

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 11 October 2011

The Speaker (Mrs Shelley Hancock) took the chair at 1.00 p.m.

The Speaker read the Prayer and acknowledgement of country.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

RURAL FIRE SERVICE CADET GRADUATIONS

Mr JOHN BARILARO (Monaro) [1.00 p.m.]: On 21 September 2011 it was my great pleasure to attend the Rural Fire Service 2011 cadet graduation in Bombala. As a result of the graduation of those cadets the entire region will benefit from an increased preparedness for the impending summer season. The Rural Fire Service is an intrinsic part of our community and its commitment and dedication to defending our community from the dangers of bushfires is truly inspiring. There is no organisation in my electorate that is held in higher regard than the Rural Fire Service, which has a most important role to play in New South Wales.

Bushfire is part of the Australian landscape, and in New South Wales it is managed by the cooperative effort of the whole community. The New South Wales Rural Fire Service is the lead agency in combating bushfires; it enables the community to be better prepared for and protected from bushfires. Although fighting fires and protecting the community in times of emergency is the most visible role of the Rural Fire Service, it has many responsibilities as the lead agency for bushfire management and mitigation in New South Wales.

The New South Wales Rural Fire Service is a world leader in the development and implementation of training programs for fire and related agencies. Its volunteers and staff undertake a variety of functions at fires and other emergencies that occur from time to time throughout New South Wales and, on occasion, interstate. To ensure this capability its personnel are provided with competencies—skills, knowledge and attitudes—necessary to undertake their duties. All firefighters of the Rural Fire Service must be competent to the minimum level of bush firefighter, which is generally the first level of firefighting training undertaken by all personnel within the Rural Fire Service. Personnel who complete that training can choose to go on and develop leadership and specialist skills through a range of courses and activities of the Rural Fire Service.

The cadets who graduated at the Bombala ceremony should know that they are joining an organisation with a proud tradition of service and that their commitment and hard work, which have been demonstrated already in their training, is highly valued by the broader community. To volunteer one's time and energy to keep one's own property and that of others safe from the threat of bushfire is a remarkable commitment. The community I represent is very proud of the cadets and is very thankful for the service they provide. The continual flow of enthusiastic and competent members is critical to the future sustainability of the Rural Fire Service membership. Therefore, it is important to encourage young people to join the Rural Fire Service by establishing structures and programs that support their involvement with the service.

Membership with the Rural Fire Service is a wonderful way to help young people develop qualities such as initiative, cooperation, self-esteem, community responsibility and service. Young people can begin their association with the Rural Fire Service between the ages of 12 and 16 years by participating in a secondary school cadet program such as that provided in Bombala for year 9 or year 10 students, joining a Rural Fire Service Brigade as a junior member, or joining a Rural Fire Service Cadet Brigade. The students from Bombala who graduated in September were Tanya Cox, Gary Giles, Thomas Hall, Veronica Hartmeier, Jye Herron, Todd Jamieson, Troy Jamieson, Tyler Jones, Jacob Litchfield, Daniel McKinnell, Dylan Overend, Andrew Platts, Luke Platts, William Regent, Rebecca Richardson, Lawrance Salter, Matt Towns and Darcy Walker.

Volunteering is very important to community safety. As fire is a natural part of the Australian landscape, the Rural Fire Service plays an important role in reducing the risk of fire and the problems posed by other emergencies. This community safety role relies on the participation of all members of the community: land owners, councils and fire authorities and volunteers in bushfire management. A wide range of Rural Fire Service

programs and personnel have been developed to involve all land managers and New South Wales residents in bushfire management and prevention and protection from other emergencies. They include such things as fire education programs, risk management, planning, hazard reduction, safer building in bushfire prone areas, encouraging volunteers to the organisation and training and education. I congratulate all the graduating cadets and wish them and everybody in our community all the best in the upcoming fire season and look forward to a safe summer.

Mr CRAIG BAUMANN (Port Stephens—Parliamentary Secretary) [1.05 p.m.]: I congratulate the member for Monaro for reminding the House of the important work of the Rural Fire Service and its ongoing need to train new volunteers. Like you, Madam Speaker, I represent an electorate with large areas of bushland. I and my neighbours rely on the professional volunteers of the Rural Fire Service. The House congratulates Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons and hopes and prays that we will have a relatively safe fire season.

WOLLONGONG ELECTORATE

Ms NOREEN HAY (Wollongong) [1.06 p.m.]: I inform my colleagues of the continuing contempt shown to the people in my electorate of Wollongong and, indeed, the whole of the Illawarra by the O'Farrell Government. Wollongong will not receive the of State Government payroll tax rebates that were announced earlier this year that are aimed at creating 40,000 jobs in regional New South Wales. This outrageous move has been made possible by having Wollongong classified as "metropolitan" rather than "regional", resulting in Wollongong having to compete with areas such as Sydney and Newcastle for a share of 60,000 jobs. I remind members that much was made by the Coalition of Wollongong getting a share of the 40,000 regional jobs in the run-up to the recent State elections. Among the Coalition's promises there was no suggestion that Wollongong would be deemed "metropolitan" and, therefore, would not receive a share of the regional jobs that were promised.

During the election I made much of my doubts that the Coalition would create 40,000 jobs and indeed, even if it did, whether Wollongong would get a share of them. Clearly, and disappointingly, I was proved right; Wollongong has again been disregarded, contrary to the Coalition's promise during the election, at a time when BlueScope Steel has laid off more than 800 workers. It is an absolute slap in the face for the people in my electorate, especially given that Wollongong was clearly deemed a regional city in the 2004 Regional Development Policy. In the past weeks in this House I have called on the Government to either relocate funding to government departments or to increase or match funding from the Federal Government that is proposed to assist the steelworkers who have been laid off, but my calls have fallen on deaf ears.

The Government's election promises are, as usual, vaporising in the wind and it no longer speaks about job creation and support for the Illawarra, and particularly in my electorate of Wollongong. Its silence is deafening. To add insult to injury, the Government has announced the closure of the emergency department of Bulli Hospital. I am sure that my colleague the member for Keira will have plenty to say about that. From my perspective the closure makes a mockery of one of the promises made by the Minister for Health, and it will take place without a single additional resource being put into the emergency department of Wollongong Hospital.

It beggars belief. This Government is closing down one emergency department and sending patients to the emergency department at Wollongong Hospital, which, according to Coalition members during the election campaign, is already stretched to the limit. The Minister repeatedly said that if the Coalition were elected, she would fix trolley block and other problems. However, she has not allocated any resources to Wollongong Hospital emergency department despite the fact that it will now be required to take patients from the northern suburbs. This Government should spend more money at Bulli District Hospital and encourage patients who now travel to Wollongong Hospital emergency department to go to Bulli District Hospital to alleviate the pressure on Wollongong Hospital.

The Government's proposal is a recipe for disaster. It will be yet another in the long list of disasters that this Government has foisted on the people of Wollongong and the Illawarra. The abolition of stamp duty relief for first home buyers will destroy the hopes of young families who want to own their own home. The axing of the Illawarra Advantage Fund is yet another disaster for the people of the Illawarra. That funding assisted businesses that wished to relocate to the area and to create jobs. During these dire times we need specific assistance to generate employment and financial investment, not a mere \$5 million. We need whatever is necessary to create jobs to take the pressure off those who are doing it tough in the electorate of Wollongong. The axing of the Illawarra Advantage Fund is a disgrace and I call on the Government to rescind its decision.

MORIAH COLLEGE AND ROSE BAY SECONDARY COLLEGE GRADUATIONS

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON (Vaucluse—Parliamentary Secretary) [1.11 p.m.]: I appreciate this opportunity to speak about two recent graduation ceremonies that I attended to celebrate the achievements of year 12 students at schools in my electorate of Vaucluse. The first graduation ceremony was held at Moriah College on 20 September 2011. Although the college is located in the electorate of my parliamentary colleague the member for Coogee, a vast majority of the college community lives in my electorate, and that is why I take a special interest in the school.

The second graduation ceremony was held the following night at Rose Bay Secondary College in the suburb of Dover Heights. The college is the only public high school in my electorate. Having attended the two ceremonies in the space of two days, I was clearly reminded of both the diversity of my electorate and the tenacity and achievements of its younger residents who are about to take the next big steps in their lives. Attending the graduations made me reflect on my year 12 graduation. Although it was a long time ago, I remember feeling excited at the prospect of a new life beyond school.

Mr Ryan Park: About five years ago.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: Indeed, even less than that. I remember my excitement, but I also felt a tinge of anxiousness about what lay beyond. I would not have dreamt at that time that I would have the opportunity to represent the people of New South Wales in this place, and I am gratified to have that opportunity. Both Moriah College and Rose Bay Secondary College welcome a different mix of students and both are co-educational. Moriah College is an independent Orthodox Jewish school that allows students to complete the New South Wales school curriculum while promoting awareness amongst its students of Jewish traditions and ethics and a commitment to Orthodox Judaism. Led by the Principal Kim Fillingham, it is one of the premier Jewish schools in Australia.

My electorate has the largest Jewish population of any electorate in New South Wales, with more than 20 per cent of my constituents declaring themselves to be of Jewish faith. Moriah College has proved to be a strong institution for children of the Jewish community and it supports them to achieve both their academic and community goals. In 2010 the college was ranked fifteenth in the State and was the fifth best school in all English courses. In addition, 25 students achieved an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank of 90 per cent or more and the students generally excel academically while practising Orthodox Judaism.

Rose Bay Secondary College has a different background, but, like Moriah College, it also has a proud tradition. As I said, the college is the only public high school in my electorate. It is of course secular and it is partially selective, with two selective classes in each academic year. It is led by Principal Jim Linton and it had 993 enrolments in 2010. The college takes in students from all backgrounds within my electorate, with 12 per cent coming from a low socioeconomic background and 48 per cent speaking languages other than English. Priding itself on its diversity, Rose Bay Secondary College focuses on offering a wide range of extracurricular activities. The musical performances at the graduation ceremony were unforgettable. I think we have a number of talented budding composers and performers in our midst. Like their fellow students at Moriah College, students at Rose Bay Secondary College excel academically. In 2010, 10 students completing the Higher School Certificate at the college achieved an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank of more than 90 per cent.

There were also similarities at both school's graduation events. At each I was surrounded by jubilant students and their parents, who were of course proud of their achievements and excited for their future. I saw firsthand the reward for effort that our educational system encourages and the way in which education is an invaluable tool in helping individuals to find their talents, to pursue their dreams, to help them understand others around them and to embrace diversity. Regardless of their background, it is clear to me that they can reach for the same opportunities through quality education. We in New South Wales are in a lucky place.

My electorate has beautiful views, a stunning natural environment, the spectacular shores of Sydney Harbour and the sun and sand at Bondi Beach. However, one of the best things about it is the educational opportunities that it offers. Each student graduating this year from Moriah College and Rose Bay Secondary College shares the will to succeed and their time at those institutions is the first step towards the possibility of further achievements. I congratulate every student at Moriah College and Rose Bay Secondary College and every student in my electorate who is completing year 12 and I extend my best wishes for their future success. I look forward to following their future achievements and hope they have a healthy and happy life.

HMAS PARRAMATTA

Dr GEOFF LEE (Parramatta) [1.16 p.m.]: It gives me great pleasure to speak about an event I attended representing the Premier and the people of Parramatta when HMAS *Parramatta* departed for a six-month deployment as part of Operation Slipper, which is the contribution of the Australian Defence Forces to the international coalition against terrorism. On Monday 26 September 2011, 191 men and women departed from Sydney and will spend Christmas patrolling more than 2.5 million square metres of international waters in the Middle East area of operations. HMAS *Parramatta* will provide essential support to maritime security operations in the area. This deployment marks the ship's fourth deployment in the Middle East. The 191 personnel aboard the ship will be contributing to a global mission that is designed to help disrupt the cross-border transport of criminals, narcotics and weapons. It will also ensure the continued safety of all mariners.

As I said, this deployment is HMAS *Parramatta*'s fourth deployment in the Middle East area of operations and the twenty-seventh rotation of a Royal Australian Navy fleet unit since September 2001. HMAS *Parramatta* will relieve HMAS *Toowoomba* on station. The Minister for Defence, Mr Stephen Smith, and the Commander of the Australian Surface Force, Commodore Stephen McDowall, DSM, CSM, RAN, joined me and the shadow Minister for Defence, Senator David Johnston, at the ceremony at Woolloomooloo. Other senior naval personnel also attended, as did representatives of the Parramatta RSL sub-branch—including Rick Anderson, John Byrne, Colin Smith and John Lyon—and family and friends of the crew. I wish the ship's company, under the command of Commander Guy Blackburn, a safe and secure deployment and look forward to welcoming them on their return in March 2012. The people of Parramatta and Australia alike are proud of the ship's company.

On 1 July 2011 Guy Blackburn assumed the privileged position of Commanding Officer of HMAS *Parramatta* with a great sense of occasion resulting from the Navy Sea Swap initiative. The new HMAS *Parramatta* crew are ex-HMAS *Ballarat* returned from a south-east Asian deployment. This was a significant event for the Royal Australian Navy and the crew of HMAS *Parramatta* in preparation for deployment. Preparing the ship and the company has been a busy time. The commander has researched history extensively and intends to maintain and improve the strong bond between the ship and her namesake's citizens. HMAS *Parramatta* has strong bonds with the city of Parramatta, the various organisations it supports and, most notably, its patronage of Westmead Children's Hospital as its chosen charity. HMAS *Parramatta* also remains fully committed and proudly linked to the Parramatta Leagues Club and supports the Parramatta Eels rugby league team.

As part of the reinvigoration of the HMAS *Parramatta* spirit, monthly circulation of a newsletter from the ship via email will soon commence to outline the ship's forecast planned activities, including charity support for Westmead Children's Hospital. While the newsletter will focus on immediate family members, it is anticipated that the electronic format will be widely available for distribution to the people of Parramatta, New South Wales and Australia. HMAS *Parramatta* (IV) continues this distinguished legacy from HMAS *Parramatta* (I), the first Australian Navy ship commissioned in 1910. HMAS *Parramatta* (II) was sunk in 1941 with 139 lives lost. HMAS *Parramatta* (III) provided distinguished service in the Vietnam conflict. I will be attending the seventieth anniversary of the sinking of HMAS *Parramatta* (II) on 26 November, when a large number of people will gather by the banks of the Parramatta River to commemorate this event.

CABRAMATTA ELECTORATE VICTORY IN THE PACIFIC DAY COMMEMORATION

Mr NICK LALICH (Cabramatta) [1.21 p.m.]: On Sunday 14 August 2011 I had the pleasure of being invited to Cabra-Vale Park to commemorate Victory in the Pacific Day. VP Day, as it is known, commemorates 14 August 1945—the day on which the Japanese surrendered to the Allied Forces, effectively ending World War II. I was honoured to be asked to speak at the ceremony and to acknowledge those who had risked their lives so bravely for our country. Of the one million Australians who served in World War II, 40,000 troops died, 30,000 were taken prisoner and many thousands more were wounded or injured in the course of their military service. By August 1945 Australia had been at war for over five years, but Japan's surrender marked the end of the war for Australia. The announcement by Prime Minister Ben Chifley that morning 66 years ago was triumphant for all Australians: spontaneous outpourings of joy, happiness and relief swept across Australia at the wonderful news that our soldiers were coming home as the threat of a Japanese invasion was over.

Martin Place, Sydney, Bourke Street, Melbourne and the main streets of almost every city and town were filled with people celebrating this great victory. Traffic came to a standstill, trams inched along and people

danced in the streets rejoicing that family members and friends finally were coming home safely. While the end of the war was a joyous occasion, the lives of our returned soldiers had changed due to the harsh realities of war that they had experienced—memories that will be with them always—and they had to adjust to life as civilians. For those who fought on the front line the years ahead were to be emotional and mentally challenging.

Women also played a vital role during the war, serving in the nurse corps and auxiliary services, and volunteering in organisations such as the Women's Land Army. These women, who found a sense of independence during the war, were expected to return to their homes to again become wives and mothers. On VP Day we pay tribute to and salute the millions of Australians who served in the war. We honour those who fought so bravely, we commemorate their courageous efforts and we remember the lives of those we lost. I was asked by the RSL to reflect for a moment and recite the *Prayer of the Nation*, which I repeat to the House:

Almighty God, watch over all those serving in the Armed Forces and those who still suffer disabilities through sickness or injuries sustained in war, strengthen and encourage those who have been saddened by loss of loved ones, especially children deprived of a father's care and protection.

Grant that the same courage and resolution, the same comradeship and service shown in the last great struggle in which our country was involved, may now be offered in the greater task of making a true and lasting peace.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge the work of the Victory in the Pacific Committee and the following clubs, and their presidents, that were instrumental in putting together this memorial day: Cabra-Vale Diggers Club and president, Stan Martin; Canley Heights RSL Sub Branch and president, Richard Pritchard; Campbelltown RSL Sub Club and president, G. J. Holland; Liverpool RSL Sub Club and president, Jim Sprice, OAM; Fairfield RSL Club and president, John Burgess; Ingleburn RSL Sub Club and president, Ray James; Ingleburn RSL Club and president, Ray Williams; Mounties Group and president, Kevin Ingram; and Smithfield RSL Sub- Branch and president, Douglass Newall.

I acknowledge also the VIPs who attended the ceremony: the Hon. Chris Hays, MP, Federal member for Fowler, representing the Prime Minister; the Hon. Laurie Ferguson, MP, Federal member for Werriwa; Mr Paul Lynch, MP, State member for Liverpool; Mr Andrew Rohan, MP, State member for Smithfield; Ms Wendy Waller, Mayor of Liverpool City Council; Mr John Haines, President of the Returned and Services League of Australia; Mr Ron Brown, OAM, President of the National Servicemen's Association; Lieutenant Colonel A. Hollink, School of Military Engineering; Father Major Mau Mau Manu, Padre for the Holsworthy military area; and Aunt May Robinson, Elder of the Aboriginal Land Council, who gave us a wonderful Welcome to Country. It is important that we continue to commemorate such occasions and always remember the sacrifices made by so many to ensure the freedom and democracy of our great country. Lest we forget.

WEDDERBURN RURAL FIRE BRIGADE SIXTIETH ANNIVERSARY

Mr BRYAN DOYLE (Campbelltown) [1.26 p.m.]: On 24 September 2011 I was very pleased to attend the sixtieth anniversary celebrations of the Wedderburn Rural Fire Brigade. Also in attendance was Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons, AFSM, superintendents Martin Surrey and Jason Heffernan—Macarthur zone manager; brigade captain, David Scott, and his wife Adele; and brigade members and their families. I was proud to represent at those celebrations the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Mr Michael Gallacher. The rural community of Wedderburn has been under bushfire threat since time began. Wedderburn residents have faced strong fire risks each year due to the suburb being surrounded by bush along the Georges River and the Dharawal State Conservation Area to the south, which I am proud to say will soon become the Dharawal National Park. In her poem *My Country* Dorothea Mackellar referred to the beauty and the terror of our wide brown land. The residents of Wedderburn know the beauty and the terror all too well; for them the terror comes in the form of bushfires.

Following World War I fires were fought by local landowners and farmers using only the strength of their character and friendships, wet bags, tree branches and water from their tanks and dams. During major outbreaks police would take charge, recruiting people from local pubs and railway stations—probably in that order, as there were considerably more pubs than railway stations in those days. Past brigade captain Allan Harding recalled that those serving on jury duty also were given exemptions to join the firefighting teams. However, it was realised that fighting bushfires needed a higher response level. This led Campbelltown council to seek help from the fire commissioner to establish a bush fire brigade. So it was that 60 years ago, on 24 September 1951, the Wedderburn Bush Fire Brigade was officially formed when it elected men such as George Scattergood as captain, and C. Knight, T. Swann, R. Houldsworth, E. Stanton and H. E. McNamara as deputy captains.

Sixty years of proud service has followed and we are proud to honour that living legacy. Some of the older members were present to give personal accounts of the stories of those great men. Currently, the duty of the brigade includes combating small and easily contained grass fires through to large, fast-moving fires that cover a vast area, often requiring firefighters to stand up for long and hard duty, sometimes in remote and rugged locations. The brigade is also involved in ongoing prevention and hazard reduction together with education of the community, and it responds to local aviation incidents, floods and accidents. Underlying all of this, the brigade runs on the love and dedication of volunteers who give freely of their time to train, prepare and advise, and to go and fight bushfires.

There is a close bond between volunteer firefighters and their brigade captains and commissioned officers. As a former chief inspector of police, I know that leadership carries with it the burden of responsibility of command for training, readiness and deployment. Sending your officers—people that you know and have trained—into the danger of a fire ground is a heavy responsibility that must be exercised with wisdom and courage. This is especially so as we know that extreme bushfire conditions come around every decade or so, with our last danger period being in 2001-02. On behalf of a grateful community, I have extended my thanks to all members of the Wedderburn Rural Fire Brigade. I told them we were proud of them. They represent the very best that we have to offer at Campbelltown—the best of those opals of the south-west.

BULLI HOSPITAL

Mr RYAN PARK (Keira) [1.31 p.m.]: Over the weekend we heard that Bulli Hospital, which sits in the electorate of Heathcote, just outside the electorate of Keira, will have its emergency department closed. It is proposed to be replaced by an urgent care centre. However, tragically, that centre has had not a skerrick of money allocated to it. This is of major concern to the people of the northern suburbs of the Illawarra, who are right to be frustrated by the amount of time it has taken for Bulli Hospital to be sorted out. I accept that the previous Government took too long to resolve the issue, but prior to the election this Government made clear commitments about Bulli Hospital. It said it would upgrade services on that site. Time and time again, the health Minister came to Bulli Hospital and spoke about the important role it plays in the Illawarra health network. The member for Wollongong has already outlined the important role that Bulli Hospital plays in taking some of the strain away from an already overstrained Wollongong Hospital.

It is simply not good enough to shut down an emergency department and say there is a plan to establish an urgent care centre when not one single dollar has been allocated to that urgent care centre in the budget that was delivered just over a month ago. It is important that governments at all levels and of all persuasions honour the commitments they make to communities. I am very disappointed that for the past six months the member for Heathcote has sat silently in this place and has not fought for the primary care centre that I have been fighting for—a \$9.4 million commitment made by the previous Labor Government, which would have been supported by the then Opposition. Despite the calls and the rhetoric before the election, the member for Heathcote has been silent on this issue.

Mr Chris Patterson: Point of order: I apologise for not knowing the process, but I was led to believe in my ignorance that private members' statements were to do with the member's electorate.

Mr RYAN PARK: It is.

Mr Chris Patterson: They do not have to be positive statements, but denigrating people in other electorates is not what I would have thought private members' statements were about.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Geoff Provest): Order! If a member wishes to attack another member he or she should do so by way of substantive motion. The original point of order is that private members' statements traditionally focus on issues affecting a member's electorate. A number of Speakers have ruled on this. I draw the member for Keira back to his private member's statement.

Mr RYAN PARK: I do not think there can be any more important issue reflective of something in my electorate. Bulli Hospital is literally 20 to 30 metres outside my electorate boundary and the vast majority of people attending the hospital are from the electorate of Keira. The vast majority of people who attend Bulli Hospital come from the northern suburbs of the Illawarra and they are the people I represent in this place. There is no more important issue to the people of Keira than the provision of health services. There is also no more important issue to the people of Keira than when, prior to an election, politicians come into the area—joined by the then shadow Minister—and make enormous statements about what they are going to do in office, and less than six months later turn around and completely deceive the local community.

I will never stop defending the rights of my local community in this place. They have a right to be heard. We on this side are small in number, but my community elected in me someone who is going to fight for them. I intend fighting for them and for this hospital every step of the way, and I encourage the member for Heathcote, given the important role that the hospital plays in our local communities, to join with me and to do the same, as he is in relation to the fisheries centre.

Mr CRAIG BAUMANN (Port Stephens—Parliamentary Secretary) [1.36 p.m.]: With regard to the comments of the member for Keira, I will talk to the Minister and to the member for Heathcote. However, I point out that we have been in power for only six months; those opposite had 16 years and did absolutely nothing except leave a \$5.2 billion black hole that we are desperately trying to fill.

ORANGE ELECTORATE EVENTS

Mr ANDREW GEE (Orange) [1.37 p.m.]: I draw the attention of the House to the fact that sport and recreation have been at the forefront of people's minds in the Orange electorate with winter sports finals, the start of summer sports and a vibrant agricultural show circuit providing a host of recreational opportunities. During recent months I have had the pleasure of attending a number of agricultural shows in the Orange electorate and it has been my great honour to officially open some of them. I have even had the honour of presenting sashes to the winners of sheepdog trials and show dogs—and I note that the doyen of show dog judges, Don Mahoney, works in my office.

These annual community events in country towns and villages are almost entirely organised by volunteers who take great pride in the programs they present for patrons. They are important events because they bring our regional communities together. If people in cities want to find out what the heartland of New South Wales and Australia is all about, I say come to a country show. Annual shows also bring many visitors to towns in the form of stallholders and exhibitors. There is often keen competition for blue ribbons in a variety of sections, including jams, cakes, flowers, photographs and art, to name just a few. Children also get into the act with schools often encouraging their students to participate with entries in their local shows.

Many local volunteers take on the role of stewards of the various sections and, along with the leaders of the organisations, are the unsung heroes who make these events possible. Country show societies and their committees work extremely hard with limited resources. The volunteers and presidents of these societies work extremely hard, and I make particular mention of Lyn Jarvis at Wellington, Peter Naylor at Orange, Dave Farrell at Cudal, Colin Woodhouse at Molong and Owen Murray at Manildra. Owen's parents, Milton and Ella, who organised the Manildra show for years, met for the very first time at the Manildra show. Country shows mean a lot to country people and country communities.

In addition, I commend the work of David Gardiner and Vicki George, who were the key organisers of the second Windeyer Spring Fair, which I opened last month. While not deemed a full agricultural show, it provided the local community with a great day's entertainment and, I might add, the local member with an opportunity to ride on a Harley Davidson trike. I congratulate all country show communities in the Orange electorate on a job well done. The Group 10 rugby league grand final, which is seen by many as the centrepiece of winter sport in the Central West, was hosted by Orange this year, and it was a great credit to the Orange CYMS team that they won a consecutive grand final.

CYMS had gone close many times in the years leading up to its 2010 grand final, including the 2002 grand final played at Mudgee when the Mudgee team clinched a try just as the full time siren was about to sound—it tore the heart out of the Orange team. CYMS had gone 22 years without grand final success in the Group 10 competition before its breakthrough win last year, and it is a great credit to the club, its players and coaches that it has been able to back up its 2010 triumph with a superb victory this year. CYMS earned the right to host the grand final when it defeated the minor premiers Lithgow Workies in the grand final qualifier played in enemy territory at Lithgow.

On the summer sports front, the triathlon season is underway, and this growth sport in the Central West is producing some exceptional talent from around the Orange electorate. Mudgee's Nicholas Kastelein is one such athlete. He has aspirations to perform at the highest level and is leaving no stone unturned to make a career in his chosen sport. The son of Hawaiian and Australian Iron Man legend Nick Kastelein, Nicholas has been competing in Europe, where the sport is challenging cycling in popularity, for the past two Australian winters. During 2011 he was based in Zurich, Switzerland, and has raced his way into a start at a World Cup event in Korea at the end of next week. The efforts of Nicholas Kastelein are a great inspiration to young people in the

Orange electorate, and are important in teaching our young people what can be achieved with enthusiasm and dedication to one's sport. We should all be very proud of these outstanding achievers for communities in the Orange electorate.

GLEN INNES OPEN DOOR PROGRAM

Mr RICHARD TORBAY (Northern Tablelands) [1.41 p.m.]: Glen Innes is a community almost at the heart of my electorate of Northern Tablelands, with a population nudging 9,000, including a large district surrounding the town centre. Glen Innes is a country town, like many others across the State, but it has something that cannot be built or bought—a big heart. A successful youth program in Glen Innes was forced to suspend its activities when funds dried up. The message went out, and the community stepped in. The service is now back in business. But the question has been asked: For how long? With Glen Ennis and its big heart behind this unique project, the search for its ongoing or permanent funding is continuing.

In April 2010 the Glen Innes Open Door program began as a pilot project to create a safe place where young people could go at the end of their school day. They would do homework, catch up with friends, play games, cook a meal or prepare some after-school snacks. The project started with a \$20,000 seed funding grant from the Commonwealth before being taken on by Pathfinders, an incorporated not-for-profit community-based organisation based in Armidale and a major provider of services to young people and families in the whole of the area around the New England and north-west. With Pathfinders' involvement, the program was able to continue for 12 months.

The program is coordinated by long-term Glen Innes youth worker Sandra Smith, along with a hardworking team of volunteers, including her husband, Trevor. The service has not been able to borrow a minibus from any other service provider in the Glen Innes area, so Trevor has been using a twin-cab ute to pick up young people from around the town. A higher than average number of these participants are Indigenous youths. Aboriginal Elder Rosemary Curtis, a former local government councillor in the Glen Innes area as well as a school youth worker, has been an integral part of this program.

Many of the young people attending the Open Door program are considered to be vulnerable and at risk. Their home lives are sometimes dysfunctional and in their day-to-day lives they face many challenges that many of us could not imagine. Some live with domestic violence, substance abuse, inadequate housing and even hunger. To these young people the Open Door program is more than just somewhere to hang out. It is a lifeline and the closest thing to a real home that some will know. The Glen Innes community watched as this program was established and the benefits soon became clear—less criminal activity and vandalism, better results at school and, perhaps most importantly, happier and more confident young people. The community got behind the program, with volunteers helping out by driving, helping with homework, supervising and cooking. Even some of the parents of the young people are keen to lend a hand and get involved.

When funding through Pathfinders ran out about three months ago, the doors closed on this program, leaving many of the young people who had come to rely on its support confused and upset. Sandra Smith and her volunteers, whom I met with on a number of occasions, appealed to the community for help to keep the doors open. A lifeline soon came from the Glen Innes branch of the Freemasons who had heard of the closure. Sandra Smith said her phone rang at 11 o'clock one night and a wife of one of the Freemasons could not wait to share the news that the group had donated \$22,000 to keep the service going for a few more months. One of the Freemasons has even stepped forward to be a regular volunteer worker at the program.

Woolworths in Glen Innes also came to the rescue with an offer of groceries to keep the Open Door kitchen stocked, as did Bi-Lo, which provides a \$40 voucher each week to be used in-store. This generosity allows the kids to take part in cooking lessons and have a home-cooked meal afterwards. This is a terrific outcome for the service and the doors re-opened recently. But the problem still exists. Sandra Smith said she will stretch the money out for long as possible, but without regular funding the service will face the same problems in a few months time. However, Glen Innes is a very determined community and the fight is well and truly on to secure ongoing funding for this program. The New South Wales Government and the Department of Communities are currently reviewing funding options. Programs such as this that provide front-line services where they are needed most, at the grassroots level, should be a high priority in any government consideration.

AFRICAN WOMEN'S DINNER DANCE

Mr GUY ZANGARI (Fairfield) [1.46 p.m.]: On Saturday 10 September 2011 the African Women's Group Sydney hosted the sixth annual African Women's Dinner Dance at the Cabra-Vale Diggers Club. The

theme of the evening was "Love, Peace, Unity and Togetherness". The night was a colourful affair with green, red and yellow proudly displayed via hall and table decorations. The evening brought together a wide cross-section of African women. It was well attended, with more than 500 African-Australian women enjoying the night's festivities. For many women it was their first night out for quite some time—a night free from children, partners or husbands, a night that celebrated African womanhood and discussed the social issues faced by the community here in Australia as well as back on the African continent, a world which they had left behind. The organisers of this event feel that these women need the chance to have a break from their everyday routine. I am sure this sentiment would be echoed by members of this Chamber.

I acknowledge the efforts of the organising committee, especially Rosemary Kariuki and Achol Gai, for embracing and supporting the African Women in Sydney and New South Wales. Some of the women attending the night came to Australia as refugees, following horrific experiences of war in their countries of birth. Many have lost children and husbands to violence, often at the hands of the police or military. As you can imagine, for these women life in Australia is safe but also extremely stressful. In a speech during the evening it was highlighted how African women are coping with adjusting to a new culture, grieving for lost loved ones, learning a new language and doing their best to raise large families, often alone. Indeed for many African women migration to Australia posed its own set of unique challenges and problems, but none more so than the feeling of isolation and the expectation to conform in a new society, one that is so far removed from the world they had left behind.

In 2005 the plight of African refugees was highlighted by the horrific experiences of Melida Nsengi and her family, who came to Australia from Burundi. Melida and her family spoke not a word of English. After their arrival at Sydney airport, they were transferred to a first-floor flat in my electorate of Fairfield. Melida and her husband, Protais, had a son, Richard, who was 2½ years old and who suffered from sickle-cell anaemia. Eighteen hours after landing in Australia, Richard was in convulsions. Desperate for help, his father picked up the telephone, but unfortunately did not know how to operate it. His father then roamed the streets looking for someone who spoke their native tongue. Richard died, just kilometres away from a large Sydney hospital. The incident experienced by Melida and her family highlight the need for organisations such as the African Women's Group, which provides vital support to new arrivals to whom a new country is just as terrifying and horrific as their war-torn homeland if they do not have a bridge with the wider community.

HIV-AIDS is a pressing issue that affects all Africans. The main speaker that evening, Ms Kahiye, spoke about her life as a mother living with HIV-AIDS. She gave a heartfelt speech in which she discussed the issues surrounding African women's health, especially HIV-AIDS. For many of us HIV-AIDS exists only on the 6.00 p.m. news but for refugees from Africa, particularly women, HIV-AIDS is an everyday reality—a reality that cannot be escaped by moving to the other side of the world. Domestic abuse is another reality for African women. Superintendent Peter Lennon from Fairfield Police attended on the night to present information packs about services available to women to help them deal with domestic violence and other social issues.

The prevalence of domestic violence against women throughout the world is shameful. It is most evident in the experiences of African women and in Uganda, for example, 41 per cent of women have reported being beaten by a partner. No matter where one lives in the world, violence against women must be condemned. For the women present at the dinner the songs and laughter of that night was a world away from the horrific experiences they had left behind to proudly call Australia home. It was an opportunity to celebrate with fashion, dance and music; it was great to see them willing to share this with the broader community. All present on the night, many of whom came from various parts of the world, were made to feel welcome.

MARIE BASHIR PEACE AWARDS

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK (South Coast—The Speaker) [1.51 p.m.]: On Wednesday 21 September I was pleased to join with her Excellency the Governor, Professor Marie Bashir, the National Council of Women of New South Wales, the member for Penrith, the member for Strathfield, and young women from across the State to attend the second annual presentation of the Marie Bashir Peace Awards. I congratulate the New South Wales Council of Women on its wonderful organisation of the event. The National Council of Women of New South Wales was established in 1896 and is linked through the National Council of Women of Australia and the International Council of Women. The international council, formed in 1888, is the world's oldest international women's organisation. The National Council of Women of New South Wales is an umbrella organisation for a large and diverse number of affiliated women's organisations.

The council is non-sectarian and non-political and seeks to provide a forum for considered debate on policy matters, in particular those affecting women and children. It was fitting that this ceremony took place on

the United Nations International Day of Peace. The International Day of Peace or "Peace Day" provides an opportunity for individuals, organisations and nations to undertake practical acts of peace on a shared date. It was established by a United Nations resolution in 1981 to coincide with the opening of the General Assembly. The first Peace Day was celebrated in September 1982. By creating the International Day of Peace, the United Nations devoted itself to worldwide peace and encouraged all of mankind to work in cooperation for this goal. During the discussion of the United Nations resolution that established the International Day of Peace it was suggested that:

Peace Day should be devoted to commemorating and strengthening the ideals of peace both within and among all nations and peoples ... This day will serve as a reminder to all peoples that our organisation, with all its limitations, is a living instrument in the service of peace and should serve all of us here within the organisation as a constantly pealing bell reminding us that our permanent commitment, above all interests or differences of any kind, is to peace.

In 2010 the National Council of Women of New South Wales celebrated the inaugural Marie Bashir Peace Awards, which seek to acknowledge those young women who have made a significant contribution to harmony or social justice and who have displayed leadership in fostering harmonious relationships and peace within their communities. Principals from schools across New South Wales were invited to nominate one female student in years 10, 11 or 12 who had displayed the characteristics sought by the National Council of Women of New South Wales. This year the council was so overwhelmed by the number and quality of nominees that the program was extended to provide for an additional award winner. I congratulate and acknowledge all nominees and pay particular tribute to the winners who were fortunate enough to receive awards of \$250 each. Such was the calibre of the entrants that the National Council of Women of New South Wales extended the awards to acknowledge highly commended students as well.

I was particularly proud that day to acknowledge the efforts of Miss Jessica Booth, a student from Vincentia High School in my electorate, as an award winner. Jessica received a highly commended award in displaying characteristics of harmony, leadership and peace within her local community. I congratulate the award recipients of the 2011 Marie Bashir Peace Awards: Miss Kimberly Barrett, year 12 student at St Benedict College; Miss Lindy Hua, year 12 student at James Ruse Agricultural High School; Miss Sharfah Mohamed, year 11 student at Cheltenham Girls High School; Miss Daisy Aczel-Morris, year 10 student at Richmond River High School; Miss Cara Pauline van Wyk, year 11 student at Hornsby Girls High School; and Miss Jessica Washington, year 11 student at John Elton of Penrith Selective High School.

I also congratulate those young women who received highly commended certificates: Miss Jessie Bantock, year 11 student at Mudgee High School; Miss Katherine Hudson, year 12 student at Burwood Girls High School; and Miss Jessica Booth, year 11 student at beautiful Vincentia High School in my electorate. This event would not have been possible without the significant effort of members of the National Council of Women of New South Wales, in particular President Mrs Doreen Todd, and Secretary and Awards Committee Convener Mrs Nola Barkl. I also pay tribute to her Excellency the Governor, Professor Marie Bashir for her involvement in acknowledging the significant work done in our community by young woman around this State. I appreciate her Excellency visiting the New South Wales Parliament to present these awards and for visiting this place on many other occasions. I again congratulate all the award recipients and I look forward to attending next year's National Council of Women of New South Wales Marie Bashir Peace Awards.

NORTHCOTT PET DAY

Ms CLOVER MOORE (Sydney) [1.56 p.m.]: Saturday 10 September was the fourth annual Northcott Pet Day. On that day inner-city pet owners brought their pets to Ward Park and Northcott Community Centre in Surry Hills for free care, services and entertainment. The day, run by volunteers, aims to increase access to animal health checks and to provide advice for public housing tenants and low-income residents. The City of Sydney hosted the event in partnership with a number of community organisations, including Housing NSW, Surry Hills Public Tenants Association, Crookwell Veterinary Hospital, the Cat Protection Society and the RSPCA. Peter and I took our dogs Banjo and Bessie to this great turnout. More than 500 people brought their 200 pets; it was the biggest Northcott Pet Day yet.

Most pets received free health checks, including 168 dogs, 26 cats and two birds, from vet volunteers and young vet students who got some useful experience in dealing with different types of animals that had different levels of training and required different levels of grooming. Every pet was wormed and every owner received a bag of goodies, which included a flea starter kit. Owners also received nutritional advice and food samples. The City of Sydney and the Cat Protection Society microchipped 40 pets and appointments were made for 27 dogs and five cats under the City of Sydney free desexing program. The RSPCA provided an animal van

and the City of Sydney provided a community bus to transport people and their pets from five other public housing estates to Ward Park. Without these services many public housing tenants would not have been able to attend because they do not own a car, they cannot afford a pet taxi, bus drivers can refuse pets on board and there is a blanket pet ban on all rail services. This ban discriminates against people on low incomes, and I again call on the Government to remove it.

The RSPCA New South Wales, student representatives from the Australian Veterinary Association, the Companion Rabbit Advocates and the Cat Protection Society had stalls and provided pet owners with advice. Two agility dog trainers gave demonstrations and provided one-on-one beginners classes to train dogs to do tricks, which was fun. There was a free barbeque and pet gift packs. The event provided a great opportunity for pet owners to mingle and swap stories about their beloved companions. Importantly, some of the people got health advice, treatment, vaccinations and worming of their animals for the first time. Those beloved pets and companions had never been seen by a vet before because their owners could not afford it, which highlights the importance of the day.

Northcott Pet Day is about recognising the importance of pets in the lives of people, particularly those who live in public housing, and promoting responsible pet ownership. It is a worthwhile event and I encourage all councils to hold similar events. Pets play a vital role in people's lives. They give love, they teach children to care and they encourage people to exercise. Pets save the national health bill around \$4 billion a year, which I have told this House many times. Pets are particularly important for elderly people who live by themselves and people with a mental illness, because they can help reduce anxiety and depression. Pets make people feel wanted.

Recently I wrote to the Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Healthy Lifestyles, and Minister for Western New South Wales, the Hon. Kevin Humphries, about creating an assistance animal pass to enable people with a mental illness to travel with their pets on public transport and in public places, in the same way as guide dogs for the blind and hearing impaired accompany their owners. The dark side to pet ownership was the subject of a rally on Sunday 18 September in Belmore Park. I joined residents from across New South Wales to call for a ban on cruel puppy farm practices. Australians like to call themselves animal lovers, yet immense cruelty and suffering are permitted in the name of profit.

Puppy farmers breed dogs in filthy and confined conditions that do not allow socialisation and they are forced to breed continuously from the young age of six months. Members would have seen evidence of such practices on various television programs. Many dogs develop osteoporosis, urinary tract infections and stomach problems as a result of the poor conditions in which they have to live, and when they can no longer breed they are destroyed. These money machines supply cheap puppies for pet shop windows and classified sales where they can be sold to impulse buyers. Many owners abandon the dogs when they discover what is involved with their care. Abandoned pets often are not adopted, which leads to one dog being euthanased every four minutes in Australia—something about which none of us can be proud.

My Animals (Regulation of Sale) Bill 2008, which would have banned the sale of cats and dogs in pet shops and limited classified sales to responsible breeders and rescuers, would have closed the main outlet of sale for puppy farms. However, the major parties, to their shame, opposed that bill. I spoke at the rally with Tim Vasudeva, the new director of the Animal Welfare League; Monika Biernacki, founder of Monika's Doggie Rescue; and Anne Greenaway, companion animal lawyer. Some people in the community who are volunteering their time are doing some really good work on this issue. At that rally we agreed that a humane and civilised society—which is what we should be—would not allow such suffering and destruction. I again call on the Government to ban puppy farms and to protect dogs from this senseless cruelty.

Private members' statements concluded.

[Acting-Speaker (Mr Geoff Provest) left the chair at 2.01 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]

TRIBUTE TO CRAFTSMAN BEAU PRIDUE

The SPEAKER: This afternoon I pay tribute to an Australian soldier who died in East Timor as a result of a motor vehicle accident. Craftsman Beau Pridue, an Army Reservist of the 8th Combat Service Support Battalion in New South Wales, died from injuries sustained in a vehicle accident near the town of

Baucau in East Timor on 15 September 2011. Craftsman Pridue was on his first operational deployment, providing a vital contribution as part of Operation Astute, maintaining peace and stability in East Timor. The Chief of Joint Operations, Lieutenant General Power, said that this incident highlighted the dangers faced by Australian Defence Force personnel wherever they were deployed.

Craftsman Pridue enlisted in the Australian Army Reserve on 15 December 2007 under the Army Reserve Traineeship and Apprenticeship program [ARTAP] as a fitter armament. On enlistment he was posted to 111 Workshop Company, 8th Combat Service Support Battalion, and on 14 December 2010 Beau was qualified within his trade. As a result of his efforts during his apprenticeship training he received the ARTAP Award for Technical Achievement and the Commander 8th Brigade ARTAP Trophy (Best Soldier).

Before Craftsman Pridue was placed on a RAAF Hercules aircraft for repatriation to Australia he was honoured with a haka performed by members of the New Zealand Defence Force element of the International Stabilisation Force. Chief of Army, Lieutenant General David Morrison, presented the Australian Service Medal with clasp Timor-Leste, Australian Defence Medal and the Timor-Leste Solidarity Medal to Craftsman Pridue's family at a moving ramp ceremony on 21 September at the RAAF base, Williamtown. I ask all members to be upstanding for a minute's silence.

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

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER: I acknowledge the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Kevin Rozzoli, AM, Speaker of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly between 1988 and 1995 and member for Hawkesbury between 1973 and 2003.

ASSENT TO BILLS

Assent to the following bills reported:

Appropriation Bill 2011
Duties Amendment (First Home—New Home) Bill 2011
Business Names (Commonwealth Powers) Bill 2011
Identification Legislation Amendment Bill 2011
Veterinary Practice Amendment (Interstate Veterinary Practitioners) Bill 2011

IDENTIFICATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2011

Message received from the Legislative Council returning the bill without amendment.

ELECTORAL DISTRICT OF CLARENCE

Resignation of Stephen Rhett Cansdell

The SPEAKER: I advise the House that on 16 September 2011 I received a letter from Stephen Rhett Cansdell resigning his seat for the electoral district of Clarence.

Vacant Seat

Motion by Mr Brad Hazzard agreed to:

That, pursuant to section 70 of the Parliamentary Electorates and Elections Act 1912, the seat of the member for Clarence be declared vacant by reason of the resignation of Stephen Rhett Cansdell.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of Motions

Government Business Notices of Motions (for Bills) given.

QUESTION TIME

[Question time commenced at 2.24 p.m.]

CASINO, LIQUOR AND GAMING CONTROL AUTHORITY AND BRIAN ROSS

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON: My question is directed to the Minister for Tourism, Major Events, Hospitality and Racing. In an email on 9 June the Minister confirmed that he had been approached about the appointment of Brian Ross to the Casino Liquor and Gaming Control Authority. Who approached the Minister?

Mr GEORGE SOURIS: Advertisements were placed for positions on the board of the Casino Liquor and Gaming Control Authority. Those applications were processed by the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing in the usual way. An in-principle recommendation was made to Cabinet for Mr Ross and one other to be appointed, subject to a probity check by the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing. Following the probity check the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing advised that there were no adverse findings. The appointments were subsequently approved by the executive council. Mr Ross then resigned the post due to health reasons, both verbally and in writing. As the Premier has noted previously, the Opposition has referred this matter to the Independent Commission Against Corruption. Further consideration of this matter should be left in its hands.

ORICA PLANT INCIDENT

Mr TIM OWEN: My question is addressed to the Premier. What action will the Government take in response to the O'Reilly report on the Orica incident at Kooragang Island?

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: The member for Newcastle represents those families who live in Stockton who are affected by this spill. It is a question—

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will come to order.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Empty vessels make the most noise. This is a good example of the difference between those on this side of the House and those opposite. It is a good example of the difference between both sides of politics. On the one hand the Government is dealing with the issue and it is getting on with the job of fixing dodgy and dangerous laws inherited from those opposite when in government—

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: On the other hand—

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will come to order.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: On the other hand members of the Labor Party—those responsible for the dodgy laws—are simply prepared to scare residents and to play politics in relation to this matter. When I was doorknocking in Stockton the biggest question that I was asked was, "Where is Erin Brockovich?" The former Government promised to deliver Erin Brockovich to Stockton but it never delivered on its promise. A headline in the newspaper served its purpose but there was no sign of Erin Brockovich. The former Government said it would bring out Erin Brockovich but it did not even bring out Julia Roberts. It simply kept its scare campaign going.

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Whilst members of the Labor Party were in Stockton scaremongering the Government was getting on with the job. We commissioned Brendan O'Reilly to undertake an independent review of the Orica incident on Kooragang Island and to recommend action to ensure that any spills or incidents were better handled in the future. As my doorknocking made clear, there is no doubt that the people of Stockton were let down and suffered unnecessary worry and frustration because of the way in which that issue was handled after 8 August, which stemmed from the delay in Orica informing authorities about that spill.

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: If Opposition members do not hush up I might be tempted to quote from Frank Sartor's book.

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: It took Orica 16 hours before it informed the local Office of Environment and Heritage.

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Orica was too slow when issuing a warning about a potentially dangerous incident that clearly was of importance to the residents of Stockton. But Orica's slow response was permissible under the laws put in place by those opposite—laws that remarkably stated that a serious pollution incident did not have to be reported immediately but should be reported as soon as was practicable.

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Mr O'Reilly told me that under one interpretation it meant that Orica could have waited seven days to report this potentially serious pollution incident to the Office of Environment and Heritage.

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: That should not surprise anyone. When it comes to good government I can only quote the former Minister for Planning, Frank Sartor, who said:

The recent Keneally governments were clearly the weakest in meeting the tests of good government. Decisions were based on expediency. Little policy development work went into them.

A classic example is a piece of legislation that stated, "If it involves a serious pollution incident one does not have to pick up the phone in an hour, in minutes, or by law report to the local authorities. One has to report as soon as practicable", which could have meant in seven days.

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: It is a ridiculous requirement: It is no wonder that companies like Orica do not act earlier to warn residents and authorities about potentially dangerous pollution incidents. This Government is determined to change all that. We are determined to learn the lessons of this episode so that hopefully it will never be repeated. We will implement all the recommendations of the O'Reilly report, beginning with a new requirement for companies to immediately report spills and other accidents. Delays of 16 hours or more will no longer be permissible.

If companies do not face up to their responsibilities, they will face significant fines. We are doubling the maximum penalties for failing to notify authorities immediately from \$1 million to \$2 million. We also will restore independence to the Environment Protection Authority to ensure it is headed by an independent chair, who is responsible for its operation. We will establish the position of Chief Environmental Regulator so that pollution offences are dealt with quickly and effectively.

The SPEAKER: Order! I appreciate that members are excited to return to Parliament after a break, but the start of question time today was unacceptable. All interjections made by Opposition members were inappropriate.

CASINO, LIQUOR AND GAMING CONTROL AUTHORITY BOARD APPOINTMENTS

Ms LINDA BURNEY: My question is directed to the Minister for Tourism, Major Events, Hospitality and Racing. Why did he appoint two new members to the Casino, Liquor and Gaming Control Authority's board when only one vacancy had been created by the departure of the former deputy chair?

Mr GEORGE SOURIS: As I previously advised, advertisements were placed for positions on the board of the Casino, Liquor and Gaming Control Authority. The applications were processed by the Office of

Liquor, Gaming and Racing in the usual manner. An in-principle recommendation was made to Cabinet for Mr Ross and one other to be appointed, subject to a probity check by the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing. Following the probity check, the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing advised there were no adverse findings. The appointments subsequently were approved by the Executive Council. Mr Ross then resigned the post, both verbally and in writing, due to ill health.

Ms Linda Burney: Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129. My question is not about what the Minister is responding to.

The SPEAKER: Order! I do not need assistance from Government members to make a ruling. I have heard sufficient on the point of order. It is a little early in the Minister's answer to take a point of order relating to relevance. The member for Kiama will come to order.

Mr GEORGE SOURIS: As the Premier noted previously, the Opposition referred this matter to the Independent Commission Against Corruption. Further consideration of the matter should be left in its hands.

SOUTH WEST RAIL LINK

Mr CHRIS PATTERSON: I address my question to the Minister for Transport. Will she advise the House on progress on the South West Rail Link?

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: I thank the member for Camden for his question and for his interest in all matters related to public transport, especially this very important project. As each week passes, the New South Wales Liberal-Nationals Government continues to make progress on the South West Rail Link—unlike the previous Labor Government that announced, then reannounced, axed, and then reannounced for a third time the South West Rail Link. This Government is determined to get on with the job of building the South West Rail Link without delay. I know all our colleagues in south-western Sydney, including one member of the Opposition, will concede we are making enormous progress. We have been clear that the South West Rail Link and North West Rail Link are our transport infrastructure priorities.

I digress to mention that recently the Opposition's Transport spokeswoman was spotted leading a group on a visit to the North West Rail Link community information centre at Castle Hill. I welcome that, but she is not the only person from the other side of politics who has visited the centre. We know that recently the Federal Minister for Infrastructure and Transport also made a pilgrimage there. I must say I am delighted that members of the Labor Party are finding the North West Rail Link and know where it is. It is fantastic that the Opposition's Transport spokeswoman took the time to find out all about this—given that Labor cancelled and then axed the North West Rail Link for many years to come.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Canterbury to order for the second time. The member for Newcastle will come to order.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: In a bipartisan fashion let me, on behalf of all members of the Government, extend an official invitation to the Leader of the Opposition to also visit the community information centre to find out more about the North West Rail Link.

Mr David Elliott: He would get lost.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: Exactly.

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

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: Having acknowledged that interjection, I revert to discussing the South West Rail Link. In the Government's 6 September budget, we were pleased to announce that \$292 million had been allocated to the South West Rail Link project. The link includes 10.5 kilometres of twin track between Glenfield and Leppington, two new stations at Edmondson Park and Leppington, car parking, and a train stabling facility at Rossmore. It will serve an area where 110,000 new homes are expected to be built over the next 30 years. The New South Wales Government has overseen the laying of the first section of track associated with the South West Rail Link, and there will be plenty more to come. Last week a total of \$78 million worth of major construction tenders were awarded for two projects associated with the South West Rail Link.

I am pleased to advise the House and the community that the construction firm Arenco has been awarded a \$12.9 million contract to deliver the new overhead concourse at the Glenfield station. I am also pleased to announce to the House that Laing O'Rourke was awarded a \$65 million contract for works to construct a new train stabling facility to house 11 trains west of Auburn station. The \$12.9 million construction contract for the concourse at the new Glenfield Transport Interchange will include easy-access facilities, a new ticket office and gates, security systems, station facilities, platform canopies and platform tiling.

Awarding those two contracts brings the reality of improved train services and better public transport infrastructure another step closer for south-western Sydney. Indeed I can attest personally to the progress being made on the link: Just a few weeks ago I visited Glenfield to inspect special work that had been undertaken during a weekend blitz on the line. A track-work shutdown on that weekend enabled 300 workers to make some outstanding progress. The work on 17 and 18 September facilitated 54 eight-tonne beams being lifted into place to form the basis of the new Glenfield station's concourse, which is a key interchange between the East Hills line and the new South West Rail Link.

[Interruption]

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: If Opposition members took the time to listen, I am sure they would be interested to know that workers logged more than 3,000 hours on the job during the biggest weekend of activity seen on the project so far. Of course it took this Government to make that happen.

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

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: Those workers did a sterling job of installing the station concourse beams and overhead wiring as well as laying an additional 190 metres of track. That is real progress. The \$4.5 million weekend work-a-thon resulted in substantial progress being made. I am sure that many local residents as well as anyone who works in the area and drives past will appreciate the amount of work that was carried out on the project over that weekend alone. The progress we have made on the flyovers and station over the past six months will be clear to rail passengers and residents—anybody who takes an interest in this important project and the progress that is being made. This Government will make sure that the project is finalised. I again thank the member for Camden for his question. *[Time expired.]*

FORMER MEMBER FOR CLARENCE

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON: I direct my question to the Deputy Premier. In the lead-up to the resignation of the former member for Clarence, was any member of the Deputy Premier's staff sent to the electorate to sort out alleged staffing issues?

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition has asked the question. He should listen to the answer.

Mr ANDREW STONER: It is quite a bizarre question. I know that the fishing is very good on the North Coast, but the Leader of the Opposition is on a fishing expedition here. He is not very good at it. The fact is that, as has been reported, no staff member from my office, or any other office I am aware of for that matter, has been sent to the Clarence electorate in relation to that matter.

PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADE

Mr ANDREW FRASER: My question is addressed to the Deputy Premier. What action is the Government taking in relation to the upgrading of the Pacific Highway?

Mr ANDREW STONER: That is a much better question from a member who is passionate about safer roads and better transport in this State, rather than in muckraking like the previous questioner.

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

Mr ANDREW STONER: As members of the House are well aware, while the Pacific Highway arguably is Australia's most important road link for transport and freight, it is also one of the most dangerous.

That is why the New South Wales Liberal-Nationals Government has made completing the upgrade of the Pacific Highway to dual carriageway one of its highest priorities. Prior to the election the Coalition said it would finish what Labor had failed to do on the Pacific Highway. I am pleased to report today that we are moving ahead with the vital task of upgrading this important highway. Last week I had the pleasure to announce the next stages of the Pacific Highway upgrade.

The Government's recent budget announcement, combined with Federal Government funding, means a design and construction contract can now be prepared for the notorious Frederickton to Eungai section of the highway. The 26-kilometre Frederickton to Eungai upgrade will link with the 14.5-kilometre Kempsey bypass and with the previously built eight kilometres of existing dual carriageway between Eungai and Warrell Creek. The section between Frederickton and Eungai includes the Clybucca area, the site of Australia's worst-ever road accident in 1989 involving two buses and which killed 35 people. In 1992 the Coroner's inquiry into that accident recommended this upgrade.

It is expected that contracts for the Frederickton to Eungai project will be awarded by early 2013 with construction commencing mid-2013. Pre-construction activities are also proceeding to the north and south on the Warrell Creek to Urunga, and Oxley Highway to Kempsey upgrade projects. Those new projects form part of the Australian and New South Wales governments' commitment to complete the Pacific Highway upgrade as a result of the 2011-2012 State budget which shows that \$1 billion will be invested this year towards the upgrade of the Pacific Highway—an increase of \$468 million or 94 per cent on the former Government's commitment between 2009 and 2014. It more than meets the \$450 million contribution the Federal Government sought from this State.

The Federal Government must breathe a sigh of relief now that it is working with a New South Wales Government that is true to its word—a grown-up government that delivers results, not just spin and broken promises as we heard from those opposite. As we have said before, we might disagree with the Federal Government in some areas, such as the carbon tax, but we will work with it on important issues such as the Pacific Highway. Sadly, communities along the Pacific Highway are all too familiar with Labor's woeful record in getting the job done on that road. Labor promised to finish the upgrade by 2006 but only completed a little more than half of the job by 2011 when it was voted out of office.

These broken promises have not been without repercussions, with the completion date of the Pacific Highway upgrade being extended by a decade—out to at least 2016. The former Government became expert at backflipping on funding promises to upgrade the Pacific Highway. I know that members on the North Coast—members of The Nationals all of them—remember the now infamous November 2008 mini-budget of the Hon. Eric Roozendaal, who hacked into the funding for the Pacific Highway and stripped away \$300 million or 37 per cent of the funding for the five years out to 2013-14.

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

Mr ANDREW STONER: That is Labor's track record and we have seen accident after accident and road carnage as a result of its failure to do the job. We are getting on with the job, including the upgrade between Coffs Harbour and Woolgoolga, the Banora Point upgrade near Tweed Heads in the electorate of the member for Tweed, the upgrade at Bulahdelah, the upgrade between Tintenbar and Ewingsdale, in the electorate of the Minister for Local Government, the member for Ballina, and the Ballina bypass. The Pacific Highway upgrade has been and always will be a top priority of the Liberal-Nationals Government in New South Wales. We will work with the Federal Government as we endeavour to achieve the commitment of the Prime Minister to finish the job by 2016.

ELECTION CAMPAIGN STAFFING ARRANGEMENTS

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK: My question is directed to the Deputy Premier. Did any member of your staff undertake any work during normal business hours for any candidates of The Nationals in the 2010 Federal election?

Mr ANDREW STONER: Once again the Labor Party is on a fishing expedition and it is not asking about roads, transport, economy, health services or education. It is down in the gutter as usual, raking away in the muck. We always know when the back bench is sold a pup of a question. I advise the House that to my knowledge all my staff have followed the proper and ethical guidelines concerning elections.

UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: My question is addressed to the Minister for Education. What has the Government done to empower New South Wales universities?

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: I thank the member for Vacluse, the Parliamentary Secretary for Tertiary Education and Skills, for her question relating to this very important area of public policy. But before I refer to the Government's reforms of university governance I will provide a background of what the Government has done in relation to education since that historic day on 26 March. The first thing was the Government brought early childhood into the Department of Education from the Department of Community Services, something for which the sector has been asking for years but which was ignored by the former Government. It also has a Numeracy and Literacy Action Plan and a Numeracy and Literacy Task Force, headed by the esteemed educationalist Dr Ken Boston and an esteemed group of professionals and experts in their field looking at the best way to improve literacy and numeracy for kids in kindergarten to year 2 and to which the Government has added \$250 million.

This year we have piloted 10 positions of student support officers to support school counsellors in our schools and there will be 50 next year. This measure will help us deal with bullying and mental health issues across all our schools. We have released a discussion paper called Local Schools Local Decision looking at the devolution of authority back to school principals, something that schools have been asking for years. We have postponed the implementation of the national curriculum for a year because we are not satisfied with quality and we want to see a commitment from the Commonwealth to put some money towards professional development. We are reviewing the school facilities standards. We have undertaken a condition-based assessment for the first time since 2007. Why? It is because the former Government blew billions of dollars on the Building the Education Revolution.

We have announced a program to have thermally comfortable schools. We have contributed an extra \$60 million to school maintenance. We have released a discussion paper about skills and TAFE reform and now we have reached the point of introducing reforms around university governance to allow universities to opt into the changes that we will be introducing into Parliament this week. Universities can adopt the new arrangements at a time suitable to their needs by a two-thirds majority decision of their governing bodies. It will enable the governing bodies of universities to opt into adopting standard governing body provisions allowing greater flexibility in their size and composition.

The new arrangements will allow universities to maintain the existing size and composition of their governing bodies if they so choose. Currently governing bodies have between 17 and 22 members. The new rules will allow the governing bodies to be a minimum of 11 members, with a maximum of 22. We will cease the appointment of New South Wales members of Parliament to university governing bodies by the Minister but we will allow the governing body itself to appoint members of Parliament, if considered appropriate, as one of the other forms of appointment, such as alumni representatives.

The former Government abused these ministerial appointments. Neville Newell from the North Coast has been appointed to Southern Cross University. He could not stay awake in Parliament and that university was insulted by his appointment to its governing body. Tony Catanzariti and that esteemed former member of this Chamber, Gerard Martin, have been appointed by that mob to the Charles Sturt University governing body. There is no greater insult to regional New South Wales than to appoint a person such as Gerard Martin to a university governing body. These reforms will help to reduce red tape by allowing for modernisation such as the ability to hold teleconferences and to remove chancellors or deputy chancellors who have lost the confidence of their governing body without resorting to Government interference. This is not only good policy but also consistent with the Government's pledge in the State Plan to reduce red tape by 20 per cent.

Finally, the legislation also provides the capacity for universities to remunerate appropriate governing body members if they choose to do so. I thank all the chancellors and vice-chancellors—including the Chancellor of the University of New England, who is a member of this Chamber—and the Parliamentary Secretary, the member for Vacluse, who has done an enormous amount of work consulting with universities. The 10 universities in New South Wales have a turnover of \$12 billion a year, which means they are huge industries in themselves, and they need the kind of flexibility that this Government will introduce. They are thrilled to have a government listening to them and they are more than thrilled about the legislation that will be introduced this week.

FORMER MEMBER FOR CLARENCE

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON: I direct my question to the Deputy Premier. In light of his comment that he took swift and decisive action against the former member for Clarence after he admitted to lying in a statutory declaration to avoid a speeding fine, why did the Deputy Premier try to convince him not to resign from Parliament?

Mr ANDREW STONER: That is yet another bizarre question from the Leader of the Opposition. The facts are these: On Thursday 15 September the then member for Clarence—

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

Mr ANDREW STONER: —Steve Cansdell visited my office here in Parliament House and informed me that he had signed a false statutory declaration relating to a traffic matter in 2005. He also advised me of rumours of the possible misuse of a staff member in a political campaign and that in his view those rumours were untrue.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition asked the question. I suggest he listen to the answer. I call the Leader of the Opposition to order for the third time.

Mr ANDREW STONER: I advised him at that stage to stand down as Parliamentary Secretary for Police and Emergency Services. I further advised him that he should speak to the police and seek legal advice. As required under the Independent Commission Against Corruption Act, I then informed the director general of my department. I also advised the Premier. Over the following days allegations were made in a number of media outlets about the misuse of electorate entitlements by Mr Cansdell, but I have no information other than what has been publicly reported. Anyone with further information about these allegations should contact the appropriate authorities. I reject the absurd claims made by the Leader of the Opposition that because my electorate is, in his words, "directly next door to Clarence" I should have been aware of what is alleged to have happened in the Clarence electorate office. In fact, my electorate office in Kempsey is some 200 kilometres and more than two hours' drive away from—

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

Mr ANDREW STONER: —the electorate office of the member for Clarence in Grafton.

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

Mr ANDREW STONER: There is another electorate in between—the electorate of Coffs Harbour. The Leader of the Opposition obviously has an in-depth knowledge of the North Coast. As I said at the time, according to many of his constituents, Mr Cansdell was a very good local member who always fought hard for his community. However, as the Premier has stated on many occasions and as we have demonstrated by our action in this matter, the Government will enforce the highest ethical standards and the member's resignation was appropriate.

VENUES NSW

Dr GEOFF LEE: My question is directed to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. How is the Government working to improve community outcomes through enhanced sporting venues?

Mr GRAHAM ANNESLEY: I thank the member for his question and his interest in his local area. I extend to him my commiserations on the performance of his NRL team this year and I should probably also congratulate the member for Manly. I also congratulate the Wallabies on their great win against South Africa and I am sure the Socceroos will be equally successful tonight.

The common theme to those events is a high-quality sports venue. I am happy to inform the House that the New South Wales Government will announce legislation designed to create a new statutory authority to be called Venues NSW. The authority will consolidate the current responsibilities of the Illawarra Venues Authority, the Parramatta Stadium Trust and the Hunter Region Sporting Venues Authority. The facilities that will be administered by Venues NSW include Parramatta Stadium, WIN Stadium and WIN Entertainment Centre at Wollongong, Ausgrid Stadium at Newcastle, the Newcastle Entertainment Centre and Showground and several other venues managed by the Hunter Region Sporting Venues Authority.

This Government initially will allow these venues to come together as part of a single portfolio delivering better commercial and community outcomes. However, the Government remains committed to ensuring local community involvement at the venues. To achieve that, three local venue councils will be established to address the needs of the Illawarra, the Hunter and western Sydney. The Venues NSW board will have up to 11 members, including the chairs of the three local venue councils. A new position will be created to head up the new authority with a venue manager and staff maintained in each region to ensure local involvement and employment opportunities. An independent review undertaken by KPMG in 2010 recommended that regional sporting venues responsibilities and operations be combined. The review considered all three authorities and the case for consolidation was supported by the following observation:

- The similarities involved in managing the venues will allow benefits to be gained from sharing experience and combining resources to achieve improved community and commercial outcomes.
- It will provide the most effective way for the venues to work together to source and promote events.
- Sharing these opportunities will maximise commercial performance, community participation, utilisation and revenues.

A separate independent review undertaken by Ernst and Young in 2010 recommended consolidation of stadia events and marketing to increase revenue. That proposal is similar to arrangements already in place in Queensland and Western Australia, which have established a consolidated approach to venues management. Consolidating these venues will help to achieve improved community and commercial outcomes. From a financial perspective, consolidation will support cost savings from shared procurement, consolidated service contracts, shared resources and increased revenue from better utilisation. From a broader community perspective, Venues NSW will support improved community access, more events and tourism in regional community, more efficient services for the community and better value for government investment. Venues NSW is designed to take advantage of current facilities, to maintain a high level of local involvement and to improve opportunities and efficiencies for the people of New South Wales.

FORMER MEMBER FOR CLARENCE

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON: My question is directed to the Premier. When was the Premier first advised of the Steve Cansdell matter and his lying in a statutory declaration?

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: As the Deputy Premier said, on the Thursday night.

PENRITH INTERNATIONAL ROWING FESTIVAL

Mr STUART AYRES: I direct my question to the Minister for Tourism, Major Events, Hospitality and Racing, and Minister for the Arts. What is the Government doing to attract interstate and international visitors to the Penrith region?

Mr GEORGE SOURIS: I thank the excellent and hardworking member for Penrith for his question. Last month the Premier and I announced that an international rowing festival would be held in western Sydney at Penrith. It is part of this Government's commitment to the people of western Sydney and it is expected to generate \$7 million of new money into the local economy. This festival will attract the cream of Australia's and the world's rowing talent and is a fantastic forerunner to the London Olympics. It also confirms Penrith as the home of elite rowing in Australia and one of the top rowing venues in the world—a world-class Olympic facility that will continue to be used for many such events.

As part of the festival, the Liberal-Nationals Government, together with Destination NSW, have secured the opening round of the prestigious Samsung World Rowing Cup in 2013 and 2014 to be staged at Sydney International Regatta Centre at Penrith, a legacy of the Sydney 2000 Olympics. This will be the first time that the event has been held in the southern hemisphere and only the second time outside of Europe. Our Olympic facilities ensure that we remain Australia's global city of choice for sports such as rowing. It will also be the first time key Australian rowing events will be brought together to mark a week-long celebration of the sport. The festival at the Sydney International Regatta Centre at Penrith Lakes will include the Kings Cup Regatta, Australian Open Rowing Championships and Australian Schools Rowing Championships.

I congratulate Rowing Australia and the events team at Destination NSW on successfully developing a new international rowing regatta for Sydney and for the fillip it will provide for the local economy. The Samsung World Rowing Cup alone will bring some 800 athletes, officials and media from across the world, all

staying for up to three weeks. On top of that, there will be an influx of about 2,000 athletes arriving from around Australia, and then there are the tens of thousands of spectators expected to visit the Penrith area. This Government is proud to support an event which boosts the economy and generates interstate and international visitors, particularly to western Sydney. This is an exciting new addition to the New South Wales events calendar, further enhancing our reputation as Australia's global events city. As Rowing Australia president, Colin Smith, said:

The Sydney International Rowing regatta is a significant new event for rowing in this country and will create a platform for our elite level rowers to represent Australia at international competitions including the Olympic Games.

COAL SEAM GAS EXPLORATION

Mr CLAYTON BARR: My question is directed to the Deputy Premier. Does the Deputy Premier agree with recent comments made by Tony Abbott in relation to coal seam gas exploration on farming land that if you do not want something to happen on your land, you ought to have the right to say no.

Mr Brad Hazzard: Point of order: It is getting a little tedious. The member for Cessnock is asking whether the Deputy Premier agrees with Tony Abbott. That is clearly an expression of opinion. I ask that the question be ruled out of order.

The SPEAKER: Order! It is an expression of opinion and I do rule the question out of order. The member for Cessnock should read Standing Order 128 before he decides to canvass my ruling.

WAGGA WAGGA BASE HOSPITAL

Mr DARYL MAGUIRE: My question is addressed to the Minister for Health. Will the Minister update the House on the hospital redevelopment at Wagga Wagga?

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: I am absolutely delighted to inform the House that last Friday week I visited the electorate of Wagga Wagga with the fantastic member for Wagga Wagga and was very happy to be accompanied by officers of Health Infrastructure. We talked about the long-awaited start of the redevelopment of Wagga Wagga hospital, with \$270 million submitted to the project in the first term. Work has commenced to provide additional parking so that those who have been complaining for years and years about lack of parking can have better access to the hospital.

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

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: Immediately 70 extra car parking spaces will be provided. I commend the member for Wagga Wagga on his work with the local council for looking at new street parking to further increase the number of spaces. Immediately after that, in March, work will start on the first phase of the redevelopment, which is a brand new mental health block—a substantial new building. The demolition of houses and the preparation of sites starts later this year. That work will be completed by the end of next year, when the next phase will start, which is the development of the operating theatres and intensive care—in other words, the clinical services facilities of the hospital. Following that, in a continuous redevelopment, the building that they have been occupying will be demolished and new wards will be put in place. I thank the member for Wagga Wagga for his fantastic work. This project has been on the books for years and years. The former Labor Government talked about it as it did everything—talk, talk, talk—but delivered absolutely nothing.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Keira, the member for Wollongong and the member for Shellharbour will come to order.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: I am very pleased to stand in this place—

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

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: —and advise members about part of the O'Farrell Government's major investment in health capital works in its first term in office: \$4.7 billion invested in health infrastructure, 60 per cent more than was invested in the last term of the previous Government.

Dr Andrew McDonald: No, 6 per cent more.

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

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: This is an absolute indictment of the former Labor Government, which talked about doing things but did not deliver, and promised but did not invest any money. I first visited Wagga Wagga hospital when I became the shadow Minister in 1995, when the Carr Government was elected. Labor had been promising to do something about the very rundown facilities at that hospital. It is a great credit to the very hardworking and committed doctors, nurses, allied health professionals and those supporting them that the hospital continued to provide such a great service. It was certainly not because they were supported by the former Labor Government. They were working in conditions that were simply deplorable.

The last real work done in that hospital was in 1994, when a Coalition Government was in office. On the agenda now is the first stage of a major hospital redevelopment, with \$215 million being provided by the State Government and \$50 million by the Federal Government. I am very pleased that—at long last—this work is beginning. Last Friday week I spent five hours at the hospital talking to doctors and nurses, sitting down with the medical staff council and walking through various parts of the hospital. They were very pleased to see the plans and the wonderful concept drawings that show how the development will proceed.

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

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: Work will be conducted in phases, a continuous redevelopment, with the old shabby building gradually being pulled down and replaced by a facility that will do the patients of the Wagga Wagga region proud and give the staff who have worked very hard to provide services the kind of facilities that they deserve. I am very proud that we are able to deliver the Wagga Wagga hospital.

COAL SEAM GAS EXPLORATION

Mr CLAYTON BARR: My question is directed to the Deputy Premier. Will the Deputy Premier adopt the position of Tony Abbott in relation to coal seam gas exploration on farming land that, "if you do not want something to happen on your land, you ought to have the right to say no"?

The SPEAKER: Order! The standing orders state that questions should not ask for an announcement of government policy. I am very dubious about that question. The Deputy Premier can answer it if he wishes.

Mr ANDREW STONER: I welcome the opportunity to respond, but first I will give the member for Cessnock a little bit of advice. When the Leader of the Opposition comes down the corridor to knock on his door to say, "I've got a question for you, mate", he should be very, very careful.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Keira to order for the third time. I call the member for Bankstown to order for the second time.

Mr ANDREW STONER: This question is a massive hospital pass from the Leader of the Opposition.

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

Mr ANDREW STONER: For 16 years, this mob presided over the most loose and dirty process around exploration licences for coal seam gas extraction and mining that any jurisdiction in this nation has ever seen. It was a system in which Labor mates were given a fast track to the right to mine and extract coal seam gas. Members will recall Ian Macdonald stomping around the place and John Maitland and the training mine. The plight of that poor blind farmer from Jerrys Plains in the Hunter, Ian Moore, was also the result of the rorted system of the lot opposite.

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

Mr ANDREW STONER: The mob opposite was in office for 16 years and should have known that the law provides that a property owner has no right to any mineral resources underneath his or her property, but there is a process involved with regard to access to a property owner's land. In fact, a landholder does have a right to refuse to allow access. One would think that after 16 years those opposite would know this but in their haste to write exploration licences—one that springs to mind is the \$300 million those opposite took from the Chinese Government for an exploration licence for the Shenhua Mine—they were not too worried about the minor details.

I can inform the House that since this Government has been in power not one access case has been arbitrated, and that means that the Government is already moving to fix the loopholes and problems that were evident in the process under those opposite. The Government has already announced an extension of the moratorium on new fracking approvals until 31 December 2011. The Government has put a ban on the use of BTEX additives during coal seam gas drilling, including fracking. In addition, the Government has prepared a position paper on the form of this ban to be released for public comment. The Government has put in place a regulation that requires a water access licence for extraction of more than three mega-litres per year from groundwater sources.

The Government has introduced a ban on the use of evaporation ponds relating to coal seam gas production and the details of that proposal are being finalised. Further, the Government has developed new public consultation guidelines to increase transparency and accountability that are to be finalised in consultation with the Government's stakeholder reference groups. When it comes to a process that ensures that the communities' needs are considered, as well as those of landholders, the Government is well down the track of fixing a broken system over which those opposite presided for 16 long years. That was certainly a hospital pass that the member for Cessnock got from his so-called leader.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Cessnock and the member for Keira will come to order.

Question time concluded at 3.12 p.m.

PARLIAMENTARY ETHICS ADVISER

Correspondence

The Speaker tabled, pursuant to clause 6 of the resolution of the House relating to the Parliamentary Ethics Adviser, correspondence from the Parliamentary Ethics Adviser enclosing advice provided to former Ministers the Hon. Verity Firth, Ms Jodi McKay and the Hon. Graham West, dated 30 August 2011.

REGISTER OF DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS

The Speaker tabled, pursuant to section 21 of the Constitution (Disclosures by Members) Regulation 1983, a copy of the Register of Disclosures by members of the Legislative Assembly as at 30 June 2011.

Ordered to be printed.

POLICE INTEGRITY COMMISSION

Report

The Speaker tabled, pursuant to section 103 of the Police Integrity Commission Act 1996, the Report of the Inspector of the Police Integrity Commission for the year ended 30 June 2011.

Ordered to be printed.

POLICE INTEGRITY COMMISSION

Report

The Speaker tabled, pursuant to section 103 of the Police Integrity Commission Act 1996, the Report of the Police Integrity Commission entitled, "Special Report pursuant to section 98 of the Police Integrity Commission Act 1996 regarding publication of complaint reports by the Inspector of the Police Integrity Commission", dated September 2011, together with a letter from the Commissioner of the Police Integrity Commission to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and the President of the Legislative Council, dated 5 October 2011, enclosing a copy of an opinion dated 4 October 2011 from Bret Walker, SC, for inclusion in the Special Report.

Ordered to be printed.

The Speaker further tabled the following documents:

Letter from the Acting Commissioner of the Police Integrity Commission to the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly and the Clerk of the Legislative Council regarding the 2011 Annual Report of the Inspector of the Police Integrity Commission, dated 14 September 2011

Letter from the Inspector of the Police Integrity Commission to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and the President of the Legislative Council regarding the 2011 Annual Report of the Inspector of the Police Integrity Commission, dated 19 September 2011

Letter from the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and the President of the Legislative Council to the Inspector of the Police Integrity Commission regarding the 2011 Annual Report of the Inspector of the Police Integrity Commission, dated 19 September 2011

Letter from the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly and the Clerk of the Legislative Council to the Crown Solicitor seeking advice in respect of the making public and tabling of the Annual Report of the Inspector of the Police Integrity Commission for the year ended 30 June 2011, dated 21 September 2011

Advice from the Crown Solicitor to the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly and the Clerk of the Legislative Council in response to the request of 21 September 2011, dated 26 September 2011

Letter from the Inspector of the Police Integrity Commission to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and the President of the Legislative Council in relation to the Inspector of the Police Integrity Commission's 2011 Annual Report, dated 27 September 2011

Letter from the Inspector of the Police Integrity Commission to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and the President of the Legislative Council in relation to the Inspector of the Police Integrity Commission's 2011 Annual Report, dated 28 September 2011

Letter from the Inspector of the Police Integrity Commission to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and the President of the Legislative Council in relation to the Inspector of the Police Integrity Commission's 2011 Annual Report enclosing various correspondence, dated 5 October 2011

Letter from the Inspector of the Police Integrity Commission to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and the President of the Legislative Council in relation to the Inspector of the Police Integrity Commission's 2011 Annual Report, dated 7 October 2011

Letter from the Inspector of the Police Integrity Commission to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and the President of the Legislative Council in relation to the Inspector of the Police Integrity Commission's 2011 Annual Report: Opinion of Mr Bret Walker, SC, dated 7 October 2011

Letter from the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and the President of the Legislative Council to the Inspector of the Police Integrity Commission enclosing correspondence, dated 7 October 2011

Letter from the Inspector of the Police Integrity Commission to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and the President of the Legislative Council in relation to their letter of 7 October 2011, dated 11 October 2011

Letter from the Acting Commissioner of the Police Integrity Commission to the Chair of the Committee on the Office of the Ombudsman and the Police Integrity Commission, dated 21 September 2011

Letter from the Inspector of the Police Integrity Commission to the Director, Legislative Assembly Committees, dated 27 September 2011

Copies of media statements released by the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and the President of the Legislative Council, dated 28 and 29 September 2011

Copy of the Crown Solicitor's opinion to the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly in relation to the publication of a complaint report by the Inspector of the Police Integrity Commission, dated 26 February 2009

Ordered to be printed.

AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT

The Clerk announced the receipt, pursuant to section 63C of the Public Finance and Audit Act 1983, the Performance Audit Report of the Auditor-General entitled "Prequalification Scheme: Performance and Management Services, Department of Premier and Cabinet, and Department of Finance and Services", dated September 2011, received 28 September 2011.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

Government Response to Report

The Clerk announced the receipt of the Government's response to Report 1/55 of the Public Accounts Committee, entitled "Conduct of the 2009 review of the Audit Office under section 48A of the Public Finance and Audit Act 1983", received 28 September 2011.

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON ROAD SAFETY**Government Response to Report**

The Clerk announced the receipt of the Government's response to Report 5/54 of the Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety, entitled "Vulnerable Road Users: Inquiry into Motorcycle and Bicycle Safety", received 7 October 2011.

LEGISLATION REVIEW COMMITTEE**Report**

Dr Geoff Lee, as Deputy Chair, tabled Legislation Review Digest No. 5 dated 11 October 2011, together with committee minutes of the meeting regarding Legislation Review Digest No. 4/55, dated 13 September 2011.

Report ordered to be printed on motion by Dr Geoff Lee.

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE OFFICE OF THE VALUER-GENERAL**Deputy Chair**

The SPEAKER: I advise that, pursuant to Standing Order 282 (2) on 22 August 2011, the Hon. Scot MacDonald, MLC, was elected Deputy Chair of the Joint Standing Committee on the Office of the Valuer-General.

PETITIONS

The Speaker announced that the following petition signed by more than 10,000 persons was lodged for presentation:

Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre of Excellence

Petition requesting that the Government retain all services and staff at the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre of Excellence, received from **Mr Mark Speakman**.

Discussion on petition set down as an order of the day for a future day.

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

Walsh Bay Precinct Public Transport

Petition requesting improved bus services for the Walsh Bay precinct, and ferry services for the new wharf at pier 2/3, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Pet Shops

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

Animals Performing in Circuses

Petition requesting a ban on exotic animals performing in circuses, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Drink Container Deposit Levy

Petition requesting a container deposit levy be introduced to reduce litter and increase recycling rates of drink containers, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

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

The Hon. Brad Hazzard—Rezoning of Regents Park—lodged 3 August 2011 (Mrs Barbara Perry)

The Hon. Brad Hazzard—No. 1 Colliery, Russell Vale—lodged 9 August 2011 (Mr Jamie Parker)

The Hon. Brad Hazzard—Rezoning of Green Space in Queanbeyan—lodged 10 August 2011 (Mr John Barilaro)

The Hon. Andrew Constance—Western Sydney Respite Care—lodged 23 August 2011 (Mr Andrew Constance)

CONSIDERATION OF MOTIONS TO BE ACCORDED PRIORITY

Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS (Murray-Darling) [3.18 p.m.]: For 16 years those opposite neglected people living in rural and regional New South Wales. My motion deserves to be accorded priority because it shows that the Liberal-Nationals Government is committed to people living in rural and regional New South Wales. When Mrs Jillian Skinner was the shadow Minister for Health she willingly visited rural people to listen to their health-related issues. I accompanied Mrs Jillian Skinner on many visits to the electorate of Murray-Darling when she talked with people about issues associated with the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme. Those issues included problems of denial and low reimbursement rates. She also heard about the hurdles faced by rural people in their attempts to obtain equitable access to travel to medical facilities for chemotherapy or radiotherapy treatments. The Minister was prepared to go outside the range of the town hall clock and listen to the people in regional New South Wales.

I went to the Minister for Health after a Senate inquiry highlighted the shortcomings of the Patient Assisted Travel scheme. The inquiry reviewed the patient assisted travel schemes in every jurisdiction in the Commonwealth, and it highlighted the inadequacy of the New South Wales Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme [IPTAAS]. The per capita reimbursement rate in New South Wales was the lowest of that of all other States. Of all the States, New South Wales spent the least amount of money—\$6.3 million at its lowest—on the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme. The people in rural and regional New South Wales were denied what was available to rural and regional people in all the other States in the Commonwealth. In comparison, Queensland spent \$26 million on its patient assisted travel scheme.

Under the previous Government, people elected not to get professional help or have treatment as there was no reimbursement of costs. The previous Government was not listening. I have spoken many times about the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme, the problems faced by people in the Murray-Darling electorate and the issues they face to get reimbursed. In most cases people have been denied reimbursement, and it has been difficult to get even a pittance of a handout from the Government. The previous Government had 16 years to fix the problem.

Today we recognise the great work of the Minister for Health. She listened to the people in regional New South Wales in terms of their needs, she knew what had to be done, and she has allocated a record amount of funding to provide them with the level of support they need to access and accommodate themselves when they seek professional medical help and treatment, in most cases for cancer with radiotherapy or chemotherapy.

No doubt there will be joy in the streets of every regional town in New South Wales because people have been calling out for this. Can Assist, which is the greatest organisation in rural and regional New South Wales, has been calling out for this every week. That organisation deals with people who have been diagnosed with cancer and who face imposts for seeking professional help and treatment. People will rejoice at this announcement. I congratulate the Minister for Health. She has clearly demonstrated that she is prepared to listen by delivering on another election promise. After 1 January the people of rural and regional New South Wales will benefit from a Liberal-Nationals Coalition.

Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON (Blacktown—Leader of the Opposition) [3.23 p.m.]: This motion deserves priority because it is time for the Government to step up to the plate. Today the Government received a petition signed by 19,000 people opposing the closure of the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre. The workers at the research centres have families to feed. They are experts on maritime ecosystems. They were conducting research until the Premier and, more particularly, the Deputy Premier and the Minister for Primary Industries turned their lives upside down. We know that 147 jobs are set to vanish from the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre. Shutting down Cronulla's largest employer will have devastating knock-on effects across the Sutherland shire, scuttling business confidence at a time when economic conditions are already tough.

Moreover, the O'Farrell Government has refused to guarantee that all 147 positions will transfer to new locations in Port Stephens, Coffs Harbour and Nowra. It is a deliberate refusal. The Government knows that the overwhelming majority of the Cronulla workers, even when served a proposition with a gun to their head, will not take up these positions and uproot their families. That is because these families are entrenched in the Cronulla community and surrounding areas. These people have lives, their kids are at school and they have family support in the area. The Minister is social engineering supposed regional relocation without any consideration at all.

Mr Troy Grant: Point of order: This is outrageous. The Leader of the Opposition is making inappropriate inferences against the Minister.

The SPEAKER: Order! I will hear further on the point of order.

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON: According to the member for Cronulla—I acknowledge that he is an honest, true and credible person—the Minister has been on television saying that this matter did not go to Cabinet or the party room and the member for Cronulla was not consulted about it. If Cabinet, the party room and the local member were not asked, what can one say other than that the Deputy Premier and the Minister are seeking to apply social engineering and forcibly relocate people from a world-class facility, which they know cannot be replaced, to Port Stephens, Nowra and elsewhere throughout New South Wales?

If the research conducted at Cronulla is to be conducted elsewhere, places like Port Stephens will need to have seawater trucked in so that world-class research can continue to be conducted by these great workers who do so much to ensure that our fishing community can continue to enjoy fishing and to monitor shark movements around Sydney Harbour. These people perform a fantastic function. The Government has said that this will be economically responsible. How can it be economically responsible to relocate workers to an area where seawater must be trucked in simply so that this valuable and important work can continue?

I am not the only person who is saying that this is economically irresponsible. This morning the member for Cronulla, who received a petition with the member for Oatley, the member for Heathcote and the Minister for Sport and Recreation, said that this was economically responsible. And because it is so economically responsible he felt compelled to say that the Government has got it wrong. It is one thing to accept the petition from the workers. It is another thing to say on 7.30 *New South Wales*, "I'm going to stand up and fight." The real challenge is whether the member for Cronulla will vote for this motion.

Mr Brad Hazzard: Point of order: The function of the Leader of the Opposition is multiple, varied and interesting, but at this stage he must confine his remarks to seeking to establish urgency or priority.

The SPEAKER: Order! I note that the Leader of the Opposition's time for speaking has expired.

Question—That the motion of the member for Murray-Darling be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 63

Mr Anderson	Mr Fraser	Mr Rowell
Mr Annesley	Mr George	Mrs Sage
Mr Aplin	Ms Gibbons	Mr Sidoti
Mr Ayres	Ms Goward	Mrs Skinner
Mr Baird	Mr Grant	Mr Smith
Mr Barilaro	Mr Hartcher	Mr Souris
Mr Bassett	Mr Hazzard	Mr Speakman
Mr Baumann	Ms Hodgkinson	Mr Spence
Ms Berejikian	Mr Holstein	Mr Stokes
Mr Brookes	Mr Humphries	Mr Stoner
Mr Casuscelli	Mr Issa	Mr Toole
Mr Conolly	Mr Kean	Mr Torbay
Mr Constance	Dr Lee	Ms Upton
Mr Cornwell	Mr Notley-Smith	Mr Ward
Mr Coure	Mr O'Dea	Mr Webber
Mrs Davies	Mr Owen	Mr R. C. Williams
Mr Dominello	Mr Page	Mrs Williams
Mr Doyle	Ms Parker	
Mr Edwards	Mr Piccoli	
Mr Elliott	Mr Provest	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Evans	Mr Roberts	Mr Maguire
Mr Flowers	Mr Rohan	Mr J. D. Williams

Noes, 21

Mr Barr	Dr McDonald	Ms Tebbutt
Ms Burney	Ms Mihailuk	Ms Watson
Ms Burton	Ms Moore	Mr Zangari
Ms Hay	Mr Parker	
Ms Hornery	Mrs Perry	
Ms Keneally	Mr Piper	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Lalich	Mr Rees	Mr Amery
Mr Lynch	Mr Robertson	Mr Park

Pairs

Mr Bromhead	Mr Daley
Mr Perrottet	Mr Furolo

Question resolved in the affirmative.

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

Mr BRAD HAZZARD (Wakehurst—Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Infrastructure NSW) [3.38 p.m.]: I move:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to permit the introduction and passage through all remaining stages at this or any subsequent sitting of the following bills, notice of which was given this day for tomorrow:

Protection of the Environment Legislation Amendment Bill
 Technical and Further Education Commission Amendment (Staff Employment) Bill
 Thoroughbred Racing Amendment Bill
 Universities Governing Bodies Bill

Earlier I indicated to the acting shadow Leader of the House that I would move a motion to suspend standing orders and sessional orders to enable the House to deal with four bills. The standing orders permit the introduction and passage through all remaining stages of the four bills, but the intention at this stage is to take only the Thoroughbred Racing Amendment Bill through all stages this afternoon. I do not think that will excite too many people one way or the other.

Mr John Robertson: Giddy-up.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Giddy-up; that is right. In relation to the other bills, the intention is that agreement in principle speeches will be made this afternoon or this evening, with debate possibly concluding tomorrow. That way, at least the Opposition will have had time to examine the bills. Various Ministers have indicated they will ensure shadow Ministers have an opportunity to examine the legislation. I indicate that this afternoon's formalities will begin with agreement in principle speeches by the Minister for Education followed by debate on the Thoroughbred Racing Amendment Bill which, assuming there are no divisions, will be concluded today.

After that there will be debate on the Public Sector Employment and Management Amendment (Ethics and Public Service Commissioner) Bill, which I do not anticipate will conclude this afternoon. However, that might be possible; I will speak to the Opposition in relation to its position on that. If debate on that bill concludes today, we may be able to transmit it to the upper House. If there is the possibility of divisions, debate will continue tomorrow morning instead. We also will deal with the Election Funding, Expenditure and Disclosures Amendment Bill tomorrow morning.

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

Motion agreed to.

ISOLATED PATIENTS TRAVEL AND ACCOMMODATION ASSISTANCE SCHEME

Motion Accorded Priority

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS (Murray-Darling) [3.42 p.m.]: I move:

That this House supports the Government for delivering its election commitment to provide greater assistance for rural and regional patients who travel for medical treatment.

In November 2010 the Liberal Party and The Nationals announced a policy to improve assistance at a shadow community Cabinet meeting in Dubbo. Last month the Minister for Health, and Minister for Medical Research, Jillian Skinner, delivered on this promise to boost the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme [IPTAAS] by \$28 million over four years. From 1 January 2012 patients who travel long distances to receive specialist treatment will receive a massive 30 per cent boost in accommodation subsidies and a 25 per cent boost in petrol subsidies. That will be the first time the accommodation subsidy has increased in 11 years and it will be the first increase in the fuel subsidy since 2006.

As promised prior to the 2011 election, the New South Wales Liberal and Nationals Government has provided a 50 per cent boost to the scheme of \$28 million over four years, including \$7 million this year. The funding is expected to increase travel and accommodation reimbursement for an average client by approximately \$100. The increase represents a significant investment by the New South Wales Government and delivers on our promise to provide greater assistance to people who live in rural and remote areas and who need to travel to receive medical treatment. Greater funding for the scheme will allow more patients to claim assistance with travel expenses to access specialist medical treatment and will reimburse them at a fairer rate. The boost supports the Government's commitment to ensuring that the people of New South Wales have access to timely and quality health care, regardless of where they live.

Changes to the scheme include a 25 per cent increase in rates for travel and a 30 per cent increase in the accommodation assistance rate for people who travel less than 100 kilometres one way to receive specialist medical treatment. Reimbursement for car travel will now be at the rate of 19¢ a kilometre, an increase from 15¢ a kilometre. Commercial accommodation subsidies will be increased to \$43 a night for single accommodation and \$60 a night for double accommodation, an increase from the single rate of \$33 and \$46 for the double rate. It also will be easier for patients to stay with family and friends when receiving specialist medical treatment. The subsidy for private accommodation will increase from \$30 a week to \$140 a week. Patients will be able to claim the subsidy from the first night's stay whereas under the previous arrangements patients could claim a subsidy only after a week's stay, which provided patients with no incentive to stay with family or friends when accommodation was needed for just a short period.

The new arrangement will come into effect on 1 January next year and will allow any patient who has to travel at a cumulative cost of at least \$200 a week to claim subsidies under the Isolated Patients Travel and

Accommodation Assistance Scheme. Previously only patients who were travelling to access renal dialysis services were eligible to claim under that rule. The change will provide a major benefit to people who have to travel regularly to receive specialist medical treatment, such as patients who need to travel to receive radiotherapy or chemotherapy treatments and patients who have a chronic disease. There will also be a change to the current \$40 administration fee for processing claims made by patients who are not pensioners or healthcare card holders. From 1 January, once a patient's subsidies under the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme reach \$1,000 within a year, the \$40 administration fee will be waived. This change particularly will benefit patients who need to travel regularly for specialist medical treatment. As Peter Garling, SC indicated in his report following his 2008 review of public hospitals:

Once one accepts that we cannot take medical services to all of the population of NSW, then the only alternative is to take the people to the medical services and return them home.

Current subsidies under the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme have meant that patients who have to travel to access specialist medical services receive limited financial assistance and often suffer financial hardship as a result of having to travel to regional or metropolitan centres. Through this major boost to the scheme the Government has delivered on its commitment to provide equitable access to quality health care, regardless of a person's financial status, background or place of residence. However, this financial boost is not the only action that will be taken to improve the scheme.

The Government has listened to individuals and organisations that have regularly drawn attention to problems associated with the complexity of the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme's application form. In response the Minister has asked the Ministry for Health to streamline the scheme's application process. This work will involve the development of a simpler and more user friendly application form as well as development of web-based version of the form that will allow patients to submit online claims. When the Government recently highlighted these changes it was obviously a major issue, particularly for organisations such as the Country Women's Association of Australia, which regards the form as a major barrier.

We must remember that people who submit these forms are suffering from ill health, dealing with major problems in relation to the diagnosis of their illness, and in most cases have little or no assistance when filling out the form. There are plenty of examples of people in remote areas who are not able to fill out a form: they are technically illiterate and have a great deal of difficulty. The Government will make the form easier. I therefore commend the Government for delivering on its election commitment, thereby providing valuable assistance to patients who live in regional, rural and remote areas of New South Wales.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields) [3.49 p.m.]: I am pleased that the member for Murray-Darling moved this motion because the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme is very important to people from rural and regional areas seeking care. That is why on 8 September, 33 days ago, I asked the Minister for Health about her plan to boost the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme by 50 per cent based on her press release of 13 March 2011. I also asked the Minister what the budget was for the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme for 2009-10 and 2010-11. Given the budget enhancement, I asked what the planned budget was for 2011-12. I asked those questions to ascertain if this truly was an increase in the budget of the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme by 50 per cent.

The member for Murray-Darling indicated that accommodation assistance would be increased by 30 per cent and petrol assistance by 25 per cent, which does not equate to 50 per cent. As the Minister has promised to make all reporting transparent, publishing the actual budget of Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme on an annual basis would hold her to that promise. Finally, I asked what changes an individual patient could expect from these changes to the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme. The member for Murray-Darling has outlined changes to the rate, but no changes whatsoever to the criteria. For that reason I move:

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

"this House calls on the Government to:

- (1) deliver on its election commitment to increase IPTAAS by 50 per cent in 2011-12; and
- (2) publish the actual budgets for IPTAAS to confirm that it has in fact done so on an annual basis."

This is a "show me the money" amendment. Earlier I saw the member for Murray-Darling talk to the Minister and I hope that he also asked her where the money is coming from and what the proof is that this 50 per cent increase over the next financial year will actually occur. The Minister has a long list of broken promises relating to rural health, for example, Gulgong and similar promises such as \$145 million for Blacktown but only \$500,000 committed. Not one brick will be laid at Hornsby in the next 12 months. The Minister refuses to answer any questions about hospitals in country areas such as Parkes, Forbes and Bega and a hospital for the Northern Beaches.

The most simple question that every person wants an answer to is: When will the first patient be admitted to the promised new facilities at those hospitals? The Minister will not answer the question. The Minister will not tell us how much money is coming from the Federal Government and the State Government. She will not even tell the people of the State how many beds are in New South Wales hospitals. It will take nine months and an inquiry to answer that simple question. The Minister also refuses to answer simple questions about staffing in various units such as emergency departments—she has not released one performance measure for the emergency department since the 2011 election. Instead of transparency as promised by the Government we are getting tricks, spin and bluster.

Mr Troy Grant: Point of order: My point of order relates to relevance. The shadow Minister for Health is ranting about spin when he should speak to the motion, or even his proposed amendment. He has well and truly diverted from it.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! I am aware of the experience of the member for Macquarie Fields and I am sure he is about to refer to the motion, which is about providing greater assistance for travel for rural and regional patients.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: I thank the member for Dubbo for taking his point of order because my next sentence was about the electorate of the member for Murray-Darling. His electorate has received significant enhancements to its health facilities: for example, the wonderful multi-purpose service at Berrigan that was opened by the former Government, the great facility at Balranald for which we turned the sod and also the \$33 million the former Government spent at Broken Hill Hospital in 2000. I have visited that wonderful hospital and the fantastic school for rural health. The electorate of the member for Murray-Darling has received very significant and well-deserved enhancements to health facilities.

It is not only the Murray-Darling electorate that received funding. The former Government built a new \$250 million hospital at Orange and a hospital at Bathurst. It began construction on smaller hospitals such as the facility at Narrabri, which is well advanced. The former Government also provided multi-purpose services at Bourke and the fantastic service at Coonamble that I visited last year. As I said earlier, today is the day for answers. The Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme is part of a wider strategy called Transport for Health that integrates all non-emergency health-related transports into one program, including the health-related transport program, the statewide infant screening hearing travel program, the interfacility transport service and the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme.

The Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme is a subsidy scheme and assists people who need to travel more than 200 kilometres in one trip or a cumulative 200 kilometres over a week. The member for Murray-Darling mentioned that the changes that expanded renal dialysis services to other patients and were introduced by the former Government are very welcome. The \$1,000 cap for the \$40 administration fee is welcome but very, very few patients will reach that cap so it is more a change in spin than in substance. The changed form for the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme is most welcome as it was difficult to fill out—I have filled in far too many. However, a 30 per cent increase in allowance for accommodation and 25 per cent increase in allowance for travel is not a 50 per cent increase. We need to hear from the Minister about her plans. [*Time expired.*]

Mr TROY GRANT (Dubbo—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.56 p.m.]: I support the motion moved by the member for Murray-Darling and congratulate the Government on providing greater assistance for people living in rural and remote areas who need to travel for medical treatment. As the member for Dubbo and a former police officer who looked after 65 per cent of this State within the western policing region I am well aware of the benefits of the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme to people in regional New South Wales. However, it was far from enough, something that was outlined and acknowledged by the member for Murray-Darling and the former shadow Minister for Health, Mrs Jillian Skinner, who spent a

considerable amount of time in our electorates. I am proud to address this motion because it is an example of the O'Farrell-Stoner Government, led on this issue by the Minister for Health, Mrs Jillian Skinner, delivering on an election promise.

For the benefit of those who are not aware, the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme provides a financial subsidy, as was pointed out by the shadow Minister for Health, to assist eligible patients to meet the costs of travel and accommodation for specialist medical treatment not available to them locally. Because of the efforts of the former Government, unfortunately it was not too soon. As my colleague the member for Murray-Darling mentioned, the Liberal-Nationals Government has provided a 50 per cent boost to the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme of more than \$28 million for the next four years, including \$7 million this year. This funding injection is expected to increase the travel and accommodation reimbursements for the average claim by approximately \$100. I hope that assists the shadow Minister for Health, who was not quite sure about how it would work.

In addition, these new arrangements will also allow any patient who has to travel a cumulative weekly distance of at least 200 kilometres to claim the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme subsidy, something that is not hard to do in our part of the world. This change is a major benefit to people who travel regularly for specialist medical treatment, such as patients having radiotherapy or chemotherapy and patients with a chronic disease. In practical terms these changes will make a great deal of difference to patients who must travel from rural and remote New South Wales for specialist medical treatment. This is a fantastic measure because it is so practical.

I will provide a couple of examples because I think that is what the shadow Minister wants. Under the new arrangement a patient who needs to travel from Coffs Harbour to Sydney for specialist medical treatment will receive a fuel subsidy of about \$200 for the return trip, which is about \$40 more than he or she would receive under the current scheme. If the patient travels with an escort and stays in Sydney for three nights—which is the average length of stay for patients requiring accommodation—he or she will receive an additional \$42 under the new arrangement. In total, the patient will be \$82 better off because of this Government's new rates.

Patients requiring renal dialysis must travel for treatment three times a week 52 weeks a year and patients requiring radiotherapy treatment typically must travel five times a week for a six-week course of treatment. Many other patients with a chronic disease also must travel regularly to access specialist medical treatment. As all members know, the cost of travel is often a significant financial hardship for patients. Under the new arrangements those patients will be able to claim an Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme subsidy if they travel at least 200 kilometres a week. That means that a renal patient travelling 300 kilometres a week to access dialysis will receive about \$2,950 a year. Under the current rules—

Dr Andrew McDonald: Which we introduced.

Mr TROY GRANT: I am glad the shadow Minister made that point. Under the current rules that patient would not be eligible for an Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme subsidy. How does the shadow Minister feel about that? That is not something to be proud of.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! The member for Dubbo will direct his comments through the Chair.

Mr TROY GRANT: The shadow Minister thinks he is Jerry Maguire—he certainly is not. Similarly, a patient travelling 400 kilometres a week for a six-week course of radiotherapy treatment will receive a fuel rebate of about \$450. That patient is not eligible for any assistance under the current scheme, which, as the shadow Minister said, was introduced by the former Government. I do not need a lot of help on this issue, but I am pleased that the member pointed out that the Labor Government introduced the errors that this Government is correcting. I am sure that members will be interested to know that the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme is but one component of the Government's Transport for Health Program, and that is an important point.

Dr Andrew McDonald: Which I mentioned.

Mr TROY GRANT: Indeed, the shadow Minister did mention that. The 2011-12 Transport for Health Program budget is \$27.5 million, which is a \$7.5-million increase from the last budget.

Dr Andrew McDonald: That is not 50 per cent.

Mr TROY GRANT: The 50 per cent increase is over four years. The Transport for Health Program budget is allocated across local health districts so that they can deliver transport services and undertake initiatives to improve patient access to health services. The program provides assistance to meet the travel needs of people who cannot reasonably get to or from health facilities. The shadow Minister also referred to the statewide infant hearing screening program travel assistance. These services provide free transport for patients between health facilities for tests and treatment. These additions to the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme are welcomed not only by the Government but also by the Australian Medical Association New South Wales Branch, Can Assist, the Council of Social Services of New South Wales, the Rural Doctors Association (NSW) and the Cancer Council of New South Wales. [*Time expired.*]

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK (Bankstown) [4.01 p.m.]: This is our first day back in Parliament after a short break and the Government has already resorted to self-congratulation about its supposed commitment to rural and regional New South Wales. In March this year the then shadow Minister for Health, the now Minister for Health, announced that a Coalition Government would boost Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme funding by 50 per cent. We have now been told that that increase will occur over four years despite the fact that the budget includes funding for only one year.

The figures clearly show that the increase is only 25 per cent for travel and 30 per cent for accommodation, which is far less than 50 per cent. Government members should use a calculator because their maths skills are definitely not up to scratch. What is even more interesting is the issues that Government members have carefully avoided. Not one of them mentioned The Nationals' resources for the regions initiative. They promised \$160 million for mining-affected communities, but that was left out of the September budget.

Mr Troy Grant: Point of order: My point of order relates to relevance. This motion and the amendment relate to the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme not resources for the regions. Mr Deputy-Speaker, I ask you to direct the member back to the leave of the motion.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! I have allowed the member a little latitude in her opening comments. I am sure she is about to refer to the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme.

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK: The member for Macquarie Fields correctly pointed out that not one member opposite mentioned the Gulgong hospital.

Mr Troy Grant: Point of order: Although the member has spoken only about nine words, it is obvious that she is not addressing the motion.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! I have seen the notes of the member for Bankstown and I know that is she about to address the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme.

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK: This is yet another sore point, so I will not upset the member any further. Of course, it was the former Labor Government that established this scheme in 2006 and last year it provided it with a \$20-million budget. This Government claimed that it would not break any of the promises that it made during the election campaign, but that is not the case with regard to this scheme.

Mr Troy Grant: No, it is not.

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK: The Coalition promised to increase the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme budget by 50 per cent. That is clearly not the case and members opposite do not want to acknowledge it. The member for Murray-Darling did not even know the correct figures when he spoke to the motion; only the member for Dubbo was privileged enough to have those figures. I will continue to detail this Government's failure to assist rural and regional New South Wales.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! I remind the member that the motion relates to the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme.

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK: It is worth mentioning the cost of living and there is no doubt that one of biggest broken promises of this Government—

Mr John Williams: Point of order: Mr Deputy-Speaker, the member for Bankstown is now canvassing your ruling. This motion is about the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! The member for Bankstown has 28 seconds in which to conclude her contribution. I am sure that she will talk about the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme and nothing else.

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK: I congratulate the member for Macquarie Fields on reminding Government members of the commitment they made to increase funding for the scheme by 50 per cent and on being so vigilant in doing so. Sadly, of course, we have had no response. [*Time expired.*]

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS (Murray-Darling) [4.06 p.m.], in reply: I thank the members for Dubbo, Macquarie Fields and Bankstown for their contributions. This motion deals specifically with a rural and regional issue, and I note the absence of members of Country Labor. The member for Bankstown knows nothing about the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme [IPTAAS]. The Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme does not operate in the electorate of Bankstown and, unfortunately for the member for Bankstown, she would not have seen what happened under the previous Government when it administered the scheme. I think the mathematics are pretty simple.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! Opposition members, who have had the opportunity to take part in the debate, will listen to the member for Murray-Darling in silence.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS: I can handle anything that the member for Bankstown throws at me: it is like being mauled by a fieldmouse. Under the Labor Government \$12 million was allocated to the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme and, under our budget, it was \$19 million—a 58 per cent increase. They are the figures. What happened under Labor? What did Labor do? In my memory, \$14 million per annum was allocated to patient transport. It had to provide patient transport via Home and Community Care [HACC] services and it had to provide unique patient transport that was available through some non-government organisations. Part of the deal was to deny anyone a claim because "We haven't got the money; the budget can't afford it." That is why the Labor Government repeatedly came up with about \$6 million or less on those claims.

The budget was blurred by the fact that the Labor Government called it "Patient transport" and tried to fit so much into it that any poor devil trying to claim under the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme was always going to be denied. The member for Macquarie Fields would have signed a number of letters that I sent to the Minister for Health at the time relating to matters pertinent to the scheme. He would know firsthand some of the things that people were denied and how unjustified that was. One of the biggest single issues that I faced in the electorate of Murray-Darling was frustration associated with that scheme, and I am sure the member for Macquarie Fields well knows it.

We now have a program that has seen some major increases. It was not until the member for Burrinjuck brought a group of cancer sufferers from her electorate to this House and talked about the individual issues that they faced that the previous Labor Government was shamed into making some changes and it was dragged, yelling and screaming, into reducing the travelling distance from 200 kilometres to 100 kilometres and boosting the petrol reimbursement rate to 15¢ per kilometre. The previous Government did not want to face the issue. Then it introduced an administration fee, so it gave with one hand and took back with the other.

This Government recognises that there is a claim out there which has to be met. The claim form will be made a lot easier and will remove the barriers that the previous Government put in place that made it nearly impossible for needy people to claim under the scheme and receive some reimbursement of their travel and accommodation expenses. Those people were always there. I dealt with this issue many times in the electorate of Murray-Darling with individuals who had a legitimate claim for travel and accommodation and, because of the scheming that was done by the previous Government, were denied their claim and missed out on some support.

Question—That the words stand—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 60

Mr Anderson	Mr Gee	Mr Rowell
Mr Annesley	Ms Gibbons	Mrs Sage
Mr Aplin	Ms Goward	Mrs Skinner
Mr Ayres	Mr Grant	Mr Smith
Mr Baird	Mr Hartcher	Mr Souris
Mr Baumann	Mr Hazzard	Mr Speakman
Ms Berejiklian	Ms Hodgkinson	Mr Spence
Mr Brookes	Mr Holstein	Mr Stokes
Mr Casuscelli	Mr Issa	Mr Stoner
Mr Conolly	Mr Kean	Mr Toole
Mr Constance	Dr Lee	Mr Torbay
Mr Cornwell	Mr Notley-Smith	Ms Upton
Mr Coure	Mr O'Dea	Mr Ward
Mrs Davies	Mr O'Farrell	Mr Webber
Mr Dominello	Mr Owen	Mr R. C. Williams
Mr Doyle	Mr Page	Mrs Williams
Mr Edwards	Ms Parker	
Mr Elliott	Mr Piccoli	
Mr Evans	Mr Provest	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Flowers	Mr Roberts	Mr Maguire
Mr Fraser	Mr Rohan	Mr J. D. Williams

Noes, 20

Mr Barr	Dr McDonald	Mr Robertson
Ms Burney	Ms Mihailuk	Ms Tebbutt
Ms Burton	Ms Moore	Ms Watson
Ms Hay	Mr Parker	Mr Zangari
Ms Hornery	Mrs Perry	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Keneally	Mr Piper	Mr Amery
Mr Lynch	Mr Rees	Mr Park

Pairs

Mr Bromhead	Mr Daley
Mr Perrottet	Mr Furolo

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment negatived.

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

Motion agreed to.

THOROUGHBRED RACING AMENDMENT BILL 2011

Bill introduced on motion by Mr George Souris.

Agreement in Principle

Mr GEORGE SOURIS (Upper Hunter—Minister for Tourism, Major Events, Hospitality and Racing, and Minister for the Arts) [4.25 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

The primary purpose of the Thoroughbred Racing Amendment Bill 2011 is to amend the Thoroughbred Racing Act 1996 in relation to the appointment procedures and eligibility requirements for the board of Racing NSW

and to increase the number of appointed members. I make it clear that these changes do not reflect on the current board of Racing NSW or on any particular board member. The Government recognises the importance of the racing industry in terms of its employment and economic contribution to the State, as well as its importance to the people of New South Wales as a source of entertainment and social interaction. The Government's broad policy for racing is to support the viability and the sustainable economic development of the racing industry, while ensuring that the highest integrity standards apply to racing and associated wagering in accordance with community expectations.

The controlling or governing body for the thoroughbred racing code is Racing NSW. Although it is established by the Thoroughbred Racing Act 1996, Racing NSW is independent of government, does not represent the Crown and is not subject to ministerial direction. This recognises that the racing industry has self-management of its affairs. Nevertheless, the Government is responsible for the legislative framework that underpins the racing industry and the governance and integrity standards set out in the enabling legislation. The thoroughbred racing code is the largest sector of the New South Wales racing industry: it is made up of some 137 race clubs, which conduct over 750 race meetings per year across the State. Prize money distributed to participants each season is well over \$100 million.

The New South Wales racing industry is a significant employer, providing 50,000 full-time and part-time jobs. The industry also makes a significant contribution to the State's economy—estimated to be in the order of \$1 billion annually. It has provided the State with wagering taxes for many years, with its most recent contribution being approximately \$160 million. Apart from regulatory functions under the Act and under the rules of racing, the primary responsibilities of Racing NSW include the registration of race clubs, the allocation of race dates and the distribution of TAB revenue and prize money. Historically, there has been an issue with factional interests within the racing industry seeking to secure a benefit in accordance with their self interests. Ian Temby, QC identified a primary example of this tendency in 1995 when he recommended that the Australian Jockey Club should revert to a race club and relinquish its governing body role for the industry. The Temby review found that it was inappropriate for the Australian Jockey Club to manage TAB payments and race date allocations for the racing industry at the same time as it operated as a race club.

The Temby recommendations resulted in the creation of what is now known as Racing NSW as an independent body. Since then there have been several changes to the arrangements for the structure of Racing NSW and the manner in which members are appointed to improve the governance model and to ensure contemporary, best practice governance in the spirit of continuous improvement. The present arrangements in the Act for the appointment of members of Racing NSW were made in 2008. The intent of the 2008 changes was to move away from a nominee structure and to establish a board made up of independent members appointed by an independent selection panel and based on a merit-selection process in accordance with prescribed business skills criteria.

In addition, the legislation was also changed to impose on members of Racing NSW the duty to act in the public interest and in the interests of the horse racing industry as a whole in New South Wales. The bill has come about in part from a concern that the existing eligibility criteria for membership of Racing NSW are not suited to ensuring that members comply with their duty to act in the public interest and in the interests of the horse racing industry as a whole in New South Wales. For some time I have had concerns about whether Racing NSW can operate effectively and meet its statutory duty to the racing industry and to the public under the current arrangements.

When leading for the then Opposition in debate on the Thoroughbred Racing Amendment Bill 2008 I expressed the need to create a board of governance that comprises people of high calibre, but not necessarily people with fixed views who have the aim of representing only their own section of the industry. There are a number of pressing challenges facing the racing industry, such as the ongoing race fields information usage fee issue, the major redevelopment of Randwick and Rosehill racecourses and the unprecedented competition for the entertainment dollar. It is questionable whether the current Racing NSW board membership of five is sufficient in terms of size and range of skills to manage the workload and to undertake the many reforms necessary to ensure the future viability and sustainable economic development of the thoroughbred racing industry.

The bill leaves intact the business and skills criteria for appointment as a member of Racing NSW but strengthens the eligibility, disclosure and management of pecuniary interest requirements to minimise the influence of factional and personal interests as a basis for decision making. The bill also retains the independent selection panel process but amends its procedure. Under the current arrangements, a person is not eligible for

appointment if he or she is an employee of a race club or racing association, or a member of the governing body of a race club or eligible industry body. However, the Act is silent on the operative date of effect, and the practice has been that the prohibition applies at the time of appointment. This arrangement does not afford sufficient separation from the interests and influences of a former role within the industry and the duty of an independent member of Racing NSW.

Under the proposed new arrangements, the eligibility requirements for appointment to Racing NSW will provide that a person is not eligible for appointment if he or she is currently, or during the past 12 months has been, either an employee or member of a governing body of a race club, racing association or eligible industry body as defined in the Act. The 12-month separation period is considered appropriate and is likely to become the benchmark for appointments to other independent boards established by legislation. The new provisions will also expressly prohibit membership of Racing NSW if the independent selection panel forms the view that an applicant has a direct or indirect pecuniary interest that is considered to be a conflict of interest that is incompatible with membership of Racing NSW. Examples of conflicts of interest that would be incompatible are already set out in section 21 of the Act, that is, being a member, partner, employee of a specified company, body or person or having some other specified interest relating to a specified company, body or person.

This concept will be extended to cover any direct or indirect pecuniary interests that a member may acquire or that may become apparent following his or her appointment as a member. As currently occurs, a member will be required to disclose any direct or indirect pecuniary interest in a matter to be considered at a meeting of Racing NSW. In the past such conflicts of interest were left to the board to manage and to determine whether the member should participate in the consideration of an issue. However, under the proposed amendments, a member will be prohibited from participating in the consideration of that matter. Should a serious conflict of interest exist the Minister may ask that the member show cause why his or her appointment should not be terminated.

These amendments will ensure, firstly, that self-interest is, and is seen to be, eliminated and, secondly, that board decisions are made in the best interests of the whole of the thoroughbred racing industry and the public interest. Currently, the independent selection panel is limited to recommending appointees for the precise number of vacancies on the board. Under the new provisions, the independent selection panel will be required to provide a list of recommended appointees that exceeds the number of vacancies so as to enable the Minister to make a selection. This arrangement gives the Minister greater purview over the appointment process and, coupled with the expansion of the board from five to seven members, reflects the need to broaden the skill base of the board and allows for the appointment of the best available talent.

Similarly, the independent selection panel will be required to provide a list of eligible appointees for the Minister's consideration for appointment to the positions of chairperson and deputy chairperson. While it is appreciated that Racing NSW is independent of government, the appointment of the chair and deputy chair by the Minister will provide for stability and allow Racing NSW to focus on its statutory responsibilities to the racing industry and to the public. The bill also provides that the independent selection panel will continue to be able to make recommendations concerning the term of office for which a person is to be appointed. However, this would not be binding on the Minister, as is presently the case.

Given the concerns about the existing arrangements, the bill provides that the terms of existing appointees be terminated and that a fresh appointment process be undertaken, with existing appointees eligible to reapply under the new arrangements. The current appointees are Chairperson Alan Bell, Deputy Chairperson Alan Brown, Mr Ken Brown, AM, Ms Kim Harding and Mr Arthur Inglis. I acknowledge their service and commitment to the State's thoroughbred racing industry. It is appropriate that their contribution be considered, along with new candidates, but in terms of the new benchmarks for eligibility and conflict of interest. To provide for business and governance continuity, appropriate transitional arrangements have been included so that all existing Racing NSW members continue in office, under caretaker provisions, until such time as the fresh selection process is undertaken and new appointments are made.

The proposed amendments are intended to provide for the future viability and growth of the New South Wales thoroughbred racing industry and to ensure that a strong, viable industry continues to provide an economic benefit to the State generally and to regional and rural communities in particular. The Government has the prerogative to ensure that the legislation is appropriate in its policy objectives, that it reflects current best practice and that it meets community expectations. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr PAUL LYNCH (Liverpool) [4.36 p.m.]: I lead for the Opposition in this place in debate on this bill. I note that the Hon. Steve Whan in the other place is the shadow Minister for this portfolio area. Notice of

this bill was given to the Opposition two hours ago. I acknowledge, however, that we have received a one-page briefing note from the Minister, and that is an improvement over what has happened with other legislation. However, it is obvious that we will be reserving our position and either supporting, seeking to amend or opposing the legislation in the other place. The shadow Minister tells me that at first glance there are some significant industry concerns about this legislation but we will explore the matter further and deal with it in more detail if necessary in the other place.

The legislation is expressed as an attempt to amend the Thoroughbred Racing Act to make provisions relating to the membership of Racing NSW, which is the body responsible for the control and regulation of thoroughbred racing in this State. This legislation makes amendments to the appointment procedures, eligibility requirements and the number of appointed members of Racing NSW. The bill, in the short time we have had to look at it, would seem to do those things. It will increase the number of appointed members of Racing NSW from five to seven, and it will alter the eligibility requirements so that a person is not eligible for appointment if he or she has been an employee or member of the committee of a race club or the like in the 12 months preceding the appointment.

The bill will alter the eligibility requirements to expressly prohibit membership of Racing NSW if the independent selection panel forms the view that an applicant has a direct or indirect pecuniary interest that is considered to be a conflict of interest that is incompatible with membership of Racing NSW. It will amend the Thoroughbred Racing Board Act so that the independent selection panel may submit to the Minister a list of eligible candidates for membership of Racing NSW and that the Minister may make a final selection from that list. It will alter the conflict of interest provisions in the Act requiring the disclosure of a direct or indirect interest in a matter under consideration by Racing NSW.

The bill will amend the Act in relation to the appointment of the chair and deputy chair of Racing NSW so that the Minister makes those appointments. The bill will terminate the appointments of existing members of Racing NSW and provide for a fresh appointment process. Existing appointees will be eligible to reapply under the new arrangements. That seems to represent a significant change in power and vest a much greater degree of power in the hands of the Minister than is currently the case. As I indicated, the Opposition reserves its position and will give further consideration to this legislation in the other place.

Debated adjourned on motion by Mr Daryl Maguire and set down as an order of the day for a later hour.

TECHNICAL AND FURTHER EDUCATION COMMISSION AMENDMENT (STAFF EMPLOYMENT) BILL 2011

Bill introduced on motion by Mr Adrian Piccoli.

Agreement in Principle

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Education) [4.41 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

The New South Wales Government is committed to delivering the change called for by the people of New South Wales to rebuild our State and make New South Wales number one. The Government has released its plan "NSW 2021: A Plan to Make NSW Number One", which drives our agenda for change in New South Wales. We are unashamedly focused on rebuilding the economy, returning quality services and strengthening our local environment and communities. We have particularly set out clear goals including improving the performance of the New South Wales economy, driving economic growth in regional New South Wales, strengthening the New South Wales skills base and improving education and learning outcomes for all students.

The New South Wales Government has agreed to a national framework for reform of the vocational education and training system. In reshaping the direction of these reforms we will do what is best for New South Wales. The Department of Education and Communities is currently undertaking a consultation with industry, students, community groups and training organisations and their staffs to provide feedback so we can hear from those using our vocational education and training system. We want New South Wales to lead the country in sustainable economic growth and we can do this by ensuring that we have a smart and skilled workforce to lead us into the future.

The New South Wales Government is committed to supporting a strong and dynamic TAFE NSW as we recognise its critical role in contributing to the growth of the New South Wales economy. TAFE NSW is the leading provider of vocational education and training in this State with a global reputation for excellence and innovation. TAFE NSW makes a substantial contribution to business and community skills needs and has an unparalleled capacity to meet rural and regional skills needs. As members know, I am delighted to acknowledge that contribution and capacity. TAFE NSW is a key lever for our Government in making New South Wales number one.

TAFE NSW is at the heart of our communities and we are proud of its achievements: It has over 550,000 enrolments across 130 campuses. More than 46 per cent of these enrolments are in higher level courses—AQF Certificate III and above. In 2010 it had more than 278,000 students enrolled from regional and remote areas. In addition, this year, TAFE NSW Higher Education started offering its first Bachelor Degree program. We are particularly proud of the achievements of TAFE NSW in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Aboriginal people represent 2.1 per cent of the State's population, but represent 6.3 per cent of TAFE NSW enrolments. TAFE NSW has been responding to the skills needs of our economy since it was first established 120 years ago as the Sydney Technical College.

Ensuring the ongoing success and sustainability of TAFE NSW is as critical to our State's future economic prosperity today as it was all those years ago, and that is the reason that I am introducing this bill today. In 1990 a Coalition Government introduced the Technical and Further Education Commission Bill into this House. When introducing the bill the then Minister for Education, the Hon John Fahey, acknowledged that the transformation of TAFE in New South Wales into a dynamic and competitive education and training provider was vital to improving the economic performance of this State. TAFE NSW was the employer of its staff for more than 15 years, from 1990, when the TAFE Commission was established, to 2006. Independent reviews of TAFE NSW over the years by such bodies as the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal have identified the need for reforms so that TAFE NSW can deliver on its mandate in an increasingly competitive training environment.

The bill I am introducing today restores the employer power to TAFE NSW as it was originally established in 1990. Staff will once again become TAFE NSW employees. As I have visited TAFE colleges and institutes across the State, it is obvious that staff are proud to be working for TAFE NSW, and rightly so. This change is necessary for TAFE NSW to remain a strong, pre-eminent public provider of vocational education and training. The bill has three key features: first, the introduction of a specific power to enable TAFE NSW to employ staff; second, the transfer of all existing employees, including TAFE teachers, institute managers, administrative staff, and educational support staff from their existing employment under the Public Sector Employment and Management Act 2002, so that they become employees of TAFE NSW; and third, the maintenance of existing conditions of employment.

The main provision of the bill is the introduction of a proposed new section 15, which will grant TAFE NSW, referred to as the TAFE Commission, the power to employ staff. The terms of this section are identical to equivalent provisions that existed as part of the Act from its passage through the New South Wales Parliament in 1990 until 2006. The mechanism for transferring staff to the employment of TAFE NSW is set out in the proposed new part 5 of schedule 4 to the bill. Clause 13 of the schedule defines the term "existing staff member" widely, and includes a power for the director general of the department to identify in writing persons who are presently employed primarily to assist the TAFE Commission. Clause 14 sets out the mechanism that will result in the transfer of existing staff members to become employees of TAFE. The clause becomes operative on the commencement date, which is defined to be the date on which the amending Act is proclaimed to commence.

The bill preserves the existing core conditions of employment for transferred staff. Clause 15 of schedule 4 makes clear that the TAFE Commission is to take such action as is available to it as an employer to ensure that the core conditions of employment are maintained for its staff. These core conditions are set out in subclause 2 to be hours of work, salary, shift, overtime and penalty rates, allowances, and leave. The bill establishes a 12-month transition period, which is contained in part 5 of schedule 4 to the bill. During this period, the TAFE Commission will endeavour to negotiate one or more enterprise agreements to cover its staff that incorporate, where appropriate, the existing award provisions. I also make it clear that the Government's policies relating to wages and the management of excess employees will continue to apply to TAFE NSW.

As I have indicated, the purpose of the bill is to give TAFE NSW the power to re-employ its own staff. TAFE NSW will then develop fair, equitable and sustainable industrial arrangements for its employees that reflect its unique position within the New South Wales public sector. The bill is an important and positive

reform for TAFE NSW and it will support the future success of TAFE. The bill preserves existing conditions of employment for staff to the extent that that is possible. TAFE NSW will remain part of the New South Wales public sector and continue to be subject to New South Wales Government policy. TAFE NSW staff will be covered by the Fair Work Act, as are the staffs of other New South Wales owned corporations, such as RailCorp and Sydney Water. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Ms Carmel Tebbutt and set down as an order of the day for a future day.

UNIVERSITIES GOVERNING BODIES BILL 2011

Bill introduced on motion by Mr Adrian Piccoli.

Agreement in Principle

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Education) [4.49 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

The University Governing Bodies Bill 2011 facilitates amendments to each of the 10 Acts establishing the State's public universities. The amendments will bring the governance arrangements of New South Wales universities into line with contemporary practice. Those amendments also will give effect to key recommendations of the 2009 report of the Legislative Council General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2 entitled "Governance of NSW Universities".

Universities are a crucial part of the New South Wales education system and economy. The State needs our universities to be well equipped to meet our growing needs for skills and innovation. Last year New South Wales universities received \$1.2 billion in income from commercial sources. They are both major public institutions of great strategic significance to the State and very significant businesses. Their governance arrangements need to reflect this reality. A number of universities in New South Wales have been requesting changes to their governing body size and composition for some time. This has been a matter of particular concern to universities both before and following the report of the parliamentary committee chaired by my colleague the Hon. Robyn Parker. That is why we have moved quickly to consult with universities and introduce this bill to Parliament.

The Government has consulted widely with New South Wales public universities on a model for legislative change to university governance arrangements, and that model lies at the heart of this bill. The New South Wales Vice-Chancellors Committee has advised that all 10 of our public universities, including their chancellors and governing bodies, support the model for legislative change. The New South Wales Liberal-Nationals Government is committed to supporting a strong, contemporary regulatory framework for New South Wales universities. Our universities need to be supported to maintain their current strengths and to continue to develop in ways that properly equip them to thrive in the future. The amendments in the Universities Governing Bodies Bill 2011 chiefly will ensure that the governing bodies of New South Wales universities are able to have greater flexibility in determining their own size and composition, if they so choose.

At the same time, the bill maintains a representative model of university governance that ensures key stakeholders remain appropriately represented. Governing bodies will continue to include elected academic and non-academic staff members, and elected student members and graduate members—whilst ensuring that a majority of the membership of each governing body must be external. The changes give universities much-desired flexibility as well as the capacity to decide the size, composition and related mix of necessary skills and experience on their governing bodies, and thus more freedom to govern themselves according to their individual missions and strategic plans. The changes also allow universities to take control over other important matters they have wanted control over for some time, such as the ability to hold meetings by electronic means, the ability to dismiss the chancellor or deputy chancellor and, if they deem it necessary, to remunerate members.

The bill is an opt-in model that allows each university to decide for itself whether and when to introduce changes to its governance structure. The capacity to remunerate members and to dismiss a chancellor or deputy chancellor if the need arises were key recommendations of a 2009 Legislative Council committee report entitled "Governance of NSW Universities". Currently, the capacity to dismiss a chancellor or deputy chancellor for losing the confidence of the governing body is available to two universities only—the University

of Sydney and the University of Newcastle—through provisions of their by-laws rather than in their enabling Acts. This bill will extend that capacity to all universities and place that particular power of these two universities in their Acts rather than their by-laws.

In terms of the capacity to remunerate members, all current New South Wales university legislation is silent on this issue. The bill will provide legal certainty in this area and give universities only the capacity to remunerate: They do not have to implement the provision if it does not suit their particular circumstances. For example, some regional universities may wish to take advantage of remuneration to facilitate the involvement of external members who have the necessary skills and attributes to undertake the responsibilities associated with university governance. The structure of the bill is that clause 4 in the main body of the bill provides that a university governing body can adopt the standard governing body provisions contained in schedule 1, provided that is approved by a two-thirds majority of members.

If that is approved, those standard provisions will replace the existing governing body provisions in the university's Act. It is not compulsory for universities to make the changes. The legislation provides them with the flexibility to opt in only if they wish to. Such a resolution will enable the particular university governing body to determine a number of factors, such as the total number of members it will have within a specified range, the total number of members in most categories of membership, and the time when the resolution itself should come into effect.

Clause 4 of the bill sets up the mechanism for effecting those changes by an order made by the Minister for Education after receiving notice of the governing body's resolution. At the appropriate time after the ministerial order is made the university's Act will be amended and the existing replaceable provisions will cease to have effect. Schedule 1 contains the standard governing body provisions that will amend the existing replaceable provisions in university Acts. Schedule 2 provides for savings, transitional and other provisions necessary on the enactment of this bill, including the capacity for savings and transitional regulations to be made. Schedule 3 contains a number of related amendments that will be made to all university Acts, whether or not the particular university's governing body decides to opt in to the standard governing body provisions contained in schedule 1.

Schedule 3 consists of a series of amendments for each of the 10 New South Wales public universities in a clearly marked section for each. These have some small variations that reflect the particular Acts and take account of minor, local or pre-existing differences between our public universities. The changes set out in schedule 3 were identified by the universities as important reforms, whether or not the universities wish to change the number and composition of their governing bodies. Back to clause 4 for a moment, this contains also a provision that amends the rule-making power in each university's Act. This will not come into force on assent to the bill, but only if and when a governing body decides to opt in to the standard governing body provisions contained in schedule 1. If adopted, the new governing body arrangements will require university rules, which are known as Constitution Rules, to be made to support them, rather than university by-laws as at present. The rule-making power therefore needs to change to enable the new approach to operate, but only at the appropriate time.

I now will deal with different parts of the bill in more detail and, in doing so, outline the key background issues, the amendments the bill initiates, and the approach it takes. There are six clauses in the main body of the bill. The commencement clause, clause 2, provides that, the Act commences on the date of assent. The definitions in clause 3 indicate the provisions in each university's Act that will be replaced by the standard governing body provisions in schedule 1 when universities choose to do so. Clause 4 is the key clause on which the bill turns. It provides the mechanism that will enable universities to adopt standard governing body provisions in schedule 1 when they choose to do so. A two-thirds majority decision by the governing body will be required to opt in. The Minister will then need to make and publish a ministerial order after the terms of the decision are conveyed to him or her.

When the resolution takes effect, the standard provisions will take the place of the existing provisions, which are the replaceable provisions, in the relevant university Act, and any necessary consequential changes also will be made to the particular university's Act and by-law. Schedule 1 contains the standard governing body provisions of the bill. The governing body of a university can decide to adopt these by a two-thirds majority decision at any time after the passage of this bill, or not adopt them at all, if it prefers to retain its current size and composition. The same categories of membership are retained in these provisions, which reflects continuing support for the representative model of governance underpinning the bill as well as the current university Acts. The schedule 1 provisions set the size range for the governing body and required categories of membership.

They enable the governing body by a two-thirds majority resolution to determine its own size within the specified range and the number of members it will have within most categories. The actual numbers determined by a university are to be specified in Constitution Rules made by the governing body.

The provisions require that the governing body membership must include the following numbers across the specified categories: three official members, who are the chancellor, vice-chancellor and president of the Academic Board; between two and six ministerially appointed members; at least one elected member of the academic staff; at least one elected member of the non-academic staff; at least one elected student who is not employed on a fulltime basis as a staff member of the university; at least one external person who is a graduate of the university, either elected or appointed; and such number of external persons appointed by the governing body as is prescribed by the Constitution Rules.

The bill continues important key principles that apply to the current university Acts: external members are required to be in the majority. The current representative nature of governing bodies is preserved, with all the main stakeholders represented amongst the membership. Academic staff, non-academic staff, and student members will continue to be elected, and external graduate members can be either elected or appointed, as is current practice. To maintain a continuity and balance in the overall composition of the governing body, the bill provides that no single category of membership may constitute a 12 majority.

The bill provides for a minimum of 11 and a maximum of 22 members on the governing body, with each university to determine the size considered appropriate to its circumstances. Currently, there is no specified minimum number, although the same maximum of 22 is the existing upper limit. The bill continues current provisions in the university Acts relating to the qualifications and experience of governing body members. At least two members of the governing body must have financial expertise, and at least one must have commercial expertise. These qualification requirements were incorporated into university Acts in the 2004 amendments that implemented aspects of the Howard Government's National Governance Protocols.

All appointed members—whether governing body or ministerial appointments—must have expertise and experience relevant to the functions of the governing body, and an appreciation of the object, values, functions and activities of the university. Each university's constitution rules are to prescribe the number of people who will comprise the elected academic staff members, elected non-academic staff members and elected student members. Graduate members must be external and can be elected or appointed, or the process can be a combination of both. Graduates need not form a separate category of membership, but can be appointed either as ministerial or governing body members. The number of graduates must be specified in the constitution rules. Subject to the maximum membership limit and the key principles that apply, the bill allows governing bodies to appoint as many external members of their own choosing as they feel necessary to meet their requirements. Again, the number of governing body appointees decided on must be specified in the constitution rules.

At present each university Act provides for the Minister for Education to appoint six external persons to the university governing body. This bill will give universities the option of having between two and six ministerial appointees on their governing bodies, with the number specified in the constitution rules. While the Minister will retain absolute discretion over his or her own appointments, the governing body of a university may suggest persons to the Minister it considers appropriate for appointment. This is consistent with current processes. The only change to the current arrangements for ministerial appointments is that the Minister will no longer be able to appoint a member of Parliament to the governing body. The governing body itself, however, may do so in its own category of appointed members if it feels this is desirable or beneficial.

The bill will preserve the current status of the chancellor, vice-chancellor and chair of the university academic board or senate as ex-officio members of the governing body. One change, however, is that the chancellor may now be counted as an external member, depending on the circumstances. It remains possible that a governing body may elect a chancellor who is an internal member of the university. The bill provides limits on the term of office for all elected or appointed members, as specified in clause 10 of schedule 1. In summary, the terms are: for an official member, while the member holds the particular office; for a ministerially appointed member or governing body appointed member, a term not exceeding four years; for an elected staff or student member, a term not exceeding two years as specified in the by-laws; and for an elected graduate member, a term not exceeding four years, as specified in the by-laws.

The bill also continues the following requirements in the current legislation, stemming from the Howard Government's National Governance Protocols: a person must not be appointed or elected to serve more than 12 consecutive years of office unless the governing body specifically resolves to allow it for a particular

person and the governing body and the Minister should consider the appropriate balance between experienced and new members when by-laws and appointments are made. Schedule 2 provides for the making of the necessary provisions to support implementation of this bill, including transitional regulations as necessary. When a university governing body decides to adopt the Standard Governing Body Provisions contained in schedule 1, detailed provisions will then need to be developed by Parliamentary Counsel in conjunction with the particular university to enable a smooth transition to the new arrangements. Transitional arrangements would need to include provision for exactly how the existing membership of a governing body is to transition to the new membership arrangements that will apply.

The University Governing Bodies Bill 2011 provides the public universities of New South Wales with much needed flexibility to govern themselves in the way they see fit. The bill helps reduce red tape by allowing for such modernisations as the ability to hold teleconferences and remove chancellors or deputy chancellors without resorting to Government interference. This is consistent with this Government's pledge in the State Plan to reduce red tape by 2021. I understand that universities have been asking for these changes for many years. They need flexibility to operate in the more globalised educational environment in which we find ourselves. They knocked on the ever-revolving door of changing education Ministers over the past few years and no-one answered. In six months, this Government has been able to consult with all New South Wales universities and work with them on a proposal they all assent to and have it presented here for deliberation, something those opposite could not do in 16 long years of Government.

Thanks to the Liberal-Nationals Government, governing bodies will now be better able to meet the challenges of an increasingly competitive global knowledge economy, and a demand-driven national higher education system. They will have skills to match their responsibilities, and members will be appointed through a customised and transparent procedure. This bill is an affirmation of the commitment of the Liberal-Nationals Government to the autonomy and independence of universities, while also ensuring that appropriate and effective representative governance arrangements are in place. While the representative model of university governance will continue, the amendments will allow universities to rebalance membership structure so that governing bodies can have an effective strategic focus at a time when the external context increasingly requires this. The bill has been drafted in such a way that universities are free to maintain exactly their current arrangements if they consider that those arrangements are serving them well.

I thank the chancellors, vice-chancellors and vice-chancellor committees of all universities. The member for Vacluse, the Parliamentary Secretary, and I have met with them on several occasions prior to the election and we have met with them since the election. The Liberal-Nationals in New South Wales and the vice-chancellor committees have cooperated through open discourse about the future of universities in New South Wales. They have asked for these changes and we have consulted with them. I thank the member for Vacluse for her enormous amount of work in consulting with the university sector. She has travelled to every university in Sydney and regional New South Wales to make sure that we get this legislation right and that it is what the universities want. This legislation will increase the performance of universities so that they can deliver for the students and the people of New South Wales. I compliment the Parliamentary Secretary on her work on this very complex bill. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Ms Carmel Tebbutt and set down as an order of the day for a future day.

THOROUGHBRED RACING AMENDMENT BILL 2011

Agreement in Principle

Debate resumed from an earlier hour.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS (Hawkesbury—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.10 p.m.]: Once again it gives me great pleasure to participate in a debate about the thoroughbred racing industry in New South Wales. As members know, I had a lifetime of experience in that industry prior to being elected to Parliament. I appreciate the consistency of the approach of the Minister responsible for racing and gaming' to this issue and I commend his staff for the major role they have played in drafting the Thoroughbred Racing Amendment Bill 2011 and bringing it to fruition. The disparity in thoroughbred racing prize money across the State has been of great concern to me over the past 20 years and this legislation addresses that issue.

The Thoroughbred Racing Act 1996 provides that the body governing racing in this State, Racing NSW, is responsible for not only the regulation of the industry but also commercial activities, promotion and

development. Its responsibilities include the registration of race clubs, the allocation of race dates, insurance coverage for the industry, training, the important task of distributing TAB revenue in the form of prize money and the allocation of funds for capital development and improvements at racecourses. I will discuss the distribution of prize money in more detail later.

Unsurprisingly, history indicates a problem with factional interests in the New South Wales thoroughbred racing industry seeking to secure benefits. I know that that is true and it is wonderful that this bill will address that problem, which has resulted in the disparity between the city, provincial and country sectors of the racing industry. In view of the significant economic and social benefits that the industry provides to the State it is imperative that the governing body act in the public interest and in the interests of the thoroughbred racing industry as a whole. Efforts have been made over the years to establish an appropriate governance model and to ensure contemporary best practice governance in the spirit of continuous improvement.

The aims of this legislation are to strengthen the eligibility requirements for appointment to Racing NSW, to minimise the opportunity for conflicts of interest and to address the need to broaden the board's skills base by increasing the membership from five to seven members. A person will not be eligible for appointment as a member of Racing NSW if he or she is currently or has been during the past 12 months either an employee or a member of a governing body of a race club, racing association or eligible industry body. Simply being a member of a race club, such as the Australian Turf Club or an eligible industry body such as the Thoroughbred Breeders Association New South Wales or the Australian Jockeys' Association, will not prevent a person from being eligible for board membership. However, it is considered important that a member of Racing NSW will be sufficiently separated from the interests and influences of a former role as an employee or a member of a governing body of those bodies to minimise the risk of factional interests being pursued.

The bill also contains provisions that will strengthen requirements to ensure that disclosure and proper management of pecuniary interests to remove personal agendas from the decision-making process. In the first instance, a person interested in appointment to Racing NSW will be required to disclose to the selection panel any perceived conflicts of interest, including pecuniary interests—as they should. It will then be the selection panel's role to assess whether the conflict would be incompatible with serving as a member of Racing NSW. Appointed members who acquire an interest that may be incompatible with their role will be required to disclose the details of that role to the board. In practice, they will be prohibited from taking part in any discussions regarding an issue in which they may have an interest.

At present, the management of such matters is left to the board, but that has not proven to be effective in dealing with perceived conflicts of interest. Should a serious conflict of interest exist or the member's position become untenable due to a conflict, the Minister may then ask that the member show cause why his or her appointment should not be terminated. These amendments are aimed at ensuring that factional interests and self-interests are and are seen to be eliminated from board machinations and that the governing body is acting in the very best interests of the New South Wales thoroughbred racing industry and the public. That is the sole purpose of this bill; that is, to ensure that the board is entirely committed to the interests of the thoroughbred racing industry and the public.

As a lifetime participant in the industry, it has aggrieved me no end to see the enormous disparity between prize money awarded in the city and in the country. I am not the only person involved in the industry who has those concerns. A former leading Australian trainer, John Hawkes, once said that it would not matter if the Melbourne Cup was worth \$5 million or \$1 million, it would potentially attract the same field because \$1 million is an enormous prize for any race. The point he was making, which is similar to my point, is that the other \$4 million should be spread more fairly across the State. He was speaking predominantly about provincial and country races. I have held that view for a long time. John Hawkes was Australia's leading trainer and, therefore, probably the top prize winner in the country. However, he knew that the winnings he collected on behalf of his owners were not generated only at the group one level; they were generated across the racing industry, including at midweek city race meetings and provincial and country race meetings. That is why it is so important that Racing NSW represent the interests of every sector of the industry.

In his agreement in principle speech the Minister said that he wanted to attract the highest calibre people to the board. I endorse that comment. I would love to see someone with a background in country racing appointed to the board. I do not mean someone who has been an owner, a director of a large stud or the fortunate owner of a champion racehorse; I mean someone who, like me, has been a thoroughbred trainer. People like my good friend Pat Cass, Johnno Johnson and Reg Priest come to mind. They no longer train but they did so for many years and they understand the complexities of the racing industry. They have retired from the industry but they know the challenges facing country trainers and country racing.

Mr Assistant-Speaker, as a country member you know of not only the economic benefits but also the social capital that racing brings to a country area. I have said many times in this place that between 1997 and 2007—and we know who was in government at that time—52 per cent or 1,100 provincial and country trainers left the industry. Their departure had a domino effect because their strappers, farriers, track riders, feed suppliers and so on were also lost to the country. Of course, that has a serious economic impact and it also leads to a loss of social capital. People from hundreds of miles away would flock to a Saturday race meeting, not necessarily to gamble but to catch up and have a beer with their neighbours whom they might not have seen for months.

Country racing provided very strong social cohesion. Unfortunately, when we started losing non-TAB races and factoring some of those resources into TAB races that took place on a Tuesday at Orange or a Friday at Bathurst, we lost the opportunity for country racing and the ability of working-class people to partake in race meetings. We lost the economic benefits, and we certainly lost the social capital and social cohesion in those areas. When I first contributed to debate on the racing industry alongside the then shadow Minister, now the Minister, we argued very strongly. To his great credit the Minister took the opportunity to meet people like Peter V'Landys from Racing NSW, who was certainly a breath of fresh air. He understood that we needed to grow the industry from the grassroots and that losing grassroots participants would affect racing right across the board.

When debate took place in 2007, the average prize money in country areas was around \$5,000. Changes were introduced and the average prize money in country areas is now \$10,000 or more. That was a wonderful result because in the 10 years preceding 2007 country racing increased only minimally. What has been the result? Participants have flocked back to the racing industry. One can judge that simply by looking at a country meeting with an eight-race program and healthy 11-plus fields. That is the greatest test, as the TAB will attest. If there are 11 or more horses in a field, one will get the greatest benefit from one's gambling money—one can spread more across the board. Country race meetings grew consistently after the prize money returned. One can do a lot of things but, at the end of the day, if the takeout is not there people will not stay in the industry.

I cannot let this opportunity go by without mentioning my very good friend's racehorse. My friend Neil Werrett has been able to get the greatest racehorse in the world that has ever raced. He is the owner of Black Caviar. All power and strength to him and the rest of the owners of Black Caviar because I can put firmly on the record that we may never in our lifetime, or our children's lifetimes, see another racehorse of the quality of Black Caviar. She is quite phenomenal. As Alan Jones mentioned during his wonderful breakfast racing program the other day, after 14 starts for 14 wins that little mare has won by an average of some 46 lengths, which is quite phenomenal for a sprinter. Over the years we have seen wonderful stayers and appreciated the distances by which they have won, but to see sprinters win by such a margin is quite extraordinary. To Neil Werrett and to all the owners of Black Caviar: all strength to them at Moonee Valley.

I refer to the comments of the jockey of Karuta Queen, a bonny filly that won the Magic Millions, who said the other day after racing that he was travelling so sweetly at the corner, there was no chance in the world of anything going past, but, in the blink of an eye, Black Caviar had cleaned him up, cantered past him and went on to win by four lengths. My point is that that does so much good for the racing industry. It is not just the Peter Moodys that pick up horses like Black Caviar; there are great little people like Joe Janiak, who picked up Takeover Target, and my uncle, who had a wonderful champion many years ago called Tullmax. People from the bush get those horses, and that is what encourages and inspires others to participate in this wonderful industry. It gives me great pleasure to commend the bill to the House.

Mr STUART AYRES (Penrith) [5.25 p.m.]: I will make a slightly briefer contribution to debate than my learned colleague the member for Hawkesbury. The Thoroughbred Racing Amendment Bill 2011 improves the current arrangements, which were established in 2008, whereby a selection panel appointed by the Minister and assisted by a probity adviser makes recommendations regarding eligible persons for appointment. The selection panel will continue to be required to satisfy itself that a proposed appointee has experience in a senior administrative role or experience at a senior level in one or more of the fields of business, finance, law, marketing, technology, commerce, regulatory administration or regulatory enforcement. The bill retains the independent selection panel process, but amends its procedure to provide that recommendations for appointment are made to the Minister from which a final selection is made.

In other words, the selection panel will be required to submit to the Minister a list of recommended persons in excess of the number of vacancies. Another change to the current arrangements is that the Minister will appoint the chairperson and deputy chairperson of Racing NSW from a list of eligible persons recommended by the selection panel. Under the current arrangements, the board selects a chairperson and a

deputy chairperson from amongst its membership. While this is in keeping with the principle of independence of government, it is considered necessary to strengthen the stability of the board and to provide for an environment in which it can focus on its statutory responsibilities to the racing industry and the greater public. Similarly, the terms of office of appointees will be recommended by the selection panel. However, the Minister will make the final determination.

These amendments provide the selection panel with flexibility when recommending appointees and give the Minister greater purview to ensure the best possible appointments are made. Coupled with the increase in membership of the board from five to seven members, the skill base of Racing NSW will be broadened so that the best talent can be made available. The bill provides that the terms of the existing board be terminated and that a fresh appointment process be undertaken. However, to provide for business and governance continuity, transitional arrangements have been included so that current members continue in office under caretaker provisions until new appointments are made. These changes are in no way a reflection on the current board of Racing NSW or its individual members, who should be thanked for their dedication and service to the thoroughbred racing industry.

There are a number of challenges before the racing industry across the country, and particularly in New South Wales where the current Racing NSW board members—Alan Bell, Alan Brown, Arthur Inglis, Ken Brown and Kim Harding—have overseen a fairly significant period of transition. There has been a merger of two major metropolitan race clubs, the Australian Jockey Club and the Sydney Turf Club into a now flourishing single Australian Turf Club under the leadership of John Cornish and its chief executive officer Darren Pearce. That organisation will need to oversee the redevelopment of Randwick racecourse and the upgrades to Rosehill racecourse. There are a number of other challenges, which include ongoing debate and legal challenges taking place surrounding race fields and finances around them. There will be ongoing discussion in the industry regarding broadcast rights and the industry's ability to control its own message and signal, which will be critical to generating revenue throughout the industry.

Recently I had the privilege of representing the Minister and the Government at the Country and Provincial Racing Awards. Touching on some of the themes raised by the member for Hawkesbury about how important racing can be to local communities, there were plenty of stories, whether they be from what are considered provincial tracks in outer metropolitan areas of Sydney, being Kembla Grange near Wollongong, Newcastle or Hawkesbury in the north-western area, close to the electorate I am privileged to represent in this place, or from country racetracks, whether they be TAB meetings held on a regular basis or once-a-year picnic events that draw people from literally hundreds and in some cases thousands of kilometres away to attend a particular event. The social benefit to those local communities cannot be lost on this place. Its true benefit lies in community engagement in racing throughout the State. Racing has the ability to bring people together in a safe and social environment and it drives local economies, which is critical to the continued prosperity of the State.

Racing is very important to local economies. Penrith does not have a racetrack but it is very close to the Hawkesbury Race Club. That race club is sponsored by a number of local businesses in my electorate, including the Penrith Panthers leagues club. The Hawkesbury Gold Cup, which is the major race meeting held at that racetrack, will be run in the first week of November. The Darley Corporation, which runs a number of horse studs in New South Wales and Victoria, has significant investments in Osborne Park at Agnes Banks. That training facility, which is located in the electorate of Londonderry, provides 60 jobs for people in the local area. That is an example of employment away from racetracks. Provincial racetracks such as Hawkesbury Race Club and those at Newcastle and Kembla Grange provide entertainment opportunities, corporate hospitality opportunities, and function and event facilities for local communities.

Country members who have racetracks in their electorates would agree that it is not only about the racing because country racetracks tend to be the major event centres of local communities. The strengthening of the racing industry across New South Wales will be critically important not only to its ongoing viability as a multimillion dollar industry but also to enable our communities to continue to reap social benefits. But it requires significant and strong governance. The bill will create a stable environment and it will ensure that the best possible people are available to oversee the governance of industry so critical to New South Wales. The bill is quite a simple piece of reform but it provides that stability. The bill also removes some of the conflicts of interest that have previously existed in the industry. The competition to racing is not racing itself: it is the competition for the entertainment dollar.

New South Wales is no longer competing only with other Australian States; it is competing with other racing jurisdictions, in particular the emerging racing jurisdictions of Asia and South America. We need the best

possible product to attract more people to this great industry and to encourage them to participate in racing in New South Wales. I thank the Minister for introducing this bill and for his continued leadership in the industry. I also thank the leaders of the industry: the current board of Racing NSW and the boards of all race clubs in New South Wales. I encourage them to continue to engage with the Government in the growth of this industry. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr GEORGE SOURIS (Upper Hunter—Minister for Tourism, Major Events, Hospitality and Racing, and Minister for the Arts) [5.33 p.m.], in reply: I thank the members who have contributed to this debate. I particularly thank the acting shadow Minister for Racing, the member for Hawkesbury and the member for Penrith for their insights. When considering racing legislation it is always handy to have the benefit of hands-on grassroots experience. The member for Hawkesbury and the member for Penrith, having been owners, trainers and participants formerly of the racing industry, have that experience.

I thank them for their contributions both to this bill and to the many previous racing bills that have come before the House. I place on record my thanks to my staff members Mr Frank Marzic and Mr Jinesh Patel and also to Mr Greg Semmler from the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing for their dedication and for the hard work that went into the preparation of the Cabinet minute, the bill, the speeches and the consultations that have gone on. In fact, when it was announced that the bill would be presented today Mr Semmler was hurriedly called to Parliament House. I commend the bill to the House.

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

Motion agreed to.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Passing of the Bill

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

PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2011

Bill introduced on motion by Ms Robyn Parker.

Agreement in Principle

Ms ROBYN PARKER (Maitland—Minister for the Environment, and Minister for Heritage) [5.36 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

The Protection of the Environment Legislation Amendment Bill 2011 is a direct response to the immediate issues arising from the recent incidents that occurred at the Orica industrial complex at Kooragang Island, near Newcastle, and to other recent incidents involving major hazardous facilities. The community has also called for more transparency and accountability from industry and Government. The bill forms part of a comprehensive response from the Government not only to those incidents but also to recommendations made by Mr Brendan O'Reilly in his review of the Kooragang Island incident. Mr O'Reilly's report has been publicly released and while the Government has accepted all his recommendations, it will go beyond them.

The Kooragang Island incident on 8 August 2011 exposed a number of practices that were not good enough from the industry's perspective or from the responses of a number of authorities, and certainly not good enough under legislation. It has also been telling as to what took place in the Environment Protection Authority under the former Government. The Environment Protection Authority was proudly established under the last Coalition Government. It was designed to respond and independently regulate as a statutory body in those industries involving major hazardous facilities and other types of pollutant industries, such as waste industries. Over the past 16 years the strength and responsibility of the Environment Protection Authority has been moulded into what is now the Office of Environment and Heritage.

The Environment Protection Authority lost its way and its resources were reduced. The bill commences a process, which the Government has been working on since day one and since realising a number of the

inadequacies highlighted by the Orica incident, for an independent Environment Protection Authority. The authority will be comprised of an experienced board with control over what happens under direct lines of supervision. It will have a chief environmental regulator and a chairperson employed to work with the community and industry to achieve good outcomes.

I am proud of the Government's response but the Opposition acted in a shameful fashion during the Orica incident. The Government has been working hard so that if an incident such as this were to happen again it would not be handled in the same way. If such an incident did occur the community would be informed in a timely fashion, with an adequate response given by industry, authorities and government. The Government is working hard to get good results and outcomes, the fruition of which we see today. In contrast, the Opposition simply wanted to grandstand and scare the community at any expense. Members opposite went up the freeway to Kooragang and Stockton simply to grab media headlines with outrageous comments and claims. It was an absolutely appalling effort by members opposite who know full well that all the people involved in this incident were simply doing what they did for 16 years under the previous Government.

The community was scared and frightened by the Opposition's politicking. We had the outrageous idea of bringing Erin Brockovich to Stockton to talk to the residents, and we had one falsehood after another. It was outrageous. Almost immediately after the incident the Government introduced the notion of holding an independent inquiry with an independent chairperson—a person who is widely respected—but that was not good enough for the Opposition. Brendan O'Reilly was given terms of reference that allowed him to inquire into anything he wished, with the resources to do so. He chose the people he spoke to; I know he went doorknocking in Stockton. He spoke to the Premier, other Ministers and me at length. He listened to our ideas about what we thought we would change. The Opposition knew about our ideas because they were contained in the documents provided to the Legislative Council under Standing Order 52.

Those ideas, generated in the days following the Stockton incident, related to the community's right to know, community consultative committees, an immediate response by industry and, importantly, air quality monitoring. The Opposition spokesperson pulled the ideas out of the box one by one and claimed that they were his ideas when he did not know what he was talking about. He simply wanted to sensationalise the matter. He made sure there was headline after headline with catchy little phrases that attacked individuals and did not get to the heart of the problem. And the heart of the problem is the system that the previous Government accepted as okay. On radio as recently as Friday, when the Opposition environment spokesperson was asked why the previous Government had not done anything about the system, he said, "It wasn't on our radar." The system should have been on the previous Government's radar because there were 76 major pollution incidents over the past 16 years.

Dr Geoff Lee: How many?

Ms ROBYN PARKER: There were 76 major pollution incidents. Guess what? We have been unable to find one ministerial statement or press release from any Labor Minister about those incidents—not a peep. Do members opposite want to mention that? Of course they do not. They wanted to get into the media with references to 54 hours, 16 hours, whatever they wanted to say. They did not want to get to the heart of the problem, which was the system inherited by this Government. Unlike the previous Government, we will fix the system. The Opposition simply wanted to do some politicking on the issue. We are having another inquiry. That will be more of "smells like, looks like, feels like a witch-hunt"; it does not look like it will have any substantive outcomes. The Government will participate in that inquiry. In the meantime the Government is getting on with business and fixing what the previous Government would not do.

People should not think that the incident at Orica on Kooragang Island was the first incident where there were delays in reporting by industry. Under the previous Government, there were more than 30 incidents where there were delays in reporting—delays of 14 days and 37 days. During the time the Leader of the Opposition was the Minister for Climate Change and the Environment there were two major incidents but there was no press release or ministerial statement—nothing from the previous Government. Indeed, there were delays of one day, six days and 37 days, and in one case there was a delay of three years in reporting a major incident. I compliment The Greens on their approach to this matter. They have not been involved in this political witch-hunt or tried to get media headlines in order to raise their stakes as leadership material. They have been sensible. The Hon. Cate Faehrmann introduced a bill in the other place to address the issue of industry being required to respond immediately to a major incident such as a chemical spill. All credit to The Greens for their approach and the reasonable way they have gone about that.

While we accept the Greens approach and have incorporated their ideas as part of our legislative changes, we have gone much further. We have also incorporated a number of the recommendations contained in Mr O'Reilly's comprehensive report. He talked to me and to other Ministers at length, and the Government has accepted all his recommendations. He discussed at length what we thought needed to change, and more changes will be made. I note that the Leader of the Opposition is now in the Chamber. To correct the record, I had nothing to do with writing the terms of reference for the upper House inquiry. The Government will participate in the inquiry although it is simply a political witch-hunt. Let us be clear in relation to what Mr O'Reilly said about a ministerial statement. He addressed the response by the Minister for the Environment—

Mr John Robertson: What? The 54-hour delay?

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Sonia Horner): Order! The Leader of the Opposition will come to order.

Ms ROBYN PARKER: Mr O'Reilly referred to the way this became a political issue and how media interest intensified. I wonder why.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Sonia Horner): Order! Members will come to order.

Ms ROBYN PARKER: The Leader of the Opposition was being ignored and had no profile so he used the incident as an opportunity to scare the people in Stockton time and again. Mr O'Reilly addressed that issue on pages 35 and 36 of his report. He addressed the fact that people were confused and concerned because of all the media and political interest. Members opposite could not care less about the people of Stockton; they care only about their own profiles and their catchy claims in the media. The Leader of the Opposition and the potential Leader of the Opposition, when there is a seat available in the lower House, tried to one up themselves. Let us be honest: That is what the upper House inquiry is all about. I have talked to many people and environmental groups in Hunter communities.

Mr John Robertson: In Stockton?

Ms ROBYN PARKER: Of course in Stockton. I have the neighbouring electorate. I have been in Stockton many times. I do not simply turn up promising to bring Eric Brockovich. I live there. I live in the Hunter Valley and I represent the adjoining electorate. I do not use people and frighten and scare them, unlike members opposite. Today the Government is fixing what the previous Government did to the Environment Protection Authority. That is why I am proud to introduce this legislation. The Government has developed a wide-ranging package of initiatives which includes both legislative and non-legislative reforms that will strengthen the legislation holding industry to account for its environmental performance, improve the community's right to know, provide for an independent and modern Environment Protection Authority to better regulate high-risk industries, increase penalties for non-compliance and, importantly, improve the knowledge of the Environment Protection Authority and the community about the cumulative impacts of industry where they coexist in close proximity to residential areas.

In essence, the bill will strengthen the ability of the Environment Protection Authority to regulate serious pollution incidents by significantly improving notification requirements and pollution incident response management provisions and increase penalties for non-compliance. These amendments will ensure that serious pollution incidents are avoided to the greatest extent possible and that if they occur they are handled more effectively, quickly and transparently in the future. At the heart of these changes is a renewed commitment to the communities of New South Wales—a commitment that got lost during 16 years of a Labor government. The bill modernises the Environment Protection Authority to ensure that the people of New South Wales have a single, consolidated, modern environmental regulator that is responsive and flexible with clear goals, functions and accountabilities. This requires a series of amendments to the Protection of the Environment Administration Act 1991 to establish the Environment Protection Authority with an independent chairperson to lead it, and a smaller reconstituted expertise-based board to make it more accountable.

[*Interruption*]

If the Leader of the Opposition had been the Minister for the Environment for more than two months he might have done this in the two major incidents that occurred while he was Minister for the Environment. He could have done this, but did not. He is just interested in politics. He was there for only two months, thank goodness. However, we will do it—just watch and learn. The existing board is made up of part-time members: it is too big and meets only monthly. While this has helped to inform Environment Protection Authority policies

and approaches, it is difficult to give a board of that type greater responsibility and accountability. The intention of the Government is to create a new board with clear governance, accountability and reporting requirements; one that is more along the lines of a corporate board that takes greater responsibility for setting a clear direction for the Environment Protection Authority and monitoring and reporting on performance. The chairperson and the board will oversee the effective, efficient and economical operation of the Environment Protection Authority. They will hold the Environment Protection Authority to account and will report directly to the Minister.

The board will be required to provide an annual regulatory assurance statement to the Minister, which I will table in Parliament. This statement will detail the success of the Environment Protection Authority in reducing risks to human health and material harm to the environment and whether this level of protection satisfactorily compares with other Australian jurisdictions. It will provide an assessment of the performance by those industries regulated by the authority in reducing risks to human health and preventing material harm to the environment, and the impact those industries have on the environment.

A new statutory position of chairperson appointed by the Governor will be responsible for managing and controlling the affairs of the Environment Protection Authority. The chairperson will be the head of the Environment Protection Authority and will be responsible for the strategic direction and management of the authority. The chairperson will be assisted by a new position of Chief Environmental Regulator who will be responsible for the day-to-day running of the Environment Protection Authority and its activities. In order to ensure the Environment Protection Authority stays connected to the community it serves, the chairperson will be required to actively engage with community groups to hear firsthand the concerns of local residents about environmental and health impacts from industry and other activities. The community must be able to have a say about how the industries operate in their local areas.

In the first instance this will be achieved through the chairperson meeting with the Community Consultative Committee I am establishing in the lower Hunter and Newcastle areas. There will be an opportunity to expand these committees to other heavily industrialised regions in the future. The new chairperson will be the community's champion and will ensure that local government has a voice through its involvement in the consultative committees. Where specific issues warrant it, the chairperson will also engage face-to-face with individual councils and their regional bodies. There will be a new role for a Chief Environmental Regulator who will be responsible for the day-to-day delivery of the authority's statutory responsibilities and management of its staff. The Chief Environmental Regulator will report directly to the chairperson.

The Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997 will be amended to require industry to report immediately serious pollution incidents not only to the Environment Protection Authority but also to the Ministry of Health, the WorkCover Authority, New South Wales Fire and Rescue and the local council. Consequential amendments are also required including amendments that ensure the licensee can report the incident immediately, without having to wait for all the information about the incident to be available. However, the licensee must provide further information as and when it becomes available. In essence, not what was acceptable to the last Government—as soon as practicable—we are talking about immediate; that immediately they pick up the phone, not that they wait 16½ hours which Orica did in this case and not that they wait two years, six days, three years 14 days, 37 days, eight days, one day, six days, 19 days, 14 days and so it goes on for at least 32 other incidents in the case of the former Government.

The Environment Protection Authority will now be able to direct an industry, where a pollution incident has occurred, to notify other parties of the incident including the immediate industrial neighbours and the community. The amendments will be supported by clear guidance for licensees and response agencies that will be made publicly available. Appropriate methods of notification will be detailed in the guidance material. The bill increases the penalties for failure to comply with notification requirements, to provide a more substantial deterrent to the offence. In essence, the maximum penalties for contravening the "duty to notify pollution incident" requirement will be doubled for both corporations and individuals. That means instead of a \$1 million fine, a \$2 million fine for a failure to notify. This figure of \$2 million is a substantial penalty that will ensure industry picks up the phone immediately. Additional provisions in the bill explicitly allow the Ministry of Health and the Environment Protection Authority to require polluters to pay for independent expert advice or studies into the human health and/or environmental impacts needed to better understand the effects of, and inform the response to, the particular pollution incident.

The Orica incident highlighted the need for stronger and broader provisions for the Environment Protection Authority to require appropriate premises to prepare, implement and test pollution incident response

management plans. The bill will require all environmental protection licensees to prepare such plans which will also include community notification and communication protocols. All licensees will have six months from the commencement of the provision to prepare and implement a pollution incident response management plan. A regulation-making power will also be included in the Protection of the Environment Administration Act to allow a regulation to be made that specifies the content of such plans and testing and review requirements. This may be extended to require some non-licensed industrial facilities also to prepare, implement, test and report on pollution incident response management plans. These plan requirements will be designed to complement existing requirements that are in place for major hazardous facilities under WorkCover New South Wales legislation.

Finally, it is proposed to make it more straightforward for the Environment Protection Authority to require mandatory environment audits to be conducted when it reasonably suspects that an activity has been or is being carried on in an environmentally unsatisfactory manner. The Government has already embarked on a comprehensive audit, the largest audit ever undertaken in New South Wales, of major hazardous facilities. No doubt when the audit looks into the behaviour that industry got used to under the last sloppy government mismanagement, the Environment Protection Authority will uncover a number of truths. The Leader of the Opposition would not be so smug if he looked at the record of the former Government and the 76 incidents that occurred, two of which were on his watch. I doubt whether he will be Leader of the Opposition for long.

Other initiatives in the suite of actions include improving the "community right to know" aspects of environmental regulation. This includes measures to improve the public's access to information by requiring industry to make its monitoring results publicly available and expanding the information on the public register of the Environment Protection Authority. This will include information about mandatory environmental audits required by the Environment Protection Authority and undertaken by industry, pollution studies and pollution reduction programs required by licence conditions and the details of penalty notices issued by a regulatory authority. The Environment Protection Authority will provide written guidance to ensure that licensees provide this information in a meaningful way. It will also consider the best way to present large amounts of data to make it practical for licensees to allow it to be understood easily by the public.

I have also directed the Environment Protection Authority to commence work to establish an industry-funded environmental monitoring network in the lower Hunter, and in particular for the suburbs of Stockton and Mayfield, to provide information on the potential cumulative impacts that might be occurring. Further investigation will determine whether pollution impacts are occurring or have the potential to develop in the area, the nature of those impacts such as cumulative hotspots or site-specific, the type of pollutants that appear to be causing the impacts and in general where they are occurring, the need for a program to monitor the identified pollutants and whether the program should be funded by licence holders or particular classes of licence holders.

I have directed the Environment Protection Authority to provide a full report to me by March 2012. In addition, a pilot Lower Hunter area community advisory and consultative committee is being established. This will be a body with representation from interested members of the community, local and State governments and industry. This will ensure that the local community is given the information it needs to regain confidence that its industrial neighbours are addressing issues of community concern. The committee will have the capacity to establish specific groups to address local issues.

To inform industry and the community about the reforms that the Government is implementing and what is expected and required of industry, I am convening a roundtable discussion among a number of groups to formulate evidentiary requirements so that we can work out the best way of informing the community of the best response in an emergency and so that clusters of organisations and responsible authorities are all on the same page. The Office of Environment and Heritage has also commenced a program of audits targeting industries that pose a high risk of environmental harm. Initial audits are being conducted at 42 high-risk facilities across the State that store toxic, hazardous or dangerous substances in large quantities or volumes. These include oil refineries, chemical processing plants, large chemical and gas storage depots and large chemical warehouses. The audits are focusing on making sure that industry manages potential risk to people and the environment, and that adequate emergency response procedures are in place should an incident occur. Any deficiencies found will be systematically addressed.

I take this opportunity to remind members of two motions of which notice has been given in the Legislative Council in relation to the Orica incident. I have already acknowledged the work of the Hon. Cate Faehrmann. The bill supersedes the bill she introduced in that it incorporates the requirements for industry to

respond immediately and beyond, and the recommendations of the O'Reilly review. The Hon. Luke Foley gave notice of motion in the other place relating to the need for air quality monitoring sites at Stockton and Mayfield. He does not understand what they are. He got the idea out of our box of papers and documents produced to Parliament in accordance with Legislative Council Standing Order 52. As I indicated earlier, air quality monitoring already is underway and the Government is examining locations.

Of course, the motion of which he gave notice does not consider the critical elements required for effective environmental monitoring, which needs to be done in a strategic rather than a political manner and in a way that considers the potential for cumulative impacts. In other words, the Government is getting on with what a government needs to do and is not playing politics, unlike the Opposition. This Government already is committed to expanding the State's air quality monitoring network that was cut in previous mini-budgets of the former Labor Government. The suite of initiatives I have outlined to the House not only responds to the recommendations of the O'Reilly review in a comprehensive way.

It goes beyond those recommendations to make sure that the needs of communities and the people of New South Wales are at the heart of environmental protection in this State. The bill re-establishes and strengthens the Environment Protection Authority and provides it with the capability to deal with major industrial incidents as well as informing and involving the community, thereby placing the Environment Protection Authority at the forefront of environmental regulation. This legislation represents a Government getting on with business and being prepared to fix the mistakes and sloppy behaviour of the former Government. The bill also represents just the start of what we intend to do to tighten regulation that applies to hazardous industry and pollutant licensing. I commend the bill to the House.

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

SENATE VACANCY

Joint Sitting

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Lee Evans): I report the receipt of the following message from the Legislative Council:

Madam SPEAKER

The Legislative Council, having taken into consideration the Legislative Assembly's message dated 24 August 2011, agrees to meet the Assembly for the purpose of sitting and voting together to choose a person to hold the place in the Senate rendered vacant by the resignation of Senator the Honourable Helen Coonan, in the Legislative Council Chamber, on Thursday 13 October 2011, at 3.45 p.m.

Legislative Council
11 October 2011

DON HARWIN
President

I direct that the joint sitting with the Legislative Council in the Legislative Council Chamber for the election of a senator for the Commonwealth of Australia be set down as an order of the day for Thursday 13 October 2011.

PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYMENT AND MANAGEMENT AMENDMENT (ETHICS AND PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSIONER) BILL 2011

Agreement in Principle

Debate resumed from 15 September 2011.

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON (Blacktown—Leader of the Opposition) [6.05 p.m.]: What we have here is another bill of no substance and little consequence that will take up hours of the Parliament's time because the Government has nothing else to do in the House. Following the Library Amendment Bill, the Government Advertising Bill and the Summary Offences Amendment (Intoxicated and Disorderly Conduct) Bill 2011, members now have this bill to consider. These are all bills that start off as thought bubbles after making a political point on morning radio, then become election promises that talk of big things but end up being legislation that delivers nothing. How disappointing has the O'Farrell Government become. It is run by a Premier who says one thing but who delivers something very different.

There are three main parts to this bill. First, it establishes an ethical framework for the public sector. Second, it will appoint a Public Service Commissioner and confer on the commissioner a number of functions. Third, it will establish the Public Service Commission Advisory Board. The Government has produced a draft ethical framework for the New South Wales public sector based on four points—integrity, trust, service and accountability. Those points form the core values that are expected of the public service, but apparently not of Cabinet Ministers of the O'Farrell Government. To develop those values, the Premier said that consultation was held with stakeholders including government agencies, the Auditor-General, the New South Wales Business Chamber, the Council of Social Service of New South Wales, National Disability Services, and the New South Wales branch of the Institute of Public Administration Australia.

The bill provides for the appointment by the Governor of the Public Service Commissioner. The function of the commissioner is, among other things, to promote the new public service ethics, provide strategic and innovative policy advice and ensure the integrity of the recruitment process. The commissioner will assume most of the public sector policy related functions that currently are exercised by the Director of Public Employment. The commissioner will have the power to request reports on staff and agencies, to conduct an inquiry in relation to staff, and to inspect and gain entry to premises. The Public Service Commissioner will be Mr Graeme Head. The bill also creates a Public Service Commission Advisory Board. The advisory board is supposed to comprise an independent chair, the Public Service Commissioner or delegate, the Director General of the Department of Premier and Cabinet, and four other external members appointed by the Premier.

Professor Peter Shergold has been appointed chairman of the advisory board of the Public Service Commission. It is probably worth noting, and some members may recall, that Professor Peter Shergold at the time of the waterfront dispute worked for Peter Reith. When it comes to selecting matters that the Public Service Commission will deal with, the real question is: What sort of advice will someone like Peter Shergold provide to Mr Graeme Head and to the Government when it comes to dealing with workers? One can only assume that nothing has changed from when he worked for Peter Reith and we can expect to see access to workplaces with balaclavas and dogs.

The Act will be amended to expand the mobility powers to allow for temporary assignments beyond the New South Wales public sector as outlined in clause 88A of the bill, including the private sector, tertiary sector, the not-for-profit sector as well as other public sector jurisdictions. This was an election commitment, and is promoted in the context that the O'Farrell Government is modernising the New South Wales public service and making it more professional. There is little scope or understanding of how the Government will measure the success of this bill—the Premier said he wants to make the New South Wales public service "the best in the nation and a leader in the world". How this bill will do that I do not think anyone will ever know.

The powers of the Public Service Commissioner are weak. I agree with the appointment of Graeme Head; he is a very capable and well-respected public servant. However, this bill gives him a nice title and the functions of a policy adviser. The implementation of his advice relies on the Premier and the Government of the day. What the Premier has done is literally cut the current policy related functions of the Director of Public Employment and pasted them to the Public Service Commissioner. The bill provides nurses, teachers, police, firefighters and thousands of public sector workers a list of core values for the public sector.

The Premier said consultation had been conducted with a wide range of stakeholders in order to devise this list. I can only think what feedback he would have received if he consulted the more than 40,000 public sector workers who came together in The Domain on 8 September. They would have been able to tell the Premier a thing or two about core values. The Premier's four pillars are integrity, trust, service and accountability. I find it deplorable, but not unexpected, that the Premier can treat public sector workers so badly, yet preach to them the values that he thinks they should work by.

As I said earlier, these four pillars are expected to form the core values of the public service, but obviously not of Cabinet Ministers or the Premier. I always knew Barry O'Farrell was not the kind of person to lead from the front. This is an important point because after six months in Government we see examples every day of this Government's hypocrisy. The Premier placing these core values on the table is yet another example of that hypocrisy. I think it is worth considering these core values in greater detail.

Firstly, in schedule 1.1 under "Integrity", paragraph (c) states, "Take responsibility for situations, showing leadership and courage." That might be expected of public servants, but when the Minister for the Environment, the member for Maitland, was told that Stockton families were potentially exposed to toxic chemicals what did she do? Did she take responsibility for the situation? Did she show leadership and courage?

She actually did the complete opposite. She took no responsibility, and therefore Stockton families were unaware for 54 hours that their children were potentially exposed to a hexavalent chromium leak. This is an obvious breach of the Premier's own core values worthy of action from the Premier. What did the Premier do? Did he take responsibility, and show leadership and courage? Of course he did not. He arranged for an inquiry that deliberately prevented an investigation of the inactions of the Minister for the Environment.

The next public sector core value is trust. In particular, in schedule 1.1 under "Trust" paragraph (e) states, "Provide apolitical and non-partisan advice". On day one of the new Government in March, the new Premier and the Treasurer fabricated a budget black hole that was disputed by evidence provided by Michael Lambert, the Parliamentary Budget Office and Standard and Poors. As part of fabricating the lie, the Premier forced Michael Schur, the public servant who provided the apolitical and non-partisan advice, to resign. As Imre Salinsky observed in the *Australian* in April:

O'Farrell came into office promising to restore independence and integrity to the public sector. Instead, he chose to make a political scapegoat of one of the state's most respected public servants.

The real purpose of that beheading was to fire a warning shot across the bow of every public servant in the State. The message is not "come forth and give us your fearless advice". Every public servant now knows not to do that. But despite this, providing apolitical and non-partisan advice still manages to make the core values list. But wait, there is even more in this bill. Another core value is service. In particular, in schedule 1.1 under "Service" paragraph (c) states, "Engage with the not-for-profit and business sectors to develop and implement service solutions."

It is worth putting on the record the O'Farrell Government's own record of engaging with the business sector to implement service solutions, in particular the solar industry. During the election campaign the Premier promised to support renewable energy but as soon as he formed Government he declared war on the sector. The O'Farrell Government's relentless hostility to renewable energy has claimed Solar Shop Australia Pty Ltd, Australia's largest provider of solar panels, which recently went into receivership. That is in addition to Silex Solar deciding to end local manufacturing of solar cells, with the loss of 30 jobs at its western Sydney plant. Despite the industry screaming out for help, New South Wales is now the only State on the Eastern Seaboard with no tariff to solar customers.

Mr Ray Williams: Point of order: This matter has absolutely nothing to do with the bill. I ask you to bring the Leader of the Opposition back to the leave of the bill. We are not discussing the failed antics of the Leader of the Opposition in relation to the Solar Bonus Scheme. We are debating public sector wages and I ask you to bring him back to the bill.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Lee Evans): Order! The Leader of the Opposition will return to the leave of the bill.

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON: When the backyard plumber can speak about something constructive, he might be worth listening to. The solar industry has stopped dead in its tracks since the Premier was elected. This is what one gets from an O'Farrell Government engaging, as the bill says, with the business sector. Finally, the fourth core value is accountability. In schedule 1.1 under "Accountability" paragraph (c) states, "Provide transparency to enable public scrutiny." That noble value has been shunned by this Government. The Premier has shut down the Parliamentary Budget Office to avoid scrutiny, despite saying prior to the election that "We believe that openness and transparency are the best ways to deliver better services and results for the community." Even Tony Abbot, whom I quote on the rare occasion, said last year:

It is very important that we have a Parliamentary Budget Office so that means that these issues ... [of competing costings] are avoided in the future.

Despite what the Federal Liberal Leader says, and despite what the Premier promised before the election, we still have no Parliamentary Budget Office to provide transparency to enable public scrutiny. But somehow "accountability" still makes the Premier's list of public service core values. Under this Government, hypocrisy has reached new heights. I could go on and on but I will not. If members opposite are interested in the many other examples of how the Premier and his Ministers stack up against their own core values, I encourage them to read Barry O'Farrell's 100 Broken Promises. I will provide it to them.

I understand that putting together this list of core values was an election commitment, but the fact that this Premier has the nerve to preach core values to the very workers he considers have no value is extraordinary.

Actually, it is offensive. It is offensive to the more than 40,000 public sector workers who marched on Macquarie Street last month, it is offensive to the hundreds of workers from Cronulla Fisheries who gathered out the front of Parliament House today who have been betrayed by members representing the electorates of Cronulla, Oatley and Heathcote and the Minister for Sport and Recreation today, and it is offensive to the thousands of public sector workers who are facing months of uncertainty while management decide where the cuts are going to be made. Whatever the outcome of this inconsequential bill, it will not make up for the way this Government treats public sector workers. It will not make up for capping their pay or removing their right to have their wages and conditions considered by the independent umpire or the tangible things that make working life worthwhile.

Dr GEOFF LEE (Parramatta) [6.20 p.m.]: It gives me great pleasure to support the Public Sector Employment and Management Amendment (Ethics and Public Service Commissioner) Bill 2011, the object of which is to amend the Public Sector Employment and Management Act 2002 as follows:

- (a) to establish an ethical framework for the public sector comprising core values (namely, integrity, trust, service and accountability) and the principles that guide the implementation of those core values,
- (b) to provide for the appointment of a Public Service Commissioner and to confer on the Commissioner functions in relation to the public sector workforce (including the existing public sector policy functions of the Director of Public Employment and the EEO functions of the Director of Equal Opportunity in Public Employment),
- (c) to establish the Public Service Commission Advisory Board (the Advisory Board) which will determine general policies and strategic directions for the exercise of the Commissioner's functions and provide advice to the Premier on matters relating to the management and performance of the public sector,
- (d) to make a number of other miscellaneous amendments of a minor or consequential nature.

Those objectives are clear and the Government is determined to make the New South Wales public sector the best in Australia and a leader in the world. That can be achieved only by providing unambiguous goals, clear policy directions, transparent processes and consistent accountability. As pointed out, this legislation is part of the Government's 100 Day Action Plan, which the O'Farrell-Stoner Government is delivering. The Government is committed to the enactment of public sector ethics legislation.

The proposed legislation applies to everyone in the New South Wales public sector, including police officers, health personnel, firefighters, teachers and staff of state-owned corporations such as Sydney Water and Ausgrid. It sets out an ethical framework detailing the four core values of integrity, trust, service and accountability. The Government undertook extensive consultation with the wider community about this legislation, including the New South Wales Business Chamber—a highly respected body with which I have been involved. On 28 March 2011 the chamber published a document entitled "What your business can expect from an O'Farrell Government". The document states that a Coalition Government will:

Appoint a NSW Public Service Commissioner who will:

- be tasked to improve the integrity, performance and accountability of the State's public sector workforce;
- ensure NSW has the best qualified and most professional public service in the nation;
- restore the highest levels of impartiality, ability, accountability and leadership in the NSW Public Service ...

The document goes on to list a number of goals that the Coalition will achieve. The 100 Day Action Plan includes the appointment of a chairperson of the Public Sector Commission, and on 14 April the Government announced the appointment of Peter Shergold AC. Mr Shergold, who is one of the most experienced public administrators in Australia, is currently the Chancellor of the University of Western Sydney and Macquarie Group Foundation Professor at the Centre for Social Impact. He also serves on the board of AMP and is involved with the law firm Corrs Chambers Westgarth and not-for-profit groups such as the National Centre for Indigenous Excellence. Mr Shergold is highly qualified, he has a sensational resume and he is an ideal person to undertake that role.

Public servants are important because they deliver services. Parramatta is home to a number of major departments, including the Department of Attorney General and Justice, the NSW Fair Trading, the Office of State Revenue, the Aboriginal Housing Office and Sydney Water, which employs many thousands of people.

We also have New South Wales Police Force facilities and the third largest justice precinct in Australia, which employs 1,500 staff. It is also home to Westmead Hospital and regional offices of Housing NSW, the Department of Family and Community Services, and the Roads and Traffic Authority.

The Government recognises that many public servants see their employment as a vocation and not simply a job and that they want to make a difference. Public service is a unique specialist area in our nation's work spectrum, but too often it is characterised as having a faceless and anonymous workforce. Of course, that demeans and undervalues the uniqueness of each public sector employee and his or her contribution to the State. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend) [6.26 p.m.]: The Opposition will not oppose the Public Sector Employment and Management Amendment (Ethics and Public Service Commissioner) Bill 2011. Clearly, any ideal of supporting and maintaining the core values of integrity, trust, service and accountability are vital not only for the public sector but also for private enterprise. While he was Leader of the Coalition Opposition the Premier made a commitment to modernise the public service and to make it more professional. Members on this side of the House support any reforms that are designed to achieve those goals, especially if they are in the best interests of public sector workers and the community. This bill seeks not only to make amendments to the ethical framework of the public service but also to install a public service commissioner and a public service commission advisory board.

As stated by the Leader of the Opposition, the Public Service Commissioner is Mr Graeme Head, whose job it is to promote the new public service ethics, to provide strategic and innovative public policy advice and to ensure the integrity of the recruitment process. The commissioner will assume most of the public sector policy-related functions currently undertaken by the Director of Public Employment. The commissioner will also provide advice to the Premier regarding the development of workforce planning and recruitment, set standards for the appointment of members of boards and committees and will have the power to ask for reports about staff and agencies and to give direction to any agency in relation to staff and to conduct inquiries. The bill also provides for the creation of a public service commission advisory board comprising an independent chair and others.

How will the so-called improvements to the legislation covering the public sector be measured? My discussions with people who have the best interests of the public service at heart suggest that this is a blancmange bill. While it is important to reinforce the positive core values of the public service—and, as I said, any public or private business—members on this side of the House believe that public sector employees already display integrity. How the commissioner and the board will modernise and reform the public sector remains to be seen. Capping public service wage increases at 2.5 per cent does not engender faith in the service and it is questionable how that minimal increase will attract quality and professional staff. Cutting at least 5,000 public sector jobs in the 2011-12 budget will be very damaging to the service and diminish customer service. As I mentioned, while we do not oppose the bill, it is disappointing that the amendments proposed by the O'Farrell Government are an opportunity missed to restore faith in the public service.

Mr ANDREW CORNWELL (Charlestown) [6.29 p.m.]: It gives me great pleasure to speak to the Public Sector Employment and Management Amendment (Ethics and Public Service Commissioner) Bill 2011. One of the advantages of being on Chamber duty is that you get to sit down and listen to some excellent speeches from time to time, but the verbal incontinence of the Leader of the Opposition was just ridiculous. A few issues need to be addressed. First, he seemed to be denying change. As far as I am aware, the flat earth society has not existed for some time, but, if he is afraid of change that is his issue.

He also raised the Solar Bonus Scheme, which was very timely given the fact that during his 83 days of dual responsibility for energy and the environment his ill-designed solar bonus scheme managed to be struck in such a way that it blew out from an estimated cost of \$355 million to \$1.65 billion. That is some \$15 million a day of breathtaking incompetence. I am sure Bill Gates would not knock back \$15 million a day. He seems to be denying that these changes are needed. It is not just our side of the House that is arguing it. Just outside in the foyer is a bust of the former Labor Premier, Neville Wran, and whilst I note that most Labor members genuflect as they walk past it every day, the former head of the Premier's Department when Neville Wran was Premier, Gerry Gleeson, in fact spoke out last year—

Dr Geoff Lee: Tell us.

Mr ANDREW CORNWELL: I am very happy to tell the member for Parramatta because Gerry Gleeson has spoken out asking for the very changes that we are introducing. I will quote from the *Stateline* program in October 2010. Quentin Dempster began with three little words: Fear, greed and incompetence. He then went on to say:

That's the considered conclusion about the politics and public administration of this State by Gerry Gleeson, once the most powerful of administrators—head of the Premier's Department, member of the Public Service Board, head of the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority.

On that program Gerry Gleeson said :

You can't give it today because if you keep giving frank and fearless advice that the Minister doesn't like you'll be out of a job. I do believe that the public service has been politicised in several ways, one is the appointment of staff, senior staff, where the Minister has unfettered power to appoint the head of the Department, and he has unfettered power to sack him and we've seen several examples where that's been done, almost overnight, without any explanation.

Obviously, the Labor Party held Gerry Gleeson in very high esteem and I think most members of this House would hold Gerry Gleeson in very high esteem. He was a very well regarded senior public servant and his views should be given some weight because what he is saying really foretold what the O'Farrell Government is introducing. Let us look at the reforms. The bill will amend the Public Sector Employment and Management Act 2002 to include an ethical framework for the New South Wales public sector and create the position of Public Service Commissioner and public service commission advisory board. The ethical framework, which John Robertson managed to use to segue into his own diatribe, which has undergone a comprehensive consultation process, will enshrine for the first time in New South Wales a set of values and principles that cover the entire public service.

The ethical framework identifies four core values of integrity, trust, service and accountability. A set of supporting principles has also been formulated that translates each of the four values into actions. The Government made a commitment that the Public Service Commissioner would be assisted and supported by an advisory board. In April it was announced that Professor Peter Shergold had been appointed as the independent chair of the advisory board. The new Public Service Commissioner and the Director General of the Department of Premier and Cabinet will be ex-officio members. The commissioner will be expected to provide advice and make recommendations on how to implement contemporary practice in public administration for the New South Wales public sector.

The commissioner will have a sector-wide focus and along with the Department of Premier and Cabinet, and Treasury will be a key central agency providing advice and setting policy for the New South Wales public sector. It is with great pleasure that I commend the bill to the House. This is a very important reform and, whilst the Leader of the Opposition tried to politicise it by drawing very tenuous links with some of his own agendas, I believe that the public sector wants this reform. I believe public servants want this reform because it takes the politics out of their jobs and allows them to get on with what they do best, that is, serve the people of New South Wales. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr GUY ZANGARI (Fairfield) [6.35 p.m.]: The Public Sector Employment and Management Amendment (Ethics and Public Service Commissioner) Bill 2011 is an attempt to reform the New South Wales public service and define the core values to which members of the public service must adhere as employees of taxpayers of this great State. At the centrepiece of this reform is the creation of a Public Service Commissioner. New part 1.3 of the amending legislation defines the scope and function of the commissioner. New part 1.4 seeks to establish the Public Service Commission Advisory Board. Whilst new part 1.2 sets out the core values, the commissioner and advisory board have the task of implementing this new public service paradigm that the Coalition has envisaged.

The values that this amending legislation seeks to embed into the public service espouse the highest ideals connected with a democratic bureaucracy. New section 3B identifies these values as being integrity, trust, service and accountability. Whilst integrity, trust and accountability are principles that are already ingrained in the psyche of everyday Australians, it is the inclusion of the principle of service that I think requires greater examination. Unlike the other principles, which in a broad sense are adjectives, descriptions of characteristics that we believe the New South Wales public service should express, "service" is a doing word. In this sense, it relates to the structure, framework and strategies of the public service, in particular, that of public servants.

According to new section 3B, the term "service" encapsulates the following objectives: to provide services fairly with a focus on customer needs; be flexible, innovative and reliable in service delivery; engage

with the not-for-profit and business sectors to develop and implement service solutions; and focus on quality while maximising service delivery. It pains me to point out that what the O'Farrell Government has in mind for the public service is rather stark and unsurprising considering how this Government has treated the workers of New South Wales in its first 100 days in office. Whilst the values espoused are admirable on their own, I fear that the effect of the term "service" and how it is constituted in new section 3B could have a negative effect on the public service and, in the long term, would result in a loss of service to the people of New South Wales. The potent ingredient in this pessimistic view of this paradigm of the public service in this legislation, as I said, is the current Premier and his deputies sitting opposite.

The second objective, to be flexible, innovate and reliable in service delivery, can be read like the manual of an outbound call centre, where members of the public service are treated as monotonous beings capable of only limited and strictly defined functions and easily replaceable. This outlook is in stark contrast to what is needed in the public service—people who care and are responsive to the diverse needs and demands of the community—yet the actions of this Government have so far led to the above perspective becoming closer to reality. As we have seen, in its first months in office, the O'Farrell Government has deleted 5,000 public sector jobs, with the possibility of more job cuts to come, pegged public sector wage increases at 2.5 per cent per annum, well below increases in the rate of inflation, and paved the way to reform the Department of Community Services and move a number of its functions into the hands of private providers. Despite all the rhetoric, the actions speak for themselves. To Premier Barry O'Farrell and the Liberal party, this is what the terms "flexibility" and "service delivery" mean.

For the taxpayers of New South Wales this spells interruptions and inefficiencies in the services they rely on the State Government to provide. The quality of government services such as education, health, and law and order is premised on having quality men and women in the provision of service and support, and in managerial roles in government departments. Fostering such a public service requires not only integrity, trust and accountability but also a notion of service that values people charged with delivering services to the community. The previous Labor Government recognised this. It recognised the need to properly remunerate public servants so their income kept up with the cost of living. It recognised the need for an independent umpire through the Industrial Relations Commission to determine what level the wage should be. It recognised the value of continuous education and training to ensure the skills of public servants remained among the best in the world.

Unless this Government changes its perception of what the term "service" should espouse, the people of New South Wales will see a decline in the quality of their public service provision. Make note, Premier, the education and training in New South Wales creates some of the best public servants. Teachers, nurses and engineers are highly regarded and sought after around the world. If this Government fails to recognise and properly value men and women who make up the public service, New South Wales will see an exodus of experienced and talented men and women to other States and countries that properly value their abilities.

The crux of the three main amendments to the Public Sector Employment and Management Act 2002 is the creation of an ethical framework for public service and the creation of the Public Service Commission and the Public Service Commission Advisory Board. All are worthy changes based on the ideal public service and were promptly supported by my Labor colleagues. As I have pointed out, it is what this Government, led by the current Premier, does with the new framework they have set up that will determine whether it will provide any benefits for the people of New South Wales.

Mr BRYAN DOYLE (Campbelltown) [6.42 p.m.]: It gives me great pleasure to speak to the Public Sector Employment and Management Amendment (Ethics and Public Service Commissioner) Bill 2011. The bill goes to the heart of what it is to be in the public service. It is about service to the public. Having been in the Police Force for 27 years and having been a servant of the people of New South Wales it does my heart good to see that this Government is strengthening and entrenching in the public service the core values of integrity, trust, service and accountability. It is interesting to note that the mission of the Police Force is the police and the community working together to reduce crime, violence and fear. I always used to say to my officers that it meant policing for and with the community, not policing to and against them. One of the keys to my success as a chief inspector at Campbelltown was that I was known among the people.

Officers would often come back to the station and say, "Mr Doyle, we have just been to this street and not only did the people there know you but you are their friend." This bill embodies that level of service and trust. It is about providing services that meet customer needs. It is about having trust so that you can reach out to people in the public service and get something done. On one occasion some members of the community had

their property damaged during a police operation when police were pursuing an offender. The police told them, "We will get your car fixed." Some time passed and an elder approached me and said, "Mr Doyle, their car hasn't been fixed." I took up the matter, found the file and worked out what the block in the process was. I took a letter to the people involved and got them to sign it. Then I got the cheque and presented them with it. That is something I would do as a senior officer.

Being in the public service is about providing value and service and being accountable for what you do. It is important to our system of government and our community. Without peace and good governance there is no tranquillity of order in our community. Recently a constituent came to my office and told me he was from another country and had come here and taken up citizenship in Campbelltown, the opal of the south-west. He said, "Mr Doyle, the reason I chose to come here is the integrity of the processes in the Australian public service." It is only when you have lived in a country that does not have that public service integrity and where rights are trampled on and there is no-one in government you can go to that you truly appreciate the value of an Act that entrenches those values in the public service. I know the legislation reflects the values that our Premier, Barry O'Farrell, and this Government hold. It also reflects the traditions of this great Parliament. That is why this bill is so important to the people of New South Wales and I am so glad to commend it to the House.

Mr TONY ISSA (Granville) [6.46 p.m.]: I will be very brief, as much has already been said about this bill. I am pleased to support the Public Sector Employment and Management Amendment (Ethics and Public Service Commission) Bill 2011. The Government is determined to make the New South Wales public sector the best in the nation and a leader in the world. We all know that this Government will have to make hard decisions, but that does not mean cutting 5,000 jobs as members opposite have claimed. It means that people will be able to take redundancy packages if they wish. To drive this vision of the public sector the Government made a key election commitment to establish a Public Service Commission in New South Wales. In the 100 Day Action Plan the Government committed to appointing an independent chairperson and commence setting up the Public Service Commission.

The 100 Day Action Plan also committed to commencing consultation for a public sector ethics Act. The Public Sector Employment and Management Act 2002 is the main employment legislation for the New South Wales public service. It also applies in some areas to the whole of the New South Wales public sector, including police, health, firefighters, transport, education and State-owned corporations such as Sydney Water and Ausgrid, formerly Energy Australia. The Act does not apply to employees in the local government sector as they do not form part of the New South Wales public sector. The Local Government Act 1993 provides for the staffing of local councils while the employment arrangements and conditions are included in the Local Government (State) Award.

The Act covers the establishment of the Government Service, the Chief Executive Service and the Senior Executive Service, and detailed employment provisions for the public service including merit, conduct, performance and leave as well as mobility arrangements for the entire public sector. Creating the Public Service Commission and establishing the new public sector ethical framework are significant changes that impact on employment and management in the New South Wales public sector. Importantly, the creation of the office of Public Service Commissioner requires the removal of the position of Director of Public Employment, a role currently held by the Director General of the Department of Premier and Cabinet, as well as certain other modifications to be made to the Act. These provisions are included in the bill to amend the Act.

It has been said before that the ethical framework identifies four core values: integrity, trust, service and accountability. A set of supporting principles has also been formulated that translates each of the four values into actions. The Government made a commitment that the Public Service Commissioner would be assisted and supported by an advisory board. The bill proposes to make the following amendments to the Public Sector Employment and Management Act to include establishing an ethical framework for the public sector with the twin objectives of recognising the role of the public sector in preserving the public interest and establishing an ethical framework for a merit-based, apolitical and professional public sector that implements the decisions of the Government of the day. This amendment will enable expertise to be shared and developed, and should encourage the increased engagement of other sectors in flexible and innovative joint ventures and collaborative projects. This is the way forward. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr KEVIN ANDERSON (Tamworth) [6.50 p.m.]: I support the Public Sector Employment and Management Amendment (Ethics and Public Service Commissioner) Bill 2011. The Government is determined to ensure that the New South Wales public sector sets the standards for the rest of the nation. The introduction of this bill has set a standard by establishing New South Wales as a world leader. This bill was introduced by the

Premier on 15 September. I am pleased to support a bill that set clear goals for our State's public service. It creates the position of Public Service Commissioner and Public Service Commission Advisory Board. It sets clear policy directions, transparency processes and consistent accountability ideals.

During the election campaign the Liberals and The Nationals promised to set standards for a new public service that would bring about a new customer service culture underpinned by value and choices in our public services. The bill sets a standard that will lead to public sector employees being encouraged to bring new ideas to their work and to adapt to modern day work ethics. They will be encouraged to be responsive to their clients and to meet the needs of the citizens of this State. The Coalition has a vision for the public sector to be a protector of public interest and a defender of public value. The establishment of the Public Service Commission was a key election commitment of the O'Farrell-Stoner Government as part of its 100 Day Action Plan. That commitment led to the establishment of the Public Service Commission and to commencing consultation on a public sector ethics Act.

The Public Sector Employment and Management Act 2002, the main employment legislation for the New South Wales public service, includes police, health workers, firefighters, transport workers, teachers and those employed by State-owned entities such as Ausgrid, formerly EnergyAustralia. The Act does not cover local government employees as the Local Government Act 1993 provides for staffing of local councils. The bill covers the establishment of the government service, the chief executive service and detailed employment provisions for the public service, including merit, conduct, performance and leave, as well as mobility arrangements for the entire public sector. The bill sets up a new public sector ethical framework, which will make significant changes that will impact on employment and management in the New South Wales public sector.

Under the bill the Public Service Commissioner will replace the position of Director of Public Employment, a position now held by the Director General, Department of Premier and Cabinet. The commissioner will provide advice and make recommendations with respect to the New South Wales public sector. For the first time in New South Wales the ethical framework, which results from an extensive consultation process, will be enshrined in the Act. This framework sets values and principles to cover the entire public sector and identifies four core values: integrity, trust, service and accountability. A set of supporting principles has also been formulated that translates each of the four values into actions.

The O'Farrell-Stoner Government also made a commitment that the Public Service Commissioner would be assisted by an advisory board. The functions of the advisory board will include approving the appointment of the commissioner. In April this year the Government announced that Professor Peter Shergold had been appointed as the independent chair of the advisory board. Members of the advisory board include the new Public Service Commissioner and the Director General of the Department of Premier and Cabinet as ex-officio members. The bill makes the amendments necessary to set up this ethical framework, which will bring about new work values for members of the public sector which I am sure will be welcomed by the people of New South Wales.

The commissioner will have policy-related objectives and functions in respect to the New South Wales public sector. The commissioner will assume most of the public sector policy-related functions currently exercised by the Director of Public Employment and the Director General of the Department of Premier and Cabinet. These functions include the issuing of guidelines relating to the employment and management of public sector employees; the ability to give directions to agency heads about staffing issues; engaging in consultation—the commissioner can also conduct an inquiry into the management and administration of a public sector agency—identifying reform opportunities to the public sector workforce; and the strategic development of the public sector. The commissioner will promote integrity and accountability in the public sector as well as building confidence in that sector.

In the electorate of Tamworth many public sector workers do a sensational job. They turn up to work wanting to make a difference and to ensure that they provide the best possible service to the government of the day. The Liberal-Nationals Coalition Government was elected on 26 March to deliver integrity and accountability to the public sector. Many people who work in the public sector, such as police officers, health workers, firefighters, transport workers, teachers and those employed by State entities such as Ausgrid, will welcome these changes. The Government was given a mandate on 26 March to ensure that it operated at the highest level. Many great people in the public sector have sensational ideas and are bursting with enthusiasm. Those people are bringing to the table new ideas and a new look and feel about the way in which they want their agency to operate. This bill will give them the freedom to expand on the great work that they already do. They

will not be hamstrung or held down by the heavy hand of government forcing them to be stuck in a corner and unable to express their ideas to enlighten the public sector. This bill will give them a chance to grow. In country centres in particular many public servants are bursting with enthusiasm. This bill demonstrates the commitment of the Liberal-Nationals Coalition to provide good government for the people of New South Wales. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mrs Tanya Davies and set down as an order of the day for a future day.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of Motions

General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) given.

BUSHFIRE HAZARD REDUCTION

Matter of Public Importance

Mrs ROZA SAGE (Blue Mountains) [7.15 p.m.]: My matter of public importance is that the bushfire season in New South Wales has officially started. With the abundant rains we have had over recent years and the resultant build-up of fuel on the ground, this year promises to be a particularly bad bushfire season, especially out west. There is no timelier reminder that the bushfire season is upon us than the bushfires that started in the Leura-Katoomba area of the Blue Mountains in the past few weeks—fires that reached the intensity of a section 44 emergency; fires that were deliberately lit.

As the member for Blue Mountains, I live in the most fire-prone area in this State. We have the unfortunate geography of being a city within a national park, built along the top of the mountain ridge. Anyone who lives in the Blue Mountains for any length of time can expect to experience a bushfire. Indeed, we have experienced loss of life and loss of homes, most recently in 2002 with the loss of seven homes in Cross Street, Warrimoo, near where I live. I can say from personal experience that bushfires are frightening—indeed, they are a terrifying and dangerous event.

Over the years out of these disastrous bushfires has grown the volunteer service of the Rural Fire Service, with sheds that dot communities throughout New South Wales. Men and women volunteer their time to keep those communities living close to our bushlands safe. The people of New South Wales can be proud that in the Rural Fire Service we have a firefighting force recognised as among the best in the world. In my electorate we have 20 brigades, the bushfire control centre for the area and two other locations which will receive stations in the future. During bushfire emergencies not only is the Rural Fire Service involved in containment campaigns but also New South Wales Fire and Rescue and the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

In all, New South Wales has more than 20 million hectares of bushfire-prone land; and with almost 9 per cent of the State covered by national parks and reserves, or more than seven million hectares, fire management is an important and vital tool. That is why the Rural Fire Service and the other agencies use a range of sophisticated strategies to help prevent bushfires from happening and a range of firefighting responses to aid in the event of an incident. These strategies include carrying out hazard reduction burns, conducting public education campaigns such as Being Firewise, and setting standards for developments with local government for developments in bushfire-prone areas.

I am pleased that the New South Wales Government will be strengthening these existing programs with a new and innovative strategy to reduce bushfire risks. As announced by the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, the Hon. Michael Gallacher, MLC, the new strategy will involve the creation of an independent audit panel and dramatically increase the amount of hazard reduction being carried out overall. Indeed, we have made a clear commitment in New South Wales 2021—our plan to make New South Wales number one—to increase the number of properties protected by hazard reduction by a further 20,000 properties a year by 2016. As well, the Minister recently announced the purchase of a new aircraft with updated software that can penetrate dense smoke and provide a clear image of where bushfires are occurring.

The New South Wales Government has also provided funding for cutting-edge communications and operations tools with a state-of-the-art video wall at the Rural Fire Service operations headquarters. The Rural

Fire Service will share incident information and monitor weather data and bushfire movement in real time, aiding greatly the battle to bring a blaze under control. In conjunction with the Rural Fire Service the Minister for the Environment, and Minister for Heritage, the Hon. Robyn Parker MP, announced a \$62.5 million bushfire package for the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Six new dedicated rapid response firefighting teams and two additional helicopters will be on standby in national parks, in the most remote fire areas of New South Wales, during the bushfire season. In addition, the National Parks and Wildlife Service will employ as many as 90 new firefighters to help double the hazard reduction programs in the State's national parks over the next five years. These measures show how serious and committed the New South Wales Government is about protecting the people of New South Wales who live in bushfire-prone areas.

However, none of this equipment can compare with the educating and the implementing of an individual's own FireWise plan. This is part of the Rural Fire Service motto of Prepare, Act and Survive. Those in bushfire prone areas need to have a bushfire survival plan. The FireWise document or Bush Fire Household Assessment Tool, which is readily available from the local Rural Fire Service brigade or on the Rural Fire Service website, is a comprehensive checklist of everything that a household must do. It sets out how to prepare, the listing of valuables, and how much at risk you are in your area, and much more. Householders in a high risk area need to be aware that the local Rural Fire Service can help householders by doing a property assessment on site to give tips on how to prepare the property. The Rural Fire Service also provides a service of actually preparing a property for those who are unable to do so, the frail, the aged and the disabled. Help is only a phone call away.

Preparing is vitally important for those who live in bushfire prone areas. Cleaning gutters and cleaning around the home is important, but there is so much more to a survival plan. Knowing the neighbourhood's safer place, deciding to leave early or to stay and defend, and even preparing mentally and physically will make the important decisions easier in emergencies. In the meantime—with the start of this year's bushfire danger period on 1 October—I would strongly encourage you all to take action to ensure your families, homes and properties are prepared for the threat of fire.

Mr GUY ZANGARI (Fairfield) [7.22 p.m.]: I join the member for Blue Mountains in commending the fine work done by the New South Wales Rural Fire Service. This is one of the largest groups of volunteers in this country. I am sure the member would agree with me when I say that they are the guardian angels of rural communities, particularly in the Blue Mountains. Being residents of Sydney, we have all experienced or become aware of over the years the tragic results of bushfires. As the member said, due to recent rains and consequent fuel increases we must not take anything for granted and should prepare properties to reduce fire risks—even properties in metropolitan areas, especially those that back onto large nature reserves.

The bushfire season is upon us. Prior to the commencement of this season, we know the Rural Fire Service has been preparing areas of high fire risk for the current fire season. Though people might know that we are already in the bushfire season, much work has been done prior to the declaration of its commencement. We thank the brigades in all areas for the wonderful work they do in hazard reduction and hazard management. Back-burning is one of the hazard reduction strategies used by the Rural Fire Service. Making communities aware through announcements on radio, on television and in the print media is another great strategy. At any one time, men and women volunteers go out to protect bushland as well as properties that are in danger. These men and women are always first on the scene where an outbreak occurs.

We have heard too many sad stories over the years about the loss of life as well as property resulting from bushfires. The issues surrounding bushfires are too numerous and too painful to detail, but we know these volunteers are dedicated and that they put their lives on the line for people that they do not necessarily know; they are out there working tirelessly under extreme and treacherous conditions, particularly during the summer months. I pay tribute to those who have lost their lives. I am sure members of this Chamber often think about the families left behind by volunteers who went out to fight bushfires and help their fellow brothers and sisters.

Not only does the Rural Fire Service in New South Wales prepare and fight fires; it also educates the community. In my time as a construction teacher in Fairfield, the Menangle Rural Fire Service team provided an afternoon training session for my vocational and educational training construction teachers. I pay particular tribute to one of the volunteers, James McFarlane, who provides assistance and tips regarding what to do and what not to do when fighting fires. My feeling was that some of the 17-year-old male students I taught

demonstrated some bravado regarding fighting fires, but the realities hit home in the presentation by the Rural Fire Service and they realised that this work is treacherous and that the tasks undertaken by these volunteers are not taken lightly.

While I am on the topic of education, I should mention that the message of the Rural Fire Service regarding property preparation is one which, although articulated very clearly, nevertheless is not heeded by many property owners who become complacent even though the fire season is upon us. As the member for Blue Mountains pointed out, simple tips are given through FireWise and property owners are reminded of the Rural Fire Service motto of Prepare, Act and Survive, but there are a number of simple things they can do, such as clearing gutters. It is so easy to do. When fires are threatening a property, leafy gutters can increase the risk of fire for that property. Removing hazardous materials from the backyard and storing them in approved, fire-safe storage facilities sounds simple, but at times these simple things are neglected and they have adverse impacts when fires occur. Making sure that backyard hoses are long enough to hose down fires coming onto a property is just another of those simple measures.

Of course, I am not advocating that property owners take over the role of the Rural Fire Service. These are just simple tips that will help. Preparing a family emergency evacuation plan in the event of a fire is of course something that people in bushland and rural areas should do, but people in some metropolitan areas should also make these plans. I mentioned earlier that certain properties in the Fairfield electorate back onto natural bushland and vegetation. The Rural Fire Service provides a property assessment service. Service members go to properties and assess risk management strategies for some properties. I join all members of this Chamber in acknowledging the efforts of the New South Wales Rural Fire Service. I repeat, the brigades are the guardian angels of our communities. They do a wonderful job. I join the member for Blue Mountains in acknowledging the efforts of these fine men and women of our State.

Mr LEE EVANS (Heathcote) [7.29 p.m.], by leave: I emphasise the importance of bushfire awareness and preparedness. I praise the efforts of our firefighters. My electorate of Heathcote is surrounded by some of this State's most beautiful bushlands and national parklands, but that beauty comes with a great vulnerability to bushfires. Constituents in my electorate have been threatened by countless fires since the area was settled and most residents have their own terrifying stories of close calls and evacuations. This ever-present danger has inspired a powerful sense of duty in my constituents. We are protected by an army of dedicated volunteers and retained firefighters.

Just last week the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, the Hon. Michael Gallacher, acknowledged the enormous debt we owe these courageous men and women, particularly volunteers, who have made the ultimate sacrifice to protect their communities. In 2001 the volunteers' memorial service at Mrs Macquarie's Chair was dedicated by the Governor of New South Wales, Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir. Today the memorial's honour roll bears 86 names. The most recent name, Don Deppeler, was added on 31 January this year, when the 60-year-old Senior Deputy Captain of the Marsden Park Rural Fire Brigade collapsed at the wheel of the brigade's Cat 1 tanker and hit a tree. The roll is a reminder of the constant danger faced by more than 80,000 volunteers who make up the Marine Rescue, the Volunteer Rescue Association, the State Emergency Service and the NSW Rural Fire Service.

In Heathcote we are all too familiar with this danger. In 1977 Leslie Delardes of Menai Brigade died while fighting a fire near the Old Illawarra Road at Menai. Three years later five members of the Sutherland Shire Volunteer Bushfire Organisation, Station 10, Headquarters Brigade, were killed at once when their truck was caught in a burn over the Uloola track near Waterfall. They were Alan Crunkhorn, 26; Gregory Rolf, 24; Vernon Stedman, 21; David Marshall, 19; and William Cummings, 21. In 1983 Keith Campbell, Thomas Bielecke and Gregory John Moon from the same brigade were fatally burned while fighting a bushfire on Anana Hill, Grays Point, and six more members were seriously injured. Five years later, in 1988, firefighter Allan Rendell from Illawong Brigade was crushed to death when a tree fell on his fire truck in Lady Carrington Drive near Waterfall. On 7 December 1997 Peter Estcourt of Grays Point Brigade died four weeks before his twenty-first birthday in the fires at Still Creek Trail, Menai.

These men and women put their lives on the line. Some have died so that others could survive. They knew all too well the danger they were facing. We owe them an immeasurable debt and we must ensure that their sacrifices were not in vain by preventing further loss of life in fires. Unfortunately, we may never stop bushfires from occurring close to residential areas but we can plan for them. Tragedy usually strikes because residents have not prepared bushfire survival plans and have waited too long to act.

The NSW Rural Fire Service and Fire and Rescue NSW provide excellent preparation and survival guides, training and real-time information about nearby fire dangers. It is our duty in this place to promote these services as much as possible so that our constituents use the available tools to defend themselves. Sadly, a necessary part of these preventative efforts must be to discourage those who deliberately light fires. Statistics gathered between 2008 and 2011 reveal that firefighters attended 5,234 fires suspected of being started by children under 16 years of age. Of these, 3,504 were as a result of children playing with matches and 1,730 as of result of children playing with lighters. Of the total figure, 3,700 fires—more than half—were grass and bushland fires.

Firefighters regularly visit schools across New South Wales to deliver fire education programs, but parents need to continue this education at home. Fire and Rescue provides resources for this purpose at the website *brigadekids.com*. We all need to be vigilant in reporting suspicious activities. It is hard to imagine, but a simple phone call to Crime Stoppers or a conversation with a child could save lives. I conclude by again emphasising the importance of bushfire awareness and preparedness, and praising the courage and dedication of our firefighters.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Melanie Gibbons): I thank the member for Heathcote for honouring firefighters, particularly those in my electorate of Menai.

Mrs ROZA SAGE (Blue Mountains) [7.33 p.m.], in reply by leave: I thank the member for Fairfield and the member for Heathcote for their contributions to this debate. It is good to see that there is a bipartisan approach to this issue, which pertains to all people in New South Wales. I thank the Rural Fire Service volunteers and people from smaller agencies—the ones that are little heralded—such as the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Rural Fire Service volunteers put their lives on the line all the time. The member for Heathcote named—it is almost an honour roll—the five Sutherland shire brigade members who died in a bushfire in 1980. I remember it vividly—they were trapped in their tanker. It behoves people who live in bushfire-prone areas to be mindful of this and to take precautions so they do not put firefighters in these sorts of situations.

The member for Fairfield said that we should not take anything for granted. People in metropolitan areas, especially those who live close to bushland, are as much in the firing line as ever. I remember fires one year at Jannali, which is close to residential areas such as Menai—areas where one would not have expected bushfires to be. It is important that people in metropolitan areas are aware of the dangers. Bushfire volunteers do a lot of work prior to the bushfire season. Hazard reduction results in less fuel on the ground. I acknowledge that there are a lot of sad stories. However, the Rural Fire Service people are a wonderful asset to the community. They help wherever they can. As I mentioned earlier, they go to homes and do assessments. They look after people who are unable to do it for themselves. That is the sort of service they provide.

Education is important, as the member for Fairfield and the member for Heathcote mentioned. Education is the priority. As the member for Fairfield said, property owners may become complacent, especially if there have not been any big fires for a while. In the last few years we have not had a big fire. However, people still need to know that they have to remove their hazardous materials and do those sorts of simple things. I have it on good authority that we will potentially have a very bad bushfire season this year. A lot of grass has grown in the central west area. The Rural Fire Service is preparing for contingencies this year.

The Rural Fire Service has been well equipped by the Government. The service has been provided with new technologies to enable people to undertake their duties in a safer manner. For example, the Government has bought new helicopters so they can see through the smoke and better communications equipment. Communication is always the biggest issue when it comes to any emergency, especially bushfires. As the member for Fairfield mentioned, listening to the radio, looking at television, being prepared and knowing when to go are some of the most vital things people can do. Communication is important.

I remind people that the Blue Mountains is a dangerous area as there are so many hectares of bushfire-prone land to the north, the west, the south and even in Sydney, as has been demonstrated. I commend the bushfire volunteers in my area, who I have visited over many weeks. They are preparing to look after the people of New South Wales this fire season, particularly the people of the Blue Mountains. I commend the volunteers, the Rural Fire Service and all the other agencies that will look after us in this bushfire season.

Discussion concluded.

**The House adjourned, pursuant to standing and sessional orders, at 7.38 p.m. until
Wednesday 12 October 2011 at 10.00 a.m.**
