rail Link. That is a fact. After dumping the metro project and leaving the taxpayers of New South Wales with a bill of at least \$500 million—some say it is closer to \$1 billion, but those facts are yet to be revealed—what does the State Government do? It re-announces the South West Rail Link—this time at a cost of \$2.1 billion.

The Government first announced this project in 2004 at a cost of \$688 million, but now it will cost taxpayers \$2.1 billion. Why? Because the Labor Party does not care about the south-west. It uses the south-west for political reasons. Every time the Government has a problem it pulls out the South West Rail Link and then

dumps it when it no longer suits. I have a strong message to send to the residents of south-west Sydney: I love south-west Sydney; I have been there a number of times by train and by other forms of public transport—I have been stuck at Campbelltown a few times and I have had to get a lift because the buses and trains do not connect very well there. I really enjoy visiting that part of Sydney.

Despite a lot of pressure when the State Government was trying to twist everybody's arm to support the Rozelle metro, we on this side of the House stayed true to the residents of the south-west and the north-west. We stayed true to those hardworking families who want to raise their children and grandchildren in the south-west of Sydney and who have inadequate transport options. We had a lot of pressure applied to us from various people and we said, "No, the Rozelle metro is the wrong project." Our position has always been that we support the South West Rail Link and the North West Rail Link. Not only will we start building the South West Rail Link but we will also complete it, because that has been our promise.

The State Government keeps talking about the Glenfield interchange and what it has done. That is all well and good, but the Glenfield interchange is just that: an interchange. It is not rail track. We have heard these promises before from the Labor Party, which now wants us to believe that after 15 years of hollow rhetoric, broken promises, nine re-announcements and wasted money it will complete the South West Rail Link. We know that will not happen under the Labor Government. The Government will be confronted with another political issue and the South West Rail Link will get pushed out even further.

When the Government last re-announced the South West Rail Link it said it would be completed by 2012. That has been pushed out now until 2016. Residents of south-west Sydney not only have had to put up with this on-again, off-again commitment by the Labor Party, but now they have to wait until at least 2016 before they get their rail line—if one can believe the Labor Party. As I have outlined, Labor's track record on this issue is just appalling. The residents of the south-west deserve so much better. They deserve to have a government that is committed to their needs. As outlined by the member for Macquarie Fields in his opening remarks, tens of thousands of people will move into that area in the next few years, but there is no adequate public transport.

I take the opportunity to thank the Mayor of Camden, Chris Patterson, the Liberal candidate for Wollondilly, Jai Rowell, and all the community groups and councils who have been lobbying us continually on this issue. We feel their pain and we share their concern. They can rest assured that if we are successful at the next election in March 2011 this project will be an absolute priority for us. We have not changed our tune on this issue at all, unlike the Labor Party, which has axed the project, re-announced it and axed it again, and the cost to taxpayers has gone from \$688 million to \$2.1 billion. The Labor Party is lazy. It is not committed to the residents of the south-west and it takes them for granted. We care about that fantastic part of Sydney and we will make sure its residents get the transport they deserve.

Mr GEOFF CORRIGAN (Camden) [4.14 p.m.]: I thank the member for Willoughby for her comments. The next time she goes out to Campbelltown on the train—I know she was there three Mondays ago because she met with the Mayor of Camden, Chris Patterson, at the Coffee Club at Macarthur Square and tried to convince him to run against me at the next State election—I urge her to look at the work that is going on currently at Glenfield. She will see the progress that is underway and she will see where the \$2.1 billion will be spent. It is wonderful work and it is great news for the people who will move into the area over the next 20 years—not the 10,000 who will move in over the next couple of years, as the shadow Minister for Transport says—which, of course, will provide us with an opportunity to ensure that there is adequate housing for Sydney's growing population and adequate infrastructure in place before people move in.

As well as the South West Rail Link the Government is committed to many other transport initiatives in the area. My colleague the member for Macquarie Fields referred to new stations at Leppington and Edmondson Park as well as new commuter car parks. I know he uses those facilities. He referred also to a new train stabling facility at Rossmore. Most of the land has been acquired for that already, but one or two people have not finished their negotiations. I refer also to the development of Glenfield station into a first-class transport interchange, with a new platform, a new pedestrian footbridge, easy access, facilities and improvements to the bus interchange on Railway Parade.

I urge people, particularly those from around Leppington, to go to the Glenfield display section. There is a wonderful video available showing what this project will look like when it is finished. It is a fantastic development. I attended two lots of community information sessions on a Thursday night and my colleague

attended one on the Saturday. We were there because we care about our constituents. We go out and listen to their concerns and we try to take very good care of them. The work is going ahead. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS (Hawkesbury) [4.18 p.m.]: Once again, we spend time in this House of democracy not debating the issues that matter to the people of New South Wales but debating the sort of motion that is currently before the House. It is one of those self-adulating, pat-on-the back motions in which the Government thanks itself and congratulates itself on doing virtually what it has done for the past 15 years—letting the people of New South Wales down, and letting them down very, very badly. And along the way the Government has managed to waste many, many billions of dollars. As has been pointed out by the very good shadow Minister for Transport, the South West Rail Link was promised to be delivered by 2010 at an original quote of some \$680 million.

Of course, that original price tag has blown out three times because, just like the North West Rail Link project, it has been re-announced and cancelled time and again. What can we construe from that? We cannot avoid coming to the conclusion that it is nothing but a lie. This Government continues to lie because it has no intention of ever delivering new rail lines on behalf of the people of New South Wales. That is evident in my electorate of Hawkesbury. For many years we have been promised that we would get a rail line to cater for growth in the area.

The member for Camden tried to convince us that the South West Rail Link project has commenced. He well knows that the only part of the project that has been constructed is the commuter car park, which should have been constructed many years ago. He knows that the South West Rail Link is a pipe dream and that its completion is so far in the future that everyone knows it will not happen. Members opposite can continue to sprinkle sugar on a lump of manure but it will still not taste like a doughnut. That is what the Government continues to do: It continues to spin the line that it is doing things. It puts out glossy brochures and press releases, but we know that it is not going to deliver anything. That is a very sad state of affairs.

Rather than my continuing to bleat, as we do, pick up on this Government's failures, I will provide quotes from real people—that is, the people of New South Wales who are suffering. The *Daily Telegraph* conducted a transport survey and asked people to comment. One comment was made by Jock, who said:

This Government had the last 14 years to plan ahead and fix this. They have clearly demonstrated they have absolutely no ability to sort this mess and are now desperately relying on spin and lies to get re-elected. They offer nothing to this State and its people. They are inept, incompetent and corrupt. They need to go now!!

Jock has probably hit the nail on the head. The newspaper has gathered comments from hundreds of people. "Angry Voter" states:

More lies from NSW Labor. Why would anyone believe anything that the NSW Government says?

That confirms everything I have just said about the spin that this Government continues to indulge in without putting a shovel into the ground. Jerome comments:

I am moving to the hills district. I now know who to not vote for.

Martin states:

Dear Kristina,

Stop lying and just build it! This joke has gone on long enough.

It is a sad joke. The only people affected are those who move into these areas—the young families who do not have public transport and who must rely on buses and endure gridlock. Michael writes:

I don't often agree with what the Libs have to say, but Michael Richardson is spot on. I was excited about the prospect of a rail link to the Hills when I still lived there as a kid, but today I don't hold much hope of riding a train, ever.

That sentiment is echoed by people living in south-west Sydney. Justin probably sums it up by saying:

All nonsense and rhetoric and pipe dreams from a befuddled, worn out labor government that is broke indeed!

It is broke and incompetent, and it continues to tell us a pack of lies.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.23 p.m.], in reply: I thank the members representing the electorates of Camden, Willoughby and Hawkesbury for their contributions to this debate. Craig Emerson's words apply to members opposite: Look not at what they say, but look at what they do. The Liberal Party has never promised the South West Rail Link; it was conceived and commenced by the Labor Party, just as the East Hills line was delivered by the Unsworth Government. The Liberals do not deliver infrastructure for south-west Sydney. That is why today the Coalition has not been able to produce a Liberal member representing south-west Sydney to debate this motion. I repeat: The South West Rail Link is underway. If members opposite had been to the site they would know that that statement is true.

I am pleased that the member for Willoughby has travelled on the train to Campbelltown a number of times. We have all done that. I hope she enjoyed Macarthur Square and had a coffee at the Coffee Club, because it is very good. While she was there she would have observed that the people of south-west Sydney are decent and reasonable. That is why this Government is so pleased that it has commenced construction of the rail link. The Glenfield transport interchange is being constructed because, as members opposite should know, rail tracks cannot be laid until there is something to connect them to. That is why work on the Glenfield interchange is being undertaken. I have not seen any members of the Liberal Party at the Glenfield station since the 2007 election when I was handing out how-to-vote cards at 6.00 a.m. If they were to visit the area they could meet the local people and hear what they have to say. They say that the rail service is reliable and that they catch trains every day. Members representing south-west Sydney electorates regularly catch the train to Sydney.

The member for Hawkesbury said that we are discussing something that does not matter to the people of New South Wales. It may not matter to members opposite, who spend their time discussing what happens in north-west Sydney, but it certainly does matter to the people of south-west Sydney. He said that the State Government has no intention of delivering new rail lines to New South Wales. In that case, the Chatswood to Epping rail link must be a figment of our imagination and the workers on the South West Rail Link site must be ghosts. Work on the rail link has commenced. If members opposite were to visit the information centres they would see what is being done and the plans for the line. The member for Hawkesbury referred to real people, but he did not say where many of them lived. Most of those who commented were from The Hills. This motion is about the South West Rail Link, the people of south-west Sydney and the people with whom we share our lives. This project is a vital piece of infrastructure for south-west Sydney and it must be built for our growing population. I commend the motion to the House.

Question—That the words stand—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 46

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

Noes, 38

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

Pairs

Mr Daley	Mr Roberts
Mr Koperberg	Mr Stoner

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment negatived.

Motion agreed to.

ASSENT TO BILLS

Assent to the following bills reported:

Relationships Register Bill 2010
Carers (Recognition) Bill 2010

SCHIZOPHRENIA**Matter of Public Importance**

Ms MARIE ANDREWS (Gosford) [4.34 p.m.]: As many members would know, Schizophrenia Awareness Week is a national, annual event that takes place this year from 16 to 22 May. The week consists of a series of events, including fundraisers, exhibitions and public lectures, and culminates with a major symposium held in Sydney. Schizophrenia Awareness Week is an opportunity for those who work in schizophrenia research or support services or who have been impacted by it to raise community awareness of the disease. It is also a chance for people who have schizophrenia to impart their knowledge and communicate their own experiences so they can teach society about what schizophrenia means to the people who have it. It is important that we encourage people to talk openly about this condition so that we can get past the stigma associated with schizophrenia and ensure that patients are diagnosed early and receive treatment as soon as possible so they can go on to lead independent, satisfying lives.

Schizophrenia is believed to be a developmental disorder that causes sufferers to retreat from reality. It leads to a slow decline in mental function and social relationships, resulting in personality changes, social isolation and occupational disability. In Australia and internationally, around one in 100 people will develop schizophrenia during their lifetime. The condition is one of the top 10 causes of disability in developed countries worldwide and the life expectancy of sufferers is reduced, on average, by 10 years. The disease is also a major cause of youth suicide, with 30 per cent of sufferers attempting suicide and 5 per cent succeeding.

In addition to the profound emotional cost to sufferers and their families, the disease costs the Australian community approximately \$1.5 billion per annum in both direct health costs and loss of productivity. The New South Wales Government supports a range of research initiatives to address the devastating impact that schizophrenia is having on our communities. The Government believes that investing in research into schizophrenia holds the best hope for sufferers of this disease and the families and friends who support them.

Research is gradually leading to new and safer medications and a greater understanding of the complex causes of the disorder—but continued investigation is needed. That is why the New South Wales Government contributes approximately \$2.5 million per annum to support the research programs of the Schizophrenia Research Institute—Australia's only medical research institute solely dedicated to discovering ways to prevent and cure schizophrenia.

An additional boost came earlier this year, with the establishment of the Schizophrenia Research Institute's new Australian Schizophrenia Research Bank database, launched by the Minister for Science and Medical Research. This database, which was developed in New South Wales, brings together the diverse knowledge of schizophrenia researchers and will provide online access to comprehensive research information that will help scientists, carers and health providers understand the causes of schizophrenia and develop better treatments. The database is the result of a partnership between researchers from the University of Newcastle and the New South Wales Government-supported e-research institute, Intersect. The new database will lead to the exchange of cutting edge scientific research, which is one of the best means of generating scientific breakthroughs.

The New South Wales Government supports the sharing of knowledge to drive research excellence, which is why the New South Wales Government is providing \$10,000 to sponsor the eleventh Biennial Australasian Schizophrenia Conference in September this year. This conference will draw 300 experts in schizophrenia from across the globe, and attempt to capture the recent international increase in knowledge about schizophrenia, its causes and potential treatment. This type of New South Wales Government support for research into schizophrenia, along with initiatives such as Schizophrenia Awareness Week, is important for researchers and carers. But, most of all, it is important for the one in 100 people and their families whose lives have been affected by the distressing impact of schizophrenia.

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES (Barwon) [4.39 p.m.]: I join with the member for Gosford and the Government in recognising Schizophrenia Awareness Week, 16 to 22 May. This is an annual event to raise community awareness of schizophrenia and mental illness in general. Schizophrenia Awareness Week provides an opportunity for those who have schizophrenia to share their experience and knowledge, and to help create a greater understanding of their needs and aspirations. Statistics indicate that around 20 per cent of the Australian population will experience some form of mental illness at some point in their lives—3 per cent will be seriously affected and around 1 per cent will develop schizophrenia. Of that 1 per cent, approximately 30 per cent of those will attempt suicide therefore raising awareness to break down barriers is crucial.

Schizophrenia involves losing touch with reality, not being able to tell the difference between what is real and what is unreal. It is a lonely disease. Its symptoms include hearing voices, and being delusional and socially withdrawal. Schizophrenia is the third leading cause of disability in young people. Schizophrenia can occur in any family. Schizophrenia costs the Australian community between \$1.5 billion and \$2 billion per annum in both direct health costs and loss of productivity. Onset of schizophrenia usually occurs in the mid to late teen years, with men affected in slightly greater numbers than women, who tend to experience a later onset of the illness. Although there is no cure yet, schizophrenia is highly treatable, with many people going on to lead normal lives.

I commend the Schizophrenia Research Institute for its great research. I recently met with its Chief Executive Officer, Professor Vaughan Carr. I congratulate the research institute on its vital work in drawing on some of the leading professional minds in this country—and later this year from around the world—and gathering data to find better ways to treat schizophrenia, and inevitably to find a cure. Similarly, I have met numerous times with the Chief Executive Officer of Schizophrenia Fellowship NSW, Rob Ramjan. I commend his organisation for its great advocacy work, for aiding to breakdown the stigma attached to mental illness and for supporting carers.

One carer I have met with regularly is Bernadette Beinke, mother of Patrick Beinke, a schizophrenia sufferer and consumer employee at Cornucopia Cafe and Nursery at the old Gladesville Hospital site. The name "Cornucopia" should be familiar to the Government, as its members and the Governor seem to dine there quite regularly. The Cornucopia Cafe and Nursery is a vocational skills and training workplace for more than 50 people who have mental health issues, with an additional 150 people who participate in social support activities. The Government and the area health service are trying to offload the Cornucopia Cafe and Nursery, which has caused considerable concern within the community.

Action was taken following numerous meetings with those affected on the Cornucopia Cafe and Nursery site. The Cornucopia Cafe and Nursery has equipped mental health consumers with great vocational

skills. It has boosted their self-esteem and given them a sense of belonging. It is a place where real people gather. They undertake real jobs and earn real money in a workplace that has been in the community for well over 13 years. It is inappropriate for the Government to put the site out to tender, to break it up. It should recognise that many people live with schizophrenia in a fragmented way over a long period of time. Places must be made available where people can live functional lives, attend regular workplaces, socialise with people who have similar difficulties and undertake restorative rehabilitation to help them deal with their mental illness, in particular, schizophrenia.

In his special commission of inquiry report on the state of the New South Wales health system Peter Garling, SC, highlighted the 2008 Federal Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs recommendation to "substantially increase funding to establish more long-term, step-up and step-down community-based accommodation for people with mental illness that is linked with clinical and psychosocial supports and rehabilitation services". In my time as the shadow Minister, the constant call from people living with mental illness, carers and people in the wider community, particular those living with schizophrenia, is that we need more transitional accommodation services. Other States around Australia, and indeed countries such as New Zealand, Canada and the United Kingdom, have undertaken that initiative.

We should have more appropriate step-up and step-down facilities, such as the 72-hour accommodation centres in Victoria, rather than the revolving door scenario of mental health consumers presenting to emergency healthcare centres. The Government's failure to consider the future wellbeing and progress of mental health consumers at places like Cornucopia is nothing less than discriminatory. I will continue to fight this issue and protect the State's most vulnerable against a sometimes out-of-touch and incompetent decision-making group. The Minister gave an undertaking that the report on Cornucopia will be presented on 11 June. The community eagerly awaits that report. I urge the Government and particularly the Northern Sydney Central Coast Area Health Service to consider the needs of those people. They should consider the value that transitional and psychosocial rehabilitation services provide in our community.

One of the challenges for all governments—an undertaking that the Liberal-Nationals will give in government—is to shift the centre of gravity from the crisis-driven acute back to community-based and community-driven strategies when supporting people living with mental illness. We will support those people and provide in-reach into hospital, with a highly geared community-driven approach to support those living with mental illness.

Ms LYLEA McMAHON (Shellharbour—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.46 p.m.]: I am sure many members in this House have personal experience with the debilitating effects of schizophrenia, be it family members, friends or constituents. Many of us have seen the strain it places on relationships and the isolating impact it can have on the individual, family and carers. That is why the New South Wales Government has invested so heavily in both those working to find a cure and those organisations whose core business is helping people with schizophrenia to live independent and prosperous lives.

This year Schizophrenia Fellowship celebrates its twenty-fifth birthday. For more than two decades the fellowship has been supporting people living with schizophrenia and their families. It has made an invaluable contribution to our community and to the lives of those it assists. The New South Wales Government is proud to support the fellowship with more than \$2.2 million in annual funding to help carry out this important work. Schizophrenia Awareness Week is the perfect opportunity to acknowledge Schizophrenia Fellowship's tremendous work in coordinating this initiative and the support provided across New South Wales each and every day. Whilst this is an important week to combat the stigma around mental illness, breaking down the myths and taboo is something that needs to happen every week of the year.

We need to make people aware of the wide range of supports available to them and give them the confidence to seek that help. That is why this financial year the Keneally Government has invested more than \$1.17 billion in mental health. Our State's mental health workforce comprises dedicated and compassionate people, working hard to improve the lives of those living with a mental illness, both in our hospitals and in the community. We also have the best minds in the world working to unlock some of the remaining mystery behind mental illness. World-leading expert in schizophrenia research, Professor Cyndi Shannon-Weickert, is the current Macquarie Group Foundation Chair of Schizophrenia Research—the first position of its kind in Australia. The Government has supported the chair's work, with more than \$2.5 million in funding since 2007, with the Minister for Planning, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Mental Health) announcing earlier this year a further \$1 million towards the position.

Professor Weickert is undertaking groundbreaking research into the effectiveness of new medications in the treatment of schizophrenia. After identifying a brain receptor that is faulty in people with schizophrenia, Cyndi is currently conducting clinical trials to examine the effectiveness of a drug that has been found to protect those neurons. This research could revolutionise the treatment of people with schizophrenia. Cyndi's expertise could mean the world of difference to the some 30,000 people in New South Wales currently living with schizophrenia. Professor Vaughan Carr of the Schizophrenia Research Institute said of Cyndi, "If there was a single scientist who was going to make a big difference in unravelling the nature of this condition it would be her." And here she is working in New South Wales, supported by this Government.

Professor Weickert's profound determination to find a cure is inspired by her late brother who was diagnosed with schizophrenia in his teens. It is this driving force that could ultimately have a remarkable impact on the way we treat schizophrenia. It is that personal connection or experience with schizophrenia that has inspired so many to commit their lives to supporting and improving the mental health of others. In another Australian first, last year the New South Wales Government appointed Australia's first Chair in Schizophrenia Epidemiology and Population Health, in a joint partnership with the University of New South Wales. Professor Vaughan Carr, one of the world's leading researchers, who also continues his work with the Schizophrenia Research Institute, holds the position.

In fact, our commitment to and investment in mental health and research in this State has meant New South Wales has retained five of the world's 10 leading mental health researchers. This includes Associate Professor Phil Mitchell, head of the Government's Mental Health Priority Taskforce and the School of Psychiatry at the University of New South Wales, Professor Vaughan Carr; Professor Gordon Parker, Executive Director of the Black Dog Institute; Gavin Andrews, an expert in anxiety management working at St Vincent's Hospital and Professor of Psychiatry at the University of New South Wales; and Ian Hickey, Head of the Brain and Mind Institute at the University of Sydney. The New South Wales Government is determined to keep mental health at the forefront of everyone's minds and to continue to invest in mental health services that improve outcomes for those in New South Wales living with a mental illness.

Ms MARIE ANDREWS (Gosford) [4.51 p.m.], in reply: I thank the member for Barwon and the member for Shellharbour for their contributions to the discussion on this matter of public importance on Schizophrenia Awareness Week. I take the member for Barwon to task for some of the comments he made. The Government has shown that it takes mental health in this State very seriously. In fact, it was this Government that created the portfolio of Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Mental Health). That is how seriously the Government has taken mental health issues in this State.

I reinforce the fact that this year the Government spent almost \$1.2 billion on mental health alone. It was my great pleasure on Monday of this week to join the Minister for Health, the Hon. Carmel Tebbutt, and the Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Mental Health), the Hon. Barbara Perry, in officiating at the opening of the Gosford Mental Health Centre, which is located in the grounds of Gosford Hospital. The centre, which cost \$13 million, provides 30 mental health beds as well as many outreach services. The telephone access line has also been housed in that centre. It is a state-of-the-art centre that I know will make a big difference to the treatment of people on the Central Coast who suffer with mental health conditions. Indeed, on the Central Coast we now have 80 mental health beds, as well as a whole range of outreach services, telephone access lines, and other mental health services.

I pay tribute to all those who work in the very difficult and challenging area of mental health. As this is Schizophrenia Awareness Week, I particularly thank all the medical personnel who are involved in assisting people with schizophrenia. I acknowledge that we still have a long way to go in addressing mental health issues, but we have come a long way in the past 10 years in making sure that mental health is at the top of the list when it comes to addressing health issues. Unfortunately, in all the developed countries around the world mental health is getting near the top of the list of medical conditions. The Government is certainly making sure it addresses the issue.

As I said recently at the opening of the Gosford Mental Health Centre, when I first became the local member in 1995 many constituents would come to my office to raise concerns about usually their relatives who were suffering with mental health issues. At that stage there was a definite lack of medical treatment available on the Central Coast for those people. I can honestly say that these days we hardly ever have a constituent contact my office about treatment for mental health conditions. We have come a long way in dealing with mental health issues, although, as I have said, there is still a lot more to be done. It should be placed on record that during this Schizophrenia Awareness Week the Government is taking all mental health issues very seriously. Again I thank the members for Barwon and Shellharbour for their contributions to this discussion.

Discussion concluded.

NATIONAL PARK ESTATE (RIVERINA RED GUM RESERVATIONS) BILL 2010 (NO. 2)

Bill introduced on motion by Mr Frank Sartor.

Agreement in Principle

Mr FRANK SARTOR (Rockdale—Minister for Climate Change and the Environment, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Cancer)) [4.56 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

This new bill provides for the most significant forest conservation decision in many years over the river red gum forests of the Riverina. The House will recall that on 22 April this year I introduced a previous version of this bill, which we have now withdrawn. The Government has undertaken this unusual step because, after talking further with the timber industry, local government and conservation groups, we saw an opportunity for a bigger, better and fairer outcome in the river red gum forests. We recognised that, while the previous bill delivered on most of the key recommendations stemming from the Natural Resources Commission assessment, we could go further and give the communities of the Riverina, the timber industry and the river red gum forests a better future.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order! The member for Burrinjuck will come to order.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: The member for Burrinjuck will have her turn to speak in this debate. This new bill provides for many of the same measures that the original bill provided for, and I do not intend to go into the same detail about those components that have stayed the same. The key changes in the new bill and the overall package are, first, the removal of the transitional logging arrangements in the Millewa forests and the establishment of national and regional park over the full extent of the Millewa group of forests from 1 July 2010; and, secondly, a \$17 million increase in the river red gum structural adjustment package, taking the total for business exit assistance to \$25 million and worker assistance to \$21.5 million, with an additional \$3.5 million for regional and community development and catchment programs, with the component to come out of the Environmental Trust reflected in section 5 of schedule 10 to the bill. This means that the total river red gum package is now \$97 million.

Mr John Williams: It's a sell-out, Frank.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: The member will get his turn. The Werai and Taroo forests, which are planned to be handed over to Aboriginal communities to be managed for conservation under the Commonwealth's Indigenous Protected Area Program, will be vested in the Minister administering the National Parks and Wildlife Act from 1 July 2010 instead of remaining as State forest. This will prevent commercial logging before they are handed to Aboriginal owners. The third key change in the new bill is that the provision for the collection of firewood for domestic purposes in specified zones within regional parks will be extended to national parks, with a review to be conducted after three years.

The bill therefore sits alongside the tradition of strong and balanced forest conservation decisions made by the Government since 1995. The Government is rightly proud of these decisions and the gift they represent for future generations, and it is proud today to be able to introduce a bill that delivers such an effective response to the challenges for the river red gum forests. And these forests do face significant challenges. As wetland forests that have evolved within a regime of regular extensive flooding, the changes to our rivers and floodplains brought about by regulation and water diversions are a threat to their very future.

Last year the Government tasked the Natural Resources Commission with carrying out a regional forest assessment and making recommendations on the use and management of the public forest land in the Riverina. In December the commission submitted its assessment and recommendations to the Government. Their findings very clearly lay out the challenges faced by the forests and the communities reliant upon them. To quote from their report:

The river red gum forests and the industries and social systems they support are in decline due to river regulation, over-allocation of water and drought. This decline is predicted to worsen under climate change".

The Natural Resources Commission made a set of findings and recommendations to attempt to address this decline and meet the needs of the environment and the communities of the Riverina. This bill represents the core

of the Government's response to the report and recommendations of the Natural Resources Commission. The Government endorses and will implement nearly all of the recommendations of the Natural Resources Commission, including the establishment of new national parks and regional parks—including the entirety of the Millewa forest. It will also commence the process of establishing indigenous protected areas for the Werai and Taroo forests. It will provide for harvesting to continue within the Koondrook-Perricoota and Campbells Island State forests under existing environmental controls until an Integrated Forestry Operations Approval is developed by December this year. In addition, the package will ensure that a fair and effective structural adjustment package for the industry, its workers and the communities of the region can be implemented.

As I outlined previously, the Government is strongly supportive of the recommendation of the Natural Resources Commission to ensure environmental watering of the river red gum forests. The Government has a very strong record as a national leader in environmental water reform. However, other processes will drive this outcome. As the Legislative Assembly will recognise, the Murray-Darling Basin Authority is currently developing the Basin Plan, which will be the driver of the quantum and timing of water recovery across the basin. The prioritisation of water purchase by the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder will also be key in this regard. These processes will deliver increased environmental water, and they are not matters for this bill.

The cornerstone of this bill is the creation of more than 100,000 hectares of new protected areas, including 65,922 hectares of national park, 15,259 hectares of regional park and 20,684 hectares of land which, when the Aboriginal community is ready, will become indigenous protected area. Included from 1 July 2010 within the new national and regional parks are the entirety of the Millewa and Barooga forests along the Murray, which will be incorporated into the new Murray Valley National Park and Murray Valley Regional Park; the forests of the Murrumbidgee below Narrandera, including the former Yanga National Park, which will be incorporated in the new Murrumbidgee Valley National Park and Regional Park; and a string of forests along the Lachlan, which will become the new Lachlan Valley National Park and Regional Park. In addition, a new Euston Regional Park and Kemendok National Park will be created on the lower Murray River. These new national and regional parks will form a magnificent network of conservation reserves for the river red gum forests, and will complement the recently gazetted reserves across the Murray River in Victoria. Part 2 of the bill provides for the land transfers necessary to establish the new reserves from 1 July 2010.

The Government will also ensure that the National Parks and Wildlife Service is adequately resourced to manage the new reserves, and has set aside a total of \$23.52 million for park management over the next three years. This includes \$11.83 million of capital expenditure for the establishment of the new reserves, and another \$9.69 million of recurrent management funding. In addition, the Government has set aside \$2 million to support Aboriginal communities to become involved in the management of the new reserves and for the development of indigenous protected areas for Werai and Taroo. I make it clear that this Government is committed to entering into a joint management agreement with the Yorta Yorta in relation to cooperative care, control and management of the Millewa forests.

The Natural Resources Commission made very clear recommendations about the need for active and adaptive management of the river red gum forests, including a large-scale trial of ecological thinning. The Government has put in place measures, including funding of \$3.532 million beyond the management funds I have already described, to implement adaptive management and a broad-scale trial of ecological thinning within the new national and regional parks and in cooperation with other land managers on other tenures.

Part 2 of the bill also provides for the Werai and Taroo groups of forests to be managed by indigenous communities for the conservation of flora, fauna and cultural sites. The Government is strongly supportive of these lands being handed to an appropriate Aboriginal organisation. Just for clarification the term "Aboriginal land-holding body" in the bill is not necessarily limited to similar terms defined in other legislation, and it may include a traditional owner incorporated body. The Commonwealth Government runs the Indigenous Protected Area Program, and it is not within the power of the New South Wales Government to create an indigenous protected area. Despite this, the New South Wales Government intends to continue to work cooperatively with the Commonwealth so that the lands will be able to be managed under this program. Should this not be possible, another option would be the application of a voluntary conservation agreement.

In contrast to the previous bill, the new bill vests the Werai and Taroo groups of forests in the Minister administering the National Parks and Wildlife Act under part 11 of that Act from 1 July 2010. Following negotiations with the Aboriginal community, they will be vested in an appropriate Aboriginal organisation for conservation management when such an arrangement is possible. The bill makes it clear that these lands can be divested for this purpose. Part 2 of the bill also provides for the revocation of some State forests to be vested in the Crown as Crown land, as I explained for the previous bill.

As I mentioned in the introduction, the Government is intent on providing the river red gum timber industry, and its workers, with a fair and equitable structural adjustment package. This bill amends the Forestry Restructuring and Nature Conservation Act 1995 to allow payments to be made from the Environmental Trust Fund to offset payments made from the Consolidated Fund for the implementation of forestry structural adjustment programs in the Riverina. This is reflected in section 5 of schedule 10 to the bill. The Government has developed the Riverina red gum structural adjustment package based upon what was applied in the Brigalow, but with some differences. The most important of these is that the overall package for the mills is broadly based on paying out the equivalent of two years of sustainable yield. Payments to individual mills will be settled by the steering committee.

In the previous bill the Government had put forward the proposal of a five-year period of transitional logging in part of the Millewa State Forest as another way of assisting the industry and the community adapt to the changes. However, several mills and operators have since indicated their preference for an enhanced exit package rather than the Millewa transitional arrangement—they have had those discussions with me. Once the new reserves are established, no timber supply will be available in the Murrumbidgee and Lachlan forests. In the central Murray, timber will continue to be available from Koondrook-Perricoota and Campbell's Island State forests, providing a sustainable yield of high-quality sawlog of 4,413 cubic metres per annum. In the lower Murray the Western Lands leases will continue to be available for harvest, subject to operational requirements of Forests NSW.

Were these volumes to be distributed amongst all businesses there would not be sufficient wood available for them to be viable. Inevitably some will close and effectively "sell" their remaining allocation back into the pool for use by those businesses that choose to remain. Following advice on the financial position of the mills, and close discussions with them and the Forest Products Association, the Government will now be allocating up to \$25 million for business exit assistance to support the timber mills and smaller timber operators with a Crown allocation. As I have advised the Legislative Assembly previously, this process has already commenced with the Darlington Point sawmill on the Murrumbidgee having begun shutting down and the first exit payments having been made. All workers who lose their jobs as a result of the changes to Crown allocations and yields, and the full or partial closure of mills with Crown allocations, will be eligible for special worker assistance on top of their statutory payments from their employer. These payments have been set at \$81,360 per worker, plus up to \$10,000 for retraining.

In addition, the Government will provide up to \$5 million for industry development assistance in the Riverina. Any businesses with proposals for industry development either within or outside the timber industry will be eligible to apply for these funds. This allocation will also be available to businesses that can demonstrate they meet the criteria as being dependent on timber businesses with a Crown allocation that have closed as a result of this decision. The river red gum steering committee will advise the Minister for Climate Change and the Environment on the expenditure of these funds. The Government has increased the total funding package for structural adjustment, including business exit assistance, worker assistance and industry structural adjustment, including dependent businesses, to \$51.5 million of the \$97 million package.

The Government has also continued discussions with the representatives of the local communities in the Riverina that will be affected by these necessary changes to the river red gum industry. As a result of these discussions the Government is increasing the allocation under the new Regional Employment and Community Development Fund to \$12 million.

Mr John Williams: Try and get your hands on that money. You will block them all the way.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: If the member for Murray-Darling listened he would learn something. This fund will seek to support and assist new and alternative business and development opportunities that will be of broad benefit to the community.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order! Opposition members will remain silent during the Minister's agreement in principle speech.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: A committee comprising local representatives, including local government and Regional Development Australia will advise the Minister for Climate Change and the Environment on the expenditure of this fund. The bill provides for the development of an Integrated Forestry Operations Approval in the remaining production forests, in line with the Forestry and National Parks Estate Act. This will bring logging standards up to those that apply elsewhere in New South Wales. The Government will expedite the development

of the Integrated Forestry Operations Approval to ensure it will be ready by the end of this calendar year. This action, together with new wood supply agreements, will provide industry with the certainty it is seeking and, in turn, establish a strong and clear regulatory arrangement. As flagged previously, the bill amends the Forestry and National Parks Estate Act to remove the requirement for a forest agreement. This will permit the preparation of a comprehensive Integrated Forestry Operations Approval to be expedited.

The removal of the Millewa transitional logging arrangements will remove another potential source of domestic firewood collection. As a result the Government has decided to extend the provision in the former bill covering domestic firewood collection within regional parks to national parks as well. The bill will permit firewood to be collected by individuals or not-for-profit organisations that have been issued with annual licences by the department. Firewood can only be collected from off the ground in zones within regional and national parks that have been determined by the department. This measure is intended for locals of the Riverina only. Also, this measure will not permit anyone to cut down any trees for any reason. Wood will only be able to be cut if it is on the ground. The department will ensure sufficient supplies are available and may use wood obtained from ecological thinning undertaken elsewhere and brought into the firewood zones for this purpose. Detailed information will be made available prior to the commencement of the provisions on 1 July 2010.

The Government also has listened to requests for greater accountability in the expenditure of funding allocated in the river red gum package and has extended the reporting provisions in the former bill to cover all expenditure. In addition, at the end of five years there will be an independent assessment of the outcomes achieved in the river red gum forests since the decision. The Government is committed to the long-term future of these beautiful forests. Working with the conservation groups, the timber industry and the communities of the Riverina, the Government has developed an improved river red gum package and an improved bill. Its passage will go a long way toward securing the future of the forests and the communities of the Riverina. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Ms Katrina Hodgkinson and set down as an order of the day for a later hour.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): I acknowledge the Chinese delegation from Beijing city led by Mr Lu Heshun, guests of the member for Davidson.

TRANSPORT ADMINISTRATION AMENDMENT BILL 2010

Agreement in Principle

Debate resumed from an earlier hour.

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA (Davidson) [5.13 p.m.]: Although the Transport Administration Amendment Bill 2010 has some good objects, it is a backward step in that it reverts the remaining transport agencies that are State-owned corporations to statutory authorities. It fails to separate planning functions from operational functions in transport and it reduces governance by abolishing many of the agency boards. The recently formed Department of Transport and Infrastructure now will be called Transport NSW. I am sure that will result in further wasteful expenditure from the production of new stationery and related material associated with yet another departmental name change.

No doubt, once the bill is passed, the Government will try to argue that it is delivering an integrated transport network. For a long time the New South Wales Liberals and Nationals have advocated for a properly integrated transport authority, as has been capably articulated by the shadow Minister for Transport and criticised by the Government. I support the views espoused by the shadow Minister for Transport in her speech on this bill. The alternative approaches she outlined would result in superior management of public transport services as they involve a more streamlined approach, emphasis on front-line services rather than bureaucracy, and the delivery of improved outcomes for the long-suffering commuting public of New South Wales.

Changed bureaucratic structures do not necessarily mean better public services or accountability. In practical terms, who will be responsible and accountable under the proposed new approach? I ask this question mindful of the Government's recent performance in relation to the CBD metro. I will put this crucial issue in context. In question time today the Premier commented on a changed Coalition policy position compared with

the position at the last State election. She was hypocritical in her comments, in light of her own Government's belated about-turn on the CBD metro. She left herself exposed to shattered glass as she threw stones from inside the ageing and fragile glasshouse that is New South Wales Labor. While the Premier loves to front the public on a good news day, there has been a distinct lack of visibility from Kodak Keneally when it comes to explaining the debacle that is the CBD metro project.

When I asked a question on notice of the Premier as to who was responsible for the hundreds of millions of dollars wasted on the CBD metro project the Premier could identify no individual officeholder. She attempted to hide behind an amorphous overall governmental responsibility. The Premier was part of a Cabinet that made the decision to proceed with the CBD metro project and she was the planning Minister who played a part in the relevant announcements. She also was the leader of the Cabinet that axed the project. Now, with this bill, she wants to abolish the same Sydney Metro Authority that New South Wales Labor created only last year. Why does the Premier not accept proper responsibility or discipline anyone? Why have we not had an inquiry into the waste of \$500 million of valuable public resources? Clearly, the Government, having taken hard-earned dollars from the pockets of every taxpaying person in New South Wales, does not want the transparency and accountability that such scrutiny would involve. If the truth were revealed we would find that the Minister for Transport and Roads fought to keep the CBD metro project until the end, and the Premier promised to protect him and others after belatedly making the call to pull the plug on a project that we had opposed from the start.

The member for Wyong, in his speech on this bill, talked about problems with buses on the Central Coast and about the F3. He spoke about some advantages in his electorate, but he also spoke about problems that have existed and continue to exist in relation to buses on the Central Coast. On my prompting, in acknowledgement of my interjections, he spoke about the F3, which has been compared to a commuter car park at times. Given that the mismanagement of \$28 million of public infrastructure for contra flow traffic measures on the F3 resulted in a senior bureaucrat being stood down and an independent investigation, what special measures have been implemented in relation to the waste of about half a billion on the CBD metro project? We have seen none so far. We have seen what has happened in the past. That prompts the obvious question: Under this proposed new regime who would take responsibility for a hypothetically announced multibillion-dollar transport project that was axed after \$500 million was spent? That is the crucial question. I ask the Minister for Transport and Roads to tell us who would take responsibility under these new arrangements because, as we have seen, under past arrangements no-one has taken responsibility.

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL (Keira—Minister for Transport and Roads) [5.19 p.m.], in reply: I thank the member for Willoughby, the member for Pittwater, the member for Davidson, the member for Sydney, the member for Charlestown, the member for Maitland and the member for Wyong for their contributions to the debate on the Transport Administration Amendment Bill 2010. I will make some comments in my reply to some of the issues that have been raised in the debate.

Effective integration and coordination of public transport services and infrastructure are a core responsibility of government. That is why on this side of the House we are determined to do everything we can to ensure the community gets the most effective transport network available and that decisions are made with the community's interest first, not the needs of various agencies, and without the Machiavellian plots and conspiracy theories that we heard from the member for Davidson in his contribution to the debate. This bill will deliver greater coordination of the daily transport effort whilst at the same time improving the way we develop strategic plans and priorities going forward. It has a strong focus on accountability back to the community for the decisions made, and that is something that I am determined to see enhanced across the portfolio.

To address some of the comments made by Opposition during this debate, I am pleased to place on record corrections to the misinformation that has been provided. With regards to the responsibility and accountability of the Minister, I draw the attention of the House to new section 3B. The director general and the chief executives of the following bodies are, in the exercise of their functions, subject to the control and direction of the Minister, RailCorp, the Roads and Traffic Authority, the State Transit Authority, Sydney Ferries, the Transport Construction Authority and the Country Rail Infrastructure Authority. Opposition members want to hand over accountability and decision-making to an independent, unelected authority, but the bill makes it clear that the Minister is ultimately accountable. That is the outcome our community expects.

The bill makes it clear that the functions of the director general are targeted at integration and coordination, which includes things like transport planning and policy, transport funding, transport infrastructure coordination, contracting for the delivery of services, transport services coordination, incident management and

transport information. The member for Davidson sought to mislead the House by saying that the bill does not separate planning and operations. That is wrong, and I encourage him to look at new part 1A 3C, which demonstrates that the director general has a clear responsibility for planning and that the chief executives of the various line organisations I just mentioned have responsibility for operations. This arrangement will ensure the creation of fully integrated transport plans, a single budget for transport, effective implementation of the integrated transport plans and coordinated information for the community.

To streamline accountability it is essential that the Transport Infrastructure Development Corporation and the Rail Infrastructure Corporation, which currently report to boards, have strengthened accountability and responsibility. Those businesses are heavily government subsidised, and clear accountability must rest with the chief executives of those entities. We will use a single advisory board to provide expert and community advice to assist with the delivery of transport infrastructure and services. The advisory council will consist of expert and community representatives, who will report directly to the Minister and the director general and will provide assistance and advice in the administration of transport in New South Wales. This will provide an effective forum to address transport issues important to the community and to other key stakeholders. It will enable expert legal, financial, economic and community issues to be discussed and policies of the new agency to be strengthened.

To be clear, the safety functions of the Independent Transport Safety Regulator are strengthened through this bill by the broadening of their role across the portfolio, particularly in relation to bus safety, rather than just rail. The only aspect of the safety regulator's function being absorbed by the new agency is responsibility for monitoring reliability, which will form a core part of the new service contracts with the operating agencies. Clearly, reliability needs to be tied to the deliverer of the services. We must also make clear that we are not expanding the bureaucracy. Any experienced administrator knows that when you consolidate like functions and back-of-house services you generate economies of scale and, hence, savings in organisational costs that can be put back into front-line services. No front-line services are being removed as part of this process. Indeed, as part of the Government's efforts we will see front-line services expanded.

I note that this debate occurs a month after the introduction of the MyZone ticketing system, which brings me to address some comments made by the member for Pittwater, who blithely said, "Nothing is being delivered." As part of the integration and as part of an improvement of front-line services MyZone has been well received. The only member of the Opposition who has ever had anything remotely positive to say about MyZone is the member for Pittwater, but he blemished his record with that silly statement he made in the debate. Planning functions are being coordinated and consolidated into the Centre for Transport Planning, a core part of Transport NSW. Individual transport service providers will retain responsibility for operations, maintenance and safety on their networks.

Members should understand how vital the connection is between transport and land use. The precinct planning responsibilities proposed for the director general are an important part of ensuring that connection. It needs to be understood that planning approval still rests with the Department of Planning and the Minister for Planning. However, this bill creates an environment where land-use planners and transport planners come together to achieve better outcomes for our community. That concept is an important part of the Metropolitan Transport Plan that the Premier announced on 21 February: the notion of ensuring that strategic planning for urban development, whether that be commercial development or residential development, comes together with road and public transport planning. That is a core goal in the Metropolitan Transport Plan and provisions in this bill facilitate it.

I am amazed that the member for Willoughby would debate this bill and say that she is against consolidation while at the same time she is on record as saying that she has a view that it should be contracted out. The Opposition would set up some remote body that was unelected and unaccountable and simply contract out the decision-making. We know that the Opposition is particularly lazy on policy, but it puts out that view. Of course, this shows how out of touch it is. As recently as yesterday members of the business community called for a so-called transport tsar—a very unfair term and not the best term one could imagine, but it is in the context of what the business community is seeking to achieve: the director general role established by this bill where one person has accountability for planning integration.

It is bizarre that once again the Opposition is so far off the pace with what the community expects, with what the business community is arguing for, with what planning and building lobby groups are arguing for and, indeed, what the Government is getting on with delivering as part of this significant restructure in the way that transport operates in New South Wales. I acknowledge the very strong contribution made by the member for

Sydney. Her considered contribution showed that she at least had looked at the bill, which was clearly not the case with members of the Opposition who contributed to this debate. I acknowledge the member for Charlestown, the member for Maitland and the member for Wyong, whose contributions again showed that they understood what can be achieved through proper integration of planning and service delivery functions.

Notwithstanding that the bill is not yet through the Parliament, we have established the transport coordination group, which is working to find alternative ways for public transport to be provided when there are problems on the network, such as equipment failure, an attempt at self-harm by a member of the community or an accident on the road network. The transport coordination group does a particularly strong job.

This bill will assist the Government to meet State Plan targets for journeys to work by public transport. With the integration of the delivery of the Metropolitan Transport Plan and its integration with the Metropolitan Urban Development Plan for Sydney, both of which are now being debated in the community, this bill provides for strong coordination across the modes of public transport and with road construction and delivery. It also provides for proper coordination across the various operational agencies and establishes stronger and clearer accountability. It also ensures a focus on safety and facilities delivery of State Plan targets and the Metropolitan Transport Plan.

This bill will put the Government in a stronger position to deliver on the \$50.2 billion investment in roads and public transport planned for the next decade. It will ensure that agencies work together to complete the expansion of the light rail network as soon as possible. It will allow the Government to build on strategic bus networks that will provide additional services. That includes the delivery of 300 new buses through the Growth Bus plan. As the Premier announced last week, over the next 12 months the Government will deliver the next tranche of 100 of the 1,000 buses that are planned for delivery as part of the Metropolitan Transport Plan.

Agencies will work with the Department of Planning as we get on with the delivery of the South West Rail Link, which is now under construction. The planning, construction and operating agencies will work together as we build infrastructure for the city relief line and the western express service, which will provide strong support for public transport in the western suburbs. The Opposition has absolutely refused to support that project. The integration of those planning, construction, operation and delivery functions that are facilitated by a bill such as this will ensure that we can get on with the task of putting in place the North West Rail Link, which is part and parcel of the Metropolitan Transport Plan. This bill will ensure integration, coordination, accountability, safety and delivery, and I commend it to the House.

Question—That this bill be now agreed to in principle—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Passing of the Bill

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

NATIONAL PARK ESTATE (RIVERINA RED GUM RESERVATIONS) BILL 2010 (NO. 2)

Agreement in Principle

Debate resumed from an earlier hour.

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck) [5.31 p.m.]: I lead for the Coalition in this debate on the National Park Estate (Riverina Red Gum Reservations) Bill 2010 (No. 2). This legislation is wrong and its introduction is shameful. The Coalition will oppose this bill tooth and nail in this House and in another place. We will not change our position on this legislation and we will not negotiate with the Government for 30 pieces of silver. We will not betray the residents of south-west New South Wales who have responsibly and sustainably harvested Riverina red gum timber for more than 150 years. This legislation simply must be voted down in its entirety.

The original legislation, which was introduced on 22 April, lacked any commonsense and the revised legislation—of which I received a copy at 3.40 p.m. today—is even worse. That the Government seeks to rush

through all stages of debate on this legislation tonight speaks volumes about how it treats the hardworking people of south-west New South Wales. The Clerk has only now put this legislation on the table. The fact that it is not allowed to lie on the table for five days before we debate it is equally offensive. The people who will be directly impacted by this legislation will not have an opportunity even to look at it before this House has passed it. The copy of the bill that I have been given is only a draft: the legislation could have been changed since I received this copy. Even the members on this side of the House who intend to speak in this debate have not had a chance to study the bill that has been rushed into the House this afternoon.

That this bill seeks to destroy the livelihood that people have built up, sometimes over several generations, all in the name of extreme green ideology and unsupported by facts is abhorrent. That many hundreds of families who rely on the timber industry in the south-west of the State will suffer is tragic. The Riverina red gum is a magnificent tree and it produces an excellent timber that has many uses. It has been sustainably harvested for generation after generation, for more than 150 years, without any negative environmental consequences. Riverina red gum forests now cover a much larger area than they did before European settlement. The Natural Resources Commission report, the State Labor Government and the extreme green movement have ignored that crucial point.

I have received extensive correspondence from many people and I will deal with some of it during my contribution. Mr Vic Eddy has more than 40 years experience in managing red gum forests and he was the manager of the red gum forests at Yanga Station. He knows his trees and he certainly knows red gums. It was only because of his excellent management of the Yanga Station forests that they were in such good condition that this Government purchased them to be included in the Yanga National Park. Mr Eddy states:

I am quite proud that I was the manager of the red gum forests on Yanga Station that inspired the NPWS to purchase the property for Yanga National Park. They said they didn't buy it to save it, they bought it because they regarded it as being in good condition. I would also point out that every thing they are now doing was being done or could have been done without being totally borne by the public purse.

Having established his credentials, I will quote another email Mr Eddy wrote to me: He said:

We need to understand and appreciate that about 6,000 years ago river red gum invaded a human habitat and not vice versa. Then in the last 200 years the human influence has changed but it is still the human influence that has controlled the tree population. By dedicating red gum forests as National Parks these forests are now to be passively managed allowing them to develop an ecological balance that they have never previously experienced. While the exercise may be interesting it is not conserving the forest in a previously occurring context.

I seriously doubt that if the aboriginal community is involved in the forest park management that NPWS will give them free rein to burn as they like. I also seriously doubt that there is a living individual that knows the how, when, where and why, of their ancestor's burning practices. We know they used fire but that is all. We also need to understand that exclusion of regular surface fires has allowed a build up of fuel captured in the surface silt. When that buried fuel catches alight it can smoulder for weeks and the roots of every tree it comes to are cooked or the tree is ringbarked. Also the build up of debris around the big old habitat trees condemns those trees once the debris ignites.

Nathan Rees claims his action is based on the NRC draft report, but the NRC advocate addition of water and active stand management. He has no understanding of how to water a red gum forest effectively. A few years ago, the Murrumbidgee CMA had the bright idea to run an environmental flow to water the parched floodplain downstream of Balranald. Fortunately someone with a bit of knowledge got the message through to them that unless the Murray River is running bank full at any junction, any water coming down the Murrumbidgee just squirts out at the end ("the plug hole") and will not overflow the banks.

This whole red gum debate is one of perceptions and misconceptions of people with a little knowledge but no real understanding of just how complex it really is.

At the moment the forests are in poor ecological condition partly due to the lack of flooding in the last 16 years. The last genuine flood year was 1993. It was also largely due to too many trees depending on inadequate soil moisture. If there has been a significant fault of State Forest management in the last 100 years it is that too many trees have been allowed to over populate these forests.

That we have such a large amount of red gum forest for the Labor Party to lock up in a national park is only due to the excellent silvicultural management of these forests over more than 1½ centuries of forestry. The threat facing the river red gums has been clearly identified by the Natural Resources Commission, which supports Mr Eddy's statement. The "Riverina Bioregion Regional Forest Assessment: River Red Gums and Woodland Forests" states at 1.3:

The Riverina bioregion is characterised by rivers with extreme hydrological variability and extensive regulation. The construction of dams and weirs over the last 120 years and diversion of river flows for irrigation have resulted in highly modified ecosystems. In addition, there has been a dramatic decline in average inflows to the Murray system in the last 15 years compared to the long-term average.

River regulation, over-allocation of water resources and persistent drought are responsible for the observed decline in the red river gum forests and the industries and social systems they support. The health of red river gum ecosystems is driven by river flows and flooding regimes. As such, many of the river red gum forests are under high stress, and in some cases are transitioning to alternative states. Their future health, and the industries and communities they support, will depend on whether the forest stands can be artificially flooded and how they are managed. However, even with ambitious water reforms there will not be enough water to restore all the red river gum forests to health.

Climate change is a significant threat to biodiversity, ecosystem function and ecosystem resilience in the bioregion. Climate change is likely to cause landscape-scale changes, markedly different hydrological regimes and the further transformation of ecosystems. The choice ahead is therefore whether to let this decline take its course, or act to manage the forests to create new, more sustainable ecological, economic and social futures.

That section continues:

Future management of these floodplain ecosystems needs to be attuned to meeting the diverse values of conservation, commercial production, cultural and social use in an increasingly dynamic water-scarce future. Accordingly, current tenure models and management strategies need to be able to actively and adaptively manage the emerging challenges. There is a range of institutions, tenures and management models available to manage the red gum forests.

I can summarise the threat to Riverina red gums in one word: drought. These iconic forests are not threatened by rapacious slash and burn, conscienceless destroyers, clear felling a delicate environmental area, as some members of the extreme green movement and a previous failed Labor Premier would have us believe. The simple truth of the matter is that, regardless of whether the red gums are locked up in a national park or continue to be sustainably harvested, they need more water to survive. Before I go further into the real impact of this legislation I will address some of the points that the Minister for Climate Change and the Environment made in this place during his original agreement in principle speech. He referred to the recommendations made by the Natural Resources Commission and stated:

This bill represents the core of the Government's response to the report and recommendations of the Natural Resources Commission.

I must inform the House that when I first met with the Commissioner of the Natural Resources Commission, Dr John Williams, and Mr Brian Gilligan back in January this year to discuss the final recommendations of this report, I asked Dr Williams' advice as to which was the most important of the recommendations. Regardless of the land tenure or the uses to which it is put, he informed me that the provision of sufficient water for the red gum forests is the most important of all recommendations. The first and most important of the Natural Resources Commission's recommendations states:

Undertake collaborative water reform.

State and federal governments should collaborate on water reforms to save the red gum forests, including:

increasing existing adaptive and environmental water entitlements by 1,200 GL, targeting 54 per cent of the long-term, pre-development mean annual flow at Yarrowonga (or 2,000 gl).

reforming carry forward rules to allow accumulation of environmental water year on year and delivery of water in line with floodplain forest ecosystem requirements.

building appropriate water-delivery infrastructure and funding eco engineering projects to deliver appropriate flooding regimes to river red gum forests across the region.

maintaining and improving expertise in water infrastructure management.

The Minister's response to this first and most important recommendation is to pay lip service to its importance. The Minister said the Government will implement almost all of the recommendations, but about halfway through his speech came the crunch. He stated in that speech:

The Government supports the recommendation of the Natural Resources Commission to increase water entitlements to the river red gum forests. However, the quantum and timing of water recovery will be driven by the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, which is being prepared by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, as well as by prioritisation of water purchased by the Commonwealth environmental water holder. These are not matters for this bill.

This is the reality of State Labor's actions to preserve the Riverina red gums for future generations and for posterity. This legislation is the sum of the Government's efforts, but it relegates the most important recommendation—the so-called only thing that will save the Riverina red gum from continuing its current slide into extreme stress followed by death—is not a matter for this bill. In addition, State Labor's allocation of water is far below that recommended by the Natural Resources Commission. The Natural Resources Commission said that 1,200 gegalitres or 54 per cent of the long-term predevelopment mean annual flow at Yarrowonga was

necessary as the most important recommendation in the report. In his media release of 2 March the Minister said:

Water to support river red gums, wetlands and the new parks will be drawn from:

The Living Murray program in New South Wales, which has recovered approximately 220,000 megalitres;

Over 45,000 megalitres has been purchased for the Murrumbidgee and Lachlan areas by the Department of Environment and Climate Change and Water.

A five-year transitional period is being staged in the Millewa State Forest—

and I recognise that this has been pulled from the new bill—

with someone gaining access to timber under strict controls related to the method of tree selection and sustainable yield.

To get back to the megalitres point of that statement, I ask the House to note that the Minister talked about megalitres while the Natural Resources Commission was talking about gigalitres. The State Labor Government has allocated barely 22 per cent of the water that the Natural Resources Commission believes is necessary for them to survive. In his agreement in principle speech, the Minister referred to 100,000 megalitres of water allocated to the Barmah-Millewa forests and also up to 500,000 megalitres from the Living Murray initiative. Members should note the words "up to", which in pollic speak usually means about half that amount or 220,000 megalitres, to which the Minister referred in his media release.

In his speech the Minister also stated that the Government had examined the work of the Natural Resources Commission on the sustainable yield, including the "further advice on long-term sustainable yields" where the Natural Resources Commission had admitted that it had made an error of between 40 per cent and 60 per cent in estimates in its final report. The Minister stated in his agreement in principle speech:

Taking into account all the analyses, the Government has determined that the sustainable yield of high-quality quota sawlog from the Crown supply is 1,996 cubic metres per annum in the Murrumbidgee; 12,725 cubic metres per annum in the central Murray; and 1,100 cubic metres per annum in the lower Murray, comprising 800 cubic metres per annum from Western Lands leases and 300 cubic metres per annum from State forests.

It is clear that those numbers do not allow sustainable harvesting. The Minister should come clean on where he got those numbers. These numbers are not reflected in either the Natural Resources Commission final report, the Natural Resources Commission recommendations report or the further advice on long-term sustainable wood yields and standing stock volumes of quota sawlogs provided by the Natural Resources Commission in February. The Minister said, "taking into account all the analyses the Government has determined".

I suspect that the Minister has looked at the actual numbers and did not like what he saw or his advisers looked at the actual numbers and did not like what they saw, so they just made up a set of figures to suit their own ends. The Minister is grumbling. I would like him to show me where he got those figures. I ask him also to explain why the ecologically sustainable forest management plan for the Riverina, which was published by the Government in February 2008, contained a message from Minister Ian Macdonald, MLC, confirming sustainability of forest management in the region.

In addition, the environmental impact statement for harvesting and associated roadwork operations south-west of New South Wales, also published by the State Labor Government on 31 May 2009, proposed the harvesting of about 65,000 cubic metres of high-quality river red gum sawlogs as a sustainable yield. The Minister must come clean about what happened between May 2009 and March 2010 to change the red gum industry from a very sustainable prospect, according to the State Labor Government, to completely unsustainable.

In support of these concerns, I draw the attention of the House to a document that is on the Natural Resources Commission website that is very difficult to find unless one knows exactly where to look and what to look for. As part of its consideration the Natural Resources Commission conducted a series of technical roundtables. The transcript of the third session on pages 3 and 4 makes for interesting reading, and I just happen to have a copy with me. I quote:

The final question that we were considering was: Is FRAMES an appropriate tool for estimating future wood yields. Short story from Cris Bracks review, yes. It's based on a series of assumptions about future conditions. Those assumptions need to be recalibrated to what we think future conditions are going to be and if that's done properly, then our impression is that FRAMES can be a useful predictive tool to estimate wood flows.

The acronym FRAMES stands for forest resource management and evaluation system, which, for the benefit of members, is the key inventory database used by Forests NSW to calculate forestry resources. However, it is clear from the transcript that the data used by the Natural Resources Commission for its report depended upon the recalibration of the database. In other words, if data is put in showing an extremely dry outlook, of course one will get an answer showing that the sustainable yields are falling rapidly. The science on this is closely connected to the debate on climate change. These assumptions are raw, based on results predicted from climate modelling that is, in itself, based on a certain set of assumptions. Whichever way one looks at it, there is little science and a lot of assumption in the sustainable yield analysis by the Natural Resources Commission. This is a common problem with the Natural Resources Commission report and it is one on which I shall provide further evidence later.

The transcript is actually favourable towards using the FRAMES inventory database but, in the end, the Natural Resources Commission did not use it, opting for another method, which I suspect was better able to produce the desired result. The people most likely to have a good handle on the sustainable yields are those who manage and use the forests. The Natural Resources Commission has been dismissive of Forests NSW own estimates of sustainable yield that are significantly higher than those of the Natural Resources Commission, calling them optimistic in further advice it provided to the Premier on 16 February 2010. I am significantly concerned that the parameters for sustainable yield have been set to provide the results that the State Labor Government wants.

Since 1906 the New South Wales Forest Products Association has been the representative organisation of the forests and forest products industry in the State. It has written to the Premier on several occasions since moves towards locking up red gum began. It is pertinent that so much correspondence from the Forest Products Association and other forestry organisations has been targeted at this Government with unsatisfactory responses. On one occasion, on 12 April, I note that Russell Ainley, Executive Director of Forest Products Association, wrote to the Premier. He gave a short preamble about the Natural Resources Commission assessment and then stated:

On 2 March 2010 the Government's response to the NRC Final Report and Recommendations by Minister for Climate Change and the Environment, the Hon. Frank Sartor, specifically noted, "*it is clear from the NRC report that timber harvesting yields would have to be virtually halved to provide for sustainable forestry*".

Since then, on 19 March 2010, the Natural Resources Commission published on its website:

Further advice on long term sustainable wood yields and standing stock volumes of quota sawlogs.

That advice revealed that the original estimates were 40 per cent to 60 per cent understated and might now sustain a level of 16,200 cubic metres per year of quota sawlogs. The new advice fails, as did the Natural Resources Commission final report, to include any consideration of approximately 21,000 hectares of 25 State forests within the region. Obviously harvesting yields would not have to have been halved to provide for sustainable forestry. The Forest Products Association in its letter further stated:

There is a very long history of sustainable yield estimation for Red Gum State Forests of the Central Murray. Long term sustainable yield estimates have been consistently confirmed at between 22,400 and 29,700 metres³ per year of quota quality sawlogs since the mid 1980s.

Mr Frank Sartor: What was that range?

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON: I will repeat that:

Long term sustainable yield estimates have been consistently confirmed at between 22,400 and 29,700 metres³ per year of quota quality sawlogs since the mid 1980s.

Mr Frank Sartor: For what region, the Central Murray?

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON: Yes, the Central Murray. It continues:

Sustainability was confirmed by:

- the Minister for Primary Industries, the Hon. Ian Macdonald, in the Ecologically Sustainable Forest Management Plan for the Riverina Region NSW, dated 1 February 2008
- The Environmental Impact Statement for Harvesting and Associate roadwork operations in south-western NSW by Forests NSW dated 31 May 2009
- Accreditation for sustainable forest management under the Australian Forestry Standard, meeting requirements for the international Program for Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC).

The New South Wales Forest Products Association's comments in that letter bear out my concern about the rubbery nature of the data that the State Labor Government is counting as fact. The Forest Products Association has further told me that the Natural Resources Commission is persisting with its narrow sustainable yield estimates of only the Millewa and Koondrook-Perracoota-Campbell's Island forests. I have a list of forests included within the 107,000 hectares of protected land but which the State Labor Government has deliberately excluded from all assessments of sustainable yield. The assessment still has not included all the other forests of the region. Mulwala Forest's total area is 4,571 hectares, Werai Forests total area is 11,326 hectares and Wakool Forest's total area is 5,079 hectares—that is 21,000 hectares of good red gum forest excluded from all assessment.

Clearly, there are many questions that must be answered. These questions have been asked by the timber industry, individual companies whose futures are about to be destroyed and by people who have sustainably harvested this timber for generation upon generation. I ask these questions again in this House on their behalf: How can the State Labor Government claim that its assessment is scientific or credible in any way? How can the State Labor Government claim that this assessment has any basis in fact that is accurate enough to close an important industry and to put more than 1,000 people out of work? I challenge Minister Sartor to answer those questions, and I ask him to be honest with these people. Later in my contribution I will give the House some indication of the pain and stress the Government has caused to these people. But before doing so I want to read onto the record the remainder of the unanswered letter from the Forest Products Association to Premier Keneally. It goes on:

The NRC's Final Report and Recommendations of 21 December 2009 was a substantial shock, and fundamentally irreconcilable to the timber industry, which has operated and maintained the forests and all their values in the region for more than a hundred years.

Now the NRC itself has advised that their Final Assessment of 21 December 2009, on which the Government relied in its decision of 2 March 2010, was very wrong. That so-called "experts" may make errors of 40 to 60% in fundamental advice is incomprehensible. That governments rely on such incorrect advice in decision making is incredible. That industries may be closed, jobs lost, rural economies diminished and dependant communities suffer as a consequence is unjustifiable.

The Social and Economic Impact Report of the Red Gum Assessment was only released on 17 February 2010. That is, two months after the NRC Final report, so that the impacts were not available and were not able to be adequately included in Minister Sartor's response or the Government's decision of 2 March 2010.

The only surviving credible outcome of the NRC Assessment is simply that water must be provided to the forests for forest health and that forests must be managed to protect their values. That is what forestry does. Forest industry provides an economic basis to deliver all the forest values, including environmental values, as it has done in Red Gum forests for the last 153 years.

We respectfully request that the NSW government review the new information relevant to the Red Gum Assessment and consequently its decision to reserve Red Gum forests. We seek a proper, scientific and factual re-assessment to now be conducted independently.

We respectfully request that the industry be permitted to continue its operations normally and that licences be renewed until a review and re-assessment can be concluded. We also suggest that voluntary, willing exits under fair and just terms, and cognisance of community and broad impacts, be executed in the meantime.

Once again, we invite you to visit the region to meet with all the affected people and businesses so that you may obtain an accurate understanding of the impacts.

The Forest Products Association goes on to say that it would be pleased to arrange meetings and a forest tour for the new Premier, at her convenience. I draw the attention of the House to the Forest Products Association's final request: that the Premier visit the region and talk to the people involved. I do not mean one of those quick, fly in, fly out before anybody knows you are there photo opportunities. On 3 December 2009 the then Premier, the member for Toongabbie, stood at the Treasury boxes and made an astounding announcement. He completely pre-empted the release of the final report by the Natural Resources Commission, by about three weeks, and committed the State Labor Government to locking up the Riverina red gums in a national park. This came as somewhat of a shock as the industry and the affected residents, perhaps somewhat naïvely, had thought that the Natural Resources Commission report would be a fair assessment.

The industry had been encouraged by comments made during the visit to the region by the Natural Resources Commission. This perspective was further strengthened by the former Premier's commitment on 24 July 2009 to "a balance between protecting the environment for future generations and protecting jobs in a vital and sustainable forest industry". On 3 September 2009 in this place the then Minister for the Environment said:

The Government is looking for a balanced approach that protects important environmental values and supports jobs—an outcome that achieves our conservation aims through national parks and provides certainty for the forest industry. It is not simply a question about one or the other.

On 30 September 2009, in the Natural Resources Commission's terms of reference, the then Premier stated:

The New South Wales government intends to make a forest agreement with respect to the river red gum and woodland forests within the New South Wales Riverina IBRA and the South-Western Cyprus State Forests in order to determine conservation outcomes and a sustainable future for the forests, the forestry industry and local communities in the region.

It is interesting to note that the Riverina red gum industry, according to the State Labor Government, has gone from "a vital and sustainable forest industry", according to former Premier Nathan Rees, to "the forest industry forms only a small part of the regional economy", according to Minister Sartor in his agreement in principle speech. Which Labor Minister was telling the truth? Less than two hours later the member for Toongabbie was no longer the Premier, and many hoped that his last statement was a last-ditch effort to shore up left-wing support.

We were encouraged by the initial response from the new Premier, who was reported to have said on 7 December that she was taking another look at the decision and wanted to get more details about the plan. On the day after the State Labor caucus appointed her as the Premier of New South Wales, I wrote to the Premier strongly urging her to renounce the commitment by her predecessor. I also urged the Premier to meet with representatives of the industry so they could put their case to her first-hand. To this day, some five months later, I have yet to receive a written reply from the Premier. But several months after I wrote that letter I received a dismissive and indirect reply from a bureaucrat in the Premier's office saying that the Premier was just too busy.

As a result, many residents in the affected area have told me that they believe the Natural Resources Commission investigation was set up to provide the response that the State Labor Government wanted regardless of the actual facts. Everything indicates that that was absolutely the case. The residents believe that the State Labor Government is destroying their livelihood to pander to extreme green votes in inner Sydney electorates.

Another body that has been lobbying to save the Riverina red gums from long-term damage by being locked up in a national park is the Rivers and Red Gum and Environmental Alliance. The alliance wrote to Minister Sartor in early March asking a series of questions about the information he was taking into account in formulating his decision. Again the Rivers and Red Gum Environmental Alliance did not receive a reply, so I raised the alliance's questions with the Minister in this place as a question on notice. The alliance provided me with a commentary on the answers I received to my questions. I asked Minister Sartor:

Did the Department for Climate Change and the Environment conduct a cost benefit analysis of the Natural Resources Commission recommendations that the State Government has decided to accept?

The Minister's answer was as follows:

No. The analysis by the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) included consideration of the economic, environmental and social values associated with the River Red Gum forests. As part of this they had prepared a socio-economic impact assessment. The reports can be found on the Commission's website ...

The alliance provided the following comment with respect to the Minister's answer:

No cost-benefit analysis of the effects to the whole community for an \$80 million project. In private business a project manager would be sacked for such an omission.

I also asked the Minister:

With reference to the Nationally Agreed Criteria for the Establishment of a Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative Reserve System for Forests in Australia, has the principle of imposing the least cost on the community when creating reserves been observed?

The Minister's answer was as follows:

The NRC considered this principle in developing its recommendations.

The alliance provided the following comment with respect to that answer:

But without the data available from an independent cost-benefit analysis on this rushed assessment the NRC would be unable to establish least cost of various models—such as expanded Ramsar reserves.

I further asked Minister Sartor:

If this principle was observed, will the Minister provide an analysis of the other land tenure options that were considered before making this announcement?

The Minister replied as follows:

The NRC's analysis is available in the reports.

The alliance commented as follows:

If it is in the report it is well hidden or very thin on the ground. The NRC provided plenty of opinion, but little documented analysis.

I have finally received the paper the Minister promised to provide to me, but only after my staff chased it up. The "Regional Economic Impacts of National Parks in the Riverina Bioregion" is an interesting report in that the Minister says that this was the data that was used to assess economic growth in tourism following the formation of the new national parks. This paper has not one single footnote, and it provides no indication of where the information it asserts as facts came from, with one exception where it states that information was obtained from agency records. It is no wonder that New South Wales is in such a parlous state if this is the sort of research on which the Government is basing its decisions.

The report estimates that with the new red gum national parks included there will be a total of 201 jobs, existing and new. Members should note that these 201 jobs probably include existing employment within the National Parks and Wildlife Service. The report does not differentiate on this matter. The report also states that the total impact in gross regional product terms is \$17.1 million. Again that figure includes existing national parks. The report states that the new red gum national parks will contribute approximately an additional 50 per cent of existing gross internal product. In other words, the value of the new national parks will be about \$5 million and about 60 jobs. However, the report does have something to say about the accuracy of the results section in the paper and at table 4-12 and figure 4-5 it states:

These estimates are relatively more conjectural than others prepared for this study. However, they are generally indicative of the likely impact of the proposed capital expenditures.

The terminology used in this report such as "are relatively more conjectural", "generally indicative", "likely impact" and "assumptions" show that this report is so vague as to be totally useless. I remind members that this report contains the data the Government used to assess the level of economic growth from tourism that would occur following the formation of red gum parks.

The value to the region of the red gum timber industry has been strongly debated. I will not revisit that debate, as other members on the side of the House will do so. The Natural Resources Commission has found that there are 274 employees of 32 commercial operations with licences to harvest timber from public land, there are a further 30 employees in Forests NSW and 15 haulage contractors employing a further 17 staff. Other sources of varied employment figures range from as few as 60 by some of the extreme green groups, to more than 1,000 from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Using the Government's own data, the national parks will provide a conjectural 60 jobs for the loss of 321 direct jobs, and possibly many hundreds of other secondary jobs. The National Resources Commission report states that the gross turnover of the red gum forest industry is a direct contribution of \$48 million to the region. Direct royalties paid to Forests NSW in the Riverina region is \$4.3 million per year. The Government's decision will bring in a conjectural \$5 million and destroy an industry that directly contributes \$48 million to the region, including a confirmed \$4.3 million. Is that logical?

On the basis of assumptions drawn from climate modelling based on assumptions and supported by a conjectural report, the State Labor Government has decided that the red gum timber industry is to die. Many of us on this side of the House wonder what it is that the Government does not recognise about this State being in such a terrible mess. Rather than rubbery figures and conjecture, the New South Wales Forests Products Association commissioned a study into the required expansion in tourism activity to replace the lost timber output. That report uses hard data provided by Tourism Research Australia and shows that over the past five years tourism in the Murray region has declined and, on current trends, that decline is set to continue. Last year the report showed that there was some 208,000 "nature visitors" who in all likelihood visited the national park in this region. On page 6 of the report commissioned by the New South Wales Forest Products Association it states:

At a minimum level, the replacement of \$39 million for the regional economy would require the net addition of 333,000 new visitors.

I will repeat that:

At a minimum level the replacement of \$39 million for the regional economy would require the net addition of 333,000 new visitors. The creation of a new national park is put forward as a reason for increased visitor levels—it can be assumed, therefore, that all these visitors to the region would be "nature" visitors. Given that the current estimate of "nature" visitors is 208,000, then an increase of around 160 per cent is required to replace \$39 million.

If higher output values from public forests, as determined by the NRC at \$48 million are assumed, then the increase in nature visitors required is 200%.

If the outcome is total industry closure then replacement of the lost value would require a 300% increase of nature tourism, that is an additional 615,000 new visitors.

When compared with the current estimate of just 208,000 visitors to the area undertaking "nature" activities, even the lower level of increase would appear highly unrealistic and a virtually impossible task.

It then goes on to refer to figure 3 below, which displays the minimum increase required in total visitors, compared to trend. The conclusion of the report states that even at minimum levels almost a doubling of current nature visitors would be required and total visitor numbers would have to increase to levels that are clearly outside any long-term trend. It is clear that tourism can never replace the economic contribution made by the red gum forestry industry. Former Premier Bob Carr and extreme green groups have made this claim. On page 2 of the October 2009 issue of the *Red Gum Post* it was stated:

When he locked up Yanga, Bob Carr said don't worry about the job losses, don't worry that the Wakool shire is losing 10 per cent of its rate base (national parks do not pay rates), don't worry about the viability of the businesses that have been affected, don't worry about the future of the economy.

Tourism will fix everything he said: 50,000 visitors per year.

Don't worry about the health of the beautiful red gum forests: the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water (DECC) know how to look after them.

In March this year Mr Carr sent an open letter to members of the GetUp group. In that letter he again repeated his claim about tourism creating sufficient jobs to replace those to be lost in the red gum timber industry, stating:

The most reliable estimate is that **there are only 136 jobs in red gum logging** on public lands across NSW. **Timber jobs are 0.2 per cent of employment in the region. All can be accommodated in new national parks.**

How can I be so certain? First, because **Victoria has just done it**. As of June 30 last year, logging stopped forever in 91,000 hectares of red gum wetlands. The outcome is jobs positive because there are 30 new park ranger jobs in four new parks, 10 jobs in forests management, and 24 jobs in the tourist sector.

Mr John Williams: What a joke that bloke is. What a disgraceful financial situation!

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON: Absolutely true. The member for Murray-Darling interjects and says, "What a joke?" Absolutely, what a joke! Mr Carr based his employment information on figures that have been roundly discredited. One of the twentieth century's greatest propagandists once said:

Follow the principle that when one lies, one should lie big and stick to it.

We see that even Bob Carr cannot claim that tourism is the answer without using rubbery figures. Before moving on from tourism I will provide an example that was given by Max Rheese of the Rivers and Red Gum Environment Alliance. In the original agreement in principle speech of the Minister for Climate Change and the Environment, he referred to the Victorian experience of changing State-owned red gum forests into national parks, as has the extreme green movement. The tourism information centre in Rushworth Victoria used to deal routinely with many thousands of visitors to the Box-Ironbark State Forest, bordering Rushworth and Bendigo in the central goldfields region. Within two years of the formation of the Box-Ironbark National Park the Rushworth tourist information centre was closed due to the lack of visitor numbers. The reason for that happening was as a State forest a significant range of recreational activities were available to visitors, including camping with dogs, trail bike riding, gold fossicking, four-wheel driving and horse riding, just to name a few. These types of recreational activities are not available in national parks.

Another example is the fate of the El Dorado Pub, which used to trade just outside the Wangaratta State Park. The pub had been trading successfully for more than 15 years. A large number of its patrons were visitors to the State park, in particular, people fossicking for gold in local waterways. Within 18 months of the conversion of Wangaratta State Park to a national park the pub was forced to close because of a lack of trade. These are just two examples of what communities in the south-west of New South Wales can expect following the formation of a so-called iconic red gum national park. The Rivers and Red Gum Environment Alliance also has experience with the Victorian decision to lock up its red gums. Its response is clearly shown in an online opinion piece published on 25 March this year by Max Rheese. In part, it states:

A new paradigm for national parks

However, a number of decisions in recent years to create more parks have shown that green politics has been the driving force, rather than good environmental outcomes.

This is certainly the fear in the NSW Riverina with the NSW Environment Minister this month has declared the transfer of 107,000 hectares of red gum forest into the parks estate at a cost of \$80 million to the NSW taxpayer. Previous park creations have adversely affected the economies of Balranald and Coolah, just as they have on the Victorian side of the Murray around the townships of Echuca, Picola and Barmah where sawmills have already closed after 80 per cent reductions in harvestable area.

The NSW decision has been announced without any cost benefit analysis on the regional economy or analysis of tourism impacts on an area that already has 500,000 visitor days per year in the forests. This contravenes the obligation of the NSW government under national agreements to create new reserves with least cost to communities. Visitor surveys over the last two years indicate that most visitors come to these river forests precisely because they are not national parks, which means they can bring the family dog and undertake their holiday with little restriction. In the Victorian decision it was noted by the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council, responsible for making recommendations to the government, that "intergenerational welfare dependency" in local communities may result from the new parks created there.

That is a matter of real concern. It continues:

From an important environmental perspective, these Ramsar listed state forests were turned into parks without any analysis of what advantages, if any, to biodiversity might flow from a change of land tenure, but park creations still proceeded at significant social and economic cost to communities.

Certainly the difference between what is promised when new parks are promoted and what is delivered is miles apart. It was agreed by all that the Victorian red gum forests were stressed from drought; environmental water was promised. The first promised environmental water is now available in the form of 12,000 mega litres, but this has been recently "qualified" by the Water Minister and will now be diverted to Melbourne to enable announcement last week of the easing of strict water restrictions in the capital—ahead of the state election in November.

Similar has happened in the Riverina decision where the Environment Minister has claimed to be following the key recommendations of the Natural Resources Commission, even quoting from their report.

The river red gum forests and the industries and social systems they support are in decline due to river regulation, over-allocation of water and drought.

However, he has only allocated 265GL of water to save the forests instead of the NRC recommended 1,200GL, no doubt keeping the rest for a rainy day. In either case, the minister states the problem is water and provides the solution as a change in land tenure to national park!

In both of the above decisions and many others, it is not the local community that drives the creation of new national parks, but city based environment groups, with the result tied to green preferences in inner city seats or power struggles within cabinet as per the premature announcement by Premier Rees on the Riverina forests three hours before a decisive cabinet meeting that saw him deposed.

It will be interesting whether the Government members who speak on this bill have been in this region and know what they are talking about. I continue the opinion piece by Max Rheese:

Similar occurred in south west Victoria ten days before the 2006 state election, following campaigning by Melbourne based Environment Victoria, when the Premier and Deputy Premier arrived in Portland unannounced to declare the creation of the Cobboboonnee National Park pre-empting four years of consultations with the local community.

I emphasise there had been four years of consultation with the local community. I continue:

Recently revealed are a string of sweetheart deals, unannounced prior to the last Queensland state election, which have left indigenous Cape York communities disenfranchised from traditional lands.

Almost without exception, where a perceived political imperative drives an environmental decision, it is the environment and local communities that suffer because the funding commitment does not match the political zeal to add to the national park hectare scoreboard to appease the green vote.

That online opinion piece is an accurate statement of the situation. It is clear that retaining the red gum timber industry is vital to maintaining the health of the red gum forests. The Natural Resources Commission stated that the forests need an increase in the existing adaptive environment water entitlements of 1,200 gegalitres a year, targeting 54 per cent of the long-term predevelopment mean annual flow at Yarrawonga. This is unachievable. The State Labor Government has been able to find only about 22 per cent of this water. If we were to provide more water, New South Wales would face the likelihood of destroying the agricultural breadbasket of this State. In the absence of sufficient water to allow a natural cycle of red gum regeneration to occur, it is vitally important that the thinning of these forests is carried out.

With only a certain amount of water available, it is logical to recognise that areas with fewer trees will be healthier rather than areas that are crammed with uncontrolled regrowth. The same logic applies to the amount of sunshine. Large red gum spaced further apart will produce much healthier regrowth. Further thinning of this regrowth to select the healthiest trees also promotes healthier forests. This simple management, which the

Natural Resources Commission and every organisation associated with forestry maintain is necessary, is anathema to the National Parks and Wildlife Service. You end up with a national park as described in the October 2009 edition of the *Red Gum Post*, Volume 1, Issue 4, which states:

Yanga Station, now Yanga National Park, once Balranald's own jewel of the Nile, is now a shadow of its former self ...

Up until 2005, the red gums were selectively harvested on a sustainable, limited basis under the supervision of a responsible forester: an operator with over 40 years' experience of managing renewable forest resources in both the government and private sectors ...

Most of all, the red gums were healthy and growing. In fact, when former premier Bob Carr bought Yanga in 2005 for \$35 million, he commented on how well the property and the forest had been cared for ...

It was a major blow to the town of Balranald and to the renewable red gum industry within the Riverina.

Today, Yanga is dying. The forest is becoming increasingly choked with too many trees competing for what little water there is. In some places, the Yanga is overstocked by more than 500 percent.

The article goes on:

More than 60 per cent of the forest is dead at a cost to New South Wales taxpayers of \$35 million.

More than 60 percent of the forest is dead. The article continues:

Locally, we have a saying to describe forested areas that are clearly dying through neglect: we say they've got "the Yanga look".

I have received correspondence from the Institute of Foresters of Australia [IFA] providing me with its response to the original legislation. I am sure the institute would have liked to receive a copy of the legislation that was introduced in this place this evening so that it could have made a contribution. They said:

The IFA strongly believes that the government decision to progress this Bill is bad policy for NSW. Our reasoning and documentation is available in detail to demonstrate our conclusions. Our position on Red gum is similar to many of the stakeholders, including affected communities, the timber industry and the people who rely on forestry and the timber industry in this region.

Transfer of State forest to National Park does not automatically provide improved conservation outcomes for those forests. Prevention of catastrophic wildfire is one area where State forests have a much better track record than National Parks.

As a member of Parliament who represents an electorate that included a significant amount of Kosciuszko National Park together with many State forest areas around the Tumut region before the latest redistribution, I can certainly testify to that fact. The IFA is absolutely right when it says that prevention of catastrophic wildfire is one area where State forests have a much better track record than national parks. The Pilliga is one such example. In 2006 a large area of national park was subject to damaging wildfire following its transfer from a State forest to a national park. I am sure the member for Coffs harbour will make comment in relation to that matter—he is very knowledgeable on that subject. The transfer of large areas of State forests to national park is also a very expensive decision, resulting in compensation for business, forgoing of revenue stream from timber sales and commitment to major ongoing maintenance expenditure. The IFA goes on to say:

The IFA understands that the Bill is based on recommendations of the NSW Natural Resources Commission (NRC) made in 2009. The IFA is aware of serious flaws in the NRC's Report, including major inaccuracies in the future yield of Red gum timber. These yield projections were a significant plank in the NRC's reasoning for making its recommendations. Subsequent acknowledgement of the inaccuracies in timber yield by the NRC has had no impact on the decision regarding the size of the National Park or future shape of the timber industry.

IFA believes that policy on forest use should be based on what is in the best interests of the State, covering economic and environmental aspects, including the impacts on local communities. The IFA is confident that where a reasonable level of public Red gum timber supply can be made available under secure arrangements it will attract viable timber processing companies even if some existing companies have taken business exit.

That letter was written by Dr Peter Volker, RPF, FIFA, the President of the IFA. I have taken a bit of licence with that letter because it was substantial and lengthy. I am sure that the House understands the IFA's emphasis through the brief excerpts of the letter I read out. The Institute of Foresters Australia is the peak professional body for forest scientists, forest educators, and forest and land managers in Australia. The organisation is committed to the principles of sustainable forest management, so their opinion is worth listening to. Timber Communities Australia was first formed in 1987 as the Forest Protection Society.

Its mission is to secure long-term access to natural resources to generate employment and a future for regional communities, and to ensure our unique Australian forests are scientifically evaluated and sustainably

managed for the benefit of future generations and genetic diversity. In the February 2010 edition of the newsletter of Timber Communities Australia—*Trunklines*—was an article written by TCA's Chief Executive Officer, Jim Adams, entitled "New South Wales Red Gum Industry sold down the river". I will read an extract of that article that appeared on page 3. It has several introductory paragraphs and it goes on to say:

Paul Madden, managing director of the 140 year old Arbutnott Sawmills at Koondrook, was concerned with the potential impact any further forest closure would have on his business. Given the adjustments the company has made due to changes in Victorian forest, unforeseen changes in NSW could severely impact the availability of saw-log grade timber needed by the mill. Twenty-six of Arbutnott's employees and their families have joined TCA to continue the fight for their livelihoods.

Gary Hull, on the urging of the Department of Sustainability and Environment, invested heavily in giving his business a wholesale firewood focus to supplement sleeper cutting. However, Gary is struggling with sourcing reliable supplies of timber since unsuccessfully tendering for wood from nearby Gunbower Island. Gary employs four people, half the compliment of a year earlier.

At Barham, Ian Gellatly was running the family's gigantic firewood operation which is based solely on thinnings from the forests. This value adding processing will need to continue in the name of "conservation" when the parks are operational; not doing so will see the scrawny regrowth choke the forest to death.

The TCA newsletter article continues:

Further down the East Barham Road at TCA member Ken O'Brien's huge processing site, employees were shaking their heads at the possibility of Koondrook-Perricoota state forest suffering the same fate as the forests upstream. The O'Brien operation employs around 30 people and produces a wide variety of red gum products, including railway and landscaping sleepers, firewood, garden products and high-quality slabs.

Back in Barham high-quality furniture manufacturer Glen Gray and his four furniture makers are pondering the thought of losing the source of their magnificent products. The Barham Sawmill employs 21 staff and is a model of value adding producing laminated products, (Redboard) and veneers. Again, the feeling of uncertainty was the dominant issue on the mind of Annette Rowe and staff.

The article continues:

Gulpa Sawmill's Ian Danckert was distressed at the end of a long day, anxious and fearful about the NSW cabinet's ultimate decision. He was rightly worried about the future of the 150 year-old business, his 30 workers and their families, as well as the neighbouring businesses that support his mill and the red gum industry. Ian will recruit as many of his employees and industry supporters as possible as TCA members in order to keep up the fight.

I am summarising this article quite heavily. It goes on to say:

Catching up with TCA branch president Ray Hill and twin brother Cliff was a treat, although both were disheartened with the prospect of being booted out of their industry after more than 60 years. Ray had just knocked off work and was showing all the signs of the hardworking sleeper cutter of folklore. A big smile and two shining eyes greeted me through his sawdust impregnated skin.

The brothers are living history and know the truth about the health of their forests and the sustainability of the red gum industry. Unlike the so-called environmentalists who are really anti-timber activists and the NSW Government, they are true conservationists, knowing every part of the forest and its wildlife.

Of course they would: they live it and breathe it. They have been harvesting it for generation upon generation in a sustainable way. The article continues:

At Echuca you can't miss the sorrowful sight of the Murray River Sawmills. Founded in 1873, closed in 2009; the "For Sale" sign sits aside the historic office as a stark reminder of how the industry and the communities that rely on the forests have been sold out.

I conclude quoting from the article with the following:

Ask anybody who works in the red gum forests and you will soon realise that lack of water is the major threat, not timber harvesting. The anti-timber mobs will have governments believe anything other than these facts.

The National Association of Forest Industries also has spoken out against this decision. Its most recent media release about red gums calls on the State Labor Government to rethink its decision. It states:

So many times before we have seen decisions on the future of our forests made on the basis of political gains rather than what is really important—what is best for the health of the forests and the timber communities that rely on them.

The river red gum timber industry is a traditional industry that has supported local communities in the region for over a century. However, the decline in the health of the ecosystem of the river red gum forest is primarily a water management issue.

The media release goes on to state:

"Water has always been a critical factor for red gums, but a lack of regular flooding and drought threatens this iconic forest river system—not a sustainable harvesting of them."

The National Association of Forest Industries goes on to say:

This is an issue for water authorities and placing the forest in a national park is no guarantee those forests will receive the flooding that is essential to the survival.

So many people involved in the forestry have that said time and time again. The association goes on to say:

"... Once again sustainable forestry management practices are being confused with broader land management issue—such as the diversion of environmental water flows for other uses."

The chief executive officer of NAFI, Alan Hansard, states:

River red gum is also one of the few eucalypts sensitive to fire. For generations forest managers have managed these state forests to reduce fire risk. Selective thinning of trees in addition to a range of other uses such as recreation and grazing has ensured appropriate resources have been put into fire protection.

"In addition to the environmental aspects of this issue, we must not forget the local communities that rely on this sustainable timber industry for their livelihoods, and have done for generations.

We owe it to these local communities to assess the scientific evidence carefully.

We know that the Government has not done that. The media release continues:

One is reminded of the case of the sustainably managed Pilliga forests in western NSW that were put into a national park by the NSW Carr Government on the basis of a political decision, only to be ravaged and largely destroyed by fire a number of years later.

I have also received a large amount of correspondence from companies and individuals who are concerned about the effect that this decision will have on the region. Laura Little of the *Riverina Herald* wrote under the heading "Workers devastated":

Mathoura timber worker Dawn Crump said the timber community felt its concerns had been ignored by the government.

I have received extensive correspondence from the Crumps, who are being seriously impacted by this Government's decision. The article quotes Mrs Crump:

"We feel the decision was made before they (the government) visited the region,"

"They took no notice of the community."

An article by Nicola Bell headed "Protection for gums, not southern jobs" in the *Land* of 4 March states:

The fate of south-western New South Wales communities, such as Mathoura, Deniliquin and Barham, has been decided by the NSW Government—and it does not look good.

The article includes a quote from Rod Young from the NSW Farmers Association, who states:

Locking up forests will devastate towns like Mathoura, Deniliquin, which I have seen happen before with the lock-up of the Pilliga forest.

David Joss has been a very regular correspondent over the past several months. He lives at Mathoura and, obviously, he is a very involved and active member of the community. He strikes me as someone with great commonsense. In fact, he wrote to the Minister for Climate Change and the Environment this afternoon. I am not sure whether the Minister has read the email yet. I hope Mr Joss does not mind my reading it out, but he did send me a copy. It states:

Dear Minister,

I have been speaking to Chris Crump, the local sawmiller whose equipment was stolen by some of Bob Carr's green friends last year when they were bullying Nathan Rees into declaring a red gum national park.

Chris tells me he had heard there are negotiations going on with a couple of sawmills which want to accept the exit package and might even agree to a reduced transition period.

If this is true it is grossly unfair.

The off-quota people are simply being ignored yet between them they represent the biggest work force in the industry. They will almost certainly oppose any reduction in the transition.

The community was concerned that the bill had been on the notice paper for a long time and the Minister had not explained what was happening. Obviously, people who would be impacted by the decision were in a terrible state worrying about their future. The email continues:

The removal of the Bill from today's program for debates is also a concern.

These people are worried sick by the uncertainty and are rightly indignant at being excluded from, not only the negotiation table but from any communication about their future.

David Joss has provided several members with an essay that he wrote about the fact that the mid Murray forests did not exist when the early explorers first arrived in the area. He attached to today's email to the Minister further documentation demonstrating that, contrary to claims made by Bob Carr and others, the early settlers did very little clearing. It is important to have that on the record because it is very pertinent to this debate. Mr Joss further states:

It is becoming very clear to me that creating a national park to encompass forests that are largely the product of white settlement is a huge mistake and I am sure you do not want to go down in history as the minister presiding over such a folly as a park created by squatters.

Mr Joss's essay states in part:

Former NSW Premier Bob Carr was fond of writing, in support of his very public appeals for river red gum national parks along the Murray river, that up to 80 per cent of the river landscape has been cleared. The clear implication is that whole forests have vanished.

His friends at organisations like the National Parks Association and The Wilderness Society lent plenty of support to this scenario. Almost every press release from them managed to claim the forests growing along the river were "the last remaining red gum forests on earth."

Both of these scenarios are myths.

There never were any other red gum forests on earth although the species is grown in large plantations on every inhabited continent on the planet.

The existing forests are the only ones Australia has ever had and there is not a scrap of evidence anywhere that they have diminished in size. If anything the reverse is true. The early settlers did not clear them in the manner implied by Bob Carr for the very simple reason that river red gums grow into forests only on flood plains. Before river regulation flooding was a regular occurrence, rendering most of the forested areas unsuitable for cropping, the main reason any clearing ever took place. There are unquestionably more trees in these forests than ever before.

It is interesting to read accounts by the first white people to explore the Murray landscape.

The first to see it were members of the 1824 Hume and Hovell expedition.

Here, warts and all, is how William Hovell recorded his first impression of the country near where Albury now stands:

"The timber near the river is Blue Gumb (as Hume assures me), But the Timber at a distance from the river where the soil is not so good, is Box tree, but the whole is very thin, in many parts there is little more than sufficient to give it a handsome appearance." (Hume and Hovell 1924 edited by Alan E J Andrews, published 1981 by Blubber Head Press) (P.139).

and where they crossed the river, a little upstream:

"The country all around us has a very fine appearance, in some places there is not more than half a dozen trees in a hundred acres." (p.141)

Further downstream Joseph Hawdon, who drove the first mob of cattle from near present-day Howlong to Adelaide, saw more of the river. He arrived at Howlong from Melbourne and gave the following description of the Ovens river near Wangaratta:

"The country on the right bank of the Ovens is well adapted for grazing stock. Down the river are extensive plains about ten miles in length, more adapted to grazing sheep..." (Journal of a Journey From New South Wales to Adelaide performed in 1838, by Joseph Hawdon, published 1952 by Georgian House.) (p.7)

"The immediate banks of the Hume are well adapted for grazing stock, at least on the flats, and around the broad lagoons that join the river, some of which extend as much as three miles. Here also is a large plain, nine miles broad, called by the natives Oolong; the cattle appear to be very fond of grazing upon it..."

Hawdon's description of the Murray (then known as the Hume) landscape echoes Hovell.

"The country is much superior about thirty miles up the river, a great proportion of which is good arable and grazing land..." (p. 8) (Arable of course means suitable for ploughing.)

"We then proceeded due west along extensive plains..." (p.16)

"On ascending a tree at the edge of an extensive plain..." (p.17)

David Joss continues with his article:

It is hardly surprising to find, from Susan Priestley's *Echuca: A Centenary History*, published by Jacaranda Press, 1965, that this is precisely where the first timber mills in the Echuca region were located. Continuing with Hawdon's account we read the first written description of the Echuca district:

"We here fell in with a tribe of natives, consisting principally of old men, women and children: they were much alarmed on seeing us, but as open plains were on both sides of the creek [the Campaspe river] they could not easily make their escape."

"After passing for fifteen miles across extensive plains, we again fell in with the river ..." (p. 18)

"The appearance of the country is perfectly level, there being a succession of plains, here and there intersected with a narrow belt of pine trees." (p. 19)

"Our first eight miles were through bushy scrub, full of a small description of kangaroos and emus; after which we again entered upon extensive plains." (p. 21)

By now the expedition is near Cohuna. Hawdon and his friend Charles Bonney climbed a hill, named Mt Hope by Thomas Mitchell in 1836.

"From this eminence we had a most extensive view: to the eastward plains spread out as far as the horizon; to the southward also more immense plains, here and there intersected by belts of trees, which in wet seasons marked the water-courses, and skirted on the horizon by a small and barely discernible range of hills; to the westward we again beheld boundless plains; and to the northward a dead-level black forest." (p. 21)

That "black forest" is still there. Today we call it the Gunbower-Perricoota-Koondrook state forest, one of the largest river red gum eco-systems on the Murray.

Curiously Hawdon says it was black. Perhaps he was looking into the sun, or was it that black box predominated?

The country ahead of him is largely similar so we will leave Mr. Hawdon here to continue his journey and look at the experiences of the next traveller along the Murray.

Charles Sturt, who had named the Murray in 1830, was interested to find if the Hume was the same river. In 1838, just a few months after Joseph Hawdon, he too assembled a mob of cattle near Albury, also bound for Adelaide, but unlike Hawdon, who tried unsuccessfully to cross Victoria diagonally and had to keep returning to the Murray, Sturt followed the north bank of the river as far as where the Edward river leaves the Murray.

"From this junction [the Ovens river] we gradually advanced upon a region of reeds and swamps but even in the midst of these the grassy flats, though more heavily and more closely timbered than similar spaces on the rivers to the northward, were luxuriant and extensive." Letter from Sturt to Governor Sir George Gipps published in *NSW Government Gazette* November 21 1838.

In 1841 the squatter Edward Curr explored the area now occupied by the Barmah forest

"Looking around, on one side of us we saw extensive reed beds intersected by the Murray, which (an unusual feature in colonial rivers) flowed here almost without banks, and on the level of the plain. The other half of the circle was occupied by open, grassy forest land, which extended we did not know how far ..."

"But we were just then intent on sheep-feed and not on scenery; so, after a brief delay, we remounted and rode over a plain of couch grass of some length, and on through a narrow opening in the reeds ..."

"Some fifty yards off, amongst the reeds, however, was a gnarled and spreading gumtree, from the branches of which a view of the neighbouring country might be obtained. To this solitary odd giant we accordingly forced our horses, with considerable difficulty, and clambering up its short trunk took our seats amongst its branches some forty feet from the ground, whence we were enabled to overlook the country for a considerable distance round, and discuss its capabilities at our leisure. A sea of reeds, of several miles in extent, as far in fact as the eye could reach, met our view on two sides—

Mr Frank Sartor: We did know you can read.

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON: I am quoting this essay from David Joss. It is an important part of the history of this region and it is pertinent to the debate that we understand exactly the history of this region. Certain former Premiers have said certain things without a full knowledge of the history involved. It is all about this area. I may have to go over a bit of what I just said because of the disruption. I continue:

A sea of reeds, of several miles in extent, as far in fact as the eye could reach, met our view on two sides, flanked by some grand old trees, amongst whose branches no doubt, long generations of Blacks had hunted the opossum and flying squirrel ...

That is from *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria*, first published in 1883, reprinted in 2001 by Campaspe shire, pages 168 to 169. The essay goes on but I think the point is made that the red gum forests are very largely a product of white settlement and, in particular, grazing by the squatters' animals. I thank David Joss for his extensive contributions to this issue and for making sure I am in no doubt as to the true history of the area. It is not my intention to address the structural adjustment package the State Labor Government has offered to the red gum industry. We have taken a very principled stand on this issue. The legislation must be voted down. It is not open for negotiation for a few more pieces of silver, as I said earlier in the debate. It is important that RAMROC at least is noted in this debate. It issued a media release stating:

Councils in the Murray and Riverina impacted by the NSW Government's decision to establish a network of National Parks and Regional Parks in redgum forest areas across the region have established a Working Group with Regional Development Australia (Murray) to work with the Premier's Steering Committee in relation to components of the Government's industry and community assistance package.

...

The Chairman of RAMROC Councils Cr Terry Hogan said today that Councils, communities and redgum timber industries are all devastated by the Government's decision, which will see the decimation of the redgum industry and the loss of over one thousand direct and indirect jobs throughout the region, with the Deniliquin, Mathoura, Barham, Balranald and Darlington Point communities to be extremely hard hit.

These comments can be attributed to Ray Stubbs, executive officer of RAMROC. I have met with RAMROC on several occasions over the past 12 months. To say that those people are extremely devastated by these decisions is an understatement. They say they have fought strongly against this decision, and I can verify that they have. They go on to say:

... unfortunately the Government refuses to accept the fact that logging in the redgum forests can continue to be sensibly and sustainably managed in harmony with the environment and redgum watering requirements, as has been successfully practised over the past 150 years under strict licensing conditions.

These comments can be attributed to Councillor Hogan, who also said in this media release that \$80 million is woefully inadequate. I think a substantially larger amount would still be inadequate when you are devastating an industry in a community such as this. Councillor Hogan added that it only equates to about one year's economic value of the red gum timber industry to the region.

Several themes are common throughout all these submissions. The future of red gum forests in national parks is anything but secure. The consensus amongst people who have been managing these forests for decades is that locking up these forests in national parks will cause more damage than would occur if the current system is maintained. The provision of sufficient water to allow red gum forests to develop a natural regeneration cycle will seriously deplete the irrigation water available to the Riverina to produce food. I return to the earlier comments made in relation to my meeting with the Natural Resources Commission on 12 January 2010—with Commissioner Dr John Williams and Assistant Commissioner Brian Gilligan. I made a note of this quote during our meeting:

The NRC believes large-scale trials of ecological thinning should be initiated promptly in all main forest groups.

That was a direct quote from that meeting. Tourism is not the answer. Another email I got from David Joss, on 17 May, states:

Hello Katrina,

I've been busy with the calculator.

In 2005 the Department of Environment predicted 50,000 tourists a year for Yanga National Park. They trumpeted it widely in the media.

The best guess by NP&WS now is about four a day or around 1500 a year. Nobody apparently knows for sure. They don't count heads any more. But other estimates put it as low as four a week.

Clearly market prediction is not one of their strengths.

Last year they told CARE the mid-Murray national parks should attract 27,100. CARE put it in the report you sent Max Reese.

If DECCW are that wrong again, the actual figure will be about 750.

We get more visitors than that in one weekend for the Fishing Classic! Is Parliament being misled?

Visitor numbers will have to increase exponentially to even come close to replacing the economic contribution of the red gum forestry industry. Jobs will be lost—many more than will be created by tourism. The Government's structural adjustment package is clearly insufficient. It is considered little more than an insult to the industry and clearly shows how little their lives and livelihoods mean to the State Labor Government. This decision will result in a significantly increased risk of a catastrophic fire event, which many residents believe will take lives.

Many of us have lived through one of these catastrophic fire events. On 18 January 2003 fire ripped through the southern part of New South Wales. It started in a national park as a result of 17 lightning strikes. It ripped through my electorate, the Monaro electorate and other electorates, and 400 homes and four lives were lost in the Australian Capital Territory. We should not be taking action to increase the risk of fire in our regional areas. One need only look at the recent fires in Victoria to see the catastrophic effect of fires. This legislation is bad for the economy of New South Wales as it destroys an industry without replacing it with one that provides the same level of economic output. The legislation is bad for the environment. It removes a sustainable and renewable product. It forces end users to consider other alternatives that are much more damaging to the environment, such as concrete, steel or timber sourced from illegally logged endangered Asian forests or even legally logged equatorial forests.

The Government will not kill the demand for timber by killing off the New South Wales timber industry. Australian consumers will still demand timber products. They will want their timber benches, laminate, timber trusses, kitchen tables and nice dining room chairs. We will not produce those products here in New South Wales but will import them. We are already seeing an increase in imports, with reproduction furniture coming from overseas, most particularly goods from Indonesia being sold as reproduction antique furniture. If one looks around this Parliament or any home in New South Wales one will see beautiful timber products.

It is a great shame that the Government is hell-bent on destroying a sustainable, renewable resource, one that is a positive money-spinner for the State and that provides a livelihood for thousands of country citizens. It is a great shame that the Government, through this legislation, is ensuring the death of country industries and country employment. Finally, the legislation is bad because it will remove from the red gum forests the day-to-day management that they need to survive in an environment where water is at a premium. The Government has not produced one credible argument for why these national parks are necessary. It has deliberately ignored the most important recommendations of the Natural Resources Commission report, which, while significantly flawed—as we have heard from so many different members of the timber community and organisations—clearly identifies the major threat to red gum forests.

I know that as a result of the changes today workers will get an \$81,000 handout, as the Minister said in his revised agreement in principle speech. However, they will lose their jobs and, with the current drought, they will have to leave the town their families have lived in for generations to find new employment. This decision will not only kill red gum forests and the sustainable industry that has selectively harvested and protected this valuable resource for more than a century; it will also kill communities. It is disgusting that time and again the Premier of this State has refused to meet with people whose lives and livelihoods her Government is destroying. Not one forestry group has come out in support of this decision. The Government is incapable of providing firm evidence in support of the need for red gum national parks. The decision has been based on a flawed report, which the authors have already admitted got key data about sustainable timber supply wrong.

We have listened to the residents of south-west New South Wales. The legislation is wrong. We will oppose the legislation to the bitter end. I heard the Minister claim earlier that his compensation package is fair, but nothing could be further from the truth. This package of barely \$97 million is intended to replace a \$72 million a year industry. Once again the Labor Government has shown it does not care about the economy of regional New South Wales, it does not care about the environment and it does not care about people. If Labor members of this House had any conscience or any sense of fair play they would most certainly vote against the bill.

Ms CLOVER MOORE (Sydney) [7.05 p.m.]: As an environmentalist and as an inner-city representative of a community that cares deeply about the state of our natural environment I strongly support the National Park Estate (Riverina Red Gum Reservations) Bill 2010 (No. 2). The bill will protect the river red gum forests of south-western New South Wales through national and regional parks, including the Millewa forests—the largest river red gum forest in the world, which will be jointly managed by traditional owners—and the River Murray Channel. Two major forest groups will also be transferred to traditional owners as indigenous protected areas and will not be logged.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarrity): Order! The member for Burrinjuck was heard in silence. Members will extend the member for Sydney the same courtesy.

Ms CLOVER MOORE: The river red gum wetlands on the Murray and Murrumbidgee rivers provide vital habitat to around 69 threatened species including the superb parrot, squirrel glider, barking owl and southern bell frog. The forests play a vital role in maintaining the healthy functioning of the most significant water system in south-east Australia, the Murray River system, which is at serious risk of destruction. It is a disgrace that some 80 per cent of landscapes along the Murray River have already been cleared of native vegetation. With sustained drought depriving forests of the water they need, logging has had a devastating effect on the region: environment groups have told me that in some areas over 75 per cent of the red gum trees are stressed or dying. More than 80 per cent of logged river red gums are, shockingly, used for low-value firewood, fence posts and railway sleepers, while threatened species such as the superb parrot that rely on old hollow-bearing trees are losing their habitat. The Natural Resources Commission reported:

... river regulation, over allocation of water, drought and projected climate change are so profoundly changing the forests that the current forms of management and forestry harvesting are unsustainable.

It recommends that the Millewa forests form part of a trans-border iconic park. The Millewa forests have the best chance of survival of all regions if logging ceases. Environment groups describe it as "the single most important habitat [area] in the Riverina region". It is home to threatened species including the koala, the fishing bat and endangered ecological communities. I join environment and community groups in congratulating the Government on protecting these forests. The bill recognises the Yorta Yorta traditional owners' aspirations for a strong and ongoing role in the management of the Millewa forests. Neville Atkinson, chairperson of the Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation, refers to this as a "historic step forward for indigenous self-determination".

In 2008 Victoria transferred 90 per cent of its red gum forests from logging to national park. I understand that even before this transfer New South Wales produced five times the timber from just 1.5 times the forest area. These forests have been logged at over double the sustainable rate under the management of Forests NSW. In fact, the 2008 Economists At Large "Seeing the Value of the Trees" report suggests that, following taxpayer-funded subsidies, New South Wales has been supporting logging of the red gum forests at a loss. This region urgently needs to be transferred to national park for the long-term protection of the threatened species, communities and Ramsar wetlands that the forests support. The region cannot sustain continued logging.

Economists At Large calculated that converting the forests to national park would generate \$101 million in economic activity for the Riverina—five times the estimated value of the current timber industry. I understand transfer of the river red gum forests in Victoria actually increased net regional employment. This bill will provide great opportunities to the region. It is farcical to pretend that logging the Riverina river red gums will protect the beauty and uniqueness of these iconic forests. It will not. It puts more stress on the forests and the species they sustain.

Logging is not the same as ecological thinning. Though a questionable approach to forest management, ecological thinning is scientifically targeted for trees with the best chance of survival to have access to resources; logging is about cutting trees to sell wood. Through the creation of internationally significant wetlands, preserving 100,000 hectares of ancient trees, including ones that are more than 300 years old, the bill will protect these iconic forests. The forests will continue to act as valuable carbon sinks.

I have long called for the conservation of our natural forests. In 1993 I sponsored the South East Forest Protection Bill, which was passed in the Legislative Assembly and was blocked in the upper House by one vote—that of Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile. However, that bill was used as the basis for preserving key

wilderness and forest areas when the Carr Government later won office. Unfortunately, some areas are still under threat from logging, including the Mumbulla and Yurammie forests, and there is a proposal for a woodchip-fired power station at Eden. I call on the Government to protect these areas.

I have supported the campaign to protect the river red gum forests, by writing letters on behalf of my constituents and asking questions in Parliament. This issue is important to inner-city residents; it is about our long-term sustainability. Loss of our natural environment has severe impacts on our water supply, biodiversity and climate change. Our natural environment has intrinsic value to the wider community. There is community support for far-reaching protection to preserve the river red gum forests for future generations. I strongly support this bill.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS (Murray-Darling) [7.11 p.m.]: The contribution of the member for Sydney is a clear indication of just how misguided people who live in the concrete jungle are—people who will never, ever go to the Riverina red gum forest area, have never shown an interest in it, have never seen it, do not understand it, and have never seen a forestry operation. Yet they are prepared to dictate the terms set by the Greens, as put forward by another misguided member of Parliament who can stand in this place and condemn an industry that has sustained itself for 150 years.

I acknowledge that the shadow Minister for Natural Resource Management has covered in detail the substance of the National Park Estate (Riverina Red Gum Reservations) Bill 2010 (No. 2) and its impacts. I speak mainly on behalf of the people in my electorate who will be affected badly by this legislation. I reject and condemn the bill. Many people in my electorate have a lack of understanding of how governments work, but they clearly have a perfect example of how this Labor Government works by its introducing this bill. Last Anzac Day I left home at 4.00 a.m. to attend the dawn service at Menindee. After the service, as I made my way back to Broken Hill for the 11.00 a.m. service there, I listened to an address by the main speaker at the dawn service in Canberra. Chaplin Catie Inches-Ogden gave the address and part of what she said struck a chord with me. She said:

The lives and legacies of the Anzacs incite us ordinary Australians to live our lives in extraordinary ways. To live in relationships, homes and workplaces so that justice, compassion and hope abound and where oppression, violence and despair are diminished.

While the words spoken are certainly prophetic, one word struck me as relevant to events in my electorate. That word is "justice". Justice is something that this bill does not provide the people in my electorate. There is absolutely no justice on this issue, because there is no truth. The decision to lock up these forests is based on the obsession on the part of this green minority that says, "There is someone cutting down a tree out there and we've got to stop it. We have to continue to stop this; we have to fight this as a battle." It has nothing to do with the environment; the environment has got lost in this debate. The green minority use the environment as a means to sell their lies and misleading facts to the people in Sydney, who, as I said, have never, ever gone to the Riverina and had a look at how forestry works. They would not know where the red gums are; they could not find them if they went down there. Yet they are willing to abide by the white knights of the environment, who are dictating what should happen.

Over the past 150 years logging has taken place in the Riverina red gum forest. Red gums are a woody weed, they are a prolific grower and, in fact, they probably have more nuisance value than a forest. Most of the people in Sydney would probably think the red gum forest is like the Black Forest of Germany, when it is quite different. I think if people visited the Riverina and had a look at the forest they would probably understand that the operations carried out there by forestry are in the best interests of those forests and long-term sustainability.

About a year ago these hardworking people had their first look at the Greens. The values of this minority group are not based on what average Australians believe in; rather, their values are based on lies, misinformation and standover tactics. Unfortunately for the foresters in the Millewa, they found out that this group of bullies are capable of invading their workplace, locking up their equipment, and verbally abusing their staff and wives and threatening violence if they did not obey their orders. These grubby lowlifes have no respect for others and believe that all Australians should conduct their lives as they do, that they should become dole bludgers and find a cause that exempts them from living within the values we take for granted.

Mr Paul Pearce: What an outrageous statement!

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS: You need to go down there and have a look at the way these people behave. You have absolutely no idea. These people did not know what to expect from the Greens, because it was the

first time they had been exposed to them. Despite the Greens' Gestapo tactics, they fooled the Federal Minister into believing that their actions were to save the superb parrot—another one of their lies. Despite a recent environmental impact statement report that stated forestry was sustainable in this region and was having no impact, the Greens demanded a full forest assessment.

The Natural Resources Commission was commissioned to produce the document that would ensure the green lobby the result it wanted. The Natural Resources Commission report was about blinding flashes of the bleeding obvious and one big lie that would ensure the Minister would be provided with the vehicle to carry out this act of injustice. Unfortunately, the industry was shocked to think that data in this document could be biased to ensure its future was damned. The industry was fooled into believing it was in safe hands. Dr John Williams—who has blackened the name John Williams forever—just like Ivan Milat when he gained the trust of those unfortunate backpackers, knew before he even started the process that he would be responsible for terminating the livelihoods of the foresters. He looked them square in the eye and led them to believe that he was on their side.

Mr Frank Sartor: I really think you are crossing the line there, John.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS: The Minister should hear how this man misled people into believing that they were in safe hands. Why did the Minister not have the guts to tell them from day dot that they were doomed? He did not have the guts to do that. The Minister could not look them in the eye. He went out there knowing full well that the foresters were doomed before he even started the process. Despite every effort by the foresters to show Dr John Williams practical examples of forest management, examples of locked-up areas and the process they followed, the foresters had no idea their futures were doomed once the Natural Resources Commission started its report. The core of this report is about the sustainable yields contained in the report. As soon as the report was published it was challenged by the industry. Even though the Natural Resources Commission admitted that the data was flawed, inaccurate and biased, the Minister still ploughs ahead with legislation based on lies.

How does a member of Parliament representing this region advise the public and industry, despite the lack of honest substance in this document, that a government can still go ahead and destroy their economy and livelihoods? The Minister will try hard to sell the value of a national park, to replace a real industry with real jobs and real outcomes. Unfortunately, the people who live alongside these forests know full well that a national park is a kiss of death for their communities. A national park creates little employment and attracts very few visitors. I doubt that the Greens, Bob Carr, Peter Garrett, or any of the members opposite who contribute to this debate will ever visit these national parks or ever have any interest in them.

When I fly over national parks in my electorate, which is something I do regularly, I never see any visitors. It makes me think that the Greens are pleased that no-one visits national parks. Dawn Crump, wife of Chris Crump, a forester from Mathoura, said that the people the national parks attract arrive with \$50, a clean shirt and change neither during their stay. The compensation package that is offered has the potential to bankrupt businesses, leave a huge hole in local communities and further destroy their faith in big government.

The Minister should be aware that a lot of the forestry industry was encouraged to get involved in value adding. Examples of that are veneering and furniture making. People involved in those industries should be considered in a compensation package. The Government is going to base that compensation package on future quotas, double quotas or whatever, with zero consideration for those allied industries developed out of this business. The people of the southern Riverina constantly ask me: "What is this Labor Government about? We are workers. We are an industry. Where are they? They are not protecting our industries. We would have expected they would be on the side of the workers." That is absolutely incorrect and they are finding out that is not the case at all.

Part of the recommendations of the Natural Resources Commission was to see the forest watered, but that will never happen until a significant amount of water is flowing down the river to water those forests—as it has done in the past—when the drought is over. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

One of the examples shown to Dr John Williams was Nyah-Vinifera forest, an area in Victoria that has been locked up. If anyone took the time out to have a look at that area they would see exactly what happens when a red gum forest is locked up. The build-up of material on the forest floor will provide the basis for a fire that will burn for days and totally destroy it. Firefighters will not be able to get anywhere near the fire because of the incredible heat it generates, and the forest will be totally wiped out. This bill will see a continuation of

that. We saw what happened in Victoria with the build-up of fuel on the forest floor. One day, and I hope it never happens, we may see one massive fire along the Murray River, from South Australia to the east coast of New South Wales. I guess the only time that city members will see it is when they are complaining about the amount of smoke covering the city generated by a massive fire that they helped to spark.

Money will be provided for community development and various projects. The Murray Shire Council and the Deniliquin Council have come up with a couple of ideas as to how this money could be spent to the benefit of the community. My fear is that the money will be caught up in a government department that will spend \$250,000 on consulting fees to find out how to spend \$25,000—that is typical of those organisations. If the Minister is fair dinkum he should consult with the Murray Shire Council and the Deniliquin Council on some of their ideas to ensure that this money is used to benefit the communities in those areas that will be disadvantaged by this legislation. I place on record a couple of quotes from some credible local people. The first quote is from Lancaster bomber pilot and squadron leader Edgar Pickles, when he spoke at the Anzac Day Service held at Wanganella in my electorate:

These politicians and their bureaucratic entourage in New South Wales are not satisfied with 275 National Parks and are destroying thousands of jobs and a viable and productive red gum industry which has been sustainably managed with COMMON SENSE for 150 years. Cattle have kept the grass down, wood chippers and firewood gatherers have removed the fire load on the ground which is vital to avoid the disastrous consequences and tragic loss of home and lives which occurred on Black Saturday.

This is a man who has lived in the area, and a man I admire. This serviceman served his country well and he made that observation, which is typical of the types of comments that are often made to me. Members are well aware of the locking up of Yanga, a magnificent station that provided employment for the people of Balranald, some full time and some part time. It was said that a shearer contractor in Balranald got 30 per cent of his work from Yanga Park. The Government played it down. It said that it was only a few jobs and not too many people would be affected. But today the people of Balranald are feeling what it is all about. For instance, the General Manager of Balranald Shire Council, Chris Littlemore, said:

Environment Department denials of sitting on [a] Tourism Report are a smoke-screen says General Manager of Balranald Shire Chris Littlemore.

"If the report supported the Government, they would have been waving it about" he said. The truth is that the Department has always pushed the line that the new parks would be a tourist magnet and everyone local told them that they were dreaming. "In the fine print of the report, it also says that visitors to parks will not be likely to be big spenders in our communities. Nobody is highlighting this either" he said.

This is just what the Department did when it bought Yanga four years ago. We were promised 50,000 tourists a year back then and one day we may get them, but not any time soon.

As for the claims by Peter Cooper that the worth of the industry is only \$12M, who is he kidding, that is just the royalties the timber industry pays to the State Government. The NRC made a mistake when they calculated the yield, but at least they had the guts to admit their mistake. What did the government do, sat on that admission as well.

This government does not have a good track record when it comes to releasing all the facts. Intelligent people can form their own opinions, but not if half the facts are withheld.

This is about the Government imposing their will on country people and lying to them. The Government is telling them that it is going to save their communities by proclaiming a national park. The Minister is here today for one reason only: to satisfy the Greens, to ensure that a couple of members of this Government are re-elected, and that some of the Greens preferences flow to people who are relying on them. The Minister has had a gun held to his head by the minority Greens and he has rolled over. I would have thought the Minister would have had a more broad-minded approach to this, but he has lain down with the Greens and got up with fleas.

The speech delivered by the member for Sydney a short time ago clearly outlined that there is only one strategy in this debate—the strategy of the Greens. The words we have heard in this debate, and we will hear further in this debate, are words that come out of the mouths of the Greens. They are not really in touch with the environment. They only go there to fight the battle. The next battle will be down on the South Coast. They are going down there, coming ready or not, and this Government will roll over again and again and again. [*Time expired.*]

Ms ANGELA D'AMORE (Drummoyne—Parliamentary Secretary) [7.31 p.m.]: The Government has taken decisive action today to protect more than 100,000 hectares of area in the Riverina red gum forests from July 2010. As the Premier said in announcing the Government's action today, this is an historic day for New South Wales. The Riverina red gums agreement will protect 66,000 hectares of national park, more than 15,000 hectares of regional park and more than 20,000 hectares of proposed indigenous protected areas. The

Government's action has been given its due recognition today by a number of key indigenous and conservation groups. Earlier today the Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation, the Wilderness Society and the National Parks Association of NSW issued a joint media release. Carmel Flint, spokesperson of the National Parks Association of NSW, said:

It is a resounding environmental outcome, of national and international importance, that sees the largest River Red Gum forest in the world protected forever.

Felicity Wade of the Wilderness Society Sydney also commented on the Government's protection of more than 100,000 hectares of Riverina red gum forest. She said:

This is undoubtedly one of the most significant National Park decisions in the history of New South Wales, with a greater proportion of State Forest lands protected than in any previous forest decision.

Neville Atkinson, Chairperson of the Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation, said:

It is also an historic step forward for Indigenous self-determination, delivering joint management of the Millewa forests for the Yorta Yorta nation and the transfer of two other major forest areas to Traditional Owners as Indigenous Protected Areas.

It is clear from these comments that there is overwhelming community support for this historic conservation and indigenous self-determination outcome. It is also important to acknowledge the role that community consultation played in achieving this outcome. It was through the community consultation process that the area to be designated as regional park was expanded beyond the recommendations in the Natural Resources Commission report. That is because there was a strong view from the community that new visitor facilities be created in the Riverina parks.

The new facilities that will be constructed in regional park areas will provide an improved visitor experience for both locals and tourists. They will include camping grounds, and barbecue and picnic areas. Locals and residents also will have access to activities such as bushwalking, horse riding, canoeing and fishing at the new national and regional parks in the Riverina. The red gum regional parks generally will be situated close to towns and also allow for dog walking and firewood collection. This was done in large part because recent surveys in the Riverina indicate that 10 per cent of visitors like to take their dogs into the red gum forests. The regional parks will provide that opportunity. Importantly, for visitors, especially families, there will be no entry fees for visitors to the new protected areas, including the national and regional parks.

Mr Frank Sartor: Opposition members should listen.

Ms ANGELA D'AMORE: What else would we expect from the members opposite, when we hear the rhetoric they use in this Chamber? The New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service will manage the new national and regional parks from 1 July 2010. The service will work with councils, local tourism bodies and community members to plan visitor experiences for the new areas. Local communities also will be provided with detailed information about the new parks before 1 July 2010 and materials will be prepared for visitor information centres and local councils.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Frank Terenzini): Order! Members who wish to conduct private conversations will do so outside the Chamber.

Ms ANGELA D'AMORE: The creation of the new protected areas in the Riverina red gum forests is the most significant environmental outcome in New South Wales for five years. It continues the commitment that Labor governments have shown over many years to preserving important ecological precincts for generations to come. It is indeed an historic day in New South Wales. I commend the National Park Estate (Riverina Red Gum Reservations) Bill 2010 (No. 2) to the House.

Mr ANDREW STONER (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [7.35 p.m.]: Another tragedy is unfolding in regional New South Wales under this Labor Government. Government members may laugh, but their Government has ridden roughshod over regional communities for the past 15 years. It happened with the north-east forests and it is happening with the south-east forests. It happened with the Pilliga forests in the north-west of the State. This is a cynical trade-off of country people's livelihoods for Green preferences, with no clear environmental benefits. You have only to look at what happened in the north-east and Pilliga forests. You have gone in there—

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Frank Terenzini): Order! The Leader of The Nationals will direct his comments through the Chair.

Mr ANDREW STONER: You have gone in there, you have put country people out of work, you have declared national parks, and you have promised the creation of jobs. I am talking to your Government generally, Mr Acting-Speaker.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Frank Terenzini): Order! I remind the Leader of The Nationals to direct his comments through the Chair.

Mr ANDREW STONER: The Labor Government promised jobs from these national parks. There have not been any jobs or increased visitor numbers. The national parks have been under-resourced. They have become overrun with weeds and feral animals and they are bushfire risks. Shortly after the Pilliga forests were locked, mills closed at places such as Baradine, Gwabegar and Gunnedah. There were even impacts felt at Dubbo when a massive fire ripped through the area.

Mr Andrew Fraser: It destroyed 100,000 hectares.

Mr ANDREW STONER: As the member for Coffs Harbour says, 100,000 hectares were destroyed, as was the wildlife—more than would have been the case had the forest been actively managed. Why is this happening? It is to get Greens preferences to protect the Deputy Premier and the Minister for Education and Training, who are very worried about the seats of Marrickville and Balmain. All of this push is coming from city Greens who do not understand that Australian forests must be actively managed. Our forests cannot be locked up and let go because of the risks of fire. If we look at pictures of these forests from a couple of hundred years ago, including the Pilliga and the red gum forests, they were nowhere near as extensive as they are now because in those days the Aboriginals used fire to thin the forests.

These forests have grown and developed under the management and stewardship of the forestry industry in country New South Wales. If that management is taken away, we will have an environmental disaster. The environmental benefits of this bill are questionable. In fact, they are completely dodgy. There have been environmental disasters in the Kosciuszko National Park, where stands of forests, thousands of hectares of mountain ash, will never recover as a result of extremely hot bushfires. National parks are being declared despite a commitment from then Premier Bob Carr that rural community impact statements would be undertaken before such decisions were taken. Clearly, that has not been the case.

For 150 years the red gum forests in the south-west of the State have been sustainably harvested. They have grown in area because of the management process. The city greenies are not familiar with these areas. They have not grown up there. They would benefit from talking to families who have lived in the areas for four, five and six generations. They might learn a little bit from them. The city greenies might see the forests in a picture, on the Internet or during a brief visit. They think the forests are lovely and that they need to be protected. They are lovely because they have been managed for 150 years by an industry that values the timber resource. The people in the industry do everything they can to ensure that resource is not wasted or degraded. They work very hard to keep that resource.

That will not be the case once the forests are locked up. Once the forests are locked up, those same city Greens will forget about them and within the space of a few decades the forests will be run down or large parts of them destroyed. One has only to look at the so-called Yanga National Park in that part of the world, which was a very productive agricultural property with a lot of sheep, a lot of timber harvesting, some cattle and some mixed cropping. All those jobs are gone, the visitor numbers are not there, and guess what is happening? The red gums are dying; they are stressed because of the drought we have had.

Droughts come and droughts go, and this is where in its report the Natural Resources Commission has got it completely wrong. The Natural Resources Commission has acknowledged that key data on the sustainability of the timber supply is wrong, but the Minister does not want to take that into account. In fact, the Minister selectively grabs parts of the report of the Natural Resources Commission and uses them as justification while ignoring other key recommendations from the report. We have seen it happen in the past and we are told time and again that timber jobs will be replaced by national parks jobs. That is never the case. People are quite happy in their inner-city cafes, sipping their lattes. They do not go and visit—very few people do—and never do we see the same sort of economic input once these forests are locked up.

One has to question the Minister's motivation on this issue. He is bending over backwards to the green movement and one wonders why. Clearly he took a bit of a hit: he was stung by criticism that he was too close to developers in his former role as the Minister for Planning. But I think he has overcompensated. He has gone too far listening to a green lobby that will never, ever be satisfied. I believe the Minister is trying to reinvent himself as being warm and cuddly and green so that he can get the support of his left faction colleagues to achieve that long-held ambition of being the next Labor leader, and that is sad when he has just traded off the livelihoods and futures of country communities to do that.

The Nationals, of course, represent these communities. I come from Wauchope and I saw the devastating impact of what happened there with the hardwood forests in the north-east, which is about to happen in the south-west. Just this week I received a letter from a Mr Steve McKay who will be very affected by this legislation. He writes:

Dear Sir

It was with disbelief that I read a media release recently, stating that Southern NSW Redgum Forests on Crown Land were going to be transformed to National Parks. This decision was made after an assessment and report on the Redgum Forests was tabled by the NCS.

I've since read the NCS report and I can't believe how fundamentally inaccurate and misguided this report is. One of the major inaccuracies is in a statement "these forests have evolved over thousands of years".

I can provide photographic and physical evidence that there were no forests until after European Settlement and the introduction of sheep and irrigation development in the late 1800s/early 1900s. Apart from scattered Redgums in low lying areas and along rivers and watercourses, there was no forest.

These 'forests' are fresh forests resulting from early European farming and pastoral practices and have since been managed by State Forests to provide a controlled harvesting and conservation of these areas for the long term. Hardwood sawmilling, firewood, apiary and grazing industries have evolved with these forests to provide substantial employment and income to the communities associated with these forests.

The prolonged ten (10) year drought has certainly impacted on the health and yield of these forests, but the same thing happened approximately sixty years ago followed by a succession of wet years and flooding in the late 1950s which caused another mass regeneration of the forests.

To lock these forests up as National Parks will lead to the destruction of much of these forests. Without effective management and control, the ground and understorey fuel loads will rapidly build up. These areas are naturally low in rainfall and extremely hot in the summer months which causes any fuel load to become tinder dry, a ticking bomb waiting for a lightning strike, an exhaust spark or other ignition source, and a resulting fire will be so hot it will totally kill the forest.

National Parks have a track record of neglect and mismanagement in many other areas where noxious weeds like blackberry and wild briar have been uncontrolled, public access has been prohibited or restricted so roads and fire trails are neglected, feral animals such as wild dogs and cats take care of the native fauna and eventually the place burns.

A handful of city based, ill informed 'do gooders' are about to rape us of our livelihood and ultimately destroy a community and a national resource, and that they can do this without consultation with the people directly involved or affected and without regard for the true history of these forests and the benefit they provide under the existing management system.

Will the government provide a cheap alternative fuel for the thousands of people that currently get their winter heating from Redgum firewood? What happens to the family trucking companies that have built a business hauling mill logs or sawn timber to markets, the sawmilling companies and employee's who have spent their life in this industry? The furniture makers, the landscapers and the graziers who all rely heavily on these forests for all or part of their livelihood?

I'm one of these people; a grazier who relies on our lease of State Forest for a winter feed supply for calving cows. We have had no contact, consultation or advice from anyone regarding the closure of these forests. Other than a few unofficial newspaper articles and a lot of hear-say amongst the local people, we really don't know what's happening.

I (and several others) would love to have the power that the handful of bureaucrats behind this mindless move to create more National Parks. Then we could close them down, tell them to find an alternative livelihood and put their bungled NCS reports and recommendations in the museum of 'national blunders'.

Surely something can be done to make the general populace and particularly our politicians aware of the implications should this 'act' be pushed through and become reality.

Yours faithfully
Steve McKay

I did not write that, and to my knowledge this man is not a member of The Nationals; he is just a person from country New South Wales who has lived his entire life in the area, who knows a lot about this area and who has a lot more common sense than those who are seeking to bring in this legislation with what I believe is a purely political imperative.

For those who stand to lose from this decision I understand the Government has put together a compensation package. But that compensation package will barely cover the cost of the income from this industry over the course of one year. What about all the years to come? The average amount of compensation will be about \$80,000 per worker. But what do they do after they get that \$80,000? They will probably use most of it to move out and their towns will eventually become ghost towns—places like Barham, Mathoura and many of those other beautiful communities along the Murray River in the south of the State. The Liberals-Nationals listen to local communities in the south-west of the State and we will oppose this legislation to the bitter end.

Mr PAUL PEARCE (Coogee) [7.47 p.m.]: I speak in support of the National Park Estate (River Red Gum Reservations) Bill 2010 (No. 2). I begin by complimenting the Minister for Climate Change and the Environment on what has been a very wide-ranging discussion on this bill. The bill has been analysed by all parties and it is quite apparent that there will be winners and losers out of this legislation. That is the reason why a substantial compensation industry assistance package of some \$97 million is being put into the pot. The reality is that our environment is changing rapidly and what was a sustainable practice 50, 100 or 150 years ago is no longer a sustainable practice.

With white occupation we have already significantly impacted upon the forest cover of this continent. That has had the effect, amongst other effects, of climate change and a change in the nature of the climate within our communities. According to some of the earlier speakers in this debate, if you happen to live in the city you cannot legitimately have a view about the long-term nature of the environment and the protection of our environment within this continent. We all happen to live in this continent and those sorts of economic and environmental conflicts will occur from time to time.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Frank Terenzini): Order! Members who wish to conduct private conversations will do so outside the Chamber. The Leader of The Nationals was heard in silence. Members will extend the same courtesy to the member for Coogee.

Mr PAUL PEARCE: We must recognise that there will be impacts and determine what is in the long-term interests of our community and the environment and then make a decision. Reputable people have done a substantial analysis and there is general agreement about the amount of timber involved and the economic impact. As the previous speaker said, there will be an impact on the towns in the region. That happened when tariffs and the quota system was removed from the textile, clothing and footwear industry in which I was involved. That is the nature of a changing economy. Structural adjustments were put in place to look after the affected workers and, in some cases, the business owners. Now, about 20 years later, the economy is probably healthier as a result of the changes that were made despite significant opposition, including from me. There was a loss of jobs, but alternative industries have been developed and other opportunities have been created.

Mr Andrew Fraser: Yes, sweatshops.

Mr PAUL PEARCE: Where do you think these suits are made, you clown?

[*Interruption*]

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Frank Terenzini): Order! The member for Bega will not interrupt the debate. He will refrain from interjecting. He will have an opportunity to make a contribution to debate on this important legislation.

Mr Andrew Fraser: It sure is.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Frank Terenzini): Order! The member for Coffs Harbour will also have an opportunity to contribute to the debate. The member for Coogee has the call.

Mr PAUL PEARCE: Your party supported the changes made in the textile, clothing and footwear industries.

Mr Andrew Constance: Point of order: In the interests of consistency, Mr Acting-Speaker, I ask you to direct the member for Coogee to direct his comments through the Chair.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Frank Terenzini): Order! I uphold the point of order. The member for Coogee will direct his comments through the Chair.

Mr PAUL PEARCE: The Riverina red gum forest agreement will protect 66,000 hectares of national parks, more than 15,000 hectares of regional parks, 20,000 hectares of proposed indigenous protection areas and two wetlands of international significance—Millawa and Werri. The decision about the Millawa wetland is particularly welcome and I compliment the Minister on his efforts in that regard. The original proposal exposed that area to severe threat. However, many discussions have been held, a great deal of analysis has been done and some very sound arguments have been put. I compliment the National Parks Association of New South Wales on the quality of its submission on that issue and I particularly compliment the Minister on the decision that has come out of the debate.

The Government recognises that this decision will have an economic impact. As a result, it has increased the structural adjustment package by \$17 million. I also compliment the Minister on that. This Government has listened to all of the affected parties. It is easy for members in opposition to look after their own little patch and to ignore the broader picture. The reality is that there is a legitimate argument to be put in favour of conservation—although The Nationals will never concede that point. Is the member for Coffs Harbour still wearing his axe badge? That was a nice touch.

Mr Andrew Fraser: Yes, and you will never get one.

Mr PAUL PEARCE: The member is right about that. The reality is that this Government has put together a very viable package that takes into account the economic impact on the community and, more to the point, the longer-term environmental impact. This is a big win for the environment and I compliment the Government for introducing this legislation.

Mr ANDREW FRASER (Coffs Harbour) [7.55 p.m.]: I will start by mentioning the contributions made by the members representing the electorates of Coogee, Drummoyne and Sydney. They represent the most degraded landscape in Australia; their electorates are concrete jungles. We have a polluted harbour and trees have been clear-felled, but those members simply want to protect their own backsides. It was unbelievable to hear the Mayor of Sydney—the member for Sydney—talking about the pristine areas that are the subject of this legislation when she has never been there. She is busy widening footpaths in Kings Cross so that drunks can spew on them on a Saturday night. She should be ashamed of herself.

It is amazing that no Country Labor member has made a contribution to this debate. They know that what the Minister is saying and the Government has absolutely nothing to do with conservation. The member for Burrinjuck quite rightly read out an essay about what was discovered when settlers first went to the Riverina area. The forests that are there today were not there then. In fact, it could be argued that they are man-made. Man's intervention has promoted the growth of those forests, as happened in the Brigalow and in the cypress forests. Five years after the cypress forests were locked up there was a lightning strike and 100,000 hectares were burnt out. That timber could have been harvested and managed properly. The carbon and soil were burnt down to a depth of 30 centimetres and nothing will grow. The fire also cooked almost every koala in the area. I have seen a photograph of the one koala that survived. That disaster happened because the area was locked up as a national park.

The first thing that the National Parks and Wildlife Service [NPWS] does when it goes into a forest—a forest that is good enough to be declared a national park even though it has been logged for more than 100 years—is to close the roads. That was done in the North Coast forests, the Baradine forests and the Brigalow forests. Unlike the NPWS, foresters will maintain a road so that a class-C fire tanker travelling at 70 kilometres an hour can access it. The NPWS burnt the bridges in the Dorrigo forest to ensure that no-one could get access.

Mr Frank Sartor: We have fewer fires in national parks than anywhere else.

Mr ANDREW FRASER: I will give the Minister credit for one thing: He went to the area and talked to the people who will be affected. I have visited the area on four or five occasions and I have talked to Ken and Faye O'Brien, who are in the gallery today. I have also talked to Gavin and Doug Rose and to Glen Gray, who produces the most magnificent timber furniture I have ever seen using red gum. The red gum he uses is valued at about \$40,000 a cubic metre.

This Government keeps referring to 500 jobs, 300 jobs or whatever. The fact is that this legislation will have an impact on 1,300 jobs. That is just the jobs. Government members do not talk about how many people will really be affected. More than 4,000 people will be directly affected because their loved ones are employed in the local timber industry. Prime Minister "Kruddy" likes to use the term "working families". Those families

are being put on the scrap heap for \$80,000 and a \$10,000 retraining grant. The Minister should go to Baradine and look at what has happened to tourism there—it has disappeared. The same will happen in the red gum forest area.

I went through the forest with Ian Danckert only three or four weeks ago. That forest has a huge amount of dead and dying timber because of the drought. If that wood were harvested the industry could survive for another 10 years. However, after this bill is passed that timber will be locked up in the forest. If members do not believe me they should go to the forest at Moira. Two years ago 867 hectares of the forest were burnt. It took two years for this Government, on the advice of the National Parks and Wildlife Service, to authorise logging. Unfortunately, the dead wood is now no longer suitable for furniture manufacture because it is split.

The Minister saw the wood when he visited the area and he knows what I am talking about. That wood is not suitable for building furniture for very long and it is now effectively firewood. On 1 July that wood will be locked up in the national park; that is, more than 800 hectares of firewood will be locked away. I have photographs of this area. The Minister knows what it is like. I wish these other inner city members did. That timber will fall onto the ground and at the first lightning strike you will see a fire that will take out most of Millewa Forest, Moira Forest, you name it, and it will destroy the ecology that is there.

I use this same old argument every time this debate comes up, but these forests have been there for 150 years and have been managed for timber. If they are good enough to lock up as a national park, they are good enough to remain as working forests. Let us not forget that in 2002 the Millewa Forest was given world recognition with a Ramsar listing. That Ramsar listing stated that the listing was given to the forest as a working forest. Why lock it up now? When worldwide recognition is given to it as a working forest, as a Ramsar area, why do you want to lock it up? I will tell members why. It is about Greens preferences. We all know about that. I shall read into the record a media statement made by the Forest Practices Authority today, which I think probably says it all:

Today's announcement of legislation by the NSW government to create Red Gum National Parks provides little relief for those affected by this decision. The decision devastates an important regional industry sector and will cause severe social and economic impacts in the timber communities of the Riverina.

We have spent weeks haggling with Minister Frank Sartor to try to find a workable solution, to provide fair and just compensation and establish alternative jobs. But he is adamant that a deal with the Greens is needed for the next election—

Did the Minister hear that? The Minister for Education and Training and the Deputy Premier are here to listen. It is marvellous—the two who are affected most. The media statement continued:

so the people of the Riverina can be traded for the Sydney seat of Balmain. Actually looking after the health of the forests does not count for much at all..

An improved assistance package is still a long way short of a fair and just outcome for the affected people of the Riverina. The package provides no positive future for the communities. The outcome is still devastating for workers, mills and communities in the region. The jobs are gone, the businesses will be closed and an industry worth \$72 million per year is lost.

What are they getting in compensation? Only \$25 million. Pathetic! The statement went on:

Workers will be paid \$81,306 as a handout and lose their job ...

Mills will be paid \$20 million as compensation for making \$68 million of equipment obsolete.

That is the investment these people put in, and what are they getting back? Only \$25 million. I know the millions Ken O'Brien spent building a firewood industry that provides firewood to Melbourne and Victoria, yet that industry will be shut by this legislation. Where are those people going to get their firewood? Where will we get our sleepers, the red gum sleepers that Victoria still uses? I urge members to suspend debate on this bill and go down and look at that business. It is the best example of an integrated forest operation in the world. You can go into a forest five years after it has been logged and the areas in those forests are good enough for grazing. They have green areas, all the heads are gone, the stumps are gone, the sawdust is taken out and those areas are truly magnificent, and this has been going on for generations. We are now going to lock it up and place it in the hands of the national parks and wildfire service. The media release continued:

The Natural Resources Commission identified water and active forest management as necessary to maintain healthy Red Gum forests. Forest industries have managed the Red Gum forest for 150 years and sustained all the values that exist there today. Creating a big National Park does none of that. Frank Sartor has now placed it all under threat of neglect and bushfire.

Let us talk about bushfire. Did we not see what happened in Victoria last year—more than 200 lives lost. I do not want to see that happen down there, but I put the warning on the table tonight.

Mr Frank Sartor: I will be responding to that in detail.

Mr ANDREW FRASER: You will be responsible for it, not responding to it. Those lives were lost in bushfire in dry times. This can and will happen down there and those communities will not only be ravaged by the loss of employment, they will be burned out. I hope that never happens. I hope somehow we can get into government and reverse this situation. The Natural Resources Commission identified a number of things that were affecting the red gum forest. It identified water, river regulation and drought, but it did not identify forestry as a threatening process. The Government has decided in its wisdom that it is now going to lock them up as national parks. That reason is Greens preferences. I go back to the media release:

The NRC could not determine a sustainable timber yield, after 5 goes at it they ended up advising twice their original estimate, and then they failed to include 21,000 ha of forests. The vague and useless report of the NRC has been used as the excuse for this devastating decision. The real reason is green preferences for the next election. Country people and communities in NSW are expendable.

What happened to the Premier's priorities for jobs and communities? They simply do not apply in country areas. In all her travels around NSW the Premier has carefully avoided the people in the Riverina.

The welfare of the people and the communities of the Riverina now lies squarely on the conscience of Frank Sartor and Kristina Keneally.

I would add to that the two Ministers who are in the House now, Verity Firth and Carmel Tebbutt, because they are the ones for whom this deal has been done. Unfortunately for them, their seats will not be saved by it. The timber industry is a carbon friendly industry. Harvesting trees and using that timber for stumps, for furniture, for frames and houses, for sleepers on the railways is storing carbon, and the new trees that replace them take more carbon out of the atmosphere. That is an acknowledged scientific fact. So if the Government were really doing something for the environment, it would be supporting this industry. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

When you look at the carbon that is stored, the carbon that is taken out of the atmosphere, this Government should support this industry and the communities that rely on it. Instead, we are going to lock it up. The Government claims this will bring in tourism. It is estimated it will get a \$2.8 million return annually from tourists versus a \$72 million return from a timber industry, which is a renewable resource industry and which supports 1,300 jobs and 4,000 people in those families, yet this Government chooses to ignore that. As I said, I could probably go on for years. One point in the legislation blows me away. Proposed subsection (2) of section 16 in part 4 states:

Wood obtained from ecological thinning undertaken by the Director-General in any lands reserved under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* in the Riverina area may be deposited in firewood collection zones for collection by the holders of licences under this section.

That is for domestic use only. Proposed subsection (3) states:

A licence under this section may not be granted for a period that exceeds 1 year, but may be renewed from time to time.

There is no guarantee that even the locals can get their firewood. So, if Ken just wanted to cut firewood for the locals, he would not be able to get it, but that firewood heats the homes in Victoria and in the south of the State. There is not a lot of firewood needed on the North Coast. People under forestry permit cut most of the firewood up there, as I do, or they take it off their own property. The Government is destroying an industry here and it is destroying an opportunity for warmth for people in Victoria during those winter months. It is unbelievable, especially when that 867 hectares at Moira will not be allowed to be cut. To think that it is going to cart firewood to a dump site, at what cost? If that cost is taken into account, how will anyone be able to afford that firewood? This is quite bizarre. I do not think anyone has done the economics on this. We know that a socioeconomic statement has not been done in relation to this. I want to read to the House an AAP eClip from today. It is headed "Labor, Greens deny deal over red gums (full version)" and states:

On Wednesday, Ms Keneally announced the bill had been amended also to end logging in the Millewa from July 1.

She sidestepped a question that the deal was done to secure preferences from the Greens in the upcoming March 2011 state election.

"This is about doing the right thing for what is a nationally and internationally significant forest," she told reporters ...

Remember that Ramsar listing I spoke about? She has not been in Australia long enough to understand what the Ramsar listing was and how it got there. The eClip continued:

It's about protecting threatened species, it's about protecting ecosystems.

I reiterate that those threatened ecosystems and species are in the forests at the moment. They are not being destroyed; they are not being belted.

Mr Frank Sartor: They are, actually.

Mr ANDREW FRASER: They are not. You know that is a lie. You have misled the House again. But wait, Frank, I have some good stuff for you, mate. Greens upper House member of Parliament, Ian Cohen, who joined Ms Keneally at Wednesday's conference, denied that the amended bill was about preferences. He said, and I do not want to misquote the Minister:

At no time has the word "preferences" come up. It has been clearly about the issues.

Sections of a media report on 23 July are as follows:

Mr Cohen said the national park proposal was being stymied in cabinet by Forest Resources Minister Ian Macdonald. "This government will desperately need Green preferences at the election", Mr Cohen said. "My position is, only if they deserve it and have earned it. The river red gums are pivotal as far as I'm concerned. We won't be giving over preferences automatically at this election. I will be recommending that we don't simply recommend preferences either way. Labor will come begging ... but if they don't deliver on these forests in a sustainable way they can go to hell.

That is one man's word. He said that at a press club luncheon. I remind the Minister—and I would like to hear his comments on this—that on 14 January at Gulpa Sawmill, which is run by a friend of mine Ian Dankert and his family, that he said this, or words to this effect:

Let me give you a lesson in politics. The Greens hold 15% of the vote. And if we are to stay in power, we must hold their preferences to maintain city seats. They want a significant national park in redgum.

Frank, that was heard by witnesses.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Frank Terenzini): Order! The member for Coffs Harbour will direct his comments through the Chair.

Mr ANDREW FRASER: The Minister can mislead this House; he can tell his porkies in here, but I will get the statutory declarations, Frank, and we will refer it all to the ICAC, you and Mr Cohen.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Frank Terenzini): Order! I remind the member for Coffs Harbour to direct his comments through the Chair.

Mr ANDREW FRASER: Through you, Mr Acting-Speaker, I will get those statutory declarations and refer them to the Independent Commission Against Corruption. We will hear what the Minister has to say under oath to the commission. I wonder if he will stick with it. Mr Cohen has said publicly at a press club luncheon and in the media that a deal was being done over preferences.

Mr Frank Sartor: He said the opposite today.

Mr ANDREW FRASER: This was on 27 February, Frank. The Minister said on 14 January at Gulpa Sawmill that he was going to give those people a lesson in politics. That lesson in politics is costing the taxpayers of this State \$97 million. It is costing that community 1,300-plus jobs. It will affect 4,000 people directly and will destroy some of those towns, all for preferences. The evidence is there. The Minister may lie and try to mislead but he is destroying these people's livelihoods by doing preference deals with Ian Cohen. Is it in the interests of the environment? No, it is not. Mark my words: We will see the destruction of those areas. Last year about 867 hectares of Moira State Forest burned. Those fires will continue. The area will be destroyed economically and ecologically. I do not support the legislation.

Ms VERITY FIRTH (Balmain—Minister for Education and Training) [8.15 p.m.]: I am very proud to support the National Park Estate (Riverina Red Gum Reservations) Bill 2010 (No. 2). This bill ensures that more than 100,000 hectares of vital, endangered river red gum forests will be protected in their entirety from 1 July this year. This decision includes the immediate protection of the Millewa group of forests, the Barooga group of

forests and areas of river red gum State forests on the Murrumbidgee, Lachlan and lower Murray rivers. To support this bill is a matter of great personal satisfaction for me, as it is an issue that I worked on closely during my time as Minister for Climate Change and the Environment. I saw firsthand the devastation that had been caused to river red gum forests in western and south-western New South Wales through drought and outdated irrigation practices. On a trip to the Macquarie Marshes in 2008 the sight of these majestic trees, drained of life to a point where the future of the entire forest was imperilled, was enough to produce real emotion in everyone who was there.

Dead trees stood like skeletons, making the landscape look more like a graveyard than a forest. The urgency of reversing this tragedy cannot be understated, so I am thrilled to see such a comprehensive conservation outcome brought to this House. The forests covered by this bill are a lynchpin in the ecology of the Murray, Murrumbidgee and Lachlan rivers. They play a vital role in recycling and producing nutrients for the health of the rivers and floodplains, and in providing critical forest habitat in a region dominated by woodlands, shrub lands and grasslands. They support many of our threatened species of plants and animals, including the superb and regent parrots, powerful owl and squirrel glider. They also include internationally significant wetlands that support many migratory species. These new parks will include the iconic Millewa forests and together with the Barmah National Park across the Murray River in Victoria they will ensure the largest river red gum forest in the world will be fully protected. The introduction of this new bill will provide protection from 1 July this year.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Frank Terenzini): Order! The Minister will be heard in silence.

Ms VERITY FIRTH: I am also delighted that joint management arrangements for the Millewa forests will be established with the Yorta Yorta people. In total, 20,684 hectares of reserves being created by the Government will be owned and managed by Aboriginal groups for the purposes of conservation. These forests have also been vital to local Aboriginal people, with a history of at least 10,000 years of occupation and use. The long use of the resources of the forests has left a rich cultural heritage and underpins a strong spiritual significance for current Aboriginal communities. Along the Edwards River below Deniliquin, the Werai forests are flagged to become a future indigenous protected area, owned and managed by Aboriginal groups. Adjacent to Lake Victoria near the South Australian border, management of the environmental and cultural heritage of the Taroo forests will be transferred to the local Aboriginal management group. Under the bill introduced by the Government today, these lands will be vested in the Minister for Climate Change and the Environment until they are able to be transferred to Aboriginal owners. These amendments ensure that these forests will not be able to be logged prior to their establishment as indigenous protected areas.

The Government has set aside \$23.5 million for park management over the next three years. This includes \$11.8 million of capital expenditure for the establishment of the new reserves, \$9.7 million of recurrent management funding and \$2 million to support Aboriginal communities to become involved in the management of the new reserves and the development of indigenous protected areas for Werai and Taroo. This outcome for the river red gum forests builds on New South Wales Labor's strong record of expanding national parks. Since 1995 this Government has established more than 455 new reserves and expanded hundreds of others. In just 15 years the area under protection has increased from 4 million hectares to now almost 6.8 million hectares, or 8.5 per cent of the State. This Government has also tripled the area of wilderness in New South Wales, the highest level of conservation protection. There are now more than 1.9 million hectares of declared wilderness within our parks, which is more than 2 per cent of the State.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Frank Terenzini): Order! The member for Murrumbidgee will listen to the Minister's contribution in silence. He will have the opportunity to contribute to the debate. The Minister has the call.

Ms VERITY FIRTH: This Labor Government has established a world-class system of marine parks that protects the most important breeding and conservation areas along our coastline. Since coming to power, this Labor Government has established six marine parks—Cape Byron, the Solitary Islands, Lord Howe Island, Jervis Bay, Port Stephens-Great Lakes and Batemans—which cover 34 per cent of New South Wales coastal waters. I am proud of New South Wales Labor's strong tradition of preserving our natural heritage and expanding national parks. I am proud of the hard work and dedication of conservation activists, who have campaigned long and hard for this outcome. I am proud to have worked personally towards a strong conservation outcome for the river red gum forests and I am really proud of the outcome being delivered by this Government today. I am pleased to support the bill.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE (Bega) [8.20 p.m.]: The Minister for Education and Training should make sure she faxes her speech off to the Greens tonight, and the member for Drummoyne and the member for Coogee, who have also spoken in this debate, should do likewise. But where is Country Labor? Where is the member for Monaro and where is the member for Bathurst to stick up for country jobs and country people? One thing that seems to be lost in this debate is that no-one seems to be asking themselves why we need a sustainable timber harvesting industry in this country. One of the reasons why we should support a sustainable harvesting industry is that we as a country do not want to rely on timber imports from countries like Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, where rainforests are being clear-felled at an extraordinary rate.

That is why we should support sawmills throughout the State delivering sawlogs for the purposes of housing construction, furniture making, and a whole raft of other purposes. I find it bewildering that the Greens do not see the wider environmental benefits in having a New South Wales-based sustainable timber harvesting industry. No doubt the fact that Minister Sartor withdrew legislation and then reintroduced it was a direct result of a threat made by Mr Ian Cohen in relation to 10 marginal Labor seats that will be up for grabs at the State election—

Mr Frank Sartor: Rubbish! It's just a procedural thing, you goose!

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: Minister, you are the only goose here.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Frank Terenzini): Order! The member for Bega will respect the standing orders, direct his comments through the Chair, and confine his remarks to the leave of the bill.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: Please feel free to pass it on that I think the Minister is a goose, Mr Speaker. In March this year Mr Ian Cohen warned that the Government would be denied his party's preferences unless it did the right thing by the Riverina red gum forests. At that time he stated to journalists:

This government will desperately need Greens preferences at this election.

The river red gums are pivotal as far as I'm concerned.

Labor will come begging ... but if they don't deliver on these forests in a sustainable way they can go to hell.

This evening members representing the electorates of Drummoyne, Coogee and Balmain have delivered speeches about communities they have never visited. They do not need to worry that this evening families in timber producing areas are receiving phone calls. Having heard ABC country radio this evening, those families know that as at 1 July their jobs and their communities will be decimated by what has occurred in this Parliament. There is no doubt that the next State election will be a lot tighter than what some of the political pundits are predicting. We all knew that certainly at some point the Greens were going to come dealing. They have started dealing on this issue. There is no doubt that the next issue will be south-east forests.

I refer to that issue because it has been brought up time and time again this evening. On the record Mr Ian Cohen says to the Government, "Go to hell if you don't deliver what we want." Today the Government has delivered. We have seen the statements issued by the Wilderness Society, and we have seen the statements issued by the Greens. In fact, Mr Ian Cohen was standing with the Premier during a press conference this afternoon. For Minister Sartor to accuse me of being a goose because of what Mr Ian Cohen has said, when the Minister knows full well that it is the case that this is all being done for Greens preferences—

Mr Frank Sartor: We've always been a pro-environment Government.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: You are so pro-environment that what you have done is establish millions of hectares of national parks estate and you have not even managed it properly. You have not even put the resources into them—

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Frank Terenzini): Order! As reluctant as I am to interrupt the member for Bega, I remind him—

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: Ask him to shut up.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Frank Terenzini): Order! I have extended a degree of latitude to members during this debate. However, I remind the member for Bega to direct his remarks through the Chair. The member for Bega has the call.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: It is interesting to note that the member for Marrickville has just entered the Chamber. No doubt she will make a contribution to this debate as well. With regard to the management of national parks, any member of this House who visits and has a look at the southern alpine region of the State, the Kosciuszko National Park, will see the damage that has been done as a result of a lack of management of the forest ecology. They will see tens of thousands of dead trees. It is simply a tragedy. It is a tragedy that the ecology of that area has been destroyed for decades—and it will take decades to recover.

The points that have been made this evening with regard to the red gum forests are incredibly valid when it comes to taking away the management of that forest ecology. Wildfires will hit those red gums and decimate them. Some of my colleagues have said they hope that does not happen. I can assure them that it will happen, because it has happened elsewhere around the State where this has occurred. The red gum forests as we know them today will be decimated by wildfire in a drought, I dare say at some point in the next 10 to 20 years, and they will be destroyed. Without appropriate forest management, that will be the outcome. I have not heard anything in this debate about what the Minister intends to do to resource national parks so they can undertake the necessary management—certainly not in the same way that Forests NSW has done.

This legislation has affected around 1,300 jobs. The Minister will no doubt speak about 170 jobs, but there is a clear multiplier effect that also needs to be applied. Communities such as Barwon and others will be changed forever as a result of what has occurred in this place this evening. One of the other things that will no doubt be on the table as a result of this decision is that the south-east forests will now be very much in the gun sight of this Government. We have had 50 days of forest protests in the Mumbulla, on the far South Coast. No doubt through the efforts of people like Ms Lee Rhiannon, the Greens will want to come dealing again. Some 2,800 jobs throughout south-eastern New South Wales are either directly or indirectly dependent upon the native timber industry.

Already in our region we have seen major tracts of Crown land turned into national park. In fact, the region comprises some 500,000 hectares of national park. There are also some 82,000 hectares of Crown land reserves, where no timber harvesting is allowed. The region has some 218,000 hectares of State forests and about 11,000 hectares of plantations. Some 124,000 hectares of native areas have been excluded from harvesting due to environmental constraints. This leaves some 94,000 hectares accessible to State Forests for harvesting. In other words, 11.6 per cent of the public native forest estate is available for harvesting.

It must be remembered that timber harvesting is done on a rotation basis. This means that each year only 3 per cent of the loggable area is logged, or less than 0.4 per cent of all public lands are logged. Any particular loggable hectare will be logged, on average, once every 33 years. I hope the Government does not cave in to the Greens in the same way it has done with regard to the red gum forest in the south-east. This country needs a sustainable native timber industry so that we do not rely on timber imports from countries that clear-fell rainforests. Again I appeal to the Greens to remember that fact when they continue their crusade to lock up large tracts of New South Wales land for some form of environmental gains, which, at the end of the day, will lead to very poor environmental outcomes.

I am bewildered that time and time again we hear governments talk about science in making decisions. The member for Balmain has just spoken about marine parks and national parks, but decisions to establish them are not based on science. What is particularly concerning in relation to the red gums is that the Natural Resources Commission admitted to the State Government that its estimates on sustainability yields were way off. The Labor Party, supposedly the party of the worker, is making decisions about country jobs. Members representing the electorates of Balmain, Drummoyne and Coogee have made a contribution to the debate, when the only jobs they are interested in are—

Mr Adrian Piccoli: They have all been to Deniliquin, of course.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: They are regular visitors to Deniliquin, as they are on the South Coast. Their contributions show how transparent the debate has been this evening. No doubt the member for Marrickville will talk about the beauty and majestic nature of these wonderful forests. Then no doubt later this evening she will fax her speech to the Greens at a local level to ensure that the Greens head office sees it. There was no reason whatsoever for this legislation to be rammed through this evening. The Government could have gone back to those communities directly affected by the changes that will occur as a result of this re-introduced bill.

The Government should lay everything on the table. It should talk to the communities about these changes and engage in proper consultation. The Government could then make an assessment as to what will

happen to those communities as a result of this bill. Whilst members are engaging in debate across this Chamber families in those communities are trying to weigh up what they will do from 1 July. They might have a little bit of money in their pocket now but what does the long-term future hold for these furniture makers, contractors, truck drivers, petrol station owners, shop keepers, school teachers, doctors, nurses, you name it? Every single person in those communities will be directly affected by these decisions.

The Government may secure Greens preferences in some marginal seats and tighten up the election—we are expecting a tight election—but this is yet another example of the Labor Party selling out its true principles and philosophies to the Greens at the expense of the workers of this State. I am sure a lot of former Labor leaders, some of whom will be turning in their graves, will pass judgement on what is happening here. It is a sad day when the Government cannot see the long-term environmental benefits of having a sustainable harvesting industry in this country or the long-term environmental benefits of managing national parks properly. The Riverina red gum forest will not remain in the state it is in today. It will be decimated within a decade. Time and time again the CSIRO has pointed out that there is an increase in wildfire events through long and ongoing sustained periods of drought. There is no doubt in the world that the red gum forests, which the Greens will claim victory over tonight, will be decimated in the years ahead as a result of very poor management.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT (Marrickville—Deputy Premier, and Minister for Health) [8.34 p.m.]: I am pleased to speak in support of the National Park Estate (Riverina Red Gum Reservations) Bill 2010, which forms part of the Government's response to the regional forestry assessment of the Riverina Red Gum forests undertaken by the Natural Resources Commission last year. New South Wales Labor governments have a very proud record of delivering conservation outcomes for this State. That is one of the things that we will leave as a legacy for future generations, and this bill follows in that tradition.

I have spoken before in this House about the importance of protecting these forests. The river red gum forests in the Riverina are recognised for their exceptional environmental values. I have visited those forests and it is truly an amazing part of the State. It includes wetlands of international significance, icon sites of the Living Murray Initiative, and significant breeding habitats for migratory birds. However, we do know that the river red gums are in poor health as a result of forestry operations, river regulation, prolonged drought and the impacts of climate change. The action taken by the Government on this issue is based on sound science and independent advice.

We all recognise that these are difficult issues and any decision we make must balance the immediate needs and desires of the local communities that depend upon these forests for their way of life, economic survival, jobs and employment. But we must also recognise that we have a responsibility to future generations to do what we can to protect the very fragile ecosystems of this part of the world. I believe that the Government has achieved that balanced outcome; one that achieves our conservation aims through national parks and provides certainty for the forestry industry. I am particularly pleased that through continuing talks with both industry and conservation groups the Government will now be able to remove what was the Millewa transition area.

One of the key issues affecting the health of the river red gum is water, and the Government is rightly proud of its efforts over many years to secure water for the environment. Through such processes as improved water planning, water purchase and water efficient infrastructure, the Government has been able to secure a significant volume of the environmental water. I have seen the results of the environmental water allocation and works to deliver water to places such as the Yanga wetlands, and the results are impressive. I heard the Minister for Climate Change and the Environment say that many people refer to this as the capital of the south—

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! The member for Coffs Harbour will come to order.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: —and I think that is a worthy description.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murrumbidgee will come to order.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: The Government will continue to work hard to deliver water to the river red gum forests as recommended by the Natural Resources Commission. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority is currently in the process of developing the first draft of the Basin Plan, which will dictate the quantum and timing of water recovery. In addition, the Commonwealth Environment Water Holder is setting the priorities for the purchase of environmental water. The Government will continue to work closely with the Commonwealth,

including with the Murray-Basin Authority, to assist in the development of the Basin Plan. These are the appropriate avenues to address increased watering of the forest, and therefore environmental water is not specifically included in the bill.

The bill does establish a basis for assessing reasonable yields on which to base an industry-restructuring package. The Natural Resources Commission tells us that we can expect the yield of timber, in particular sawlogs, from the forest to drop significantly from current and historic harvesting rates. Most of the focus on yields has been on the productive central Murray forests. Following the December report of the Natural Resources Commission the Government requested the commission to undertake a further examination of the sustainable yield in the central Murray. These assessments have enabled the Government to determine what the sustainable yields will be.

This is important work as it will form the basis for the development of wood supply agreements that will provide the confidence that the industry has been unable to achieve through the annual allocations that have been used up until now. It will assist the mills and other operators to think about their future, and whether they wish to stay around to access Crown timber supply. These sustainable yields will also form the basis of the Government's proposed payments to mills and other operators. The Government has determined that timber businesses will be paid business exit assistance based on two years worth of the sustainable yield, which will be lost due to the creation of the new national and regional parks and other reserves.

The bill delivers world-class reserves, assistance for industry, workers and the community and long-term certainty for those parts of the industry that choose to stay operating. Importantly, it will make sure for future generations that these iconic forests are conserved and that the new national parks will provide protection for the unique ecosystems and sustainable recreational opportunities for locals and tourists alike. I speak with pride tonight. As members will recall, I am a former environment Minister. The assessment of the river red gums started under my watch. I recognise that this process is a difficult one. When I visited the river red gum forests and other environmental and conservation areas in that part of the world I spoke with many locals. I understand it is a difficult issue for the people who live in those areas.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! The member for Coffs Harbour will come to order.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: As the then Minister for the Environment I had the good fortune to attend the opening of an environmental sustainability initiative in the Pilliga forests.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murrumbidgee will come to order.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I spoke to people there who had opposed the Government's decision. A number of years later they acknowledged that in addition to the wonderful forests being protected the community was benefiting from increased tourism and sustainability and certainty was provided to the timber industry. I talked to the people on the ground and that is what they shared with me.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! Opposition members will come to order.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Although they are difficult decisions, they are necessary because we have to conserve these fragile ecosystems for the future. There is real opportunity for growth in the Riverina through renewed tourism opportunities and interests. This bill will protect the river red gums for future generations so that they can enjoy this iconic part of the Australian landscape. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI (Murrumbidgee—Deputy Leader of The Nationals) [8.41 p.m.]: I condemn the Labor Party for introducing this legislation. It will have a devastating effect on many communities, particularly along the Murray, as well as the Murrumbidgee and large areas that were part of the Murrumbidgee electorate prior to the last redistribution, which I was proud to represent. This bill is about conservation: It is about conserving the seat of the Deputy Premier and the seats of Balmain and Coogee for the Labor Party. It is about protecting two or three jobs at the expense of 1,300 jobs in southern New South Wales. That is the only conservation element of this bill. The Government has done a preference deal with the Greens.

The Labor Party has chosen to adopt the conservation views of people such as Ian Cohen. They want heroin to be sold over the counter at chemists. That was their election platform at the previous election. They want to legalise marijuana. They have a liberal drug policy, and the Government is taking policy advice from them in exchange for preferences. This is a dirty deal because it is about retaining Labor seats at the expense of

a large and important part of country New South Wales. A despicable part of this debate has been the dishonesty. I corralled some of the protestors out the front of Parliament House. They were holding up pictures of red gum trees of two or three metres diameter and suggesting to passers-by that if this legislation is not passed these trees will be cut down. They know, I suspect, that those trees are not allowed to be cut down. They are probably the same people who lobbied the Minister and Labor members on this legislation.

Those habitat trees cannot be touched. Who decides which trees are cut down and which are not? People employed by the New South Wales Government, who are properly trained in silviculture. Much of this campaign about the red gums has been misleading. Red gums are listed in the catchment management authority list of threatened species as an invasive native species. The suggestion that red gums are a threatened species is wrong. In fact, they are listed as an invasive native species. The Deputy Premier, the member for Marrickville, talked about Yanga Station. Yanga is a beautiful property because it has been harvested and managed. In its original state, before any active management of the property, the red gum component was much smaller. The reason there are so many red gums now is that structures were put in place to disperse water. The National Parks and Wildlife Service is now spending millions of dollars at Yanga, on goodness knows what.

When the national park was created the Government told the people of Balranald that the couple of hundred jobs that were lost would be replaced by highly paid tourism jobs to service the 35,000 tourists that would come to the area every year. Last year 100 people visited Yanga. That is not even two visitors a week. As I said earlier today when the Government moved the suspension motion to introduce this legislation, the people who have strongly advocated for this area to be turned into a national park and destroy the timber industry have no skin in the game. It is easy for the Deputy Premier, the member for Marrickville, the Minister for Education and Training, the member for Balmain, and the member for Sydney to say it will be great for the environment and biodiversity. It comes at cost to the business of Ken and Fay, who are sitting in the public gallery, and hundreds of other jobs in that part of the world. It probably does not affect anyone in the seat of Marrickville.

It is easy for people to talk about the importance of protecting the environment when there are no consequences for them. It is easy for people in Sydney, Marrickville and Balmain to say they want to protect the environment, but the people along the Murray, in Deniliquin, Barham and Mathoura have to pay for it. When the members who represent the electorates of Marrickville, Balmain and Sydney champion a proposal to turn a Sydney beach into a national park then I will say they are genuinely courageous and honest in their desire to protect the environment. They probably use the beaches themselves, as do their neighbours.

Ms Carmel Tebbutt: That is exactly what we are doing. We are opening them up to more people.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: When they advocate that a Sydney beach should be turned into a national park—no-one can use the beach, bring back the turtles and seaweed, and let it return to its natural state—then I will believe that they have a genuine interest in the environment. But they sit in central Sydney and say they love the environment, as long as others have to pay for it. That is the most dishonest part of the debate. That is the same position taken by the people protesting out the front of Parliament House. There is absolutely no consequence to them. One gentleman is an environmental campaigner in Manly. I admit that he is doing some good work conserving a little creek that runs through Manly. But there are no consequences. He is not asking people to give up a few metres of their backyard to improve the nature of the creek.

Ms Carmel Tebbutt: It is a fantastic decision.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: People are paying the price for what the Deputy Premier has just said is a fantastic decision. But it does not affect the Deputy Premier or anybody in her family or anybody who lives next door to her. The red gums issue is just the latest example of all the reforms for which people in regional New South Wales, in particular, pay the price, whether it involves the Pilliga, other forests, other national parks in New South Wales or water reform. Very few people in Sydney pay the price, and that is the most disingenuous part of this entire debate. It is easy in environmental debates to say, "I love the environment. We should do something, but somebody else should pay the price." That is exactly what is happening here.

I represented Deniliquin proudly for eight years, I represented Mathoura and I had a lot to do with Barham. They are probably the communities doing it the toughest. Deniliquin used to be a regional hub but it has lost at least 100 government jobs. Hundreds of jobs have been lost in the past 15 years—forestry jobs, fishery jobs, Roads and Traffic Authority jobs, Department of Water Resources jobs. Water reforms have had a big impact. The rice mill there, which is the biggest in the Southern Hemisphere, is virtually mothballed because of government reform and also, obviously, because of the drought. It has been doing it harder than any other

area with native vegetation legislation and the reductions in what farmers can do. Those of us from that part of the world know all about the plains-wanderer and the consequences that that had on grazing around the Hay plains. The list of things that that community has had to put up with from this Government is very long. It is truly disgusting that the decision to bring in this legislation is made purely for political reasons and purely to save the skins of a few Labor members of Parliament.

I feel a great deal of sorrow for the people who will lose their jobs and for that community. They have really taken it in the neck. Psychologically the community is doing it very hard. It is too easy for members of Parliament to stand up and say, "This is awesome for the environment and we are really striking a blow for the good of mankind". But there are people 800 kilometres away who are really paying the price for this. When Government members go home and go to bed and think what a wonderful job they have done today they should spare a thought for those who will directly lose their jobs. They should spare a thought also for the psychological effect it will have on the people who live in that community. They have copped it time after time and now they will see this legislation rammed through Parliament. It is a sad day for that community and a sad day for country New South Wales.

We are a pretty collegiate lot in regional New South Wales. We understand when other regions lose industries and I believe that all the country-based members particularly, and Sydney-based members, understand the consequences for those communities. I am very sorry that no so-called Country Labor members spoke in the debate tonight. The member for Monaro, who always claims to be such an advocate for country New South Wales, is not here. I understand the member for Bathurst has gone to hospital, but even when he was well I never saw a press release or heard him utter a word in Parliament to defend jobs in that part of New South Wales. I saw former member for Murray-Darling Peter Black here in the Parliament and I suggest that he is probably not particularly happy about this legislation, but he had his chance to influence Labor Party policy in this area and was obviously not successful.

I apologise to Ken and Fay O'Brien that this is happening. They were kind enough to take me for a tour through the red gum forests along the Murray, and we have known each other for quite some time, as I know other people involved in the red gum industry in the area. I am sorry they have been the victims of a false and misleading campaign—an emotional campaign that preyed on people's general ignorance about what happens down in that part of the world. I am sorry that people who do not live there have made a big decision today about something that will not affect their lives but will substantially affect the lives of Ken and Fay and a lot of other people in a great part of New South Wales.

Mr FRANK SARTOR (Rockdale—Minister for Climate Change and the Environment, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Cancer)) [8.54 p.m.], in reply: A lot has been said in this debate on the National Park Estate (Regional Red Gum Reservations) Bill 2010 (No. 2), and I have listened intently because this is a serious issue. Unfortunately, much of what was said was fill, although some issues were raised that I will respond to. I acknowledge Ken and Fay O'Brien, who have been sitting patiently in the gallery. I spent a considerable amount of time driving around with Ken looking at various aspects of Yanga and the red gum forests. Russ Ainley was here for a good while earlier too.

First, I will address the furphy about this bill being rushed through Parliament. The announcement about what we intended to do was made at the beginning of March after I had visited the area for a few days in January. I was very keen to get a bill into Parliament so people could see the detail, because often with these issues there are many details that worry people, and we introduced the bill on 22 April. We sought a measured and balanced approach to the transition period. I was approached by quite a number of people in the industry. The industry and some of the mills came to me and said they would prefer it if we increased the compensation and that they would prefer to stop logging the Millewa now.

If that was what the industry wanted—and we knew that the Greens wanted it—I was prepared to seriously consider it. I asked people in the industry to tell me what they needed and what they were asking for and I got a pretty good indication. Because we had tabled the bill, the steering committee was able then to get real submissions from the timber industry and value what it was saying and what it was asking for. Then we had a better idea of the compensation that we needed to pay, which I believe some members of the timber industry had been reluctant to come forward with up until that point.

We then decided to change tack. I sought additional funding and, with the help of the Premier, we succeeded in getting that funding. Today, rather than going through laborious detailed amendments, we substituted a bill that was almost identical to the original bill, except that the logging will cease at Millewa and

there is no Millewa transition. That is all that changed. The details of the bill are no different, except for two other very minor positive amendments, such as an accountability provision. This proposed legislation has been in the public domain since 22 April. Before I address the more substantive issues raised I will just talk about the politics of this issue, because there has been a lot of frothing going on in this Chamber. There has been an accusation that politics is driving this.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! Opposition members will come to order. The member for Hawkesbury will come to order.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: Members should listen to what I have to say. There have been attempts to verbal me, to say that I said X or Y. Fact number one: The community of New South Wales has a significant proportion of people who care a lot about the environment. In fact, the great majority of people do, and it is a significant constituency that all major political parties are sensitive about. It is just the reality of life. It is a legitimate constituency in our community, and I do not make any apology for saying that it is an important constituency.

Mr Ray Williams: In Chippendale, in Redfern.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: The Opposition mentioned Marrickville and Balmain. The great irony about this is that the member for Hawkesbury said that it is all about their votes. Members representing the electorates of Marrickville and Balmain were both Ministers for the Environment, so they know something about this issue and they care about it. Having said that, the Greens preferences are of no use to them because the Greens run second in this area—they even run ahead of the Opposition. That is how bad the Opposition is in those areas. Greens preferences are of no value to the Deputy Premier or the Minister for Education and Training, no value whatsoever.

Mr Daryl Maguire: That is rubbish.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: No, it is not. It is absolutely true. The member should look at the last count.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! Opposition members will come to order.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: My third point—and it is an important point—is that at a media conference today—

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! Opposition members will come to order. The member for Burrinjuck will come to order.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: Upper House member Ian Cohen and a number of members of environmental groups were asked that very question. Ian Cohen responded that in all his discussions on this issue preferences had not been mentioned once. Members opposite should get a transcript of his statement from the media. I act in a bona fide way in this place and I deal with the issues on their merits. I have worked hard on this legislation and I have been sensitive to and concerned about all the people who might be affected. To suggest that I will make a decision contrary to my conscience is nonsense.

Mr Daryl Maguire: You don't have a choice.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: I have played a big part in resolving this.

Mr Daryl Maguire: You don't have a choice; Cabinet makes the decision.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: It does ultimately, but I have had a position.

Mr Daryl Maguire: Cabinet makes the decision.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: The member for Wagga Wagga should ask the Minister for Water because he was there. I hate to disappoint Ken and Faye O'Brien, who are in the gallery, but what they are getting from Opposition members are crocodile tears. The shadow Minister for the Environment has made it clear to me and everyone else who will listen that a Coalition government would not revoke this reservation. In other words, it would not revoke the declaration of the national park. Members opposite are not prepared to say that they will

revoke this decision, unlike the Government's decisions about the metro and many other projects. They think it is a terrible decision but they will not revoke it. That is because they also understand that a significant number of people in the New South Wales community care about national parks.

Ms Katrina Hodgkinson: Point of order: I object to what the Minister is saying. He is destroying the livelihoods of these people—

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! That is not a point of order. The member for Burrinjuck will resume her seat. Members will not abuse the taking of points of order.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: Much of what was said by members of the Opposition related to political drivers. I am simply saying that they are crying crocodile tears. They are trying to con people. They do not really care about this issue.

Mr Daryl Maguire: That is unfair and cruel.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: I am being clear about this. I now turn to the specific issues raised in the first half hour of the contribution by the lead speaker for the Opposition. I listened very carefully while the member for Burrinjuck raised substantive and important issues. However, she then wasted an hour and a half by reading various people's essays. That was an insult to the House. However, I will deal with the legitimate issues that she raised.

Ms Katrina Hodgkinson: You don't understand the history of the area.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: I come from the Riverina. I grew up on the Riverina. I was a little boy on the Riverina. I understand the Riverina. I am a Riverina boy and I followed group 20 and group 9 rugby league teams. Unfortunately, my teams always lost.

Mr Daryl Maguire: And you have deserted the Riverina.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: Like many country people, I came to Sydney to pursue greater opportunities. The member for Burrinjuck raised the Natural Resources Commission recommendations. Of course, she selectively quoted the parts of the report that suit her argument and ignored other parts.

Ms Katrina Hodgkinson: I met with the commission.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: So did I. The member provided a lot of detail but not much clarity of thought.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! Opposition members will come order.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: The member for Burrinjuck said that the most important issue raised by the Natural Resources Commission was water.

Mr Andrew Fraser: What about rain?

Mr FRANK SARTOR: Water is probably the most important issue. However, the fundamental conclusion in the report was that there should be a system of national parks. The commission recommended the establishment of national parks. I admit—and I have said this publicly—that water is the key issue. However, it must be acquired to help to sustain these forests.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! Opposition members will cease interjecting. They have had an opportunity to contribute to the debate.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: I come from an irrigation area. Irrigation water is usually purchased for crop production. I was on a farm and I know how the system works. I have done irrigation to death: I have been past so many waterwheels it is not funny. There is no way that this industry could survive if it had to purchase the sort of environmental flows that would be needed to sustain it. This forest can survive only if environmental water flows are purchased for the national scheme. Declaring the forest a conservation area will attract funds and environmental water, which my colleague and I are committed to obtaining. That is why I went to Canberra

and met with the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder. We would not have obtained that water if the area were allowed to be logged. We need water to maximise the survival of the red gums. That water must be paid for, and to do that we need a source of funds.

Mr Andrew Fraser: We need rain.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: I will come to the climate sins in a minute because much was said about the climate. However, I will now deal with the sustainable yield question raised by the member for Burrinjuck. I take what she says seriously, because I think she is genuine in her concerns.

Mr Andrew Fraser: How patronising!

Mr FRANK SARTOR: I have no doubt about the sincerity of her concerns; that is not an issue. The member said that the sustainable yield since 1985 was 22,000 cubic metres to 29,000 cubic metres a year for the central Murray. In the past five years the average yield has been 26,000 cubic metres of quota wood. The National Resources Commission's initial estimate was a yield of between 4,500 cubic metres and 8,500 cubic metres. That is a massive reduction from 26,000 cubic metres. However, the commission also said in its report that it needed to do more detailed work. The member for Coffs Harbour should listen to this. He is pretty grumpy, but I deserve to be heard.

Mr Andrew Fraser: Sorry, Frankie. Didn't you want to go to dinner?

Mr FRANK SARTOR: I did want to go to dinner, but I must pay the member for Burrinjuck due respect by responding to her concerns. After I visited the area I asked representatives of the Natural Resources Commission, the forest industry and my staff to meet to see whether they could come to an agreement on the sustainable yield and resolve the dispute. Of course, Forests NSW has the Forest Resource and Management Evaluation [FRAME] system, which is geared for plantation forests. As such, it needs some adjustment to apply to forests that take 200 years to grow. By the way, some of the trees in the forest are 300 years to 500 years old and they were there well before European settlement. The group reviewed the numbers, applied the FRAME system and had some discussions. It came up with a different range of 6,300 cubic metres to 13,600 cubic metres. That is such a huge issue—the midpoint is still less than half of the 26,000 cubic metres actually being logged. Forests NSW reviewed its numbers and said the figure was somewhere between 14,000 cubic metres and 17,000 cubic metres.

Industry representatives were telling me that the sustainable yield was dropping dramatically. Had the Government done nothing, we would have seen a 50 per cent decline in logging anyway. Members should keep that number in mind because I will return to it in a minute. I now refer to the climate assumptions that have been made, because I think the member for Burrinjuck is a climate change denier. She was trying to disguise that by referring to conjecture and the many assumptions involved. I want to tell the member about climate change and the Murray-Darling Basin. This is very important. There have been some very significant droughts affecting the Murray River.

Mr Andrew Fraser: Go on!

Mr FRANK SARTOR: The member for Coffs Harbour should listen. Between 1895 and 1902 there was a major drought and the Murray River stopped flowing. There was a drought in 1914-15, another major one from 1937 to 1945, another one between 1965 and 1968 and another short but serious one in 1982-83. Of course, we have been in serious drought since 2001. At the same time—even without climate change and its massive impacts—river diversions tripled between the 1950s and 1990. Where is the member for Murrumbidgee? He was bellyaching and saying that he cared about everything. I thought he supported the red gum declaration, but he was obviously persuaded by others. What we have here is massive diversion, despite the fact that there is a history of very severe drought. The problem became so critical that the Federal Government and three or four State governments got together with the Murray-Darling Basin plan. We have had a lot of debate about that and only a fool would deny that that river system is in absolute stress.

Mr Andrew Fraser: Rain.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: Yes, but that is before we talk about impacts of climate change. The massive droughts we have had had to happen anyway and the general stress on the system will tell you that the local

system is in trouble. When one then looks at the work that has been commissioned one sees that the University of New South Wales is projecting that climate change will affect southern New South Wales the most. We have a problem: it is obvious to everyone and it has to be addressed.

Let me go to the economic issues, because the member for Burrinjuck made a big point about economic impacts. I want to address those for a minute. The member for Murray-Darling quoted the National Resources Commission report. Let me refer to it too. The National Resources Commission report says that compared with the gross product for the bioregion's economy of \$4.9 billion, the forest industry relies on river red gum forests on public land to make a direct contribution of \$23 million. The footnote says that if you add everything else it could be up to \$39 million. It is about 0.8 per cent of that.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! Opposition members will come to order. The member for Burrinjuck will come to order. The member for Coffs Harbour will come to order.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: In late 2009 the department commissioned the Centre for Agricultural and Regional Economics to undertake a study of potential economic impacts arising from the creation of a new national park in the river red gum forests of the Riverina to assist the Natural Resources Commission in its assessment. On the basis of projected park management expenditure and a range of other assumptions, the report concluded that the creation of new river red gum national parks would add about 50 per cent to current park management expenditure, with a combined impact on gross regional product of \$17.1 million or approximately 200 jobs.

It is saying, at best, the timber industry contributes less than 1 per cent of the regional economy and it is saying, at best, that new national parks will contribute at least half a per cent. We know that logging would have had to be halved because sustainable yields are only half of what they were. So when one looks at it in that sense one sees that the economic impact is quite marginal. But we have to face reality, support the community and end up with a sustainable employment base for the area. Everyone keeps talking about Yanga, and Ken O'Brien talked to me about that for 15 hours—I will never forget it. The reality is that the owner of Yango, who sold it to the Government, said quite clearly that he could not support the red gums.

[*Interruption*]

That is exactly my point.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murray-Darling will come to order.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: If you are just relying on logging, you cannot afford to buy the water. So, since it has been taken over we have held a lot of irrigation exercises there. We will probably save between a third and a half of the red gums that would have been lost before. Here is a little note from somebody to senior national park staff. It says:

Since you started the daily Yanga tours we have noticed an increase in guests staying two or three more nights so that they can tour. So we are very happy. Please pass on to the powers above,

Regards, Linda and Jim Moss,
Managers, Balranald Caravan Park

So we are doing something right.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! Opposition members will come to order.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: Let me say something about ecological thinning. There is a view in the timber industry that you thin trees and you get bigger and better trees. There is some support for that if all you are interested in is logging. But it does not consider the ecological impacts of the forest. That requires a mix of stock. It requires logs on the ground. It requires hollow trees and a whole lot of stuff. The ecological issues are much more complex. If you are just interested in forestry and logging thinning may be of assistance. I have undertaken—it is provided for in the package—to undertake some decent-scale, scientifically based trials of thinning. Some of this stuff is anecdotal and it is not clear at all that ecologically it benefits the forest.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! The member for Coffs Harbour will come to order. The member for Murray-Darling will come to order. The member for Murrumbidgee will come to order.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: A lot has been said about active forest management. We have in the national parks a very substantial and comprehensive pest management system. We manage feral animals, and I can easily give members the statistics to compare that with what others do.

Ms Katrina Hodgkinson: That's a joke!

Mr FRANK SARTOR: It is not a joke at all, and it just shows that the member listened to three people and she is not smart enough to realise that does not represent the whole universe. One has to look at all the statistics, not just what two or three people say. Anecdotes are good fun but they are often statistically misleading. Let us look at fires for a minute, because this is an important statistic.

Mr Steve Cansdell: Fifteen-hundred jobs, Frank!

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! The member for Clarence will come to order. If he continues to interject, I will not hesitate to have him removed from the Chamber.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: Our national parks contain 23 per cent of all the bushfire-prone land in this State, yet the incidence of fire starting in national parks is about 5 per cent. The incidence rate of fires in national parks is a lot less. Add to that that we are currently doing 80 per cent more control burns than the 10-year average and 50 per cent more than the five-year average. We are doing record amounts. Last week, due to a change in wind patterns, we saw a bit of it blow over Sydney. Just so that the dumbos on the other side can understand, we are doing control burning. That is the only way they will understand. Until they are choking in smoke they will not get it.

They are saying there are all these uses one cannot have in national parks. They are being very frivolous because they do not care about those people; they care about the politics of this. That is all this is about, the local politics for the member for Murray-Darling. What a great tragedy it is that we no longer have Blackie in this place. Annually, 30 million people visit our national parks. They are well frequented. In the red gums we have deliberately kept 15,000 hectares for regional parks so people can walk their dogs. We have allowed firewood provisions, which the member for Coffs Harbour does not like because he is a big rip, tear and burn man. In fact, 98 per cent of people in this State like their national parks.

Mr John Williams: Name them!

Mr FRANK SARTOR: It is a much stronger brand than your brand. This is a difficult issue. It is difficult for some communities whose lifestyles are impacted. We have tried genuinely and conscientiously to find a reasonable compensation package, but the writing was on the wall. The industry has to change. As I said at the beginning, if Coalition members are genuine about this and if they are not crying crocodile tears, why do they not say that if they are elected to government they will revoke the red gum national parks? I dare members opposite to say that, because they will not.

Mr John Williams: Point of order: The Minister has just made a statement about us in Opposition promising to reverse this legislation—

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! What is the member's point of order?

Mr John Williams: The Minister is misleading the House.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! The member will state the standing order under which he takes a point of order or resume his seat.

Mr John Williams: I refer to Standing Order 129, relevance.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! Standing Order 129 relates to relevance during question time. The member for Murray-Darling should familiarise himself with the standing orders. The Minister has the call.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: I commend the bill to the House.

Question—That this bill be now agreed to in principle—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 46

Mr Amery	Ms Gadiel	Mr Morris
Ms Andrews	Mr Gibson	Mrs Perry
Mr Aquilina	Mr Greene	Mr Piper
Ms Beamer	Mr Harris	Mr Rees
Mr Besseling	Ms Hay	Mr Sartor
Mr Borger	Ms Horner	Mr Shearan
Mr Brown	Ms Judge	Mr Stewart
Ms Burney	Mr Lalich	Ms Tebbutt
Ms Burton	Mr Lynch	Mr Terenzini
Mr Campbell	Mr McBride	Mr Tripodi
Mr Collier	Dr McDonald	Mr West
Mr Coombs	Ms McKay	Mr Whan
Mr Corrigan	Mr McLeay	
Mr Costa	Ms McMahan	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Firth	Ms Megarity	Mr Ashton
Mr Furolo	Ms Moore	Mr Hickey

Noes, 34

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

Pairs

Mr Daley	Mr Hartcher
Mr Koperberg	Mr O'Dea
Mr Martin	Mr Roberts

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Passing of the Bill

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

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Mr John Aquilina agreed to:

That this House do now adjourn.

The House adjourned, pursuant to resolution, at 9.28 p.m. until Thursday 20 May 2010 at 10.00 a.m.
