

# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Friday 9 September 2011

---

**The Speaker (The Hon. Shelley Elizabeth Hancock)** took the chair at 10.00 a.m.

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

## ENVIRONMENTAL LAND COMPENSATION

**Debate resumed from 11 August 2011.**

**Ms ROBYN PARKER** (Maitland—Minister for the Environment, and Minister for Heritage) [10.00 a.m.]: I note on behalf of the Government that we do not support this motion but we do recognise there are some key issues in this area that need to be addressed. I thank the member for Northern Tablelands for bringing this motion to the House so that we can discuss some of those key issues, because farmers do have concerns about custodianship of their land. They are interested in keeping it free from weeds, pests and feral animals, and the Government shares those views. As I said, there are key issues to be addressed, and I want to outline the ways in which our Government is already acting to address the concerns of communities about native vegetation management.

We are conducting a review of the regulations of the Native Vegetation Act. The Government is acting to bring forward the review of regulations under the Native Vegetation Act. We support the objectives of the Act: to protect native vegetation of high conservation value; to prevent broadscale land clearing unless it improves or maintains environmental outcomes; and to encourage the revegetation of land. We do not want to return to the bad old days of Labor when 100,000 hectares of bushland was cleared every year, when communities and conservationists and officials were at war and when the voices of landholders were ignored here in Macquarie Street.

We are now preparing for the review of the regulations for the Native Vegetation Act 2003. We are looking at where the current regulations can be simplified and where we can foster a more strategic approach. We want to ensure, through the regulations, that we get the best possible environmental and economic outcomes. We will slash red tape, speed up approval times, remove ambiguity and improve access to incentive programs. Our measures will include identifying types of low-risk clearing that would be assessed under a simplified process, for example, clearing isolated trees, simplifying and combining the assessment of native vegetation and threatened species to reduce the assessment time frame, introducing a special class of property vegetation plan designed to facilitate the conservation efforts of farmers, and developing improved guidelines and information in relation to the construction, operation and maintenance of rural infrastructure.

There is a long and evolving history of land clearing, land degradation and now legislation to correct the unforeseen consequences of pursuing agricultural and urban development. We need to address land degradation, which has cost farmers loss of productivity and been a longstanding problem. In New South Wales we have had State Environmental Planning Policy 46, the Protection and Management of Native Vegetation Act 1995, the Native Vegetation Conservation Act 1997 and finally the Native Vegetation Act 2003. The approach has changed from heavy-handed regulations to a regional planning model, under which communities struggled to find common ground, to ultimately a model that required landholders to sign up to individual agreements.

The cycle of policy experimentation has left many in the community disenfranchised about native vegetation laws. I empathise with anyone who has been caught up in this policy merry-go-round. After all, we need farmers to be supported as stewards of the environment. All good farmers manage their land with care. They have no interest in watching their precious topsoil wash away. They understand the benefits of shade and shelter that the trees in their paddocks provide and they appreciate the role that they play as stewards. Landholders who undertake activities that benefit the public, such as biodiversity conservation or improved water quality, which significantly outweigh the private benefits, deserve support.

In such cases cost-sharing grants incentives and even stewardship payments are entirely justified. That is one of the key roles of the catchment management authorities. However much I sympathise with farmers who

have been impacted by the native vegetation policy merry-go-round, as environment Minister I do not support exposing this Government to open-ended compensation payments for the failings of the former Government. It is not just the State Labor Party that has let down the farmers and the environment of New South Wales. The Rudd-Gillard Government is also culpable. The Federal Government has failed to come to the table on this issue and provide the sustained level of investment required to manage and restore our precious natural heritage.

In terms of environmental leadership the Rudd-Gillard Government is a pale shadow of the Howard Government. In 1997 the Howard Government established the Natural Heritage Trust to help restore and conserve Australia's environment and natural resources. In effect the Commonwealth recognised its role to support farmers who provide significant public benefits through sustainable management of the land. At the time the Howard Government committed \$1.5 billion over five years to the Natural Heritage Trust. In the 1999-2000 financial year a whopping \$360 million, or 0.2 percent of the entire Federal revenue, was spent on natural resource management.

The ultimate statement of how much the Labor Party ignores the bush was that in the 2011-12 financial year the Federal Government has allocated a paltry \$203 million to the Caring for Our Country Program. This makes up a meagre 0.6 per cent of the Federal Government's revenue. Across a period where the amount of tax raised by the Government has doubled, the amount provided to farmers to manage the environment has all but halved. Therefore, I respectfully propose to the member for Northern Tablelands that, to better ensure that farmers get a fair deal for the stewardship role they play, he take his case to the Federal Government. We will actively support him in this approach.

This Government takes its responsibility to the environment and those who manage the land very seriously. We are committed to the sustainable management of both our threatened species and the rural communities that provide our food. We are clear that where nature and the business of farming collide we would find a way to protect nature while supporting rural communities. Our commitment to providing up to \$5 million of netting subsidy to the orchardists of the Sydney Basin and Central Coast to eliminate the need to issue licences to cull flying foxes is a clear demonstration of our approach. We have also committed \$10 million to regenerate degraded natural bushland, including riverbanks, urban bushland and degraded waterways. The funding will be directed at local community groups to focus on their local environment. Finally, the Government has committed an additional \$40 million to purchase and protect strategic areas of high conservation value and ensure sufficient green spaces across Sydney and New South Wales.

Our approach here is to act strategically, directing our conservation dollars into the places that will make the greatest difference to environmental conditions. We will do so in collaboration with local communities under the model of voluntary participation established through programs such as the Great Eastern Ranges Initiative. In summary, we have set the process in motion to ensure that we have a strategic and flexible native vegetation regulation. We believe that governments have a role in supporting farmers carry out environmental works that provide significant public benefit. To that end we are busy implementing our protecting the natural environment policy. Our policy platform recognises that people are the essential element in achieving environmental change. The people of New South Wales are the stewards of natural heritage in this State and to support the environment we need to support the people.

It is refreshing to be working with my colleague the Hon. Katrina Hodgkinson and other Ministers in this Liberal-Nationals Government to get strategic land planning and management right, so that we can balance the competing needs of farming of prime agricultural land, mining in the Hunter region, as an example, the viticulture industry, the equine industry and people's lifestyles. We want to get land management right to protect the environment, to maintain our agriculture industry to ensure the provision of food, and to provide certainty for industry. That is the way this Government approaches land management. It is a collegiate approach. It is working really well, and will continue to do so. That is the difference between this Liberal-Nationals Government and the previous Labor Government.

The Federal Government needs to step up to the plate and reduce some of its red tape, to rid the industry of confusion and enable farmers to get on and do the job they need to do, understanding that we will help them as stewards and protectors of the land that they value and we value. We value the role that they play. However, on this occasion we cannot support the motion simply because we are undertaking significant review of regulation of the native vegetation Acts and our strategic land use policy. So work is in place. I can assure the member for Northern Tablelands that his views will be taken into consideration along with those of other significant people in the community, particularly our farmers, as we move forward.

**Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT** (Marrickville) [10.10 a.m.]: The Opposition does not support the motion moved by the member for Northern Tablelands, although I understand his motives are good and that he is trying to achieve the right thing on behalf of his constituents and farmers across New South Wales. There is no doubt, as the member for Northern Tablelands said, that the work of farmers has always been of great importance and value to New South Wales. We know that the farmers of this State manage their properties with great skill and care. They understand the need to manage their properties sustainably for the long term and not to destroy the land. They want to pass it on to their children and their grandchildren.

There is no doubt that in many instances farmers have been our first conservationists. But we also know that the challenge to protect our natural environment and in particular reduce the amount of land clearing has been controversial. Significant challenges are posed in balancing the needs of farmers, the needs of rural and regional communities and the needs of conservation. But we know there is community and worldwide support for enhancing and conserving native vegetation. We also know that the action that Labor took in government—action that I am very proud of—contributed significantly to controlling greenhouse gas emissions. One of the reasons that we were able to meet some targets at a national level was the action taken in New South Wales to reduce or prevent land clearing.

The Carr Government introduced the Nature Conservation Act, which had a balanced range of tools, including landholder incentives, education and scientific information, as well as regulation. It is interesting that today we almost take for granted the need to have controls on land clearing while appreciating the importance of conserving our native vegetation. But back when the Carr Labor Government introduced the Nature Conservation Act that action was extremely controversial. It was a battle every step of the way. I clearly recall some of the media and political debates about that legislation.

I also clearly recall that in that battle those opposite, who now occupy the government benches, opposed the action that Labor took to protect native vegetation every step of the way. So I note with interest the comments now made by the Minister for the Environment that too much land clearing took place under the previous Government. Well, if those opposite had had their way far more land clearing would have taken place, because they opposed Labor's sensible reforms every step of the way. The then New South Wales Government provided incentives through the \$20 million Native Vegetation Management Fund and the \$1 million Nature Conservation Trust. As then Minister, the Hon. Craig Knowles, said in this place on 31 May 2004:

Every farmer will admit that a relatively few cowboys out there give the majority of farmers a pretty crook name. They rip and gouge the land and they must be caught and dealt with under the law. We send a clear message to those who clear land with no regard to the law, to their colleagues or to the efforts of agencies such as the New South Wales Farmers Association and other peak environment groups over the past 12 months to adopt a more commonsense approach to the management of native vegetation in this State: We will be able to define clearly non-compliance and breaches of the law.

The fact is that the law was successful and farmers were compensated. Those laws were further enhanced in August 2007 when the Labor Government introduced the New South Wales Private Native Forestry Code of Practice. This brought in new rules governing the way people could harvest native forests on their land. Under the code, areas where harvesting of timber is not permitted, or is restricted, include very steep land, land next to creeks and rivers, or old growth forests and rainforests. The code also contains other conditions that protect habitats, biodiversity and areas of cultural significance.

The then Labor Government recognised that some landholders may be significantly affected by the code and other changes to the native vegetation laws. For this reason the Government set aside \$37 million for a Native Vegetation Assistance Package to help landholders deal with the changes. Grants of up to \$80,000 per property were made available to help landholders develop sustainable farming or forestry activities, or to assist in generating other income from the land. Up to 50 per cent of total project costs were funded. Examples of how sustainable farming grants have been used include diversification of enterprises, value adding of existing enterprises, development of alternative income streams, adoption of best practice conservation farming or forestry, and restructuring of the farm business. Property vegetation plans provide farmers with the right to manage native vegetation, and once a property vegetation plan is established those rights cannot be affected for 15 years.

In conclusion, the sky did not fall in, despite the best efforts of those opposite to claim that it would, when the former Labor Government introduced protections for vegetation. The system did work. Yes, there were challenges and controversies. Yes, the system constantly needs review and change because we are managing a major structural change in rural and regional New South Wales and across Australia with regards to

the protection of native vegetation which impacts on farmers and regional communities. It therefore means that the Parliament and the Government need to always keep a careful eye on it and make sure that we are balancing— [*Time expired.*]

**Mr TROY GRANT** (Dubbo—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.20 a.m.]: As Parliamentary Secretary for Natural Resources I want to make a contribution on this motion. I support the comments made by the Minister for the Environment. The impacts of uncontrolled land clearing include the extinction of native species as well as increased soil erosion, dry land salinity and a decline in water quality. These are serious challenges that landholders have faced for many years. They are issues that this side of the House understands and is committed to tackling. There is no doubt they need to be taken seriously by government in a planned and sustainable way.

The catchment management authorities and the Department of Primary Industries are committed to delivering a balanced approach to the issues facing the land—a balanced approach that enables farmers to get on with the business of farming but which also looks out for the long-term interests of the land by ensuring that important native vegetation is protected. The Native Vegetation Act 2003 allows farmers to manage their day-to-day operations. The system consolidates controls over native vegetation and threatened species into a single property vegetation plan. Property vegetation plans can authorise clearing of native vegetation, provide incentives to protect native vegetation, or secure existing uses. The catchment management authorities have delivered 2,133 property vegetation plans to date, some two-thirds of which provide incentive payments to farmers.

This Government acknowledges that the private benefits of land clearing need to be balanced with the broader landscape, the social and economic benefits of conservation and sustainable natural resource management. I am working closely with the chairs of the catchment management authorities to achieve greater efficiencies in delivering these plans. We are committed to ensuring that we are helping landholders protect native vegetation in a balanced way without unnecessary red tape while taking account of local conditions. Only 9 per cent of native vegetation cover in New South Wales is considered to be in its original condition. Some 39 per cent has either been completely removed or is severely degraded, while the remaining 52 per cent exists in a modified condition.

The Office of Environment and Heritage has the overall responsibility for the administration of the Native Vegetation Act. It monitors compliance and undertakes native vegetation mapping and satellite monitoring, as well as enforcement action. On the ground, catchment management authorities, farmers and local communities make local decisions about how to best manage native vegetation in their part of New South Wales. The system is based on voluntary agreements between landholders and catchment management authorities. This Government supports that principle. Plans are developed with the support of a computer modelling program, the native vegetation assessment tools, which weigh up the positive and negative aspects of different management plans and activities. Experts from the local catchment management authorities use those tools and their professional judgement when assessing clearing proposals.

Farmers taking part in the agreements are provided a free high-resolution satellite image of their property. They are also eligible for funds to help with conservation initiatives such as revegetation plans, salinity strategies and soil erosion control. Much of this funding has been allocated to assist landholders in protecting and restoring their properties. Funds are allocated by local catchment management authorities under the priorities of their catchment action plans and strategies. The Minister for the Environment has the role of administering the Act. I note that there is a statutory requirement for the Native Vegetation Regulation to be reviewed by September 2012.

I have complete confidence that the Minister understands the vital contribution private landholders and key stakeholders can make as a part of this process. The agencies within the natural resources portfolio will provide appropriate input. In the meantime we will continue to work with landholders and their representatives in NSW Farmers. Farmers know as well as anyone that restoration of native vegetation, in combination with the protection and rehabilitation of remnant vegetation, can reverse the negative effects of past clearances. Farmers are continuing to work with the catchment management authorities on revegetating their land and building a sustainable future. I commend these efforts and all the parties involved.

**Mr RICHARD TORBAY** (Northern Tablelands) [10.25 a.m.], in reply: It would appear that I have managed to unite the House against compensation for farmers. I did not think I would be a member long enough to see that happen.

**Mr Troy Grant:** Never underestimate your capacity.

**Mr RICHARD TORBAY:** No. I thank the Minister for the Environment, the member for Marrickville and the member for Dubbo for their contributions. I remind the House of the motion:

That this House:

- (1) notes that the Native Vegetation Act needs to be amended to provide just compensation to farmers for any land sequestered for environmental purposes; and
- (2) calls on the Government to pay farmers for their stewardship of that land to keep it free of weeds, pests and feral animals.

The Government does not support the motion. It has not offered an amendment or a proposition that says it would have a policy arrangement to do certain things to underline the principle of compensation to farmers.

**Mr Troy Grant:** It is part of the review process.

**Mr RICHARD TORBAY:** No, the member for Dubbo, for whom I have a lot of regard, should have looked carefully at the notes that he blindly read out, toeing the party line, because he does not understand the hypocrisy of the members who are now in Government on this particular issue. If he wants me to go further into that I will. When in Opposition the Coalition made it very clear that in government it would oppose the Native Vegetation Act, reform it and support the principle of compensation to farmers—the very substance of the motion that it is voting against today. In Opposition members of the Coalition, including the Deputy Premier, the Leader of The Nationals, attended various forums and protests and yelled and screamed about how terrible the Act was for farmers and how it required reform and change. An email was sent to me by a constituent of the Leader of The Nationals. So that I do not get into trouble for selectively quoting I will read it all. The Deputy Premier, Andrew Stoner, wrote:

Dear Mike and Marg

Whilst Barry O'Farrell was unable to address the Sydney rally due to other diary commitments, he and the NSW Liberals opposed Labor's Native Vegetation Act in the Parliament alongside The Nationals in 2003. The same cannot be said about several of the so-called "Independents".

In relation to his email response to you, it seems that he was referring to NSW Labor's move to compulsorily acquire any property for development purposes.

The interesting part is:

Rest assured both Nationals and Liberals in NSW remain opposed to Labor's theft of property rights, be it through the Native Vegetation Act or Planning legislation.

The Liberals and Nationals are committed to reforming these laws in Government.

We have an agreement to have a statutory review of the regulations required under the legislation. I am not an idiot and I do not think the farmers of New South Wales will accept Coalition members voting against this proposition. I note that the Parliamentary Secretary was the only member of The Nationals to speak to this motion, which is a far cry from what I heard at the many rallies and protests. The farmers of New South Wales have every reason to be concerned that Government members talked big and tough on this issue when they were in opposition but in government they have echoed Labor's view, as the debate has today.

I would have been happy to have seen an amendment stating that members understand and support the principle of compensating farmers and that the Act, not the regulation, will be reformed. That is what has been sought not only by me but also by New South Wales farmers after extensive consultation processes undertaken over the past 16 years that have led to this debate and since State environmental planning policy 46 and the Native Vegetation and Conservation Act have been implemented. It is not good enough for the Government to say that it will examine this issue in the future. This has been an issue for a long time; it was raised with the former Government because of the enormous amount of red tape that farmers must deal with and the frustration they feel. I commend the motion to the House.

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

**Division called for and Standing Order 181 applied.**

**Ayes 4**

Ms Moore  
Mr Parker  
Mr Piper  
Mr Torbay

**Question declared resolved in the negative.**

**Motion negatived.**

**BALMAIN HOSPITAL 24-HOUR CASUALTY SERVICE**

**Debate resumed from 26 August 2011.**

**Dr ANDREW McDONALD** (Macquarie Fields) [10.35 a.m.], by leave: When debate was interrupted on 26 August I was referring to a doctor in the emergency department at Balmain Hospital. The doctor who was based in the emergency department at night is still on site at Balmain Hospital and still cares for inpatients all night, seven days a week. My experience of many night shifts in emergency departments is that patients who present from midnight until 8.00 a.m. often have serious illnesses. That is not always immediately obvious to them—something tells them there is something wrong. Most patients who are admitted to Balmain Hospital from midnight until 8.00 a.m. need the full facilities of a major teaching hospital such as Royal Prince Alfred Hospital. That is why those who need to be admitted are taken to that hospital.

Medicine changes rapidly and people in the Balmain area are concerned about what would happen if they were to have a heart attack in the middle of the night. As the member for Balmain said, many people have said that without the 24-hour casualty service they feel less secure in the knowledge that if an emergency occurred in the middle of the night quick and effective care was not just a few minutes away. In 2011 the best care for myocardial infarcts—a so-called heart attack—is for ambulances to bypass smaller hospitals such as Balmain Hospital. The evidence from Demark in 2003 published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* suggests that centralisation for cardiac services with less than two hours in travel time is superior to initial treatment of that infarct with clot busters at a small hospital. The journal states:

For the treatment of myocardial infarction with ST-segment elevation, primary angioplasty is considered superior to fibrinolysis for patients who are admitted to hospitals with angioplasty facilities.

A strategy for reperfusion involving the transfer of patients to an invasive-treatment center for primary angioplasty is superior to on-site fibrinolysis, provided that the transfer takes two hours or less.

In plain English, it is better to have one's heart attack treated at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, which has an urgent cardiac catheter available if needed, than to stop at Balmain. That is why all over Sydney ambulances carrying patients with myocardial infarcts are now bypassing small community hospitals. The changing role of Balmain Hospital towards specialising in geriatrics and rehabilitation care means an expanding role in ambulatory care. The future of health care for everyone, including baby boomers, will be out of hospital care whenever possible. Patients cared for out of hospital recover more quickly than those who are admitted. Balmain Hospital is ideally placed to do that. A good example is pneumonia, which until recently was always treated in hospital. Sufferers are now most often treated as an ambulatory care patient.

Instead of a long hospital stay, home treatment with a daily intravenous injection of antibiotics given, monitored and supervised by an ambulatory care service is better treatment for most patients. They recover more quickly and feel happier. That is the best care in 2011 for community acquired pneumonia. This is the type of care I would want for members of my family. I hope they will not need to use Balmain Hospital often but if it were necessary I would be happy for them to do so because I know they will get great care. Balmain Hospital is a wonderful hospital with committed and specialised staff members who need to be allowed to work in their areas of strength, that is, a community and general practitioner-led emergency department, a state-of-the-art ambulatory care service and world-leading and highly regarded geriatric and rehabilitation care. This is the future of Balmain Hospital.

**Ms MELANIE GIBBONS** (Menai) [10.38 a.m.]: This motion is not so much about removing a vital community service; it is about providing a better service for the community. The member for Balmain expressed the view that the 24-hour casualty hospital at Balmain was unnecessarily closed down, that the demand for its

services was high and the community support to retain it was strong. However, the member for Port Macquarie revealed that the figures did not match the facts. In fact Balmain Hospital changed its hours of operation in May 2009 because of a lack of senior doctors prepared to work overnight for a service that in May 2009 saw an average of only two to three patients a night. The service could not be maintained efficiently at that low level. The service was not staffed adequately or treating enough patients to warrant its viability. Balmain Hospital was never an emergency department; it existed to serve less serious medical issues and most patients were sent to Royal Prince Alfred Hospital for more serious ailments.

I understand that the member for Balmain is concerned that a local service has been cut but the facts support the Government's decision to close down the service. In a perfect world we would all have a hospital within minutes of our homes and the inherent comfort of knowing we could reach help quickly if we needed it. But would we want to keep open a service that was seeing only three patients a night between the hours of 10.00 p.m. and 8.00 a.m.? We should keep in mind also that a doctor would be sitting there, underutilized, when the nation is suffering from a shortage of doctors. Members will agree that it makes sense to redeploy staff where they are most needed.

In 2009, at the time of the original decision to change working hours, the number of patients presenting to Balmain Hospital general practice casualty after 10.00 p.m. had been declining. On average just two to three patients a night were presenting to the practice between 10.00 p.m. and 8.00 a.m. and on some nights no patients were attending. I can understand the former Government questioning the need to redeploy medical and nursing resources. At the time the decision was made community representatives were consulted together with the division of general practice, local general practitioners, a paediatrician and emergency doctors who supported this change. Members of this House and the community would prefer resources to be deployed where they were most needed.

It is popular to keep open these services and people like having them within minutes of their homes. However, when people are informed of the facts—that there are limited numbers of doctors and nurses, that it is economically unviable to keep open these facilities, and that the hospital facilities are underutilised—they prefer to see their tax dollars spent in the best possible way. Balmain Hospital not only changed its opening hours; some services were extended in order to increase general practitioner working hours and two highly experienced nurses are now in attendance during the times that they are needed the most. Public funds are being used more effectively and the general practice casualty has increased its links with the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital emergency department to provide care for patients presenting with less serious conditions that could be treated by the ambulatory care service.

As members would be aware, there is a national shortage of doctors and this has affected the ability to recruit general practitioners and career medical officers to work the night shift at Balmain Hospital between the hours of 10.00 p.m. to 8.00 a.m. Local general practitioners have indicated that they are not available for night duties and many have had difficulties finding their own day cover in order to undertake study or take leave. Balmain Hospital experienced a lack of doctors willing to work overnight, particularly as they felt they were underutilised when seeing only two to three patients a night.

Patients with a serious or life-threatening condition can go to the nearby Royal Prince Alfred emergency department. That is what they have always done and I believe they should continue to do so. It is one of the finest facilities in the world with 24-hour access to a full range of emergency services. There are facilities available for X-rays, to carry out pathology tests and other specialist services. This does not affect the availability of staff on the inpatient wards at Balmain Hospital and an appropriately qualified doctor is on site 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to provide dedicated care to aged care and rehabilitation inpatients. Each community is different.

My local hospital, Liverpool Hospital, which is incredibly busy, has a local general practitioner clinic next door in order to take some of the pressure off the hospital. When a hospital takes in only two to three patients a night and other hospitals are extremely busy, it is clear that we need to put our resources where they can best be utilised. We have only to explain that to the community for it to be understood. I know it is an unpopular decision and I respect the member for Balmain for moving the motion in this House, but there is a clear need for doctors and nursing staff to be fully resourced.

**Mr JAMIE PARKER** (Balmain) [10.43 a.m.]: I take this opportunity to thank the House for engaging in debate on this important issue. In particular, I thank those members who contributed to the debate on 26 August 2011 and today—the member for Port Macquarie, the member for Macquarie Fields and the member

for Menai. I refer to the excellent and positive work carried out by Balmain Hospital in our local community and acknowledge the fact that medical practitioners and support staff are doing an amazing job at that local hospital. I will take the few minutes I have available to me to reiterate why I moved this important motion, which states:

That this House:

- (1) notes that the previous NSW Government cut the 24 hour casualty service at Balmain Hospital in April 2009;
- (2) expresses disappointment with the response of the Minister for Health to a question without notice by the member for Balmain on 5 May 2011 regarding restoration of the 24 hour casualty service at Balmain Hospital; and
- (3) calls on the Minister for Health to explore options for re-opening the 24 hour casualty service at Balmain Hospital.

I will spend a few minutes addressing those issues. As the member for Menai said, any local member would be arguing this point if services were cut in their local community by the former Labor Government. The Coalition Government is committed to addressing those issues, but we heard from Government members today that that was not possible. I take this opportunity to address three points—process, the argument about insufficient use and the final argument about access to a doctor. I refer, first, to process. As I said in debate on the motion, this decision was made without consultation with the local community. The view of the former Government was, "We spoke to the doctors who worked in the hospital and we spoke to other doctors and the medical fraternity, but we do not need to speak to the local community." One thing this Government should have learned from the behaviour of the former Government is that local communities must be consulted.

How did we find out about this issue? When I was Mayor of Leichhardt Municipal Council I was called to a meeting at the hospital at which departmental staff said, "We have decided to close down the 24-hour service. That is what we have done; thank you very much. See you later." That is not the way to consult with local communities. Leichhardt council and the community were strong advocates of that facility. If there were issues about its popularity, people not knowing about the service, or people not wanting to understand it, we were there, ready and waiting, to support the staff and to promote the hospital. When the service provided at Balmain Hospital was downgraded, the Labor Government lauded the fact that a 24-hour casualty service would be introduced and said, "Isn't it great for the people of Balmain?" Years later it closed down that service, so one can understand the concerns of people in the local community.

On the issue of the data, as I said in my original speech, the data supplied by the Government deals only with overnight admissions; it does not deal with the large number of patients who were still being treated or admitted before 10.00 p.m. Members would be aware that a significant number of people who were admitted on or before 10.00 p.m. were still being treated in that facility. However, the data we received from the department related to admissions between 10.00 p.m. and 8.00 a.m.; it did not deal with patients seeking overnight monitoring or those attending emergency services before 10.00 p.m. Evidence received from doctors employed in the service indicated that a significant proportion of patients attended regularly, thus increasing the total number of patients being dealt with by the service during the period I mentioned.

The evidence revealed that many people did not know of the overnight service or 24-hour coverage as it was not promoted in the community. We would have been delighted to promote it. The Government said that the services withdrawn by the former Labor Government would not be reintroduced due to staffing costs. As I said earlier, a doctor is on site at the hospital 24-hours a day and patients currently are in care at that facility. We are talking about a cost difference of approximately \$25,000. The qualification level required for a doctor to staff that facility has changed to an increased level of responsibility and competence.

Student practitioners were being sourced from Royal Prince Alfred Hospital. While sourcing more highly qualified practitioners was difficult, it was possible to do so with not too much of a cost difference to the Government. My community and I will be working with the Government to ensure that the services withdrawn from our community by the former Labor Government are restored. I thank all members for their contributions to debate on the motion and appreciate their good will. I look forward to working with the Minister for Health to ensure that facilities such as the Balmain Hospital casualty service are not only maintained but also expanded in the future.

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

**Motion negatived.**



## TAFE FUNDING

**Mr RICHARD TORBAY** (Northern Tablelands) [10.51 a.m.]: I move:

That this House requests increased funding to TAFE to address the underinvestment, to help meet training needs and address the critical skills shortage in New South Wales.

Hundreds of speeches in support of TAFE colleges have been made in this place. TAFE colleges are the mainstay for skills training in this State. Despite under-resourcing by a succession of governments across New South Wales, TAFE colleges are the only training providers that offer vocational education training from a statewide perspective with local knowledge so as to tailor programs to the needs of the local community, including the business community and industry. However, TAFE colleges, like so many other sectors, have for some time now been in a more competitive environment, including the pressure of a user-pays system and in competition with private providers.

Since the 1980s when corporate style management of public entities first gained traction there has been a concept that public education tertiary facilities such as universities and TAFE colleges should increasingly pay their way. For TAFE colleges this flies in the face of reality. Public entities first and foremost serve the public interest. It is time for this nation to face its critical skills shortage, which will only become more severe. To meet that challenge we need to utilise TAFE services. Our society is in transition. The mining boom is sucking up our skilled and unskilled workers and is leaving an uneasy vacuum in its wake. That transition and the high Australian dollar are putting many industrial sectors under threat and workers are being made redundant. The answer is to re-skill workers.

In regional areas where the mines are employing many workers who would otherwise be employed in the rural sector, TAFE is the major provider of vocational skills training. There are not many private sector providers in regional areas but successive governments insist on treating regional and metropolitan areas as though the problems and the solutions are the same. The one-size-fits-all approach to TAFE colleges does not suit regional and rural areas, where distance and isolation are critical issues. Arbitrary class sizes, which require young people to travel long distances and to pay for accommodation to access tuition, are often beyond the means of many country people. The State and the nation are missing out on skilled-up workers and young people and they are not being given the opportunity to build careers of their choice. As members of Parliament that is what we are told repeatedly on our visits to TAFE colleges in our electorates.

Recently I attended the celebration of a wonderful initiative at Inverell—the business and community backed 15 automotive trade apprentices undertaking their first year of training at Inverell TAFE rather than travelling to Armidale or to Tamworth. Many young people entering trade courses at TAFE colleges are too young to hold a drivers licence and the burden of delivering them to courses long distances away often falls on family members. With rigidity in class numbers and the withdrawal of courses from many regional TAFE colleges, travel has become the number one issue for those young people and their families who live in the more isolated areas of the State. Unless communities like the wonderful group of businesses at Inverell pitch in and take the initiative, the system will become too inflexible to provide a solution. Courses are dropped locally because the number of students does not meet arbitrary targets and it is wrongly assumed that the students have no interest in them. As a result, many young people miss out on the opportunity to train for the job or career of their choice.

Over the past decade the Northern Tablelands has benefited from some welcome infrastructure developments, including a major upgrade to the Armidale TAFE campus, an \$8 million hospitality complex, a learning centre and library at Glen Innes TAFE, and upgrades at the Inverell and Tenterfield TAFE colleges. However, the investment in infrastructure has not been accompanied with proper resourcing of the sector, particularly in the teaching workforce, and sufficient flexibility to offer courses on a smaller scale to more isolated centres. Each year courses are cut and modified. Skilled teachers are unable to make a living through cuts in hours and casualisation, which means they cannot access holiday pay or the other conditions of permanent employees. Thus teachers often leave the area and that makes it very difficult to revive courses. In New South Wales, 70 per cent of TAFE college teachers are employed on a casual basis.

I call on the Government to undertake a review of the resourcing of TAFE colleges in order to provide a skilled workforce for this State and the nation. The review should take a fresh look at the needs of rural and regional communities in particular, calculate the State resources needed to maintain TAFE colleges in smaller as well as larger areas, and ensure that the wages and conditions offered to TAFE teachers are a sufficient incentive to meet the short-term and long-term requirements of vocational education and training. Now is the time for

planning, rather than waiting for the critical shortages in the rural and other sectors to reach a point where the Government is forced to act. Upgrading and finetuning the way in which TAFE courses are delivered to provide a skilled workforce is a major priority. It should be managed much better than the current ad hoc methodology and underfunding, which has been the case for some time.

At the July meeting of the Council of Australian Governments held in Darwin, council agreed to work out a plan for further reforms to the vocational education and training system which would involve the setting up of a national regulatory body, creating more flexible apprentice training schemes, increasing investment in vocational education and training, improving communication and ensuring that training is relevant to business and industry needs. TAFE colleges have shown that they can work effectively in partnership with business and industry in responding to their specific and general needs. TAFE colleges clearly are focused on providing training to produce job outcomes and they have a clear view of what that entails.

Many students who enter TAFE colleges are from disadvantaged backgrounds. The holistic education they receive at TAFE includes not only specific job training but also brings them to a general education standard where they can successfully complete their studies. Students also receive support and advice about the job market most suitable to them and the most appropriate course of study to achieve their goals. The thrust of many of the reforms being considered include opening up the vocational education and training market to private sector providers and funding cuts to the TAFE system. Currently 2,000 registered training organisations operate in New South Wales and 5,000 nationally. The reforms being considered would provide equal access to government funding for all registered training organisations.

As a member who represents a regional and rural electorate, I am concerned that the reduction in funds to TAFE colleges will adversely impact on rural areas. Figures show that in 2009 some 44 per cent of TAFE college students attended colleges outside the metropolitan area. If the TAFE system is weakened by the rationalisation of government funding there will be fewer courses available for country students and even more expensive travel and accommodation costs involved. As I said, there are not as many private sector providers in rural areas so students have fewer options. In my view it is up to the Government to ensure that access to training is available across the State. We live in a State, not just the city of Sydney, and as participation increases, student outcomes clearly will improve.

There is also concern that the proposal to introduce income-contingent loans for higher level qualifications in the vocational education and training sector may lead to pressure to increase fees and introduce further barriers to training students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Under the current system, TAFE New South Wales disadvantaged learners are eligible for generous fee concessions. There is a risk that loans combined with higher fees might further discourage participation in vocational training. At present in Australia TAFE delivers 84 per cent of vocational education and training hours. This represents a huge investment in capacity developed over many years. In New South Wales 400,000 students attend TAFE and about 280,000 of them are supported through government funding.

A report from Allen Consulting in 2006 showed that every dollar invested in TAFE New South Wales generates benefits to the community of \$6.40. The report also found that the TAFE formula combining skills growth, personnel development and social learning produced better results than training organisations that focus on only one or two of these approaches. It puts TAFE in a prime position to respond to State and national requirements to meet skills shortages and business industry requirements. I call on the Government to acknowledge the strength of the TAFE system that has developed over so many years, to encourage and offer more flexibility within the system and to increase funding to ensure that equitable access to TAFE vocational education and training is available to all students, regardless of where they live.

**Ms GABRIELLE UPTON** (Vaucluse—Parliamentary Secretary) [11.01 a.m.]: I support this motion, and I thank the member for Northern Tablelands for raising this important matter. The member has a strong and consistent advocate for education and for better funding for TAFE throughout the State. Indeed, I am visiting his electorate in a week to visit the TAFE and the University of New England. TAFE New South Wales plays an essential role in supporting the State's economic and social development. Also, it literally changes people's lives, as I have seen when I have visited TAFEs throughout New South Wales in my role as Parliamentary Secretary. This is something that all members of Parliament will know from their strong work in the community.

TAFE New South Wales offers unparalleled training pathways into employment, as well as pathways from low-level skills to advanced vocational training. The O'Farrell Government is committed to a strong TAFE sector because we understand all too well its role in supporting the State's economic recovery, which is

something we have been planning through the presentation of the budget earlier this week. We are committed to providing world-class education and training to all people, whether they live in inner Sydney, the Illawarra, Lismore, New England, Bathurst or anywhere else in the State.

As a first generation university graduate, a former deputy chancellor at a university and a Medical Research Institute board director, I am passionate about education and the advancement of knowledge and skills. Knowledge and skills empower us. They minimise our differences and maximise our prospects of understanding one another; and they are not diminished by their use or age. Our tertiary and vocational education sectors need to be better supported. A key part of the equality of opportunity is making them more accessible and flexible. We must also encourage those sectors to work more closely together, not only because education and training help each of us to reach our potential but because we can grow our New South Wales economy and build our export markets in education, which are a large slice of the export market in services industries for New South Wales.

TAFE New South Wales has a particular role to play: It focuses on teaching skills. It has a particular role in contrasting with and complementing the role of universities in New South Wales. It makes a powerful engine for our State and it is one that we must continue to re-evaluate and support. TAFE New South Wales continues to grow enrolments, including enrolments in higher level qualifications. Recently the National Centre for Vocational Education Research reported that last year this State added the most vocational training enrolments of any State in Australia, with 33,000 places. This has been accompanied by a growth in completions—completion is important; it is about students completing their skills—and a higher level of qualifications of nearly 40 per cent over the past five years. We should be proud of that.

However, because government funding has essentially been static over recent years—the member for Northern Tablelands made this point—the capacity of TAFE New South Wales to continue to grow is reaching an end. In response, the TAFE sector has grown its commercial revenues by 45 per cent or \$135 million between 2005-06 and 2009-10 and reinvested them in training for the benefit of students, industry and the New South Wales economy. But in the current economic environment, which is a difficult one particularly in New South Wales, generating more commercial revenue is increasingly difficult. I have seen and heard that from talking to TAFE directors across New South Wales. Of course, the reduction in the international student market is having a significant impact on not only the university sector but also the TAFE sector.

Therefore, to enable TAFE to continue to enrol more students, deliver more graduates and avoid further skills shortages, which slows our economic growth, additional government funding is needed, as the member for Northern Tablelands said. As the Parliamentary Secretary for Tertiary Education and Skills I have made it my job to visit TAFE colleges and staff, in the same way as I visit universities across the State. I meet with the senior executives, who brief me on their strategies and, indeed, the challenges they face in the sector. I tour facilities but, most importantly, I meet with the students, who are critical to this process in terms of meeting their demands.

In Lismore I took part in an English class for recent migrants. Their grasp of English over such a short period since migration was inspirational. In the Illawarra I visited a campus and had serious discussions about something the Government has focused on—the pathway programs between schools and TAFEs and TAFEs and universities. In June I was privileged to attend students and staff award ceremonies at both TAFE New South Wales and the Northern Sydney Institute. More recently I visited the green skills hub at the Marimba campus of the Western Sydney Institute, and the week after next I am visiting South Western Sydney Campbelltown facility. I will be visiting the Hunter Institute when I visit the University of Newcastle. As I said, I am also visiting the Northern Tablelands electorate the week after next.

When I visit these facilities I speak to the staff, but what is critically important is that I speak to the students. The students are the focus of TAFE, and the training works for our State when it works for them as persons in the TAFE system. Recently I also met TAFE graduates whose achievements are amazing in terms of the places they come from to achieve and build their skills in our State. TAFE New South Wales assists people to realise not only their career goals but their personal and social aspirations. While helping students to achieve their goals, TAFE also supports the State's industrial and economic development. I know—because I have seen this—that TAFE New South Wales consults extensively with industry to allocate public funding to match the economy's forecast demand for skills.

This ensures that we deliver the right training in the right place and at the right time. Between 2008 and 2010 TAFE New South Wales increased government training targets in many industry training areas. For

example, manufacturing training increased by 27 per cent to provide skilled employees for growing occupations, such as engineering technologists and laboratory technologists. In contrast, training in fine arts, where jobs are declining, decreased by about 4 per cent. So it is through partnerships with industry that TAFE New South Wales understands where the industry demand for skilled workers is, and graduates gain and retain employment as part of their study.

I want to look at a particular example of industry and TAFE working very closely together in the Illawarra region. In the past the Illawarra TAFE Institute worked with BlueScope Steel to develop skills for its workforce. With the announcement of the restructure of BlueScope Steel and the loss of more than 800 jobs in Port Kembla, the Illawarra institute is ready and prepared to provide assistance to the company and its workers. The institute will continue to work with BlueScope Steel to develop new skills for workers and enable them to seek employment. The Premier has announced that the New South Wales Government is determined to stand with the families of the Illawarra during uncertain times. There is a retrenched workers program in place and a rapid response team has been activated to work with affected workers. The team will put together a plan to look at the opportunities to assess workers' skills, identify the local job opportunities and consider training needed to help workers access those jobs.

The institute already has begun working in the Illawarra with a range of organisations, including Job Services Australia, which is a provider of strategies to assist the BlueScope workers. I am proud to be a part of a Government that helps its workers through the provision of training opportunities that will increase the completion of training of TAFE students. As I said in my inaugural speech and as I said at the beginning of my statement today, I firmly believe that our tertiary and, in particular, our training sectors need to be better supported. As a Government we will expand the training opportunities across the State to reduce skills shortages and to help produce a better New South Wales economy—after 16 years of being a laggard across States and Territories in Australia, which is shameful. I support this motion. I thank the member for Northern Tablelands for moving the motion and for his long personal commitment to TAFE NSW.

**Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT** (Marrickville) [11.11 a.m.]: The Opposition also supports the motion that has been moved by the member for Northern Tablelands for increased funding for TAFE to assist in addressing the training needs and the critical skills shortage in New South Wales. I congratulate the member for Northern Tablelands for bringing this matter to the attention of the House. TAFE is the leading provider of vocational education and training in New South Wales and Australia. It plays a critical role in delivering both the skills training needed by the New South Wales workforce and in being a provider of second-chance education. TAFE in New South Wales can trace its establishment back to a decision by the committee of the Sydney Mechanics School of Arts in 1878 to form the Sydney Mechanics' School of the Arts and the Workingmen's College, which became known as Sydney Technical College. So we can thank the foresight of what I am sure was all men of that committee for establishing what later became known as TAFE NSW.

There have been numerous studies that have highlighted the value that TAFE adds to our economy. For example, in 2006 the Allen Consulting Group's report found that TAFE New South Wales provided a 640 per cent return on Government investment. During the 2008-09 year TAFE institutes generated close to \$170 million in revenue from its commercial and international businesses. More recently a report released by TAFE called "Creating and Adding Value" highlights the value of TAFE to the State's economy, and business in particular. The report uses 10 case studies to show how the innovations that TAFE has developed through customisation and a focus on personalised learning are making a real difference in New South Wales. It means that TAFE institutes are better able to meet the needs of industry through flexible course delivery, including workplace-specific training and technology-based solutions. All of this tells us that investment in TAFE pays significant dividends over and above the actual value of the investment. It is good for business, the community and the economy of New South Wales.

When Labor was in government, we provided significant funding for TAFE. For example, in 2010-11 it was more than \$1.8 billion. There are more than 130 institutes across the State and more than 1,200 work-related qualifications. Over the last decade there has been a big expansion in TAFE enrolments evidenced by an increase of almost 64,000 since 2000. We know that TAFE provides for the whole community: It meets the needs of industry and business by providing skills training; it provides skills recognition services and training for people who are unemployed; it delivers training for young people who did not complete year 12 and do not have a job; and it provides an opportunity for matureage people who missed out on education earlier in life to go back to study to learn valuable skills.

I take this opportunity to congratulate TAFE workers for the great work they do. Many of them come from industry, some of them come from a background in trades, and together they make a wonderful

contribution to vocational education and training in New South Wales. This resolution calls for increased funding for TAFE and it should be supported. In Australia we need more people with higher skills levels and training. For example, Skills Australia estimates that Australia will need an additional 2.4 million people in the workforce with qualifications in Certificate III level or higher by 2015 to meet projected industry demand and the replacement of skilled workers. I am concerned that the budget this year for TAFE will not meet the challenges of the future, with TAFE expenses forecast for 2011-12 to be just over \$1.8 billion and the capital allocation unfortunately having been reduced for TAFE compared to the 2010-11 financial year.

In the lead-up to the March election many of us signed the TAFE pledge, including many Coalition members, and it is my concern that the budget does not deliver on that TAFE pledge. In particular, the budget outlines that the Government intends to reform the vocational education and training system. However, it does not provide any details. I think the community of New South Wales would want to know what the Government's intentions are in that regard. I call on the Minister for Education to outline what he means by further reform in the vocational education and training sector because the budget is very short on detail. I particularly would like to hear the Minister outline his views with further contestability in the allocation of funding for vocational training in New South Wales, which is a matter of huge concern across New South Wales, particularly in regional and rural New South Wales. We know that further contestability can have an adverse impact in regional and rural New South Wales. I support this resolution.

**Mr MATT KEAN** (Hornsby) [11.16 a.m.]: As a former TAFE student, it gives me great pleasure to support this motion. I commend the member for Northern Tablelands for his interest in and support for this important sector. I must say that I very much enjoyed doing my certificate IV in commercial cookery when my partner sent me to learn to cook because I lacked that skill. TAFE NSW provides essential support for the State's industry and economic development. The largest post-secondary educational institution in my electorate is Hornsby College of TAFE, which is known for its diversity of courses, student support and holistic and practical approach to learning. People in my electorate need TAFE colleges. I only have to drive down the Pacific Highway through my electorate to know how important TAFE colleges are to ensuring the creation of employment and other opportunities to all residents.

Thirty-seven per cent of the people of my electorate are employed as technicians and trade workers, in sales, community and personal services, labourers, workers, or machinery operators and drivers. These jobs would not exist if it were not for the strength of TAFE colleges. TAFE NSW provides a vital role in addressing the challenges facing the New South Wales economy. Specifically, TAFE NSW delivers training that increases workforce participation and reduces skills shortages. As the nation's leading vocational education and training provider, TAFE NSW has an enviable record. An independent economic analysis of the value of TAFE NSW found that for every \$1 invested in TAFE, benefits worth \$6.40 are returned to the State over 20 years.

Around one in nine working-age people in New South Wales enrolls in TAFE NSW annually to upgrade their skills so they remain current with workforce needs and particularly with new and emerging technologies. TAFE NSW has numerous industry partnerships and is playing its part in supporting industry and improving productivity in our workforce. It is working with Telstra, for example, and Innovation and Business Skills Australia to develop new training for information technology and telecommunications engineers. Currently 400 Telstra employees are training in TAFE NSW. Northern Sydney TAFE is pioneering partnerships with Microsoft, Cisco and Apple to deliver information, communication and technology training and testing at North Sydney and Meadowbank colleges.

**Dr Geoff Lee:** And the University of Western Sydney.

**Mr MATT KEAN:** And the University of Western Sydney. The Northern Sydney Institute, at Meadowbank College, is one of only a few Cisco-authorised training centres in the world that can offer specialised security instructor-level training. What a great thing for our community. The Illawarra institute has a longstanding partnership with Bega Cheese for the delivery of food processing traineeships for production staff. New employees and school leavers with Bega Cheese are able to progress through their training and become permanent staff. A number of TAFE NSW institutes deliver training for Ramsay Health Care to provide high-quality training for enrolled nurses, thereby reducing skills shortages in our health sector.

But that is not all. TAFE NSW is the leading provider of apprenticeship training. In 2010, TAFE NSW supported more than 43,000 apprentices, which is a remarkable 90 per cent of all apprentices trained in New South Wales. As I mentioned earlier, many people in my electorate have been beneficiaries of the quality education that our TAFE system provides. TAFE NSW traineeship and apprenticeship training ensures we have

quality and work-ready people in our State's small to medium businesses, as well as in our large corporations. This training is vital to developing our economy and avoiding projected skills shortages. For example, the TAFE New South Wales Sydney Institute delivers a pre-apprenticeship program for Energy Australia. The course is for young people with career aspirations in the electro-technology industry and prepares them for the certificate III apprenticeship.

Likewise, Western Sydney Institute—and I note the presence in the Chamber of the member for Parramatta—delivers trainee and apprentice training in competitive manufacturing, front-line management and production and processing across Australia at Owens-Illinois Inc. [O-I] glass sites. Western Sydney is currently working on a project to improve apprentice completions with O-I glass. TAFE NSW is acutely aware of the need to deliver value for money, to be efficient, to be flexible and to be responsive. TAFE NSW is focusing on increasing industry productivity by delivering higher-level qualifications. TAFE NSW offers industry the full range of qualifications, from entry level training through to diplomas, advanced diplomas and degrees. *[Time expired.]*

**Mr GUY ZANGARI** (Fairfield) [11.21 a.m.]: I join in debate on the motion regarding increased funding for TAFE NSW from the perspective of a construction teacher in vocational education and training. I understand how TAFE provides education to school leavers and adult learners. Vocational education and training teachers work in TAFE and schools—or registered training organisations, which are known as RTOs—and do a wonderful job educating the young minds of our community's future. My experiences have been working with dedicated vocational education and training in retail, business services, metals and engineering, hospitality and entertainment sectors to help high school students attain certificate I and certificate II prior to entering the TAFE system. From my experience, this preparation helped them to reach their potential and addresses the skills shortage within New South Wales.

In south-west Sydney, in Granville, Wetherill Park, Bankstown, Miller and Campbelltown, TAFE provides quality education to students who are yet to go to university, or those who are preparing for trades, and even mature-age students who are picking up a new skill. In 1999 I was retrained as a vocational education and training construction teacher through TAFE in Bankstown and Miller. My course in TAFE enabled my previous experience and qualifications in industrial arts as well as technological and applied studies to be accredited towards my certificates in construction. I undertook a further course in certificate IV at TAFE, workplace assessment and training, thus equipping me with the necessary skills to assess students in work placements on construction sites. In essence, my TAFE experience has shown me the importance of the relationship between TAFE and schools as well as TAFE and the wider community.

TAFE provides opportunities for those who require education and re-skilling to enter their trade or profession of choice. New South Wales Labor is committed to ensuring our education and training system remains among the best in the world, which is why the Labor Opposition is committed to a strong and effective New South Wales TAFE. In our last term of government in the 2010-11 financial year alone, New South Wales Labor invested \$1.813 billion in TAFE colleges. That was a huge increase in the TAFE budget of \$630.5 million since 1966-97, and showed Labor's commitment to the education sector. The funding of TAFE NSW supported enrolments in more than 1,200 work-related qualifications offered at more than 130 TAFE campuses across the State.

Both job seekers and potential employers understand that TAFE qualifications increase their employability, wages and chances of promotion. That is why there has been an expansion in TAFE over the past decade, with enrolments growing by close to 64,000 since 2000. As I said earlier, by giving priority to areas where skills are needed, TAFE plays a key role in tackling skills shortages. A 2009 report by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research found that an impressive 90 per cent of TAFE students were satisfied with their training. TAFE gives options and opportunities to those who may not have completed year 12, or to those who aspire to enter study at university. So it is vitally important that there is sufficient funding to ensure that their future livelihoods are secure.

New South Wales always has been a shining example of great education and giving young people the best start in life that they can get. Some vocational education and training statistics as at 1 January 2011 state as follows: more than 162,000 apprentices and trainees were in training across New South Wales; there were 2,050 New South Wales school students in training in part-time traineeships; 905 school-based apprentices were in training in New South Wales, with 427 of those attending government schools; and school-based apprentices in regional areas are well represented, with 137 from the North Coast, 164 from the Hunter, 121 from the Illawarra, and 79 from New England. I am proud to say that the highest representation in the metropolitan area

is from Western Sydney, with 159 school-based apprentices. TAFE NSW is the leading provider of vocational education and training in Australia. There are 130 campuses with the widest range of courses, with more than 1,200 work-related qualifications. This network extends to rural and remote areas where TAFE NSW is the only provider of post-school training. As my allotted time is fast running out, I record my support for the motion moved by the member for Northern Tablelands.

**Mr GEOFF PROVEST** (Tweed) [11.26 a.m.]: I support the motion moved by the member for Northern Tablelands. As the member for Fairfield said, TAFE NSW provides essential support for this State's industry and economic development. That is most important in regional areas. Mr Deputy-Speaker, in the south and the west, in Wagga Wagga, Monaro and Broken Hill, and in your electorate of Lismore, the local TAFE plays a vital role in educating both young and older people. As the nation's leading vocational education and training provider, TAFE NSW has an enviable record. I pay tribute to the local TAFE providers in Kingscliff and Murwillumbah. Those are both fine institutions. You and I have attended many functions and awards with Elizabeth Montgomery, the regional director of TAFE, and Fran O'Hara of the Kingscliff TAFE.

Many years ago I was a part-time TAFE teacher at the Padstow TAFE institute where I taught young people about the hospitality trade. It was a very rewarding job; many of those young people have gone on to greater things. TAFE institutions make a great contribution to rural and regional areas by providing the skills necessary in those areas. I regularly attend TAFE institutions in our electorates, Mr Deputy-Speaker, to speak about government and legislation and other issues. As we know, one in nine working-age people in New South Wales enrol in TAFE institutions in this State. That proportion has increased with the passing of legislation last year to raise the school age limit to 17 years, helping many more people who would like to undertake vocational education and training [VET] courses and so on.

I recently attended the opening of a new trades school at Kingscliff TAFE which will provide building construction experience for students. They are now building demountables for the Department of Education. I was very impressed: they are fulfilling a worthwhile process. I know enrolments are up, particularly in media and similar courses. The social worker and graphic design courses at TAFE have assisted me with some of the homeless in the Tweed. TAFE in the Tweed and across New South Wales perform an extraordinary role and we should continue to support them. Members from both sides of the House know what a great job TAFE does by turning out tradespeople. From a Nationals perspective, I often hear about shortages in trades such as building, motor mechanics, et cetera in regional New South Wales.

I attended the North Ryde Catering College adjacent to the horticultural section. Before that I attended East Sydney TAFE, located in the old jail, which was an education in itself. TAFE does a tremendous job and people want to contribute to them. They deserve the support of governments and oppositions in order to get tradespeople in regional areas. TAFEs are critical in country towns, whether it be Lismore, Wagga Wagga, Broken Hill or Tweed Heads. All members attend many TAFE functions. I know that Mr Deputy-Speaker is a strong supporter of Lismore TAFE, which has a tremendous reputation. I support the motion. Once again, I am 100 per cent for the Tweed TAFE.

**Ms CLOVER MOORE** (Sydney) [11.31 a.m.], by leave: I want to make a brief contribution to this important motion moved by the member for Northern Tablelands requesting increased funding to TAFE to address underinvestment, help meet training needs and address the critical shortages in New South Wales. Education is fundamental to a civil society. I have consistently supported government investment in adult and community education, including TAFE. I am particularly concerned about the vital role of second-chance learning and retraining, which is important for women, recent migrants and refugees, people on low incomes, young people who missed out on school, those with limited literacy and older people. Ultimo TAFE and the Eora Aboriginal College are vital to adult learning in the inner city.

There should be strong efforts to help those disadvantaged in the labour market and those suffering the impact of industry reform. TAFE restructuring and changes over some years have resulted in the loss of a number of positions in TAFE curriculum centres and equity units, adding new tasks and workload for TAFE teachers and requiring them to develop new skills and expertise. TAFE teachers need to focus on students and classrooms rather than managerial and administrative tasks to ensure the greatest opportunity for learning in TAFE programs. Teachers need security of employment and proper pay and conditions that reflect their skills and expertise. Constituents regularly contact me about courses not being offered due to lack of funding—courses that are important to help them access training that would prevent and reduce unemployment and provide opportunities. For too long investment in TAFE has been inadequate. Education is vital to our future, and I strongly support the call for increased funding.

**Dr GEOFF LEE** (Parramatta) [11.35 a.m.], by leave: It is with great pleasure that I speak to the motion moved by the member for Northern Tablelands about the importance of TAFE. I thank him for moving the motion. I also recognise the important comments made by members representing the electorates of Tweed and Hornsby, who gave an excellent summation of the value of TAFE. TAFE plays a vital role in New South Wales. I have been lucky enough to experience TAFE on many different levels: first, as a student straight after I gained my first degree I went to Baulkham Hills TAFE to learn about marketing for a couple of years, which was fantastic. Secondly, after running my own business and selling it I went to teach at Liverpool TAFE. Throughout those two years I saw the advantages TAFE delivers to students and the community.

An advantage of TAFE is that the colleges are located throughout the State. The access they provide is especially important for part-time students who work during the day and attend TAFE at night. TAFE also provides an excellent point of access for someone who does not have the Higher School Certificate and does not qualify for university on Australian Tertiary Admission Rank scores. TAFE enables them to undertake a certificate I, II, III or IV to build an academic background so that they have the credentials and a pathway to further education. We all know the importance of further education. Obviously, there is a strong correlation between a population's educational attainment and gross domestic product development. Therefore, the more we educate our population as a whole the greater the gross domestic product of our nation. Australia is moving up the list but it must continue this concentration.

Another benefit of TAFEs is their cost-effectiveness. Comparing private registered training organisations to TAFEs quite often shows that the charges for students at TAFE are very cost-effective for certificates III and IV and diplomas. When combined with a government subsidy this makes TAFE fees very cost-effective for people on low incomes, which is especially important. We want to allow people who normally would not have the chance of going to a university attend TAFE, where they can undertake part of a degree. There are wonderful pathways for them to undertake a little bit of study at TAFE and when recognition is gained for that study they can go to one of the many universities that participate in the program. I was lucky enough to attend the University of Western Sydney for many years, and it encouraged students to take that pathway.

I taught marketing at Liverpool TAFE for a number of years as a part-time teacher. I also taught marketing at the University of Western Sydney, and it was fantastic to see some of my former students from Liverpool TAFE in my classes at university. Interestingly, 20 per cent of the total intake of 3,500 at the College of Business at the University of Western Sydney are pathway students from TAFE. Some 25 per cent of those students who finish university go back to TAFE, so TAFE plays an important role in qualifying people for university and after university.

TAFE and university have different roles: university focuses on theoretical concepts and ideas; whereas TAFE has a more practical approach to learning and provides hands-on skills with a small amount of the necessary theory. I congratulate the Northern Sydney Institute of TAFE with which I have worked on a number of occasions, especially on its business building blocks, a certificate III in micro business which was a pilot at that TAFE and which is now being rolled out around Australia. I congratulate the member for Northern Tablelands on moving the motion.

**Mr JAMIE PARKER** (Balmain) [11.40 a.m.], by leave: A well-funded TAFE system particularly benefits regional economies and disadvantaged communities. It provides the skills to build local economies and creates pathways for engagement for individuals who would otherwise be unemployed or underemployed. As we confront the challenges of climate change the TAFE sector will create the skills needed both to develop and to implement new technologies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to adapt to the impacts of unavoidable global warming. Despite the social and economic benefits of the TAFE sector, successive State and Federal governments have undermined its future in a number of ways. Its funding has been significantly reduced.

We have heard about large dollar figures, but in New South Wales by 2008 government real recurrent expenditure per publicly funded hour of training had declined by 15.7 per cent since 2003 and 29.2 per cent since 1997 as a result of the increase in student numbers. Capital expenditure has also taken a big hit and has been reduced by 53.8 per cent from 1997 to 2007. The increasing casualisation of teachers in the TAFE sector is further cause for alarm. In 2008 an appalling 71 per cent of teachers were casual, in addition to the 2 per cent who were temporary. While these part-time teachers are, of course, excellent, The Greens are concerned that flexibility and industry skills have been used as an excuse to cut costs by excessively reducing the number of full-time permanent staff.

The Federal Government has demonstrated a growing hostility towards the public provision of vocational education and training. Increasing amounts of Federal vocational education and training funding have



been made contestable, allowing lower quality private providers to out-compete TAFE. They may well deliver student hours at a lower cost than TAFE, but that comes with a reduction in wages for teachers and a lowering of standards for students. In 2010 TAFE and the Adult English Migrant Service lost \$50 million for language, literacy and numeracy courses for the long-term unemployed to private and corporate providers who offer lower wages to their teachers and poorer quality instruction and facilities to their students

TAFE fees have been rising significantly—by more than 20 per cent—and the 2010-11 State budget shows that revenue collected in fees, charges and other student contributions has increased by that figure. While those figures have been rising, the workloads of TAFE teachers have increased. In late 2009 and early 2010 the former Government conducted a campaign against TAFE teachers and their union, seriously reducing their working conditions in return for an unacceptably small pay rise. The former Government also embarked on a campaign to deprofessionalise TAFE by cutting teaching qualifications requirements from a university degree to a much less rigorous certificate IV in training.

These sustained attacks have left the future of TAFE hanging in the balance. The Greens have actively campaigned for a better deal for TAFE, its employees and students. We have resisted privatisation and increasing fees and charges, supported teachers and pushed for more funding. We believe there needs to be an end to the casualisation and downgrading of qualifications in the TAFE system and we call for the restoration of permanent teaching to 70 per cent of hours taught and university-level teaching qualifications requirements for all TAFE teachers, with resources to help existing and incoming teachers achieve these qualifications.

I refer members to Budget Paper No. 3, pages 3 to 19, which indicate that capital expenditure in the TAFE sector has been reduced from \$114 million to \$98 million, which is a 14 per cent reduction, and recurrent funding has been increased by 1.7 per cent. However, when we look at the budget papers we see that the inflation rate is about 3.75 per cent. That means that this Government, like the former Government, has actually reduced the funding available to the TAFE sector. Taking on board the inflation rate and total expenses excluding losses, that represents a real change of minus 3.1 per cent in TAFE funding. While I acknowledge that members support the rhetoric of the motion, the reality is that the increase in funding of about 0.7 per cent is actually a 3.1 per cent reduction in real terms.

I acknowledge the contributions of all members. We Greens will continue to fight to support TAFE teachers and the public education sector. We call on the Government to consider ensuring that if it is proposing to support these resolutions to increase funding it does so in a real way; that is, the increase in TAFE funding needs to be adjusted for inflation to recognise those increasing costs. I thank the member for New England for his contribution and the House for allowing me to make a contribution to this debate.

**Mr STUART AYRES** (Penrith) [11.45 a.m.], by leave: It is extremely important to recognise the excellent role played by TAFE across western Sydney, which has had its own university only in the past generation. The role the TAFE sector has played in tertiary education has been absolutely critical and I am sure that other members who represent western Sydney recognise the important role that it plays in our area. The Western Sydney Institute of TAFE provides a vast array of different courses and options for students across different age groups. Students can study agriculture at Hawkesbury, engineering, marketing and computer skills at Penrith, and many other courses at Liverpool and Campbelltown.

We have in the gallery at the moment a number of high school students from around the State. Some of them will undoubtedly move into the TAFE system when they complete their Higher School Certificate, so it is most opportune that they are here while we are debating an issue that will have an impact on them. It is interesting that the member for Balmain referred to one of the budget papers. At the risk of being called an economics nut by the Treasurer, I refer to Budget Paper No. 6, which deals with the long-term fiscal outlook. As one of the younger members of Parliament I have age on my side in recognising some of the points made in that document. It states:

The projections indicate that the State's population will continue to age. The chart below shows that the ratio of people aged 65 and over to those between 15 and 64 (or the aged dependency ratio) nearly doubles, from 20.9 per cent in 2011 to 41.2 per cent in 2051. More immediately, with the first baby boomers born exactly 65 years ago and now moving into traditional retirement age, 2011 is the beginning of 18 years of accelerated growth in the aged dependency ratio.

In plain English that means the number of people aged 65 and over is increasing and the number of people aged 15 to 64 and who are working is decreasing. It is up to those of us in the younger age bracket to work and to ensure that we continue to grow the economy of this State so that we can look after the people in the older age bracket. That can be done only if we increase the productivity of the State. We must invest in tertiary resources

and enhance the role that TAFE plays in improving the intellect and skills sets of school leavers. They will need to fill every role, whether it be in agriculture, marketing, mining or another field. It is critical that we invest in those skills, and the TAFE sector will continue to play an ongoing role in that area.

The member for Balmain made a sweeping generalisation in suggesting that private education providers offer a poorer quality service. A number of private providers offer targeted skills in the tertiary sector at both the university and TAFE levels in the health, education, sport and agriculture sectors. I am sure that many people in the Northern Tablelands have studied at Tocal College. It is a sweeping generalisation to suggest that the private sector cannot play a role; however, any targeted courses provided by the private sector should not come at the expense of what takes place in publicly funded TAFE facilities. I thank the member for Northern Tablelands for moving this motion. It is clearly important to me and other members from the younger age group that we continue to invest in this area.

**ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Lee Evans):** I draw the attention of members to the presence in the gallery of the Catholic schools of New South Wales attending the Secondary School Leadership Program conducted by the Parliamentary Education Centre. I welcome them.

**Mr RICHARD TORBAY** (Northern Tablelands) [11.50 a.m.]: I join with you, Mr Acting-Speaker and with all members in welcoming the students. As the member for Penrith highlighted we are debating an important motion. I thank all members who have contributed to this debate. I remind the House—and the students with us today—that the motion I moved originally was that this House request increased funding to TAFE to address underinvestment in order to meet training needs and to address the critical skills shortage in New South Wales. I particularly thank the Parliamentary Secretary, the member for Vacluse, who led for the Government.

It is clear that she has a good knowledge of the education sector and that she will continue to make a valuable contribution to education. I look forward to her visit to the Northern Tablelands and to the University of New England. I also thank the former Minister for Education and Training, the member for Marrickville, and the members for Hornsby, Fairfield, Tweed, Sydney, Parramatta, Balmain and Penrith. There has been an extensive debate. I learned a great deal about how many members in this place have undertaken cooking classes at TAFE. I ran out of time but I intend to propose an amendment that this House undertake a Master Chef competition. I know the member for Hornsby would be right at it. The member for Parramatta might be scratching around a little.

**Mr John Williams:** We could do boiled eggs.

**Mr RICHARD TORBAY:** The member for Murray-Darling gets an F—boiled eggs are not Master Chef material. It was a positive thing to hear the support for the TAFE sector in this place. It is above partisan politics to suggest anything other than that our TAFE—which has been around for more than a hundred years—should be supported. It is of particular importance in view of the skills shortages that are occurring, and will continue to occur, in particular in regional, rural and remote parts of New South Wales.

**Mr Ryan Park:** And the Illawarra.

**Mr RICHARD TORBAY:** And in the Illawarra, as the member for Keira, who I am sure cannot cook, interjects. I can do this all day. Mr Acting-Speaker, I have not said this for a while: Order! When the students and staff of TAFE colleges read the contributions made by all the members who have spoken in this debate they will feel supported. We need to match our support with proper resources to make sure that people enjoy access to educational services, because that is how we will achieve our aspirations for the future of this State and this country. I commend the motion to the House.

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

**Motion agreed to.**

#### **GLENDALE TO SPEERS POINT CYCLEWAY EXTENSION**

**Ms SONIA HORNER** (Wallsend) [11.54 a.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) acknowledges that the Lake Macquarie Councillors have agreed to network with Newcastle City Council; and
- (2) supports planning to create a regional cycleway between the Newcastle City Council and Lake Macquarie City Council region, with its first priority to build a cycleway extension from Glendale to Speers Point.

I will outline seven points. I will first look at our aims as a Government in this session to improve the profile of cycling in New South Wales. Secondly, I will talk about the importance of political will, that is, political will between all the levels and spheres of government—local, State and Federal—regarding a greater commitment to off-road cycleways in New South Wales and Australia, and to make sure that we improve cycle networks and linkages and the logic of linkages, particularly between the Newcastle City Council and the great and wonderful Lake Macquarie City Council electorates and boundaries. Thirdly, I will talk about the regional cycleway link in general and its integration. Fourthly, I will talk about the completion of the Wallsend to Glendale historic tramway walkway cycleway and the future extension of that to the Speers Point area.

Fifthly, I will praise the efforts of the various cycling groups—and there are many enthusiastic cycleway groups in the Hunter. Sixthly, I will give some quotes from cycleway and parkway notable aficionados in the Hunter, and there are many of them. Finally, I will conclude by imploring the Liberal-Nationals Government to make a commitment towards cycling. I mentioned the importance of our aim of improving the profile of cycling in New South Wales. This is the second notice of motion I have had the privilege of debating in this House about the importance of cycling in New South Wales. I am pleased to note that the first notice of motion on cycling was well supported by the Government, the Opposition and Independents. We discussed the success of the Bike City Forum in the Newcastle area and the plans and outcomes of that forum.

I turn now to political will. We cannot build better off-road cycleways without the agreement and support of local government, which is critical. We also need funding from State Government and, for the big picture items, the Federal Government has to match the funding from local and State Governments. We are working as a team, which is important. Last year I worked with the Mayor of Lake Macquarie and the Lord Mayor of Newcastle and talked to both those gentlemen about the importance of cycleway networks and a regional network way between Lake Macquarie and Newcastle city. We have areas of great cycleways, including the Fernleigh Track and the Wallsend to Glendale historic tramway cycleway, which is almost completed. We have cycleways along the wetlands area, around the Wallsend and Maryland area and we have other bits and pieces of cycleways that are incomplete.

The problem is that bike riders have to use roads to complete their ride. That is not safe for the cyclists; nor is it in the best interests of commuters on the roads. One way of achieving a real commitment to a regional cycleway link between Newcastle and the lake is, upon the completion of the Wallsend to Glendale historic tramway shared cycleway walkway, which is close to completion, to extend the cycleway to Speers Point. The extension from Glendale to Speers Point is not in the Bike Plan yet but I am sure that, upon the completion of the Wallsend to Glendale cycleway, it will be. However, I understand that the Roads and Traffic Authority is undertaking preliminary investigations into the extension of the Wallsend to Glendale cycleway to Speers Point.

I thank the member for Newcastle for raising that when speaking on my previous motion. It is important to share knowledge as we work together. Let us make this a priority. I will support the Government in whatever way I can to ensure that we get funding for the extension of the Speers Point cycleway. As good as Lake Macquarie City Council is on such issues, it cannot afford to fund the extension on its own; it will need our help, and I am sure we will be there to support it. Many cycleway groups exist in the Hunter and I wish to praise their efforts. The Newcastle Cycleways Movement organises regular rides and lobbies politicians—no doubt all Hunter members would have been lobbied by it.

Bicycle NSW is another but it is a bit too city-centric and it would be good if it were more active in the Hunter. Bicycles Online Community is an interesting one to read. I also praise the enthusiasm of the cyclist lobby which resulted in the Bike City Forum. Some aficionados of that forum that I must acknowledge include: the late Mick Chapman, a well-known coach and famous rider in the Hunter, and his legacy has been passed on to Craig Chapman; Bernard Hockings, who organised the forum; Ray Milliss, a keen cyclist, an engineer and a very clever man, as well as a friend of mine and a friend of Lake Macquarie; David Bennett; Greg Moore; Dorothy Pinder and Olympic cyclist Olivia Gollan. Plenty of notables live in the area.

I will now read onto the record some quotes from some of our Hunter aficionados. I commence with Helene O'Neill, who is a friend of mine and a former councillor on Newcastle City Council. Helene O'Neill can be heard on the radio each morning talking about sport. No person in the Hunter knows more about sport than Helene O'Neill. Helene is also a very keen cyclist. She had this to say about the future of the Glendale to Speers Point cycleway:

As a keen cyclist, in fact a commuter cyclist, I applaud the move by Sonia Hornery and Lake Macquarie Council to launch this notice of motion to expand the existing cycleway in an effort to further the connectivity of Newcastle and Lake Macquarie. In an era when traffic is reaching gridlocks at various times of the day and inactivity is reaching endemic proportions, any attempt to get people out of cars and onto their bike is worthy of exploring.

Cycling is a great way to bring families together if only for a social ride and if they can be guaranteed a safe way to achieve this, they will embrace the idea.

Jodie Harrison, a councillor on Lake Macquarie City Council, is also keen on this project. She had this to say:

... the popularity of the Fernleigh Track and the pathway from the eastern to the western side of Lake Macquarie shows how much our residents and visitors appreciate shared pathways during recreation. The completion of the cycleway between Speers Point and Glendale is an important link in the cycleway network to reduce the reliance on cars as a means of everyday transport. Reduced vehicle usage is essential if Lake Macquarie is to be a sustainable city.

I implore the Liberal Government to give a commitment to healthy lifestyles by maintaining and improving the funding and building of off-road cycleways in the Hunter and across New South Wales. The repercussions of not doing so will mean more unfit people will be visiting our hospitals, which is something we just cannot afford.

**Mr ANDREW CORNWELL** (Charlestown) [12.03 p.m.]: It is a pity that the students have already left the gallery as I was going to welcome to the Parliament of New South Wales students from St Marys High School in my electorate as well as students from St Pauls High School at Booragul in the electorate of the member for Lake Macquarie. It would be remiss of me not to recognise some of the keen cyclists present in the Chamber today. I am advised that the member for Swansea and the member for Mount Druitt are to start the Parliamentary penny farthing society, and the member for Newcastle and the member for Keira are very adept on a unicycle.

I support the motion of the member for Wallsend. I am advised by the Roads and Traffic Authority that it was resolved by Lake Macquarie City Council at a meeting on 9 May 2011 to advise Newcastle City Council that its councillors are interested in attending a network evening, subject to a clear agenda and an agreed venue. This followed a Newcastle City Council resolution in November 2010 to invite Lake Macquarie City Council to a network evening. The evening is planned for June and it is not specifically on cycleway matters. It is a positive step for these two councils to meet in this way. The Roads and Traffic Authority has also advised me of the past close working relationship between the two councils in relation to cycleways—in reference to the Fernleigh Track, which is a wonderful piece of infrastructure that was built in collaboration between local, State and Federal governments over the past decade.

The Fernleigh Track is a combined cycleway-walkway built in five stages on a disused railway line from Adamstown to Belmont, through the Newcastle and Lake Macquarie local government areas. Work has been completed on stages one to five—stage five being the final stage. Stage five of the project was funded by: New South Wales Government, 50 per cent; City of Newcastle, 25 per cent; and Lake Macquarie City Council, 25 per cent. Lake Macquarie City Council managed construction of stage five and the New South Wales Government provided \$1.5 million towards it. The completed track is about 15 kilometres of off-road cycleway-walkway.

The Wallsend to Glendale cycleway is a further example. This is a 3.6 kilometre cycleway along a disused tramway corridor in Newcastle's western suburbs. It traverses the city of Newcastle and Lake Macquarie City Council areas. It has been over five years in planning and development owing to several property issues. The concrete pathway is currently being completed with the city of Newcastle as construction manager. The cycleway is a joint project between the New South Wales Government and Newcastle City and Lake Macquarie City councils. The New South Wales Government has provided funding towards the project, with the remaining funding being met by Newcastle City and Lake Macquarie City councils. Like the Fernleigh Track, the Wallsend to Glendale cycleway crosses the local government area boundaries and has been funded by the two councils and the Roads and Traffic Authority.

The New South Wales Bike Plan notes that councils across New South Wales are supported by the Roads and Traffic Authority local council cycleways program, which has provided an average of \$5 million in 50:50 funding each year for the past five years. In 2009-10 the program funded 92 cycle projects, delivered in partnership with 77 local councils across New South Wales. As demand for cycling facilities at the local community level continues to grow, the New South Wales Government will maintain existing funding for the Roads and Traffic Authority local council cycleways program, leading to completion of community cycle infrastructure worth at least \$10 million a year. When other 50:50 council programs are added, such as the support by the Department of Planning for the New South Wales Coastline Cycleway, the New South Wales Government and councils will, in partnership, deliver active transport infrastructure for local communities to the value of \$150 million to 2020.

The New South Wales Government will support local councils in building and increasing the use of local cycleway networks. While a growing number of bike trips to major centres may start, finish or travel on a regional cycleway, most bike riding happens on local streets. Growing cycling on streets managed by local councils requires well signposted and connected routes that get people to everyday destinations such as shops, schools, beaches, parks or swimming pools. In larger cities, where short trips may take people through several council areas, local bike networks must link across council boundaries. I am advised by the Roads and Traffic Authority that Lake Macquarie City Council is undertaking some preliminary investigation for the extension of the Wallsend to Glendale cycleway to Speers Point.

The New South Wales Government would be pleased to receive a proposal for consideration should the project be feasible. I am also advised by the Roads and Traffic Authority that Lake Macquarie City Council is currently reviewing its bike plan, and that both Newcastle City Council and the Roads and Traffic Authority are involved in the Lake Macquarie Cycling Strategy Internal Committee Steering Group. I am further advised by the Roads and Traffic Authority that both councils are looking at the potential for the extension of the Fernleigh Track. The New South Wales Government is also interested in any proposals. About two weeks ago I enjoyed a walk through the bush with some of the residents of Dudley, a suburb in my electorate. We walked along the old railway line that leads out to the old Dudley colliery. They are pushing to have a cycleway built along the old railway line.

On the face of it, it appears to be a good project. Fairly substantial cuttings are to be found in that area, which remove some of the hills and hollows, and the community could benefit from it. For example, because of the narrow part of Ocean Street, it is difficult for students attending Whitebridge High School to get across. It would circumvent that and provide safe passage for children to get to school. It would also provide a positive benefit for the community because the Spur Track, as it is now known, would enable users of the Fernleigh Track to take a little side route to Dudley, which has a quality café and two local hotels where people could refresh themselves on their journey from Adamstown to the southern end of the track.

I will be discussing that project with Lake Macquarie council. In collaboration with other local councils, Lake Macquarie council already has the Fernleigh Track committee so there is a structure whereby we may be able to progress the proposal. I look forward to working with the member for Lake Macquarie and other local members to see whether we can progress this project. If it is viable, I am sure the Government will be pleased to support it. I welcome the motion moved by the member for Wallsend. Recently the House has dealt with several motions relating to cycling. Obviously, the matter is dear to the heart of the member for Wallsend. It is a pity that the school students are no longer in the gallery. I am sure many of them would use this route, given that the network takes them past several local schools. I thank the member for Wallsend for moving this motion, and I look forward to the contribution of other members.

**Mr GREG PIPER** (Lake Macquarie) [12.11 p.m.]: I thank the member for Wallsend for moving this motion which is in two parts. The first part acknowledges that Lake Macquarie City Council has agreed to network with Newcastle City Council. That is correct, and I had the pleasure of being the chairman of that formal consultation between the elected bodies of Newcastle and Lake Macquarie. I can report to the House that the meeting was productive. It showed that there are some areas on which the two councils can work together more productively for their local communities. In many ways it highlighted the great cooperation that historically has existed, and currently exists, between the two councils. Lake Macquarie City Council will work more closely with Newcastle City Council on matters that will be beneficial and cost-effective to the ratepayers of both cities. Newcastle and Lake Macquarie are members of the Hunter Region Organisation of Councils. For the benefit of residents of the Hunter and anyone who is associated with Hunter councils, I am proud to say that the Hunter Region Organisation of Councils is probably the most professional and successful regional organisation of councils in New South Wales.

We are looking forward to doing more to assist the Government and the Minister for Local Government, and Minister for the North Coast with their aspirations to make councils generally perform more efficiently. The issue of cycleways in Lake Macquarie is dear to my heart. I have been on the council since 1991, and since that time we have pushed forward with the Fernleigh Track. I think we have shown what can be done, particularly in cooperation not only with Newcastle City Council but also with the State Government, the Roads and Traffic Authority—the member for Charlestown referred to this—the Department of Planning and the Federal Government. I note that in Lake Macquarie and Newcastle the cycle and shared pathway network links not only local government areas but also State electorates. It is appropriate that the member for Charlestown, the member for Newcastle and the member for Swansea are in the Chamber. I recognise that the local member for Swansea is also the deputy mayor of the city of Lake Macquarie—

**Mr Stuart Ayres:** And an avid cyclist.

**Mr GREG PIPER:** And an avid cyclist on a penny farthing. The shared pathway network links Wallsend to Cessnock. We recognise that an opportunity exists in southern Lake Macquarie to extend the link to Wyong, but that is some way down the path, so to speak. Cycling is extremely important. The cycling link referred to by the member for Wallsend—the member for Charlestown said that the Government will support it if it is viable—is extremely important. Not only is it viable; it is incredibly logical and practical. It will add four kilometres of cycleway from Frederick Street in Glendale, run along Rush Creek and Cockle Creek through to Speers Point, linking to the cycleway that runs around the lake from Eleebana to the art gallery at Booragul. Extending the cycleway from Wallsend to Glendale will add another eight kilometres of cycleway.

People riding the extent of the cycleway around the lake from Wallsend to Eleebana will have 16 kilometres of cycleway. We must provide the link to Belmont in a safe manner, and that will allow easy access to the Fernleigh Track. Once again, there would be an eastern route into Newcastle, joining us to our friends in Newcastle. We also have the western link from Speers Point to Glendale and Wallsend. I believe that this is practical. There are some issues to deal with, but the routes have been tentatively identified, particularly through Waratah Golf Club at Argenton. I think that is the best way to go, but we must deal with the conflicts between the desired uses. I thank the member for Wallsend for moving this motion. I look forward to the Government supporting these worthwhile projects.

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

#### **VETERINARY PRACTICE AMENDMENT (INTERSTATE VETERINARY PRACTITIONERS) BILL 2011**

##### **Agreement in Principle**

**Debate resumed from 24 August 2011.**

**Mr ANDREW CORNWELL** (Charlestown) [12.15 p.m.]: As a registered veterinarian, I am pleased to speak in debate on this important bill, the Veterinary Practice Amendment (Interstate Veterinary Practitioners) Bill 2011. This amendment will greatly benefit the community and veterinarians alike. For veterinarians, it will have several important benefits. Veterinarians will only have to register once within Australia. The bill will facilitate greater mobility, reduce the time and costs associated with registration, and encourage veterinarians to work in more than one jurisdiction and in interstate emergency animal disease response teams. There are also several substantial administrative benefits. The bill will reduce the administrative burden and associated regulating costs. The national recognition of veterinary registration model is simple to implement and it will see the retention of the current board structure.

There are also significant community benefits. The bill will increase the number of veterinarians who can practice in New South Wales, thereby providing the community with greater choice. It will increase competition, leading to improved services at reduced costs. It will reduce delay associated with getting interstate veterinarians onto emergency animal disease response teams, which will lead to more effective control of disease outbreaks. It will also improve services in regional border areas. There are no additional costs to government, except the costs associated with legislative change. However, this cost is minimal and it is part of the Government's core business.

The adoption of national registration will require amendments to the veterinary registration legislation of each State and Territory. At the Primary Industries Ministerial Council, all States and Territories agreed to implement national recognition by 31 December 2008. The veterinary practitioners board in each State and Territory and the Australian Veterinary Board Council will facilitate implementation of national registration. At present, Victoria is the only other State to have introduced legislation to adopt national recognition; the other States and Territories are in the process of doing so. Veterinarians who live in New South Wales will be required to register with the New South Wales Veterinary Practitioners Board. They will then be able to work in any State or Territory in Australia, once all States and Territories have introduced legislation to give effect to this.

Vets working in New South Wales and other Australian States or Territories will no longer be required to gain a secondary registration in each jurisdiction. A vet who is suspended or deregistered from practice in any one jurisdiction in Australia may be suspended or deregistered from practice in all jurisdictions. The Australian

Veterinary Boards Council will maintain a national database that will contain the registration details of all Australian vets. The database will include information on new registrations and amendments to existing registrations such as a change of address. The database will also list vets who have registration conditions or who are suspended or deregistered. The database has already been created and as each State enacts legislation to implement national recognition of registration the details of vets registered in that State will be added to the database.

The 2003 review of rural veterinary services report, the Frawley review, recommended the adoption of national recognition of veterinary registration. All Australian veterinary boards, the Australian Veterinary Boards Council and the Australian Veterinary Association endorse the national recognition of veterinary registration principle. A national registration of veterinarians working group was formed to develop a model. The Australasian Veterinary Boards Council and the Australian Veterinary Association had significant input into the model. A consultation regulation impact statement was released for public consultation in October 2006. The Australasian Veterinary Boards Council and the Australian Veterinary Association jointly wrote to all registered veterinarians in Australia, including me, encouraging them to make submissions to the regulation impact statement.

The responses received during consultation indicated very strong support among the veterinary profession and stakeholder groups, including livestock industries, for national recognition. There continues to be strong support from the vet industry for national recognition. The New South Wales Veterinary Practitioners Board has endorsed the national recognition model. When the national recognition of registration was being developed the existing mutual recognition scheme was discussed. It was considered unsuitable because it does not provide for deemed registration. The existing mutual recognition scheme requires multiple applications, multiple approvals and multiple application fees and registration fees. In addition, vets are required to obtain a letter of professional standing from their local board and each local board charges a fee for the letter.

The existing mutual recognition scheme would be unnecessarily cumbersome, time consuming and expensive. But perhaps the most important reason for this amendment is that it will improve biosecurity for New South Wales. I will refer briefly to the equine influenza outbreak of a few years ago. Early in August 2007, four Japanese racing stallions arrived at Eastern Creek Quarantine Station shortly after an outbreak of equine influenza in Japan. By Tuesday 21 August, several horses were exhibiting symptoms of a viral infection which was later identified as equine influenza. On the same day, horses at Centennial Park Equestrian Centre also displayed signs of infection and there had been no direct contact between these horses. On 24 August the first case was confirmed at Eastern Creek.

That same day, 16 horses at Eastern Creek and Centennial Park tested positive and another six were exhibiting symptoms. Within another 24 hours there were over 80 suspected cases and a 72-hour standstill on horses was implemented. By 26 August, 161 of the 165 horses at Centennial Park were suspected cases. Other cases were soon confirmed at Moonbi, Berry, Wilberforce, Cattai and Wyong. It subsequently emerged that most of the horses at Centennial Park had attended an event in Maitland that previous weekend. By 27 August over 400 horses on 50 properties had exhibited symptoms and this extended as far as Gatton in Queensland. Quarantine areas were established right across New South Wales and interstate movement of horses was prohibited.

I guess that this demonstrates the breathtaking speed with which some of these exotic diseases can spread. A disease such as equine influenza can spread, with aerosol transmission, up to several kilometres and therefore no direct contact is required. The initial escape from Eastern Creek was subsequently found to be due to human error. Horseracing stopped in New South Wales and it even threatened the Victorian Spring Racing Carnival. The cost of the outbreak was enormous—211 race meetings were cancelled and it is estimated that gaming turnover fell by \$550 million as a result of the outbreak. It took a monumental effort by government and by the private veterinary workforce to contain the outbreak effectively.

Equine influenza is a highly contagious virus able to be transmitted on clothing, shoes and car tyres, and strict quarantine measures are required to contain it. Horse-to-horse transmission is rapid and, generally, if horses come into contact with one another, transmission is complete. The transmissibility of this disease meant that it was incredibly labour-intensive for the veterinary profession. Practices that did a large amount of equine work found that all other work within each practice effectively needed to stop. Therefore all they were doing each and every day was identifying horses that were struck with this illness, cases that required treatment, providing treatment, or swabbing horses to obtain positive identification. Their task was incredibly labour-intensive.

The speed with which this disease can spread demonstrates why we need a national registration model so that we have available a mobile workforce that can come into the State quickly, or veterinarians from New South Wales can go to other States to help to contain outbreaks and disease quickly. Equine influenza was a terrible disaster in New South Wales but it pales into insignificance when compared to the potential damage that can be wrought by another equally contagious disease, that is, foot and mouth disease. The 2001 outbreak in the United Kingdom resulted in 2,000 cases and saw over 10 million sheep and cattle being euthanased. All sheep and cattle within three kilometres of the confirmed outbreak were compulsory slaughtered.

By the time the disease was halted it is estimated to have cost the United Kingdom economy \$16 billion. Many Australian vets travelled to the United Kingdom to assist in disease identification and control. It is vital to have available at short notice a mobile workforce such as the one to which I referred earlier. In situations where no mobile workforce is available we experience systemic failures when trying to control such a disease. There are anecdotal stories from the United Kingdom about the Army setting up a roadblock around a positive case. Members of the Army, bless their souls, would allow people out who were not meant to be coming out but refuse entry to people going into the quarantine area who were meant to be going in to deal with the outbreak.

Mobile workforces with expertise in managing and containing these outbreaks are definitely required. During the 2001 outbreak in the United Kingdom many of my colleagues went there to work. Whilst it was a terrible disaster for the United Kingdom it meant that the Australian veterinary workforce now has an enormous amount of corporate knowledge relating to foot and mouth disease. There were lessons to be learned from that 2001 outbreak. Whilst we have never experienced a similar disaster in Australia, there is always the potential for such a disaster to occur, which is one of the reasons why we have such strict quarantine measures in this country. The vets who assisted in controlling that outbreak subsequently provided valuable information to the Department of Primary Industries, which now has a more acute understanding of how this disease would affect New South Wales. Foot and mouth disease is known to affect sheep, cattle and pigs.

However, if it infected the wild pig population in New South Wales it would be incredibly difficult and expensive to control or eliminate and perhaps even become endemic amongst the wild pig population in State national parks and on private property. An outbreak of that sort would be massively expensive to primary producers and would cause billions of dollars worth of damage to the New South Wales economy. This legislation provides an extra safeguard and would enable us to control or eradicate any outbreak of exotic disease, and hopefully nothing as dramatic as foot and mouth. The biosecurity benefits generated by this bill are enormous and there are benefits also for consumers and veterinarians. As a registered veterinarian in New South Wales it gives me enormous pleasure to support this bill. I commend the Minister for introducing it and I commend all those who have been involved in working on reciprocal arrangements between the States and Territories.

**Mr TONY ISSA** (Granville) [12.29 p.m.]: I support this wonderful bill. I believe it will be supported by all members of this Chamber. The National Recognition of Veterinary Registration model will allow the 9,800 veterinarians currently registered in Australia to travel and work freely across the country as long as they are registered in the State in which they reside. In particular, it will allow interstate veterinarians to assist with emergency animal disease outbreaks in New South Wales as well as in other States and Territories. National recognition of veterinary registration works in a way that is similar to drivers' licensing. To obtain a driver's licence, we must all pass a number of tests to become registered to drive in New South Wales. Our driver licence also allows us to drive in all other States and Territories without needing to register in those jurisdictions first.

Without the important amendments that the Government is proposing, veterinarians would need to be registered in New South Wales before they could contribute during emergency situations here. It might take a couple of months to process a registration application. This is unacceptable in an emergency. The time taken to sort out paperwork and to wait for registration approval could seriously compromise an emergency animal disease response. These amendments are vital to enable quick responses in animal emergencies. The bill will allow veterinarians from other States to quickly respond and assist with disease outbreaks or other emergencies in New South Wales. New South Wales is no stranger to animal emergencies. In 2007 this State experienced an outbreak of equine influenza that cost horse-related industries upwards of \$126 million. Veterinarians from hundreds of veterinary practices in New South Wales were directly engaged in controlling this disease.

The bill will provide an efficient national system of registration for veterinarians who are practising in New South Wales. The veterinary profession requires dedication and a comprehensive knowledge and



understanding of animals. Across Australia, anyone wanting to become a veterinarian must study at university for a minimum of five years. Many veterinarians provide a range of services free or at cost. For example, in New South Wales they regularly work with organisations such as the RSPCA, Guide Dogs and the Wildlife Information and Rescue Service. Their services to those organisations include desexing animals and providing care and treatment to sick, injured and stray animals.

It is unnecessary for each jurisdiction to require separate registration of veterinarians when standards across Australia are uniformly high. Let me stress that every veterinary board in each State and Territory requires equivalent veterinary qualifications and practical experience, providing a single, uniform national standard. It is because of those uniform requirements that New South Wales will not be flooded by veterinarians with lower standards than the New South Wales public is used to and expects. With the proposed introduction of the national recognition of registration, animals in New South Wales will continue to be provided with a high standard of care because of those uniform national standards.

The requirement for veterinarians to register in each jurisdiction where they intend to practise creates a financial burden not only on the veterinarian but also on the client. Currently it costs a veterinarian upwards of \$1,770 in fees to be registered in every Australian State and Territory. The requirement to register in each jurisdiction where veterinarians intend to practise also causes delays in getting interstate veterinarians to respond during an emergency animal disease outbreak. The proposed amendments will result in some loss of income for the Veterinary Practitioners Board as the number of registration applications and fees it receives decrease. However, the board will realise some savings under the new system with a reduction in administration costs and is willing and able to absorb the net loss without needing to increase fees now or in the future.

There has been very strong support for these amendments among stakeholder groups in New South Wales, including those associated with livestock industries and the veterinary profession. For example, the President of the New South Wales branch of the Australian Veterinary Association believes that the present registration system no longer provides the most appropriate and efficient mechanism for the regulation of modern veterinary practice. She considers that national recognition of veterinary registration is one of the reforms that are vital to the profession meeting existing and future market demand for veterinary services. The national registration system is simple to implement, facilitates employment mobility and will maintain the current State and Territory veterinary boards. The proposal is also consistent with principles of mutual recognition, the reduction of red tape and the objectives of National Competition Policy.

The bill includes sensible amendments that will allow registered veterinarians to practise in other States and Territories without needing to go through the expense of registering in each jurisdiction. National recognition for registration rightly recognises the consistent standards that veterinarians across Australia bring to their work. We should be proud of our veterinarians and the great work they do. The proposed amendments will help to reduce costs and red tape. I commend the bill to the House.

**Mr CHRIS PATTERSON** (Camden) [12.36 p.m.]: The Veterinary Practice Amendment (Interstate Veterinary Practitioners) Bill 2011 will enable New South Wales veterinary registrations to be recognised in all Australian jurisdictions. My electorate of Camden has the University Veterinary Teaching Hospital. The Camden facility is acclaimed internationally for its health care and welfare of animals. It is a general practice veterinary clinic, a referral centre where other veterinarians send complex cases, and a teaching hospital whose graduates are dedicated to the compassionate and skilled care of companion and production animals. Services are provided for horses, small animals, livestock, birds, reptiles, exotic pets and wildlife.

Last year a conference centre honouring Camden's favourite daughter Liz Kernohan was opened at the University of Sydney, Camden Farms. Dr Kernohan, a former Camden State Liberal member of Parliament and the municipality's first female mayor, sadly passed away in 2004. Dean of the Camden campus, Professor Leo Jeffcott, said the conference centre aimed to honour the larger than life Dr Kernohan. The conference centre was named after Liz in recognition of the contribution Liz made to Camden and the university. It includes a 250-seat tiered theatre, meeting rooms and a café. Liz always represented and fought for the people of Camden. Dr Kernohan received her Bachelor of Science and Agriculture degree at the university in 1960. For a female to enter that profession at that time was most unusual. Liz lectured in animal husbandry at the farms before being appointed to the position of director in 1982.

Australia in the late 1800s was very much a land enjoying the fruits of primary industry. The fledgling veterinary profession was making a great contribution to this prosperity. However, the problem was that if

Australians wished to obtain a degree in veterinary science, they needed to travel and apply to established schools either in England or Scotland. I know we have come a long way since then, but here we are speaking on a bill that will enable our New South Wales trained veterinarians to work in other States in Australia.

It is true that veterinary certificates or diplomas were obtainable from certain Australian institutions, but they lacked standing in the Commonwealth. Consequently, through much agitation by individuals and by the Australian Veterinary Association during the 1890s and early 1900s, veterinary schools were proposed for both Melbourne and Sydney. In 1909 the University of Melbourne had its first intake of students, while the University of Sydney took its first students in 1910. At the opening in 1910, there were about 16 enthusiastic students, some of whom had waited for years to enter the course. With this expansion of undergraduate numbers came an expansion of the faculty, and by 1950 it had three departments and by 1966 it had six departments.

They were spread on two campuses, one at Camden and one at Camperdown, with Camden catering to the teaching of livestock veterinary science. We are very proud of our Veterinary Science facility in Camden. Veterinary practice is now a highly regarded profession. Many young people aspire to become a veterinarian and live the dream of working with animals. The facility offers accommodation so the students do not need to travel. Camden's rural lifestyle enables students to gain experience by having a teaching facility at their doorstep. My very learned colleague, the member for Charlestown, Andrew Cornwell, also obtained his veterinary degree at the Camden institute.

**Mr Ryan Park:** Very learned.

**Mr CHRIS PATTERSON:** Very learned, I thank you. In his years at the university, it was not uncommon to see a young Andrew supporting the local economy through frequenting many of the watering holes in the Camden central business district, as did many of his colleagues, past and present. The member for Charlestown often reminisces about watching Shane Warne's ball of the century in 1993 in the back bar of the Merino Tavern, which is my family's former hotel, whilst a student at the Camden campus. One of our own veterinarians in Camden, Dr Steve Ferguson, is now the President-elect of the Australian Veterinary Association. His dedication to the profession and mentoring of other young students through his business, Macarthur Veterinary Clinic, are invaluable.

Dr Ferguson, along with other committee members, Peter Standen, Ian Gannell, Camden Councillor Debby Dewbery, Camden Deputy Mayor Lara Symkowiak, Emma Robilliard, Michelle Burrell, Carey McIntyre, Stewart Ollis, Michelle Gallo, Colleen Ritchard, Ted Gillroy and I, currently are organising a community event in Camden, Paws in the Park, which will be held on 23 October 2011 to raise money for educating people about good animal management, such as desexing and microchipping. In July, Deputy Mayor Lara Symkowiak and I hosted Steve Coleman, who is the chief executive officer of the RSPCA, at a very positive meeting at the site of the event, Bicentennial Equestrian Park, to show him where the event will be held and to get the RSPCA on board. The event is expected to attract people from all over the Macarthur region. Many of the students currently at the University of Sydney Veterinary School will be offering assistance in microchipping animals. I thank committee member Colleen Ritchard for organising that. Dr Katrina Warren also will be attending as a special guest on the day.

This bill will enable veterinarians to travel around Australia using their skills. They will have the opportunity to work in various environments, which can only extend their knowledge and experience. Our veterinarians will be able to work across borders on national animal health issues, and pool resources as well as expertise. Only two weeks ago by chance I caught the train into Parliament with local veterinarian, Matthew Playford, who welcomed this initiative by the State Government. It is not uncommon for Matt, a world renowned specialist in his chosen field of parasitology, to travel overseas and interstate, so it is ludicrous that Matt would not be able to treat animals when he is interstate. It is wonderful that in 2011 we are doing something that should have been done many years ago, that is, not force qualified veterinarians to register in each State in which they choose to live and work. Government red tape will be cut and that can only benefit everyone involved. I commend this bill to the House.

**Mr GEOFF PROVEST** (Tweed) [12.44 p.m.]: I am 100 per cent for the Tweed. The Veterinary Practice Amendment (Interstate Veterinary Practitioners) Bill 2010 is crucial. The Veterinary Practice Act 2003 regulates the provision of veterinary services in New South Wales. Under the Act, the Veterinary Practitioners Board is responsible for registering veterinary practitioners and veterinary specialists, licensing veterinary hospitals and investigating complaints about the practice of veterinary science in New South Wales. Currently,

veterinarians are required to be registered separately in each State or Territory in which they intend to practise. This creates an administrative burden for governments and additional costs for an increasingly mobile workforce.

In 2007 the Primary Industries Ministerial Council endorsed a model for a national recognition of veterinary registration. This model allows veterinarians who are registered in other States and Territories to be deemed to be registered in New South Wales. Victoria became the first State to implement the national model by commencing legislation on 1 January 2011. If this bill passes, New South Wales will be the second. The other States and Territories are expected to follow. The bill will allow veterinarians who are registered in other States and Territories to practise in New South Wales without being registered here. Among other things the bill will ensure that any conditions placed on a veterinarian registered interstate will apply in New South Wales, unless the board waives or modifies it.

This bill is of particular interest to me because, as the Acting-Speaker and member for Heathcote knows, the fine electorate of the Tweed borders the Gold Coast, which is Australia's sixth largest city. In the couple of years since the former Government abolished inspections of cattle on the Queensland and New South Wales border, the Tweed has had a number of outbreaks of cattle ticks. In the past couple of years a dairy farmer in my electorate spent more than \$200,000 to build up his dairy herd, only to lose almost all his stock following an outbreak of cattle ticks. One of the problems was that the local veterinarians were away from the region. The only veterinarians who were available were registered in Queensland, which is only 20 minutes drive from his property, and as they were not licensed in New South Wales, he could not use their services. If the farmer had put his cattle on a truck and gone to Queensland, the veterinarians in Queensland could have given the cattle the vaccine and necessary treatment.

In 2007 in this House we discussed the equine influenza outbreak that resulted in quarantining the Border Park Racecourse's trotting facility, which is in New South Wales but near the Gold Coast airport. That facility could not access the influenza vaccine because Sydney deemed it to be located in Queensland, although it is located in New South Wales. I was approached by the operators of that facility to make representations to the Queensland Government. However, that Government deemed the facility to be located in New South Wales, so their veterinarians could not operate there. They remained in limbo until I made further representations to the then Minister for Primary Industries and we overturned that ruling. There are many cross-border anomalies.

The Veterinary Practice Amendment (Interstate Veterinary Practitioners) Bill 2010 seeks to address just one of them. Problems also occur in our prime agricultural areas in relation to cattle and other livestock, in particular, horses. New South Wales, and the Tweed in particular, has a large number of horses on agistment because it is very close to the site of the Magic Millions on the Gold Coast. I have spoken many times in this Chamber about the unnecessary barriers created by conflicting legislation at State level, whose effect is almost as invincible as is the Great Wall of China. In some cases State legislation can create a border across a road between Queensland and New South Wales.

I remember when the Hon. Joe Tripodi was the Minister for Finance and was in charge of harmonisation between the States in the Council of Australian Governments. I had a lengthy discussion with him and asked him what steps had been taken to create harmony between New South Wales and equivalent Queensland legislation. He said that the Government had done nothing; that Queensland Labor does not like New South Wales Labor, and New South Wales Labor does not like Queensland Labor. As a result, nothing was done—much to the detriment of the people of the Tweed.

**Mr Ryan Park:** Did he visit Coffs Harbour?

**Mr GEOFF PROVEST:** I believe he does have an interest in Coffs Harbour and he has a few close friends there. I assume he sees them on a regular basis. This is a very important piece of legislation. It represents another small step towards breaking down some of the existing cross-border anomalies. The New South Wales-Queensland border was established well over 100 years ago and we have moved on. I praise the Minister for Agriculture, the Hon. Katrina Hodgkinson, for introducing this legislation and for her active participation. This bill affects not only my electorate but also the electorates of the members for Northern Tablelands, Barwon, Murray-Darling, Albury and Monaro who all must deal with similar cross-border issues. The more we can do to support sensible legislation, the better off our constituents will be. In many regards, this legislation is more than sensible—it is simply common sense. I am afraid that common sense went out the window under the previous Government, but is good to see the new Liberal-Nationals Government bringing it back. I commend the bill to the House.

**Mrs ROZA SAGE** (Blue Mountains) [12.52 p.m.]: I support the Veterinary Practice Amendment (Interstate Veterinary Practitioners) Bill. It is high time that veterinarians across Australia had a national system of registration. The national recognition of veterinary registration model, once implemented, will allow the 9,800 veterinarians across Australia to work freely across the nation, provided that they are registered in the State in which they reside. Such a system will enable us to avoid the problems outlined by the member for Tweed that have had dire consequences for primary producers in the northern part of the State. At present there are eight separate State and Territory boards with different registration requirements applying to each area.

Unlike other work situations and other professions, veterinarians are required to register in the State or Territory in which they work. As a result they cannot work interstate to assist with emergency animal disease outbreaks in New South Wales and in other States and Territories. The current national body, the Australasian Veterinary Boards Council Incorporated, is an incorporated association formed by agreement among the State and Territory veterinary boards of Australia to provide a legal entity that has the authority to speak and act on behalf of all registering authorities. The board comprises the State and Territory veterinary boards of Australia, the Veterinary Council of New Zealand, the Australian Veterinary Association and the New Zealand Veterinary Association.

It does not have legislative powers, but the council serves an important function for the profession by accrediting veterinary schools and courses leading to a degree of veterinary science or veterinary medicine; assessing the suitability for practice in Australia of persons with foreign veterinary qualifications; advising and making recommendations to veterinary boards in Australia in relation to accreditation of veterinary schools and courses; assessing the suitability for practice of persons veterinary qualifications; importantly, establishing uniform criteria for recognition of qualifications for registration; providing advice on matters concerning the occupational regulations of veterinarians; and encouraging standardisation and quality assurance of veterinary services to the community.

As members can see, the veterinary profession already has in place a comprehensive system of standardising veterinary practice in Australia. In other words, there is already a system in place that ensures uniformity of standards within Australia for veterinary practice. Because of those standards and the monitoring of overseas qualified veterinary professionals, New South Wales will not be subject to an influx of veterinarians with lower standards. What remains is for veterinarian registration to reflect this situation. In 2007, the Primary Industries Ministerial Council endorsed a model for the national recognition of veterinary registration that would allow veterinarians registered in other States and Territories to be deemed to be registered in New South Wales.

Victoria was the first State to sign up to the national model, with legislation commencing on 1 January 2011. If this bill is passed, New South Wales will be the second, and other States are expected to follow. Other professions, in particular the health professions, have recognised the same problems associated with interstate work restrictions and separate registrations in each State. As a result, national registration boards recently have been established and are working well. The requirement for veterinarians to register in each jurisdiction where they intend to practise creates a financial burden for an increasingly mobile veterinary workforce and its clients.

Currently it would cost a veterinarian upwards of \$1,770 in fees to be registered in every Australian State and Territory. In addition, the requirement to register in each jurisdiction where veterinarians intend to practise also causes delays in obtaining interstate veterinarians during an emergency animal disease response. It may take many months to process registration, decreasing the response capability during emergencies, such as when equine influenza breaks out—something that occurred in the recent past. The equine influenza outbreak in 2007 devastated the New South Wales racing industry and cost industry hundreds of millions of dollars.

Apart from the financial hardship, the outbreak caused personal hardship. Recreational horse owners were quarantined for months until the epidemic was over. Many of the people involved were caught away from home at gymkhanas and horse shows when the areas were quarantined. The disease has a high morbidity rate and its impact is more severe upon stabled horses. The racing industry suffered greatly during the epidemic: Initially more than 8,000 horses in racing stables and on spelling farms were vaccinated. The virus spread rapidly and widely until quarantine contingences were established. After the initial response, sampling of previously infected horses took place and more than 900 horses subsequently were tested within the racing industry. The magnitude of the outbreak and the workload of veterinarians were enormous. This is where the ability to quickly mobilise interstate help is of the essence.

Veterinarians from hundreds of veterinary practices in New South Wales were directly engaged in controlling and eradicating the disease. Veterinarians identified and isolated infected animals. They vaccinated

horses, educated horse owners on biosecurity principles and treated sick horses. They worked tirelessly on farms and in laboratories to eliminate this disease. Overall, more than 50,000 horses in New South Wales were vaccinated and more than 132,000 equine influenza tests were carried out during the outbreak. However, the only veterinarians who joined in the campaign were those registered in New South Wales.

The amendments in this legislation are vital to enable us to respond quickly in animal emergencies, such as the equine influenza epidemic. It will allow veterinarians from other States to respond quickly to assist with disease outbreaks or other emergencies in New South Wales. The Australian Veterinary Boards Council already has created a national database for the details of all registered veterinarians from State and Territory boards. As each State and Territory introduces legislation to recognise national registration, the council will be responsible for maintaining the national database.

There has been strong support for these amendments among stakeholder groups in New South Wales. The national registration system is simple to implement, allows for employment mobility and will maintain the current State and Territory veterinary boards. It reflects the greater mobility of the population in general and in particular veterinary professionals. This is a sensible bill that reflects the modern collaborative approach to veterinary practice. It is essential for the profession to be able to meet existing and future manpower demands for veterinary services.

**Mr Geoff Provest:** It should have been enacted a long time ago.

**Mrs ROZA SAGE:** The member for Tweed is correct. Our veterinarians are highly skilled and valued professionals who adhere to a high standard of work. I know that is true because when I did my dentistry degree at the University of Queensland, the basic sciences were taught to those studying medicine, dentistry and veterinary science, and the course was rigorous. These proposed amendments will assist in maintaining this high standard and will enhance work opportunities. I commend this bill to the House.

**Mr JAI ROWELL** (Wollondilly) [12.59 p.m.]: I support the Veterinary Practice Amendment (Interstate Veterinary Practitioners) Bill 2011. The Veterinary Practice Act 2003 regulates veterinary service provision in New South Wales and, as it stands at the moment, vets are required to be registered separately in each State or Territory in which they wish to practise. Under the Act a board is tasked with registering veterinary practitioners and licensing veterinary hospitals. The problem that has existed in the industry for some time under the current regime is that the New South Wales Government bears a cost burden from this. There are also additional costs for individual veterinarians who, during their professional career, choose to move around the country. It has been long recognised that there needs to be a national scheme to allow vets to register only once. I note that in 2007 the Primary Industries Ministerial Council endorsed a national model of veterinary recognition.

Labor Governments across this country take a long time to listen to industry and respond. In fact, they did not respond and it took a Victorian Liberal Government to commence the operation of legislation of the national scheme this year. If the legislation passes this Parliament New South Wales will be the second jurisdiction to have enacted the model legislation. Both involve Liberal-Nationals Governments getting on with the job. I have been informed also that the other States and Territories are likely to follow suit. If the bill passes, the National Recognition of Veterinary Registration model, once implemented, will allow vets who are registered in Australia—they number approximately 10,000—to work in any State in which they live. I am not sure why such a scheme has not been implemented earlier, but we all know that Labor was not on the ball. To become a vet anywhere in Australia one must undertake university study for a minimum of five years. Having the registration nationally recognised will mean that the New South Wales standard will be the national standard, ensuring the continuation of excellent animal welfare, whether the animal be a Rover, a Kitty, a Nemo, a Betsy or a Daisy.

The bill will ensure that any condition placed on a vet registered interstate will apply in New South Wales, unless the board deems it necessary to modify or waive those conditions. It also allows the board to suspend or cancel a deemed registration where a vet is suspended or deregistered in another jurisdiction, and it provides for the creation of a national register of vets. New South Wales will be able to access and contribute to the register. The Minister informs me that key stakeholders were widely consulted during the development of the bill.

**ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Gareth Ward):** Normally, in accordance with standing and sessional orders, at 1.00 p.m. debate is interrupted to proceed with committee reports but, with the concurrence of the House, I propose to allow the member for Wollondilly to conclude his speech.

**Mr JAI ROWELL:** I appreciate the indulgence of the House. The Minister informs me that, in the development of the bill, key stakeholders were widely consulted, including the boards in other jurisdictions. The statutory process also invited individual vets and other relevant bodies to comment. In a nutshell, the veterinary profession strongly supports the amendments. And why not? It costs more than \$1,700 to be registered in every State and Territory. Delays are caused as a result of the requirement for vets to register individually in each State and Territory. This can mean delays for interstate vet response teams into New South Wales in an emergency animal disease response. The delay can take up to a couple of months and places major emergency animal disease responses in jeopardy.

I know how important this issue is to my electorate of Wollondilly, where we have the home of harness racing at Menangle Tabcorp Park. And should there be a need for an emergency response—as was required to the equine influenza outbreak in 2007—millions of dollars could be lost to the industry, which, in itself, would have a negative impact on our local economy through its effect on tourism and other lost opportunities. The equine influenza outbreak of 2007 cost the horse and related industries in New South Wales over \$126 million. If this situation were to arise again in Wollondilly many people would be out of jobs. That is why I support measures that would allow for a timely response to protect local jobs. The response in 2007 required hundreds of veterinary practices in this State to be directly involved in controlling the outbreak. I acknowledge the contribution made by the member for Charlestown, who has told me on a number of occasions what that actually meant for his area.

Vets right across the State, and no doubt from my electorate, identified and isolated infected horses, vaccinated them and undertook education programs on biosecurity principles. During the outbreak our great vets across this State vaccinated some 50,000 horses and carried out more than 132,000 equine influenza tests. This mammoth task undertaken by New South Wales vets significantly stretched their resources and caused their local practices to be understaffed. Had the national scheme been in place, interstate vets could have helped in a timely manner. I am informed by the member for Orange that the Department of Primary Industries, which is located in his electorate, also played a significant role alongside the vets. I know that the member for Orange is grateful for this. I spent a lot of time as a child competing in gymkhanas in Mudgee in his electorate.

**Dr Geoff Lee:** That was a long time ago.

**Mr JAI ROWELL:** It was a long time ago—thank you to the member for Parramatta—but I know that is something that the member for Orange is very passionate about. As I have heard in this debate, you only need one drivers licence to be able to drive in any State or Territory in this country. The national scheme, as proposed in this bill, will allow for an identical approach to vets. Vets do a wonderful job and in my electorate of Wollondilly we have many fantastic vets looking after our four-legged friends. My electorate of Wollondilly comprises two distinct parts—one rural, one urban. In the urban side of my electorate are a large number of companion animals such as dogs, cats, birds et cetera.

These pets become—as their name suggests—companions. They become part of the family and any bill that allows the consistency and clarity of professional standards which allow a high level of treatment should these companion animals require it is a good thing for local families. In the rural end of my electorate are many properties and farms—families living a rural lifestyle. Many constituents rely on the land to make a living. The health and welfare of work animals, such as horses and donkeys, together with meat and dairy beasts such as cows, chickens and sheep, are all vital to our farmers' existence.

It is equally as vital that this bill be supported to establish a national board to ensure that, should any outbreak such as the equine influenza present itself again, we can mobilise vets from other States to assist in a timely manner. This system will be simple to implement, it assists employment mobility and the State and Territory boards will remain. It is consistent with principles of mutual recognition, the reduction of red tape and the objective of national competition policy. These are sensible amendments which will allow registered vets to practise in other States and Territories, without having the hassle of reregistering in each jurisdiction. A national registration scheme will cut red tape, promote consistency and encourage the great work of our vets. I commend the bill to the House.

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

**LEGISLATION REVIEW COMMITTEE****Report: Legislation Review Digest No. 3/55****Question—That the House take note of the report—proposed.**

**Dr GEOFF LEE** (Parramatta) [1.09 p.m.]: Legislation Review Digest No. 3/55 was tabled on 6 September 2011. This is the third report by the Legislation Review Committee in the Fifty-fifth Parliament and it is expected that a new report will be tabled in Parliament each sitting week. I am speaking with sadness to this report as deputy chair recognising that on Monday the chair, the member for Myall Lakes, had an unfortunate incident in the Chamber and went to St Vincent's Hospital, and I understand he was transferred to John Hunter Hospital last night. I am sure both sides of the Chamber wish him a speedy recovery. I would prefer the member for Myall Lakes, who is a fantastic member, to present this report.

As the Parliament is aware, the committee identifies issues in proposed legislation and regulations that may trespass on personal rights and liberties and provides brief commentaries on the issues identified in the digest. Sometimes the committee will refer a matter to the Parliament if the committee considers that the matter warrants further attention. On other occasions the committee will simply provide commentary on matters deemed worthy for discussion, even if the committee does not ultimately find a particular provision trespasses on personal rights. The report examined four bills that were introduced in the sitting week commencing 23 August 2011. Three of those four bills are to commence operation by proclamation.

It is standard for the committee to comment on bills that provide for commencement on an unspecified date, and the committee prefers that commencement of a bill is provided for either on a designated date or upon assent. The committee also considered the Identification Legislation Amendment Bill 2011, in particular the provisions enabling police officers to request individuals to remove their head coverings in certain circumstances. We considered the possible impact on personal rights and liberties balanced against the statutory safeguards designed to ameliorate any impacts potentially created by the bill. I refer members to the report if they require further information on the bill or any of the other bills scrutinised by the committee.

The committee aims to assist members in their consideration of bills during parliamentary debates by raising awareness and respect for personal rights and liberties. I trust that the committee has added value to Parliament's consideration of these bills and will continue to value-add to future debates. I also commend the committee staff for their excellent assistance, particularly during my transition as deputy chair.

**Ms TANIA MIHAILUK** (Bankstown) [1.11 p.m.]: I commend the deputy chair of the Legislation Review Committee, Dr Geoff Lee, on presenting Legislation Review Digest No. 3/55 and on behalf of the Opposition I wish the chair, Mr Stephen Bromhead, a speedy recovery from the serious injury he recently sustained. I also commend the committee staff for their comprehensive research on the bills considered by the committee. I acknowledge the contributions made by the committee members in accordance with section 8A of the Legislation Review Act as to whether any of the proposed bills by express words or otherwise trespasses unduly on personal rights and liberties; makes rights, liberties or obligations unduly dependent upon insufficiently defined administrative powers; makes rights, liberties or obligations unduly dependent upon non-reviewable decisions; inappropriately delegates legislative powers; and insufficiently subjects the exercise of legislative power to parliamentary scrutiny. The committee reports its resolutions to both Houses.

The House has the power to pass bills without the committee having considered them but the committee is not precluded from making a report because a bill has been passed or has become an Act. The committee staff works to a tight deadline preparing meeting papers and having the digest completed in time for printing. In spite of that deadline they deliver comprehensive and accessible advice on time. I acknowledge the other committee members: the member for Swansea, the member for Rockdale, the Hon. Shaoquett Moselmane, the Hon. Dr Peter Phelps and Mr David Shoebridge. This week's report is a much thinner volume than previous volumes, with only four bills and one regulation having been considered. Once again I am left to ponder what the Government did during its 16 years in opposition. It had plenty of time to consider its legislative agenda, yet after six months in office it appears to have run out of steam. The lack of legislation before the Parliament certainly calls the Government's electoral bid into question. The Government claimed it was going to "fix" New South Wales—

**ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Gareth Ward):** Order! I draw the member for Bankstown back to the leave of the report.

**Ms TANIA MIHAILUK:** One of the bills considered was the Transport Legislation Amendment Bill 2011. I will not repeat the comments I made during debate on this bill but I congratulate my colleagues in the other place for successfully amending the bill to protect the rights of transport workers. I also congratulate those crossbench members who made the brave decision to support the Opposition's amendment. However, I am concerned that the amendment to ensure that passenger trains were to be prioritised over freight was defeated. Despite our political differences, I believe that members opposite have the best interests of their electorates at heart.

The bill has opened the door for freight services to be prioritised over passenger services. Despite the Minister's guarantees, we all know that there is a real difference between a promise and a legislative obligation. I repeat that it will not be only the commuters in my electorate who will suffer but also the commuters from the Central Coast and the North Shore and those who travel along the Western Line. The member for Myall Lakes has said that he hopes the committee will take a bipartisan approach, and I share those sentiments. To date the committee has taken a bipartisan approach: it appears to be working well. However, I am concerned about the Hon. Dr Peter Phelps because he appears to be a dominating force on the committee.

**Question—That the House take note of the report—put and resolved in the affirmative.**

**Report noted.**

*[The Acting-Speaker (Mr Gareth Ward) left the chair at 1.16 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15p.m.]*

#### QUESTION TIME

---

*[Question time commenced at 2.15 p.m.]*

#### ORICA PLANT INCIDENT

**Mr JOHN ROBERTSON:** My question is addressed to the Premier. Why did the Premier personally lobby the crossbench members of the Legislative Council to block the inquiry into the Orica chemical leak?

**Mr BARRY O'FARRELL:** The short answer is I did not. But never let me waste four minutes and 55 seconds. The longer answer is that on the day I announced that Brendan O'Reilly would be conducting an independent inquiry into all the events surrounding the Orica spill—an inquiry with broad terms of reference to be conducted by an impeccable person in terms of his independence—I offered crossbench members of the Legislative Council the usual briefing that even the former Government offered to crossbench members. Two of them responded. I took Mr O'Reilly to meet them. Mr O'Reilly outlined his terms of reference and answered their questions. I think the meeting went for less than half an hour about his terms of reference. As a result, we left. However, I note that clearly they were satisfied because the terms of reference for the upper House inquiry were amended to ensure that they had Mr O'Reilly's report before the upper House inquiry commenced.

#### SYDNEY FERRIES

**Ms GABRIELLE UPTON:** My question is addressed to the Premier. What progress has the Government made in attracting private operators to run Sydney's ferries?

**Mr BARRY O'FARRELL:** If ever there was a demonstration as to why this city would be better off with our ferry services conducted by the private sector, it was on display yesterday. In an act of bastardry—

**The SPEAKER:** Order! This is not a good start to question time. Government members and Opposition members will come to order.

**Mr BARRY O'FARRELL:** Without advance notice to the travelling public, about 100 ferry deckhands walked off the job on the instructions of their union bosses to join the so-called day of chaos yesterday. That day of chaos saw thousands of people apparently send me SMS messages, only for me not to receive them. The story from the union head office kept changing. Apparently thousands of SMS messages were to come to me as emails. They started to trickle in at 4.30 p.m. yesterday; I think we had 400. The good news is that a public servant in the Department of Premier and Cabinet will not have to work overtime to respond to those emails.



The bastardry of the ferry workers was underscored by the simple fact that the dispute in question—the 2.5 per cent wages cap and the Industrial Relations Commission—has no impact on deckhands. Deckhands are employed under a Federal award, so nothing to do with their work, regulations or pay has anything to do with the dispute yesterday. Deckhands are employed under an award that is hardly onerous. They are on a base salary of more than \$75,000 a year. They are the only people I know who get more paid annual leave than the Leader of the Opposition: they get 10 weeks paid annual leave. And Sydney Harbour ferry deckhands get travel passes that entitle them to free public transport on any mode across New South Wales. But the deckhands still decided to act illegally and walk off the job yesterday—

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

**Mr BARRY O'FARRELL:** —for no good reason, leaving thousands of passengers stranded. Indeed, Sydney Ferries estimates that up to 10,000 people would have normally caught ferries during the period that these deckhands absented themselves from their job. That group included a woman in pain from cancer who had caught a ferry to the city but was left stranded at Circular Quay. Thankfully, Sydney Ferries provided a Cabcharge so she could get home. Another woman who was unable to catch the service to Circular Quay said, "If the unions want our support, they aren't going about it the right way. I'm very angry." A group of schoolchildren from the Blue Mountains came to the city to visit Cockatoo Island. In the end they only got there because Sydney Ferries employed a private vessel to take them there.

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

**Mr BARRY O'FARRELL:** There are hundreds of other stories, including the aged gentleman who was travelling to the funeral of his mate but did not get there because ferry workers do not give a damn about the people they are meant to serve. Whilst that dispute was going on and those ferry workers walked off the job, private ferries were still operating as normal. They did not abandon their customers or leave people stranded for no good reason. It goes without saying that the people of this State, the commuters who rely upon public transport and, in particular, those ferries, deserve better. They deserve a workforce that is committed to the ferry services, that understands the importance of the public transport that it provides for this city and State and that does not walk out over an issue that does not affect it.

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

**Mr BARRY O'FARRELL:** That is why the path recommended to the former Government by Brett Walker, SC, is being adopted by this Government. We are seeking to franchise Sydney Ferries. I am pleased to advise the House that five private sector proposals are currently being reviewed from a short list of tenders.

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

**Mr BARRY O'FARRELL:** These short-listed tenderers will be invited to present a full case as to why they should run Sydney Ferries. It is our hope that by the end of next year private operators will be running those ferry services and the appalling behaviour of yesterday is a thing of the past.

### ORICA PLANT INCIDENT

**Ms LINDA BURNEY:** My question is directed to the Minister for Health. Is the Minister confident that the methodology used to determine the potential health risks associated with the Orica chemical leak were robust and best practice?

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

**Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER:** The simple answer is yes. I have absolute confidence in Dr Kerry Chant, Chief Health Officer, who has been handling these public health aspects on behalf of the Government. She is a marvellous woman and I have absolute confidence in her and in her assessments.

### STATE BUDGET

**Mr CHRIS SPENCE:** My question is addressed to the Treasurer. What has been the response of the financial market to the budget and to the plans of the New South Wales Government to get the State's finances back on track?

**Mr MIKE BAIRD:** It is fascinating that Opposition members have already stopped talking about the budget.

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

**Mr MIKE BAIRD:** They have also stopped looking at the budget papers. However, I look forward to any questions that they wish to ask about the budget.

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

**Mr MIKE BAIRD:** Is it not great to have responsible government back in Macquarie Street? Is it not great to have responsible government taking the hard decisions to get our finances back under control? Is it not great to have responsible government providing the infrastructure that we have been promised but that has never been delivered, and improving our services? I am not the only person who is saying this; a number of people have made comments about the budget, which I think are worth noting. ANZ senior economists said in their economic update:

This Budget places a high priority on State infrastructure and services. The policy task in this area is extremely large and today's Budget is a good start.

UBS said:

Despite a worse starting point...the new Government has still broadly pushed ahead with significant infrastructure plans ... there are long-term (productivity and social) benefits from infrastructure for future growth. Other worthy policies include changing stamp duty exemptions to focus on only first home buyers purchasing new property; and a \$4000 payroll rebate for the first 100,000 full-time jobs.

David Larocca, head of Infrastructure at Ernst and Young had this to say—and this is important as it has not occurred for 16 years:

They are doing what they said they were going to do. NSW hasn't had a positive track record in recent years on delivering on projects, which undermined confidence in the market. This [budget] will provide welcome confidence to the market that this Government is serious about delivering.

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

**Mr MIKE BAIRD:** Stephen Walters from J. P. Morgan summarised the budget as follows:

This Budget has the balance absolutely right. The necessary hard decisions have been taken to put the Budget back on path to surplus while also releasing capital for infrastructure. It's a Budget that's right for the economic times.

That is what people in the marketplace are saying. Two weeks ago, when I attended an infrastructure conference with PricewaterhouseCoopers, it said:

For the first time in 10 years there are more people working on infrastructure in NSW than Victoria.

We are on the way. Members would remember an article in the *Daily Telegraph* which reported Joshua Mathieson, aged 27, a public servant from Chatswood, as stating in the People's Parliament:

A great forward-thinking budget that looks to be very well thought out and constructed.

Although we now have responsible government I should remind members about events that took place involving Opposition members. We did not receive any apology yesterday but these are the facts: the mischief engaged in by Opposition members and their lies concerning the budget black hole have all been dispelled. The truth is to be found in Budget Paper No. 2. Opposition members have not apologised for the budget black hole that they left behind.

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

**Mr MIKE BAIRD:** Yesterday, when the Leader of the Opposition made his speech in reply to the budget I did not hear him mention one dollar worth of savings. Opposition members either endorsed every measure in this budget or this State would be in financial ruin. Those are the facts. I do not know who did these costings. Don Bradman was a national hero and the member for Maroubra is a national hero for middle

management right across this country. If he did the costings for the whole budget, as opposed to only one policy which he got 30 per cent wrong, he would be \$20 billion out. That is what we get from Opposition members. The O'Farrell-Stoner Government has rebuilt the finances of this State. Over the next four years we will have 900 additional teachers, 2,475 additional nurses, 550 additional police officers, and \$62.6 billion for the provision of infrastructure. Work has commenced on the North West Rail Link, \$4.7 billion has been allocated to the Health budget and a record amount of money has been allocated for disability services.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The House will come to order so I can hear the next question.

### TRIPLE-A CREDIT RATING

**Mr MICHAEL DALEY:** My question is directed to the Treasurer. In light of the doubt cast on the Treasurer's tenuous projected budget surplus—not by me, but by Standard and Poor's—will he resign if New South Wales loses its triple-A credit rating on his watch?

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I am happy for the Treasurer to attempt to answer the question, but it is hypothetical and should not be allowed under Standing Order 128. I will allow the Treasurer to answer it, if he wishes. However, it is a ridiculous question. Yesterday I made reference to the framing of questions. I suggested that those who frame questions should refer to Standing Order 128 (2) (a) to (h) regarding what can and cannot be included in questions.

**Mr MIKE BAIRD:** It is amazing that the member for Maroubra would ask a question about any sorts of numbers whatsoever. Yesterday the Leader of the Opposition delivered his budget reply. When delivering a budget reply, is it not a fair place to start that there ought to be some form of economic policy or framework in it?

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

**Mr MIKE BAIRD:** There was one policy—not a bad effort, three bullet points, one policy—but they got that wrong by \$100 million. Why did they get it wrong?

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

**Mr MIKE BAIRD:** They got it wrong because they ignored Treasury. Have we heard that before? Yes, we have. I cannot think of the scheme, but what does it do? Yes, it is to do with when the sun comes out—Captain Solar's scheme. There is only one Captain Solar.

**Ms Carmel Tebbutt:** Point of order: Standing Order 129 relates to relevance. The question was about maintaining the State's triple-A credit rating, not about the Leader of the Opposition. I have not heard the Treasurer refer to the State's credit rating at all.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! It was a hypothetical question asking whether the Treasurer would resign. The question was tenuous to start with. If members continue to interject they will be called to order without warning.

**Mr MIKE BAIRD:** One of the things in the budget of which we on this side are so proud is that by getting the State's finances back in order the O'Farrell Government has protected the State's triple-A rating. Labor was about to lose that rating. This Government will make sure it looks after that triple-A rating, which Labor was going to trash. I come back to the policy issue, the scheme that ran into trouble financially, and the sorts of issues that would influence the rating agency and put the triple-A rating at risk. One scheme was the Solar Bonus Scheme. What was that supposed to cost?

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

**Mr MIKE BAIRD:** It was supposed to cost \$355 million. On most recent accounts, what is the cost? It is \$1.75 billion.

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

**Mr MIKE BAIRD:** How the member for Maroubra can ask any of these sorts of questions without apologising to the people of New South Wales, I do not know.

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

**Mr MIKE BAIRD:** There are many things for which the member should apologise, but that should have been front and centre.

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

**Mr MIKE BAIRD:** I am not sure what the next 12 months will show us, but I can tell the House one thing it will show: a responsible Government improving services and delivering infrastructure for this State. On the other side, it will show that it is very likely that someone else on the Opposition side will deliver the budget reply next year. We want Robbo to hang on—

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

**Mr MIKE BAIRD:** —but that hero of middle managers across the country, the member for Maroubra, is working hard to be Opposition leader. This Government is getting on with the job. It is focusing on what the community wants, which is getting on with the job of fixing New South Wales.

### STATE BUDGET AND DISABILITY SERVICES

**Ms MELANIE GIBBONS:** My question is addressed to the Minister for Ageing, and Minister for Disability Services. How does the budget deliver on the Government's commitment to ageing and disability services?

**Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE:** I thank the member for Menai for this important question. The budget handed down on Tuesday is one of hope, opportunity and delivery for people with disabilities, their carers and families, and seniors across New South Wales. It is a budget that sets in train a five-year funding program—a record—to provide \$2 billion of new moneys for disability services, providing some 47,000 new additional places for people with disabilities. In 2011-12 the O'Farrell Government will be spending \$2.8 billion on services run through the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care. That is a \$342 million increase, or about 14 per cent, on last year's budget. It enables us to partner with some 900 organisations around the State to allocate of the order of \$1.9 billion in subsidies and grants to provide services across the board to families throughout this State.

As part of this year's budget we are outlaying some \$82 million in capital expenditure, and we are also outlaying \$137 million in new moneys to support services. That means \$22 million is set aside for supported accommodation—some 300 places. It means 100 supported living funding packages being provided to families across the State so that they are diverted from crisis. It also means that \$15 million is being spent on community participation as we transition some 500 students from the education system into the disability support system. What is particularly pleasing about the budget is the record level of expenditure around the regions.

We are spending some \$1.2 billion in rural and regional New South Wales in the next 12 months. We are also spending, on a regional basis, in western Sydney \$659 million on disability services. In other regions, such as the Hunter, we are spending \$328 million, on the Central Coast it is \$102 million, in the Illawarra \$146 million, and in the St George and Sutherland area we are spending \$211 million. That is money that is going directly into disability support services in communities, targeting those families and those individuals that have been crying out for enormous support over such a long time. This is record expenditure, unsurpassed in the history of New South Wales and unmatched by any other jurisdiction in the Commonwealth.

In the areas of ageing and in seniors we are increasing the home and community care budget by some \$42 million. This is money that has been earmarked to divert people from nursing home beds and hospital beds, to keep them in their homes longer. So we are providing that \$42 million to continue to provide around 40,000 supports each month for the seniors across the State. An amount of \$6 million has been set aside for the Ageing Grants Program, which is designed to provide support to seniors around the State, valuable services such as the Seniors Information Service, Seniors Week and Dementia Advisory Services. One of the key and important aspects of this budget relates to payroll tax exemptions for employers who take on employees with disability from the Transition to Work Program, which is an \$8 million four-year program.

It will provide and offer up rebates of approximately \$4,000 for each business that is willing to take on an employee with disabilities. I can inform the House that it was warmly endorsed by Nova Employment, which

welcomed these measures and saw them as particularly exciting. In the area of disability services and ageing the New South Wales budget has been warmly endorsed by a number of sectors around the State: for example, the Council of Social Service of New South Wales, and National Disability Services. They paid tribute to the work that has been put into this budget during tough budgetary times.

**Ms MELANIE GIBBONS:** I ask the Minister to elucidate his answer.

**Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE:** As I was saying, the Government has received warm endorsements for its budget from organisations around this State, including the Council of Social Service of New South Wales and National Disability Services. In particular, National Disability Services recognised the leadership of the O'Farrell-Stoner Government during a tough budget. If the Government did not employ the tough discipline it has employed throughout this process it would not have been able to quarantine this significant investment into the area of disability services and ageing. That work certainly safeguarded these programs. Let me refer to what has been said by members of the Opposition. During this budget week I have not heard one public statement by the shadow Minister for Disability Services and Ageing relating to disability services and ageing. The Leader of the Opposition made no mention of disability services and ageing in his budget reply which he made yesterday.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Members of the Opposition will come to order. I call the member for Auburn to order.

**Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE:** We did have one tweet from the member for Heffron, who warmly endorsed the Government's program for disability services and ageing. The member for Heffron knows better than any member that if Eric Roozendaal were the Treasurer we would not have seen that funding. However, Treasurer Mike Baird worked hard to ensure that this budget was delivered. The Premier gave his commitment and word to disability services and we have delivered.

#### UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

**Mr JOHN ROBERTSON:** My question is directed to the Premier. In light of yesterday's announcement that the unemployment rate in New South Wales has risen from 4.6 per cent to 5.4 per cent since he took office, when will the Premier stop blaming others and start taking responsibility for losing jobs in New South Wales?

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

**Mr BARRY O'FARRELL:** I noticed those unemployment figures yesterday. No-one relishes unemployment rising and no-one relishes BlueScope Steel making the decisions that it has made. Governments are meant to pitch in and help, which is why this Government worked with Senator Carr and the City of Wollongong to put together a fund to address the issue of jobs in the Illawarra region. We want to ensure a successful transition of workers in Wollongong, just as we saw a successful transition of workers in Newcastle a decade ago. For example, the Minister for Education tried to show people in Newcastle that there were jobs to be found west of the Great Dividing Range. Those situations are of concern and, frankly, are issues that should be beyond politics.

I noted from this week's figure that the participation rate in New South Wales has risen. More people participating in employment could only be described as positive. That is one of the reasons why since this Government came to office it has put in place a number of initiatives to increase the participation rate and the number of jobs. I am not referring only to the payroll tax rebate or to our commitment to create 100,000 new jobs through that rebate; I am referring also to the theme referred to earlier by the Minister for Ageing, and Minister for Disability Services, that this Government introduced a payroll tax rebate for employers who employed people with disabilities. As the Minister said, and as I said yesterday, we must ensure that the economic benefits of this State are shared.

This Government has earmarked 40 per cent of the 100,000 new jobs that it wants to create for rural and regional areas. This Government, unlike the Australian Labor Party, wants to govern for the whole State. For 16 years the Australian Labor Party governed only for three cities on the eastern seaboard, and it did not even do that very well. I assure all those who live in Tamworth, Wagga Wagga, Dubbo, other places in regional and rural New South Wales, on the North Coast or on the South Coast that this Government has made a commitment to invest in infrastructure in those areas. Upgrades to the Pacific and Princes highways are important. The 50 per cent increase in the capital health budget is important to deliver long overdue hospitals

that are critical to support communities, families and workers and to provide them with the services that they need. This Government is determined to ensure that people right across this State are afforded as many opportunities as possible.

The Government's number one priority in its Five Point Plan is to restore economic growth. Restoring economic growth can be done in a number of ways. It is all about keeping taxes and regulations as low as possible. It is all about ensuring that we run this State's finances responsibly, which is what the Treasurer commenced to do after delivering his Budget Speech on Tuesday. It is all about ensuring that we encourage employers to create wealth and employment, which will impact people's living standards. Ultimately, it is the private sector that does all those things. The private sector creates and maintains the greatest number of jobs in this State.

Our future living standards depend upon the private sector. Only the Leader of the Opposition derives satisfaction from unemployment rates going up. Only the Leader of the Opposition, who is always looking for bad news, derives satisfaction from that. This Government is getting on with the job of responsibly running this State. We are fixing all the problems that those 2.1 million people who elected us on 26 March want us to fix. The Government is doing that through payroll tax rebates and by providing opportunities for those with disabilities. It will continue to do so for as long as it is in office.

### DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY INDUSTRIES

**Mr PAUL TOOLE:** My question is addressed to the Minister for Primary Industries. How does the Government's budget support the work of the Department of Primary Industries?

**Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON:** I thank the member for Bathurst for his interest in rural communities and in the Department of Primary Industries. I also congratulate his fellow colleagues from the Central West—the member for Orange, Andrew Gee, and the member for Dubbo, Troy Grant. They all have significant primary industries agencies in their electorates. I thank them also for their support for the Department of Primary Industries. I am proud to be part of a government that is committed to supporting not just our primary industries sector but also the State's primary producers. In the Treasurer's carefully thought through budget for 2011-2012 this Government is investing more than \$1 billion in the Department of Primary Industries to deliver important services and programs for rural and regional communities across this State.

Let us take a closer look at this year's budget for the Department of Primary Industries, which includes \$390 million across the agriculture, fisheries and biosecurity sectors of the Department of Primary Industries, including \$190 million to protect valuable agricultural land; a \$120 million investment in biosecurity; \$90 million to be spent on NSW Fisheries; more than \$380 million for catchment management authorities and Crown lands; and a \$260 million investment in water management. Those investments will ensure that the services provided by the Department of Primary Industries are relevant, sustainable and effective. Those investments also demonstrate this Government's commitment to primary industries research and development. The department has more than 600 scientists and technicians working on more than 900 projects at any one time, in close collaboration with our farmers, foresters and anglers.

This financial year the Government will spend \$13 million on upgrading the Elizabeth Macarthur Agriculture Institute in the electorate of the wonderful member for Camden. In addition, \$2 million will be spent to build phase two of the new Department of Primary Industries research facility at the Ourimbah campus of the University of Newcastle in the electorate of the wonderful member for Newcastle. A further \$1.7 million will be spent in 2011-12 on a biosecurity information system known as BioSIRT to enhance New South Wales's capacity to respond to outbreaks of exotic plant and animal diseases. That is extremely important. Prior to the election the Coalition committed to retaining the services being delivered to our regional industries and communities by the Department of Primary Industries. Government members are committed to delivering services that are relevant, responsive and really make a difference to our rural and regional communities. But what have we seen from Labor members? Over the past few weeks we have heard from "Second Chance" Steve in the other place and his union mates from the Public Service Association.

**Dr Andrew McDonald:** Point of order: That falls into the category of a personal attack.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! That is not a personal attack. However, the Minister will refer to the member by his correct title.

**Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON:** I will rename "Second Chance" Steve as the Opposition spokesperson for Primary Industries. He and his union mates claim that the New South Wales Government will give the green light to a 25 per cent cut in jobs across the Department of Primary Industries. That is scandalous. What a disgrace! They have been running around preening their media profiles and scaring regional departmental employees. That is appallingly irresponsible. They have been saying things such as, "Cuts of that magnitude will mean closures of local offices and devastating job losses in regional communities." We remember the performance of Labor members.

We remember that the Labor Government closed 45 departmental offices, stations and research facilities across the State. While Opposition members were in government they managed to shut down more than 30 per cent of the Department of Primary Industries. As I said, there is absolutely no truth to the wild claims made by that most irresponsible member. This Government is looking forward, not back. I am proud to be a member of a government that is committed to ensuring that for years to come the Department of Primary Industries will have an important role to play in the lives of New South Wales farmers. The Government also has been commended by the NSW Farmers Association, which stated:

As a whole, the budget recognises rural NSW and it's an important change from the previous government.

### INNER WEST LIGHT RAIL EXTENSION

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The House will come to order so that I can hear the question. I call the member for Murray-Darling to order.

**Mr JAMIE PARKER:** I direct my question to the Minister for Transport. I refer to the delay in the extension of Sydney's light rail line that was announced in this week's budget. Will the Minister clarify why it will take the New South Wales Government until 2013-14 to deliver a 5.5 kilometre light rail line from Lilyfield to Dulwich Hill?

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Members will come to order. The Minister does not need the assistance of anyone on the Government benches.

**Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN:** I thank the member for Balmain for asking a question about public transport. I thought a Labor member would ask me a question about public transport during budget week. Almost a week has gone by since the budget was handed down, but not one Labor member has asked me a question about public transport, because members opposite cannot handle the truth. They know that this is a record budget with regard to public transport, and that it is a great result.

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

**Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN:** I am pleased to advise the member for Balmain that this State budget allocates \$103 million for the expansion of the light rail network.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Mount Druitt will come to order.

**Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN:** That includes the feasibility study to extend the light rail line into the central business district, to the University of New South Wales and to the University of Sydney. Members opposite cannot handle the truth and they do not want to admit that this budget allocation is nearly double what they allocated in their last budget. I assure the House that this Government is absolutely committed to the inner west light rail extension. The Coalition made a commitment during the election campaign that it would build the inner west light rail extension and that is exactly what we will do.

That is more than the member for Marrickville did when she was the Deputy Premier. When Labor rushed to announce the light rail project and the greenway it was absolutely clueless about the cost and the construction issues. Fortunately, since coming to office, this Government has updated the cost estimates and done its homework. Our work has demonstrated that the Labor Government failed to do its homework before rushing to make an announcement about the greenway and the light rail extension.

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

**Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN:** I am sure members know this because it is typical of the previous Government's track record. Once again members opposite announced a transport project without doing their homework. They announced that the Lilyfield to Dulwich Hill light rail line would cost \$120 million. Guess how much it will really cost—close to \$176 million, which is \$56 million more than members opposite said it would cost. They also promised that the service would be up and running by the last quarter of 2012. Regrettably, that was never going to happen. They had not done any of their homework; in fact, they received planning approval only in February. They had not done any of the required scoping work. We have done our homework and we have done the scoping.

**Mr Nathan Rees:** Point of order: I refer to Standing Order 129. I wonder whether this will be in tomorrow's the *Australian Magazine*.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! That is not a point of order.

**Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN:** They cannot even take points of order on public transport. I am pleased to say that there will be no middle managers when we build the light rail extension. I return to the important question asked by the member for Balmain. The Labor Party went to the election saying that the light rail extension would cost \$120 million. It will in fact cost \$176 million. Labor also failed to do any homework on the delivery schedule. Light rail will not be up and running by the last quarter of 2012. That was never going to happen. Members opposite plucked that timeframe out of thin air. After having done our homework, we know that we can deliver the line by the first quarter of 2014, which is just over a year longer than the previous Government predicted. The latest estimate is that the project will cost approximately \$176 million. It will be built by the first quarter of 2014 because this Government is serious about delivering its public transport projects.

Once again Labor members demonstrate that they will say and do anything to win an election. In 2008 the Labor Government said that light rail was not on and that it did not support it. However, members opposite have the nerve to comment on this Government's delivery of light rail. They have never supported it, they never wanted it and they were never able to deliver it. The only side of politics that can deliver light rail to this great city is this side. Since the election we have put our money where our mouth is. Not only have we allocated record amounts to light rail but also we have ensured that light rail is part of our integrated ticketing system. We will also ensure that access to light rail services is extended to pensioners and families, which members opposite never bothered to do. This Government will deliver the inner west extension and all the other projects we said we would deliver.

## MAJOR SPORTING EVENTS

**Mr LEE EVANS:** I direct my question to Premier. What is the Government doing to attract major sporting events to New South Wales?

**Mr BARRY O'FARRELL:** I thank the member for Heathcote for his question. I congratulate him on his own health regime. I saw him in the gymnasium this morning, along with a number of other members from the Government side of the House. The old Swamp Fox is doing very well. This is a timely question because this weekend will be one of the biggest weekends in the sporting calendar that we have seen for a long time. As we know, the 2011 Rugby World Cup competition begins in New Zealand tonight and I am sure that everybody is aware of the fact that the Wallabies appear to be peaking just at the right time—just at the time the All Blacks are choking again. I attended the Wallabies farewell earlier this week and I assure members that all the Wallabies are determined to bring back the World Cup to these shores for the third time.

This week also marks the commencement of the Rugby League final series with a blockbuster match this evening at the ANZ Stadium between the Dragons and the mighty West Tigers. The National Rugby League is expecting a crowd of more than 50,000 to see if the Tigers can make it nine in a row. I should remind all those intending to go out there that free public transport will be provided for those with a valid ticket to the game. Despite the appearance of the member for Heffron on *The Nation* last night—I was in agreement with a number of things she said—my favourite Opposition member remains the member for Wollongong. At least we have Rugby League in common. The Tigers might be about to do the Dragons tonight. Tomorrow night the football action moves to the Sydney Football Stadium, where Rookie of the Year, Daly Cherry-Evans takes on Johnathan Thurston when the mighty Manly team does battle with the Cowboys.

I also note that the Australian cricket team is dominating their Test against Sri Lanka offshore at the present time. It is great to see that team rebuilding and being led by New South Welshman Michael Clark. All



these events attract significant attention—they draw locals and visitors to wherever they are being held—and that helps generate economic growth, creates jobs and creates revenue for governments in this country, New Zealand and Sri Lanka. That is why this Government is determined to deliver major events for New South Wales. It is why, thanks to the efforts of the Minister for Major Events, we have sewn up a Bledisloe Cup match in Sydney at ANZ Stadium on the same day every year for the next 10 years. The member for Toongabbie will be interested to know that we have actually secured Tiger Woods—not Brian Eno, Tiger Woods—for the Australian Golf Open at the Lakes Golf Club in November.

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

**Mr BARRY O'FARRELL:** I will not be provoked to acknowledge that outrageous attempt by the member for Toongabbie to curry favour with Mark Tobin. I am delighted that Sydney secured the opening rounds of the World Rowing Cup in 2013 and 2014 that will be staged at Penrith Lakes. This is not just a great triumph for the Minister but a great triumph for the member for Penrith, whose electorate will benefit from the tourism and the economic activity that that event will deliver. The Government will encourage sport at all levels—from the grassroots through to major marquee events.

It is important to recognise the contribution of the clubs movement to supporting local sporting teams. One of the reasons we signed a memorandum of understanding with the clubs movement—a rescue package to give clubs a necessary lifeline—was not only to enable them to survive but also to continue to support local sports across communities. We have reversed Labor's tax hike that threatened the viability of many local clubs and resulted in reduced grants to community groups. Unlike the Federal Government, which is threatening the future of Rugby League with its measures, our measures are actually supporting Junior Rugby League.

As a result of our package, it is expected that approximately \$10 million will be injected into Junior Rugby League throughout New South Wales. Our tax changes will benefit almost 500 clubs and 3.5 million members, thereby providing a saving of over \$200 million over four years. That was opposed by Labor members who do not like Rugby League, who do not support their clubs, and who will not stand up to the crazy ideas of the Federal Government. It is supported by the Government because we understand the benefit of sports to this State. [*Time expired.*]

**Question time concluded at 3.02 p.m.**

## PETITIONS

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

### Yass Hospital

Petition requesting the improved availability of services at Yass Hospital, received from **Ms Katrina Hodgkinson**.

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

### Central West Medical Retrieval Services

Petition requesting 24-hour road and helicopter medical retrieval services for the Central West region, received from **Mr Andrew Gee**.

### Riverstone Traffic Management

Petition requesting the construction of the Riverstone rail overpass and associated traffic management works within this parliamentary term, received from **Mr Kevin Conolly**.

### Greendale Planning

Petition requesting the overturning of the joint regional planning panel decision regarding DA-1291/2010 and the suspension of any government decisions regarding cemeteries, crematoria and places of worship in Greendale, received from **Mrs Tanya Davies**.

**The Clerk announced that the following Ministers had lodged responses to petitions signed by more than 500 persons:**

The Hon. Jillian Skinner—Palliative Care Community Services—lodged 5 August 2011 (Mr Rob Stokes).

The Hon. Jillian Skinner—Northern Beaches Hospital Facilities—lodged 8 August 2011 (Mr Mike Baird).

## **BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

### **Notices of Motions**

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

## **PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS**

---

### **TRIBUTE TO HAROLD DAVID MAIR, OAM, FORMER MEMBER FOR ALBURY**

**Mr JOHN ROBERTSON** (Blacktown—Leader of the Opposition) [3.12 p.m.]: Today I pay tribute to a former member of this House, Mr Harold Mair, OAM, and I express the condolences of the people of Blacktown and elsewhere in New South Wales to his family and friends. Harold Mair was the embodiment of Labor principles. He was Country Labor through and through. Harold was first elected at the age of 59. He served as the member for Albury from 1978 to 1988. Harold was the son of a railway worker. He attended St Joseph's Parish School and Christian Brothers College. Harold had a long and varied career before entering politics. He was a veteran of World War II. He served first in the Army and then he joined the Air Force in 1942. He remained in the Air Force until 1950, when he left to become an accountant.

Harold was an extremely approachable local member and he greeted his constituents by name as he walked down the street. Like any good local member, he had a reputation for getting Ministers to deliver for his electorate. He had reasonable expectations but he never asked for too much and he also knew the value of saying "Thank you". Harold was respected by members on both sides in this place. He spoke to new and younger members about what was expected of them as members of Parliament and he was always available to give advice. In his time in this place he shared the benches of Parliament with other respected Labor members from country electorates, such as Mr Mick Clough, the Hon. John Akister, the Hon. Terry Sheahan and Mr Bill McCarthy.

In debates Harold was gentlemanly and respectful of other members and all who met him immediately liked him. He was continually focused on his electorate of Albury and when he lobbied for a project for that electorate few Ministers could resist his persuasive argument or manner. Unsurprisingly, Harold had a proud record of delivering for his electorate. He was a driving force behind the bringing of a newsprint mill to Ettamogah, which became a major employer. He also was responsible for numerous infrastructure upgrades, a new courthouse and water and sewerage upgrades. Harold never became a Minister but his record for delivering as a city alderman, mayor of Albury and local member will stand as testament to his long and admirable career in public service.

Later in life Harold did not seem to slow down. He was given many accolades, including an Order of Australia medal and an honorary doctorate from Charles Sturt University. Harold completed his Bachelor of Arts at the tender age of 88. Until quite recently he was a common fixture at former member reunions and the Albury Labor Party holds the annual Harold Mair dinner in his honour. Sadly, Harold passed away on Wednesday 7 September at the ripe old age of 92. His loss will be long felt by the Australian Labor Party, Country Labor, the Labor movement, the people of Blacktown and people elsewhere in New South Wales.

## **CABARITA WHARF**

**Mr JOHN SIDOTI** (Drummoyne) [3.16 p.m.]: I pay tribute to the hard work over the past three and a half years of a community group known as Friends of Cabarita Park. This issues-driven community group has lobbied the former member for Drummoyne and the City of Canada Bay Council on safety and amenity issues, but few outcomes have been achieved. The group and I have spoken to many commuters who use Cabarita

wharf. Official freedom of information complaint logs show that without doubt fishing from Cabarita wharf is the dominant factor in commuter safety, littering and amenity issues. Despite a council mayoral minute and a petition tabled in this Parliament by the previous member for Drummoyne, commuters continue to encounter problems. I will read onto the record some examples of the entries recorded in the freedom of information complaints log. On 9 January 2011 Sydney Ferries reported:

People fishing from Cabarita Wharf being abusive towards passengers and crew and also throwing projectiles at vessels.

On 7 January 2011 the chief operating officer of Sydney Ferries wrote:

Further evidence attached that the 5 a.m. to 10 a.m. prohibition is not working.

On 31 March 2010 Sydney Ferries reported:

Groups of youths getting down at Cabarita Wharf causing trouble, fighting with knives, putting people of the public in danger and also blocking the wharf with fishing equipment, making it hard for the public to use the facility. They have taken down council signage. The groups have been cleaning and gutting out the fish and leaving a mess all over the wharf.

I have also received correspondence from a number of residents about this issue. The first resident stated:

I have been using the ferry system for six years and the state of the wharf has deteriorated over the past year or so. I believe that council is [now] responsible ...

I come down to the wharf at 7 a.m. ... and there are milk crates, beer bottles, plastic bottles, food and paper scraps, and scales and blood where the fish have been cleaned.

Of an evening ... I also find it intimidating late at [night I] feel quite vulnerable in relation to my safety.

Another resident said:

We are disappointed this issue has dragged on without resolution for so long and ask you, as our State Member, to ... take measures to protect the living standards of the people of your electorate.

The next resident said:

I also find it intimidating as late at evening [I] feel quite vulnerable in relation to my safety.

And yet another said:

My son is 13 and he and his friends love fishing at Cabarita wharf on the weekends. But is it always a few that ruins things for others.

I will be supportive of a ban on fishing ... if it means the health of the harbour is preserved and the safety of ferry staff and commuters is ensured.

Another letter stated:

Groups of young illiterate males descend on the area on sunny days and mild or balmy nights. They come equipped with chairs, food, music and they also enjoy lighting bonfires ...

Mr Sidoti, something really needs to be done. Chiswick is the neglected and forgotten suburb as far as the Council is concerned.

I have had a number of meetings with Friends of Cabarita. The residents and commuters are sick and tired of the lack of action. I know that Minister Gay will take all the pleas of my constituents into account. The residents and I have devoted a lot of time to this issue, and we look forward to some positive outcomes. We won the fight on the Kendall Bay marina. The residents spoke, their concerns were heard, and the Liberal Government acted. The people of Drummoyne want results on this issue, not talk, which they got from the previous Government.

Fare-paying commuters who use the wharves in my electorate have argued strongly for a total ban on fishing from commuter wharves. Even the local fishing groups agree. It appears that those who are directly involved in the electorate see this as a general debate relating to fishing rights. It has nothing to do with that. What about the rights of commuters? This is a specific problem relating to the safety of public transport commuters. We look forward to a visit to the electorate by the Minister later this month. We hope we will come to a resolution of what has become a long-lasting nightmare for commuters and residents.

## RADIO 2GLF

**Mr PAUL LYNCH** (Liverpool) [3.20 p.m.]: I draw to the attention of the House the predicament of a local community radio broadcaster Radio 2GLF 87.3FM. Currently radio 2GLF runs a service from its studio in the School of Arts building in my electorate of Liverpool. A large proportion of its listeners are my constituents. It is a not-for-profit broadcaster for the Liverpool region and Fairfield regions. It broadcasts seven days a week, 24 hours a day. It operates with more than 200 volunteers. It runs a daily local magazine program and also caters for local non-English speaking communities, with broadcasts in more than 15 languages. I know from experience with my constituents the importance of these community language programs to the communities concerned. Radio 2GLF research estimates that 85,000 people listen to community radio across the radio 2GLF area at least once a week.

A not-for-profit community broadcaster always will struggle with finance. The funding for Radio 2GLF is derived from grants made by the Community Broadcasting Foundation, sponsorship from local businesses and community groups, and membership fees from members of the local community. On top of that, for more than 25 years the Liverpool City Council has provided premises for the station. As I indicated, that is presently in the School of Arts building and it has been there since 2000. The actions of the current Liverpool council are now bringing the use of the School of Arts to an end and threaten the viability of the radio station. To quote from the station's website:

Liverpool Council served the station a notice to vacate our current studios at the Liverpool School of Arts building in Macquarie Street on August 8th 2011 following a recent council decision to amend the deed of agreement for the site with a development company.

The council has given us a six month notice period.

The station has been located in the School of Arts building since 2000 and the facility remains in excellent condition. However, with the eviction notice we will need to dismantle this community facility, salvage what we can and rebuild over the next six months.

It has now set up a website called Save Our Station. A letter dated 15 August from Eddie Diwakar, Chairman of the Liverpool-Fairfield Community Radio Cooperative Ltd set out the position well. It states:

Dear Councillors

On behalf of the members and board and directors of the Liverpool and Fairfield community radio station 2GLF, I am writing to express my shock and displeasure in relation to the email sent on 8 August 2011 by the manager of property services, Michael Williams, serving "notice to vacate" the School of Arts building at 306 Macquarie Street, Liverpool, by 10th February 2012. In particular, I express my deep concerns on the council's advice that council cannot offer any alternative premises to the radio station, which is in stark contradiction to what we were led to believe throughout our ongoing correspondences and meetings with council staff.

The letter states there were several meetings between the station and council. The letter also states:

Throughout the process we were assured that the council acknowledged the importance of Liverpool's community radio station and that it would investigate alternate sites that may be suitable for the relocation of radio 2GLF. This was also confirmed via a letter dated 17th June 2011 from the General Manager, Mr Farooq Portelli.

This coupled with previous commitments by the council to relocate the radio station to Casula Powerhouse, Liverpool Museum and Liverpool Skate Rink leaves me astounded in the inconsistencies in council's approach which has now left our organisation in a vulnerable position to provide services to the community.

The current decision will significantly impact upon our ability to service the local community. Furthermore, vacating the premises in the time frame stipulated is unrealistic and unreasonable.

The letter concluded:

As you are aware, we are a non profit organisation managed and run solely by volunteers to provide a valuable service to our local community. These include servicing ethnic communities such as Sudanese, Serbian, Assyrian and Indian to name a few.

I must reemphasize that the approach taken by the council will have a significant impact in us providing valuable services to our community, services that we are proud to have provided for over 25 years.

There are two significant issues arising out of this. One is that there is a need for premises for a significant and useful community organisation, and I would have thought it behoved the council to do whatever it could to find appropriate premises. The second thing, which is in a sense more difficult and attracts a lot more criticism, is

that it seems to be a breach of the various commitments given by council staff over a lengthy period; that is, the radio station was promised that it would be looked after and suddenly it has been told that it will not be looked after. That is an entirely inappropriate way to deal with a community organisation.

It is particularly concerning that the mayor and Labor councillors did not know the council had issued this notice—that it had been done by council officers. I do not know whether the non-Labor councillors knew about it, but it is a matter of great concern that this happened within council structures. I encourage the council to be much more reasonable than it has been up until now.

### **BALLINA BYPASS**

**Mr DONALD PAGE** (Ballina—Minister for Local Government, and Minister for the North Coast) [3.25 p.m.]: As the member for Ballina I am pleased to bring to the attention of the House the significant work being done on the Pacific Highway in my electorate. To date the Ballina bypass is the biggest project ever undertaken in the Ballina electorate. At a cost of \$640 million, the bypass will provide 12 kilometres of dual carriageway, extending from south of Ballina, at the intersection of the Bruxner and Pacific highways, to the intersection of Ross Lane at Tintenbar. This upgrade to the Pacific Highway has been on the table for many years. The project initially was approved in 2003, but major construction did not begin until 2008. Since then work has progressed steadily and, together with the Federal member for Page, I was pleased to be able to announce recently that the bypass will be finishing six months ahead of schedule.

This means that Ballina will be bypassed by Christmas. For drivers who have been caught during peak holiday periods in terrible traffic snarls in town, this is very good news. Currently the Pacific Highway runs through the town. During school holidays and on long weekends traffic is often banked up in long queues at the southern and northern approaches to Ballina. The opening of the bypass will ease traffic congestion and improve safety around Ballina. The Ballina bypass certainly has been a win for my electorate with many positive spin-offs. A total of 1,800 jobs have been created and a further 5,700 jobs have been indirectly created to support the construction. The final stage of the bypass, which involves connecting the Pacific Highway and the Bruxner Highway, will start in early 2012.

Work on the highway will then move north and focus on the Tintenbar to Ewingsdale upgrade. The contract for this project has been awarded to Baulderstone and construction is expected to start early next year. The project is valued at \$780 million and will surpass the cost of the Ballina bypass. This section of the highway is due for completion in 2014, and 400 direct jobs will be created while it is under construction. In the recent New South Wales budget \$90 million has been allocated this financial year to enable construction to commence. As with most major projects, there have been some community concerns about different aspects of it. One issue for the residents of Bangalow is a proposed interchange at Bangalow.

A significant number of people have indicated to me that they are not happy with the proposed interchange. I organised a public meeting last July to allow residents to talk to the Roads and Traffic Authority about issues and have some input into the future of the project. Residents at that meeting were quite opposed to the interchange. As a result a working group was formed to look at an alternative to the Bangalow interchange. That is the difference between the current Liberal-Nationals Government and the previous State Labor Government—we listen and are genuinely interested in the community's views about issues such as the Bangalow interchange. When the working group completes its investigations the preferred proposal will be brought back to the wider community for its consideration.

I should mention also that the \$97 million Alstonville bypass, which was completed earlier this year, opened in May. For years local residents rallied and lobbied to have their town bypassed, arguing that the heavy vehicles in the main street were dangerous. The main street of Alstonville is a different place now that the bypass is operational. While there are some noise issues for those closest to the bypass, I believe the new road has made a significant positive improvement to the town.

As the local member I am thrilled with the investment in infrastructure in the Ballina electorate. The combined budget for the Pacific Highway, Ballina and Alstonville bypasses is an incredible \$1.5 billion. I need to acknowledge the Federal Government for its contribution to these projects, particularly for stepping in to fund the Alstonville bypass after it was promised by the former State Labor Premier, Bob Carr, and then shelved. In the last 20 years over 400 people have been killed on the Pacific Highway. We have had some horrific crashes, and I know that upgrading it to dual carriageway makes this road so much safer. The completion of the Ballina bypass also signals a new chapter in the history of the town of Ballina.

Ballina was essentially a river town when it was settled in the 1800s with the Richmond River used as the primary method of transport to other towns and villages such as Lismore, Broadwater and Woodburn. The Northern Rivers was rich with cedar and huge logs used to be transported via the Richmond River. The level of spending on roadworks in the Ballina electorate is an unprecedented \$1.5 billion. It is a breathtaking amount of money for any regional area. Like many locals, I look forward to the completion of the Pacific Highway upgrades. They will certainly change the face of the region by saving many lives and reducing travelling times.

### MAITLAND HOSPITAL

**Ms ROBYN PARKER** (Maitland—Minister for the Environment, and Minister for Heritage) [3.30 p.m.]: As members well know, hospitals are vital for our communities. I want to inform the House of my recent inspection of the Maitland Hospital. It is the second time I have been to Maitland Hospital and had a tour in the last little while. The last time was with our now health Minister, Jillian Skinner, who demonstrated at that time in opposition just how powerful her knowledge of the health system was then, and now as Minister. It is fantastic to see her roll out the plans that she has spent many years formulating. One of the first things that she did—I congratulate her for it—was take off the onerous roster system that the previous Government imposed on nurses.

It was making their lives really difficult and we were losing nurses from the system because they did not have control of their own roster system. This time I went to see the hospital as the local member representing Maitland. Maitland is one of the earliest European settlements in New South Wales, so it should come as no surprise that health care commenced at the site of Maitland Hospital in 1849. To put that in historical perspective, speaking as the Minister for Heritage, that is just 45 years after the establishment of the permanent convict and military camp in 1804 at Coal River to mine coal at what we now call Newcastle. While some of that long heritage remains, the Maitland Hospital of today is trying to keep pace with the latest phase of growth happening across the city of Maitland.

I say constantly that we need to manage our growth and maintain our lifestyle. The hospital is one example. Maitland Hospital and staff really punch above their weight because for much of the last decade Maitland has been one of the fastest growing regional local government areas in the State. When the Liberals and The Nationals formulated our election commitments we took note of the population growth that had already taken place and the projections for the future. New residential housing is emerging on the horizon in the fledgling suburb of Chisholm and the expanding suburbs of Gillieston Heights, Aberglasslyn and Thornton. Whilst the results of the recent 2011 Census are still being tabulated, the Coalition is already preparing for the hub of the Hunter, as Maitland is often referred to, to have a hospital and health services that are ready for the future.

That is why we made a commitment of \$20 million towards a new hospital at Maitland. That election commitment will be honoured. During my recent visit the pressing need for health services in Maitland to make progress towards the future was clearly spelt out. I thank the acting general manager of the hospital, Trish Wilson, and the Chief Executive of Hunter New England Health, Michael Di Rienzo, for their tour and briefing on the demand being confronted by the facility's workforce. In the last financial year Maitland Hospital had 14,405 admissions, up 812 on the previous year. The average length of stay by patients rose from 3.6 days in 2009-10 to almost four days in 2010-11. Maitland's 230 available inpatient beds were in use for 58,388 occupied bed days during the past 12 months.

There were 3,025 planned surgical procedures and 3,162 unplanned surgical procedures. Maternity welcomed 1,655 babies, which includes newborns from across the Hunter Valley, highlighting the regional role this hospital fulfils. The upgraded emergency department handled 41,904 presentations in 2010-11. Statistics give you an understanding of why Hunter New England Health describes Maitland Hospital as operating at capacity. The pressure of this situation has caused some patients dissatisfied with their care to publicly air their concerns in the media. However, Hunter New England Health has responded very positively, taken on board the criticisms, and will expand programs such as the early pregnancy assessment service.

During my visit I also visited the mental health unit. I am delighted to say that we are honouring our election commitment of \$2 million to upgrade mental health services in Maitland. The mental health unit is a very worthy recipient. The staff there are fantastic and they are working in conditions that need to be improved. I take this opportunity to put on record my admiration for all who work in the mental health unit. There is pressure, of course, and all is not all perfect. There is pressure on car parking at Maitland Hospital and I am

pleased that the Hospital is taking action: it has put in an application to council to develop a new 46-place car park, which should ease some of the parking congestion. I urge all members to support their local hospitals. I am delighted to have a hospital such as Maitland, with its great staff, in my electorate.

### **SOUTH WESTERN SYDNEY INSTITUTE OF TAFE**

**Dr ANDREW McDONALD** (Macquarie Fields) [3.35 p.m.]: I recently met with Mr Peter Roberts, the institute director of South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE. South-western Sydney is Australia's fastest growing regional economy and the country's third largest economy after Sydney and Melbourne. The 12 local government areas from Parramatta to Camden covered by the South Western Sydney Institute have a population of 1.28 million, and this will increase to 1.7 million by 2031 and includes eight of the ten most disadvantaged local government areas in New South Wales. Even though this area will contain 30 per cent of the new jobs to be created in New South Wales by 2031 as is, the population growth will exceed the jobs growth. That is why the quote from Barry Peddle, the former South Western Sydney Institute director, "The TAFE system provides the first, second and third chance for education," has stuck in my memory.

Traditionally, the largest industries in western Sydney have been manufacturing and heavy industry. However, the major employment areas in south-west Sydney in the future will be: retail trade 10.9 per cent, manufacturing 11.5 per cent, health care and social assistance 10.5 per cent, and construction 10.1 per cent. Over the next five years jobs growth in construction will be 23 per cent; health care and social assistance 22 per cent; sports and recreation 19 per cent; and administration 17 per cent. I am very proud of the Macquarie Fields TAFE. The health and fitness centre built during the last term of government has already opened. The Macarthur Building Industry Skills Centre, which is Federally funded, has opened. Aged care teaching is up and running and sign writing is well developed.

To meet the increased demand from future population and industry growth TAFE is planning a three-hectare site at Leppington in the south-west growth centre. Because of the rapid changes in technology we need to continually change the skills base of our workforce. Currently many workers employed in manufacturing do not have the necessary qualifications to continue to deal with these changes, which is one area where TAFE involvement is vital in the future. For that reason TAFE is moving towards aligning its training with what industries require. TAFE training will be focused on business and industry needs and will be in healthy competition with the private registered training organisations. In 2010 the South Western Sydney Institute had 73,000 students, 13 per cent of the total for TAFE New South Wales, with 52.3 per cent from a non-English speaking background, representing 157 countries and 175 languages.

In 2010 78 per cent of the students completed the units they were enrolled in and 90 per cent overall were satisfied with the course they were enrolled in. The institute offers training at certificate—including trade certificate—diploma, advanced diploma and graduate certificate level. The nine faculties in South West Sydney TAFE have now been reduced to eight. The faculties are manufacturing/transport; electrical and telecommunications; community services and personal care; hospitality/horticulture and primary industry; building/construction; business and finance; vocational access; and employment preparation. In relation to the faculty of employment preparation, the 2010 institute director's medal winner Sher Mu La Wee stated:

I have dreamed of becoming a nurse since I was little. I believe from the bottom of my heart that studying at TAFE is like a golden bridge, bringing me across to university. Without these courses, there is no way I could have received a place at UTS. They have helped change my life.

Although 23 per cent of students enrol in courses that are exempt from fees and 18 per cent are entitled to a concession, fees remain a problem for the working poor. Fee help is available for some courses although there is currently no Higher Education Contribution Scheme equivalent for TAFE courses. That is an issue that will need to be re-examined. South West Sydney Institute of TAFE gives high priority to meeting the educational needs of those living with disadvantage. For this and many other reasons, I support the South West Sydney TAFE and commend it for its great work.

### **GEORGES RIVER GRAMMAR SCHOOL**

**Mr GLENN BROOKES** (East Hills) [3.40 p.m.]: On Saturday 27 August I had the pleasure of attending a dinner hosted by the Georges River Grammar School to celebrate its 25 years of excellence in education. The dinner, held in the Grand Ballroom of the Bankstown Sports Club, was a huge success and a tribute to the work and dedication of the Principal, Mr Terry Lidgard, the school's board of directors, teaching and ancillary staff. In July of this year during the five-week parliamentary recess I used my time to visit

21 schools within the East Hills electorate. While my schools tour was a real eye-opener to the high standards of education within the East Hills electorate, I was distressed by the extent of the maintenance backlog in our public schools that was left by the previous Labor Government. But, despite 16 years of Labor's neglect, I was impressed that the schools I visited were still able to deliver high standards of education to their students.

I have spoken to the Hon. Adrian Piccoli, the Minister for Education, about what needs to be done for the schools within my electorate. The Minister is sympathetic but his departments, like most government departments, is being hampered by the big budget black hole that is Labor's enduring legacy to the people of New South Wales—that and Building the Education Revolution. The Building the Education Revolution Program could have been a once-in-a-generation opportunity to provide essential funding for education facilities desperately needed by schools in electorates such as East Hills. But what did the Labor Government do? It wasted and mismanaged the money.

Putting aside that ugliness, a highlight of my tour of the schools within the East Hills electorate was my visit to the Georges River Grammar School. Based on what I saw, the Georges River Grammar School has every right to celebrate 25 years of educational excellence. The school has a well-deserved reputation as a caring learning environment that places an emphasis on the development of each student's personal skills. The school's students are well-presented and well-spoken young men and women who, I am sure, will grow up to be very productive members of society. I congratulate the dedicated and professional teaching members of staff at the Georges River Grammar School who strive to deliver high-quality teaching and learning experiences for the students. There is no doubt that educational services in the south-west have been neglected; there is simply no doubting that.

The former Labor Government ignored education during its 16 years in office and was content for students at East Hills Boys High School to sit in dilapidated classrooms where paint flakes fell onto students' heads. But in just five months the Liberal-Nationals Government is making decisions, making changes and introducing reforms to improve education across New South Wales—reforms that will support schools right across New South Wales. For a quarter of a century the Georges River Grammar School has been an important feature of the electorate of East Hills. It is part of the rich tapestry of the area and stands proud among the educational institutions of this State. I have no doubt that based on its outstanding record to date and with the ongoing support of the New South Wales Government the Georges River Grammar School will continue to be a significant contributor to education within the East Hills electorate for many decades to come.

### LAKE MACQUARIE HIGHWAY

**Mr GREG PIPER** (Lake Macquarie) [3.45 p.m.]: I wish to inform the House of the worthwhile proposal to rename Main Road 217 as the "Lake Macquarie Highway". This highway would run from the F3 at Morisset to the junction of Lake Road and the Newcastle Link Road at Wallsend. The aim of this change would be to give this road the status it deserves and to raise the profile of the Lake Macquarie area. A useful precedent for such a declaration is the naming of the Central Coast Highway on 11 August 2006. The website of the Roads and Traffic Authority describes the route of the Central Coast Highway and states:

[It] provides an important connection between the F3 Freeway and Gosford, from Gosford to Erina and The Entrance through to Doyalson.

Main Road 217 is directly comparable, stretching as it does through many suburbs and connecting these with the F3, the Newcastle Link Road and a number of other main roads and arterial roads. Servicing more than 30 suburbs in the Lake Macquarie electorate, it is the only alternative to the limited-access F3 and the major route for many commuters. The existing identification systems for this main road are inconsistent and lead to some confusion. The current road changes names 13 times in 35 kilometres, so the unified description of Lake Macquarie Highway would simplify directions for visitors to our region.

The route from the F3 at Morisset is signposted as State Route 133 all the way to Vale Street, Shortland, but this falls short of the heavily trafficked route to the junction with Main Road 23. Most of this route is also referred to by the Roads and Traffic Authority as Main Road 217, but it extends only as far as Main Road 82, generally known as the Newcastle Link Road, which soon will be a major connection to the Hunter Expressway. This intersection is the start of Lake Road and is near the municipal boundary between Newcastle and Lake Macquarie. So it is certainly a logical starting point for traffic entering the proposed Lake Macquarie Highway from the north, just as the F3 junction is the logical southern entry.

Dedicating this increasingly important route as the Lake Macquarie Highway would be an inexpensive exercise and it would certainly add clarity to the choice of routes for anyone driving to any of the many



destinations in the Lake Macquarie electorate. It would allow simpler yet more meaningful signposting for traffic leaving the F3 at Morisset or leaving Newcastle via Lake Road. Just as the Pacific Highway serves all suburbs in eastern Lake Macquarie, this dedicated highway would serve the west. Very simple signage could enable those travelling on the freeway to know easily where to turn off and get back on without getting lost and could be signposted as a major scenic detour from the F3.

The Lake Macquarie Highway would pass through the proposed new suburb of Lake Macquarie, which includes the city's administrative centre and one of the Lower Hunter's most significant recreation and sporting precincts. The new suburb would deliver a number of significant practical benefits based largely on having a discrete suburb called Lake Macquarie, with its own postcode. The renaming of the main road and this existing suburban area do not depend on each other, but there would certainly be a synergy in asserting the name Lake Macquarie in both these ways. On 26 July the *Newcastle Herald* published a letter in support of the new suburb and supported this by juxtaposing a mock road sign representing one to be placed on the F3 near the Morisset interchange. It identified the route as the Lake Macquarie Highway and showed placenames for Morisset and Cooranbong as the first towns to the east and the west accessed via the interchange.

The name "Lake Macquarie Highway" would be more descriptive of what motorists can expect as the road skirts the lake at a number of picturesque locations, including Myuna Bay, Fennell Bay, Booragul and Speers Point. The highway would pass through the important commercial centres of Morisset, Toronto and Glendale and be within four kilometres of Warners Bay. Businesses along the road could use the name to raise their profile and that of the area.

This and similar proposals have been raised for discussion by a number of people and organisations, including the Lake Macquarie Tourist Association and Mr John Mason of Dora Creek, and advanced by Lake Macquarie Councillor Wendy Harrison. I would particularly like to acknowledge the efforts of Mr Rod Campbell of Awaba for clearly articulating what he sees as the benefits of the Lake Macquarie Highway and for providing much of the information I have used today. This would be a sensible and inexpensive proposal, and I feel it deserves support. I will be writing to the Minister for Roads and Ports and asking him to make this simple change.

### CITY OF CESSNOCK

**Mr CLAYTON BARR** (Cessnock) [3.50 p.m.]: I take this opportunity to tell the House about the town of Cessnock, which gives my electorate its name and is the town where my family and I live. We should all do this from time to time: take a moment to remind the House about the different areas we represent. It is very easy, especially in opposition—or, as some have proven, in government—to focus on the negative all the time. But Cessnock has plenty of good stories to tell. Wine production and the beautiful vineyards—not to mention our beautiful golf course—seems a natural place to begin. Any members of the House who have been to my electorate will attest to its beauty, and to the quality of the hospitality. There are top-class restaurants and accommodation, not to mention the quality of the wine itself, and of course the people. My thoughts on roads are well known, and I will not go over them again.

In recent years concerts have become a major activity in the vineyards, with more and more major acts coming to the area. Elton John, Rod Stewart and Dolly Parton are all coming to the area in the months ahead, as will the CMC Rocks the Hunter Country Music Festival. This is both a huge endorsement of the qualities of the vineyards and a great opportunity for growth of the broader City of Cessnock. I think this is an important point. While it is easy to view the Pokolbin area in isolation, I believe the gifts of the Pokolbin area must be felt across the entire Cessnock electorate, and used to address issues right across the town. In the past decade we have seen a number of large projects in the centre of the town. One of the biggest local projects we have seen in recent years—delivered by a Labor local council—is the very modern Baddeley Park Sportsground, which I can assure the House is the envy of Newcastle Rugby League and probably most of country New South Wales.

I say this because it has hosted the final of the Country Divisional Championship numerous times since it opened in 2005, as well as the Newcastle Knights and the Newcastle Jets trials, and was going to be a training venue as part of Australia's FIFA World Cup bid—still a sore point for many of us. The Cessnock Performing Arts Centre is another project that has added to the vibrancy of the town. A major investment by the last council and opened a couple of years ago, the Performing Arts Centre is a superb venue, and has hosted loads of plays, stand-up comedians, musicians and entertainers such as Jon English and Kasey Chambers, and other events that may not have come to the area had it not been for this facility. I am also told the centre is hosting a particularly big event next February, so watch this space. Cessnock is also a town full of achievers.

When it comes to people achieving things, Cessnock is perhaps best known for sport, and particularly rugby league. Following in the footsteps of the Johns brothers and Bill Peden, Cessnock product and tackling machine Joel Edwards will line up for the Knights against Melbourne on Sunday, in his first appearance in the finals. I am sure members of the House who are not Knights supporters will also have a keen interest in the outcome of this game, so that we can keep the trophy in New South Wales. He is not the only example though. Cessnock has produced junior and senior representatives in both rugby codes, football, netball, basketball, hockey, tennis, swimming, water polo, gymnastics, shooting and archery at both State and national levels. I am sorry if I have forgotten some sports but, as members can tell, there are a few to remember.

I must make special note of gymnastics because only last weekend my daughter Isla won the right to go to the State championships. The Cessnock Police and Community Youth Club is the home of gymnastics in Cessnock and many other police and community youth clubs across the State. The existing police and community youth club site has recently been sold and a new site is to be developed in nearby streets. I welcome the announcement from the Coalition Government that funding will be available for new police and community youth clubs. This new centre in Cessnock is a clear signal of growth and prosperity and a community that is experiencing an upward trend in life and lifestyle. I and other parents in the town see our children achieving in sport and are tremendously proud, not only of their ability and application but of the healthy lifestyle they are embracing.

But while sports men and women may be notable examples, Cessnock people are achieving on all scales and in all fields. We continue to see young people returning home with a degree in law or medicine or any of the other fields that address needs in our community. The challenge of course is to keep them, but that is a challenge that is helped by the vitality and sense of the collective within our community. There is a continued focus on the low level of tertiary education in Cessnock, and this needs to be addressed. However, the electorate of Cessnock ranked third in the State for its proportion of people with a trade qualification, according to the last census. What I read into this is that, while education levels in Cessnock do need to improve, there are plenty of good people with good skills in the town.

It is not all doom and gloom. Cessnock is a town in which the community and dozens and dozens of volunteer groups play a huge role. Cessnock, the town, is just one part of the Cessnock electorate. Over the years, the electorate has moved north, south-east and west, but Cessnock town has always been its heart. What I have tried to do today is to cut through some of the negative impressions that people place on the town of Cessnock, and speak about some of the things the town has going for it. I urge members of the House and people across the State to come and have a look for themselves.

**Mr PAUL TOOLE** (Bathurst—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.55 p.m.]: Cessnock is a beautiful part of New South Wales. But it is not only the Labor councillors of Cessnock who have done the work that has seen the Cessnock community grow. I commend the Mayor of Cessnock, Alison Davey, a member of The Nationals and popularly elected mayor. She has had a vision and been a strong advocate for the region, attracting new business and new residents to the Cessnock area. She has been a real champion and fighter for the area. I am sure the member for Cessnock and the mayor of Cessnock will be able to work very closely together to ensure that the Cessnock area continues to thrive.

### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT SMOKE-FREE POLICIES**

**Mr MARK COURE** (Oatley) [3.56 p.m.]: I take this opportunity to raise a matter of great concern to my community, the issue of smoking, and in particular steps that councils have taken to introduce smoke-free policies in my local community. Recently the Heart Foundation conducted a survey of councils across New South Wales called the "Smoke-free Policy in Outdoor Areas", and the policies that councils have enacted to reduce smoking. The report on the survey makes fascinating reading. Each council was assessed across a number of categories, including playgrounds, sports fields, alfresco dining, beaches, parks, recreation areas, reserves, pools, bus shelters, and within 10 metres of council buildings and council events.

Kogarah Council has instituted a number of smoke-free policies in the years since I was elected to the council in 2004, including banning smoking at sporting fields, parks, reserves, pools, bus shelters and council events. However, what troubles me and many members of my community is the lack of action and initiative taken by other councils in the St George area. Australian Labor Party controlled and dominated councils such as Rockdale and Hurstville councils have only banned smoking in playgrounds, while Rockdale Council has no smoke-free policies revealed by the survey. I find it quite incredible that neither council has taken any step to address this issue.

Smoking-related harm is a significant public health issue. Let us examine the facts. First, tobacco-related harm remains the leading cause of preventable illness and death in New South Wales. Secondly, smoking-related illnesses account for approximately 5,200 deaths and 44,000 hospitalisations each year in New South Wales. One in every two lifetime smokers will die early as a result of smoking. The social costs of smoking, including the costs borne by government and individuals, are estimated at more than \$8 billion annually in New South Wales. Those stark figures speak for themselves. It is very disappointing that neither council has tried to tackle this issue, especially as we know so much about the harm of smoking. That harm is not only to the individual smoker but also to others around them, particularly children, through secondary or passive smoking.

A number of people in my community have raised this issue with me. Mothers, in particular, are concerned that their young children are potentially suffering damage through the simple act of breathing other people's smoke. I would strongly suggest to all members that they have a close look at the brochure on the results of the Heart Foundation survey and the results of councils in their respective communities. I also note that other Labor-controlled councils, such as Botany Bay, Campbelltown and others, and Byron Shire Council that is controlled by The Greens, have no smoke-free policy and have done nothing about it since 2007.

I believe it is incumbent upon all of us in this place to champion the health of our communities, especially when a number of councils have not taken up the challenge. We should provide sound policy settings and appropriate support to those who want to quit smoking. I wrote to the Minister for Healthy Lifestyles on behalf of my community to express my real concern about some of the results in this survey. I urge him to consider smoke-free policies throughout New South Wales, especially in outdoor areas. I believe we are entitled to clean air as well as a healthy and safe environment in which to go about our daily lives.

### **EDGEHILL BATHURST JOG**

**Mr PAUL TOOLE** (Bathurst—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.01 p.m.]: I inform the House of another healthy event that will take place in my electorate this Sunday. I am glad the member for Balmain has arrived because his time was running out and he only just made it. The event that is taking place in my electorate this weekend is the Thirty-sixth Edgell Bathurst Jog. I will have the honour of standing at the courthouse and starting the several thousand runners who will be participating in this major family fun race in Bathurst.

**Mr Clayton Barr:** Are you running?

**Mr PAUL TOOLE:** As a man of the people, I will be starting the race and then I will be changing clothes and running the race. I will be taking part in the event. It is the biggest fun run held in country New South Wales. It is 7.5 kilometres long, and mums, dads and school groups take part. We see strollers being pushed along and people dressing up for the event. The event started in 1976 when Edgell celebrated the jubilee of its business in the city of Bathurst. Edgell was the first company in Australia to begin canning vegetables with the launch of Edgell asparagus in 1926. In 1995 Simplot Australia bought the company and Simplot is now the major sponsor of the event. This is a non-profit community event. The first jog attracted approximately 800 competitors.

I extend an invitation to the member for Mount Druitt to take part in it. He does not have to run; he can walk the course. It was called the Jubilee Jog when it first began. Over the years some 45,000 runners have taken part in the event. It goes for approximately 90 minutes so there is plenty of time for people to complete the race. There are lots of prizes and draws at the end. First, second, and third prizes are awarded to the male and female winning competitors. Local businesses get right behind the event and support it by donating cash and prizes. The local service organisations, such as Quota, Rotary, the Scouts and the Guides, all assist with the various activities that take place, such as cooking the barbecue, helping out with traffic control, and handing out bibs on the day. All that makes the event run smoothly.

The race used to be eight kilometres long but it had to change to 7.5 kilometres. That was not for me. That decision was made for the safety of competitors because they have to cross the Great Western Highway. This year the race is slightly shorter than it has been in the past. I congratulate the entire committee that has worked hard over the past 12 months to once again ensure that a great community event is brought to Bathurst. We will see people travelling from far and wide to take part in this annual event.

### **SCHOOL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM**

**Mr JAMIE PARKER** (Balmain) [4.05 p.m.]: I acknowledge the excellence of school leaders within my electorate of Balmain and recognise the importance of encouraging young people to take up leadership

positions within our schools and wider communities. This week I hosted a morning tea and roundtable discussion with student leaders from high schools within my electorate. At the morning tea we discussed the development of a leadership program to encourage young people to take up leadership positions in their schools and within the broader community. My office will be developing this program, which will facilitate and encourage improved engagement between different sections of our community—business leaders, community and school leaders, local councils and local residents.

As a former Mayor of Leichhardt and a councillor for more than 12 years, and now as the local State member, I believe there is a great opportunity for me to work with students and school communities to improve networks to the benefit of all involved. Both outgoing and incoming school leaders attended the morning tea and were eager to discuss a number of issues affecting them. I was very impressed by the students' level of interest and engagement in a wide range of issues. One student spoke about the importance of developing strong infrastructure and critical front-line services to support the growing inner-city residential population. There was discussion about the proposed Harold Park development, which has caused a great deal of consternation in my community.

The students drew particular attention to their frustration as a result of unreliable public transport services to and from school. The teachers said that students often are late for school due to erratic public transport services. Students were frustrated by the lack of integrated ticketing across different modes of transport and being unable to obtain concession fares for light rail. Because there are no railway stations in my electorate, light rail is an important option for people in my community. Unfortunately buses create widespread traffic congestion in my electorate. If concession fares for students travelling to and from school were permitted on light rail, it would relieve the road network of some bus congestion and also allow students from St Scholastica's College and two public schools in my community to access light rail services. I have met with the Minister for Transport to discuss this issue. I will continue to lobby the Minister to achieve the concession.

I am grateful to the teachers who attended the morning tea and joined in our roundtable discussion. It provided an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the issues affecting those at the front line of our education system. My mother and sisters are teachers and I have great respect for the excellent work that teachers do. Education is a major priority of my work as the member for Balmain. Teachers perform an invaluable role within our community—a role which often goes unnoticed and unrewarded. Last week I referred to the excellent work of the Glebe Pathways Project, which is an important educational program in my community. I will continue with my endeavours to build ties with schools and other education providers within my electorate.

I thank the following students and teachers who attended the discussion of the leadership program: From St Scholastica's College, Eliza Mannix, Louise Nolan, Laura Gordon, Ashleigh Brady and their teacher Margaret Taborda; from the Sydney Secondary College Balmain Campus, Max Harris, Alan Huynh, Anneke Anderson, Natalie Ng, Max Alston, Jessica Fernandez, Rhys Austin, Michael Inhelder and the school's deputy principal, Robyn Matthews; from the Sydney Secondary College Leichhardt Campus, Lisa Vo, Kevin Vu Ha, Emma Leyland, Finn Parker and their teacher Emily O'Connell; from the International Grammar School, Charlotte Kitchin and Lewis Evans. I acknowledge leaders from the Sydney Secondary College Blackwattle Bay campus, who were unable to attend the morning tea due to their studies: Jack Liang, Georgia Wilson, Gina Ricardo and Jake Bailey.

The development of this program is an important part of building connections between the State Government, local communities, local councils and local schools. I believe we have an excellent opportunity to help students and young people by providing work experience opportunities, mentoring and other positive initiatives. It is clear this community has a wonderful resource in their students and teachers. I thank all of the students who embody the enthusiasm and excellence that defines great leaders. I commend them on their achievements to date and wish them many more successes in the future.

**Private members' statements concluded.**

**The House adjourned, pursuant to standing and sessional orders, at 4.10 p.m. until  
Monday 12 September 2011 at 1.00 p.m.**

---