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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Thursday 27 February 2014

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

The Speaker read the Prayer and acknowledgement of country.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of Motions

General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) given.

[During notices of motions.]

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind members about the use of mobile phones in the Chamber. Members should switch off their mobile phones when they are in the Chamber.

PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT OPERATIONS AMENDMENT (PROSECUTIONS) BILL 2013

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 21 November 2013.

Mr RON HOENIG (Heffron) [10.07 a.m.]: The powers presently enumerated in the Director of Public Prosecutions Act are sufficient to transfer the entirety of the Environment Protection Authority's prosecutorial functions in respect of tier 1 offences without consequent amendment to that Act. Section 7 of the Director of Public Prosecutions Act establishes the principal functions of that office. Section (7) (1) (a) establishes the authority "to institute and conduct, on behalf of the Crown, prosecutions (whether on indictment or summarily) for indictable offences in the Supreme Court and the District Court". Furthermore, section 8 (1) (b) provides that the director may institute and conduct "proceedings for summary offences in any court".

Tier 1 offences may be dealt with under the Protection of the Environment Operations Act either summarily in the Land and Environment Court or on indictment before the Supreme Court by virtue of sections 214 (1) (a) and 214 (1) (b) respectively. Although I suspect that appearances of the Director of Public Prosecutions in the Land and Environment Court have been rare indeed, if they occurred at all, there is no impediment or any other law that would prevent that from occurring. It is the intention of this bill that the availability of both the summary and indictable jurisdictions continue in the Supreme Court and the Land and Environment Court respectively for prosecutions under part 5.2. Further, it should be noted that presently the Director of Public Prosecutions can seek to take over proceedings. This provision though is neither exercised regularly nor as a matter of course.

The body of the bill is comprised of a single schedule. Item [1] of the schedule creates a new section 212F imposing in subsections (1) and (2) respectively reporting duties to the Director of Public Prosecutions in respect of certain results of investigations in respect of tier 1 offences, that is, offences, within part 5.2. Subsections (1) and (2) impose distinct duties where the Environment Protection Authority has formed a view of a prima facie case existing and also where it has been unable to determine whether such a case exists. Item [2] of the schedule inserts a new division, division 1A, into part 8.2 of the Act. Within that new division 1A a new section 216A is inserted. Proposed section 216A gives effect to the transfer of prosecutorial function to the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Attorney General in respect of offences arising under part 5.2.

Item [3] of the schedule inserts certain specific words into the heading of part 8.2, division 2 for the purpose of narrowing its application to only tier 2 and tier 3 offences. This amendment is consequent upon the separation of tier 1 offences. Item [4] of the schedule inserts a new section 216B. This new section, consequent on the insertion of section 212F, clarifies that that division does not apply in respect of offences arising under part 5.2. I have been advised that the Government has decided not to support this bill but I am unaware of its

reasons for doing so. I introduced this bill in a genuine attempt to rectify the failure to bring to justice serious environmental offenders because of a breach of a fundamental principle. I introduced this bill not to wedge the Government, for political reasons or for any other purpose but because it is my duty as a legislator to try to rectify a fundamental problem. In the prosecution of criminal offences other than environmental or summary offences where the police are the investigative arm they do not prosecute offences in this State. There is a separation between prosecutorial and investigative functions other than summary offences.

In this case the merger has created substantial problems. The Environment Protection Authority was an initiative and achievement of the Liberal Party through former environment Minister Tim Moore who established the authority and appointed Lisa Corbyn. Minister Moore introduced the bill because the State Pollution Control Commission had been an abject failure in controlling pollution and successfully prosecuting environmental offenders. What happened to the State Pollution Control Commission seems to have happened to a number of government authorities—it became captive of the vested interest it was supposed to oversight and regulate. Over a period of years that is what happened to the Environment Protection Authority.

The Environment Protection Authority has been involved in some spectacular prosecutorial failures mainly because it made the wrong choice, did not apply its own prosecution guidelines and did not capably pursue necessary criminal prosecutions. The Environment Protection Authority simply uses its own internal lawyers, instructs other lawyers and briefs counsel. The Attorney General would do well to converse with judges of the Land and Environment Court concerning the Environment Protection Authority prosecuting in that court. The example I gave at the commencement of my second reading speech of *Environment Protection Authority v Hanna* is scandalous and a disgrace.

That matter came to my attention because the Minister for the Environment sought to amend the Protection of the Environment Operations Act after criticism was received relating to a suspended sentence given by Justice Payne in the Land and Environment Court for someone who was in contempt of court. It was only after I read Justice Payne's judgement relating to someone who had dumped asbestos building material next to a school—a civil matter rather than a criminal one—that I fully understood and appreciated the failure of the Environment Protection Authority. The Minister, who is responsible for the Environment Protection Authority, does not have the power to direct prosecutions. I invited the Minister to examine this case, which resulted in the amending bill, with a view to ascertaining proceedings at that stage.

No doubt the Minister, who received advice from the same organisation that scandalously and inappropriately dealt with Mr Hanna, provided an unacceptable explanation to this House which is what prompted my private member's bill. However, I do not intend that to be seen as a criticism of the Minister. When the Government ultimately explains its reasons for not supporting this bill I hope the Attorney General leads for the Government in debate as he is not only the chief law officer and chief Government legal adviser but also a respected senior member of the bar, a former Deputy Director of Public Prosecutions and Crown Prosecutor. People like the Attorney General should be in the Supreme Court prosecuting offenders like Dib Hanna and not allowing the Environment Protection Authority to take out civil injunction proceedings against serial criminal rubbish dumpers.

The Government should obtain legal advice from the Attorney General in relation to this matter. I am not seeking to amend the Director of Public Prosecutions Act as the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Attorney General can on indictment take over the prosecution of a serious environmental offender. However, neither the Attorney General nor the Director of Public Prosecutions know about this matter as it has been handled in-house by the same investigative body without the necessary expertise. The Director of Public Prosecutions prosecutes serious criminal offences. A serial rubbish dumper with eight previous convictions who received 22 penalty notices dumped asbestos next to a school which has the potential of killing someone in 40 years time. Such offenders should not be allowed to escape the ravages of some bureaucrat in the Environment Protection Authority. This is the only case I know about but who knows what else the Environment Protection Authority is doing?

Such offenders should be prosecuted by the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Crown Prosecutor and brought to justice in accordance with the law. Seven years is the maximum penalty for any prosecution on indictment before the Supreme Court. I am sure that no-one has been prosecuted for offences of this nature. I suspect that over a number of years the Environment Protection Authority has become captive of the very organisations it is supposed to regulate. When we grant development approvals to a number of industries in this State that may pollute—whether they are coalmining, coal seam gas or rock-crushing industries—we rely on the

Environment Protection Authority to monitor standards and conditions of approval. If those standards substantially impact on the environment we are entitled to impose criminal sanctions. The prosecutorial arm of this State must determine the seriousness of any charges and offenders must be brought to justice.

The Government should examine this legislation with the same sincerity with which it has been formulated. From the time I introduced this bill I have not attacked the Government of the day or the competence of the Minister for the Environment and I have not done a morning ring-around to get a five-second hit on radio programs. It is my duty as a legislator to introduce legislation to fix a major problem that occurred over time—a cultural problem that is easy to fix. If the Environment Protection Authority, the investigative arm, determines there is a prima facie case, just as the police would do, or alternatively it does not know whether there is a prima facie case it should hand the material to the Director of Public Prosecutions for him to provide advice and decide whether somebody needs to be prosecuted for a criminal offence. That is the purpose of this bill which I commend to the House.

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

FLUORIDATION OF PUBLIC WATER SUPPLIES AMENDMENT BILL 2013

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 12 September 2013.

Mrs ROZA SAGE (Blue Mountains) [10.21 a.m.]: I make a contribution to debate on the Fluoridation of Public Water Supplies Amendment Bill 2013 which was introduced by the member for Macquarie Fields and shadow health Minister. As I was a dentist prior to being elected to Parliament I know firsthand the benefits of water fluoridation to dental health. During my working years, and even as a dental student in Queensland, I have heard the arguments and rhetoric put forward by the anti-fluoridation lobby. I understand and share the frustration of the member for Macquarie Fields, and indeed all members in this House, at having the most effective public health measure—water fluoridation—being thwarted by the anti-fluoridation zealots.

The New South Wales Government actively supports the introduction of fluoridation into community water supplies to prevent dental decay in all age groups. Approximately 96 per cent of New South Wales residents currently have access to fluoridation. Approximately 98 per cent of the New South Wales population should have access to fluoridated water by 2015. Since being elected in 2011, the Liberal-Nationals Government has worked with 11 water supply authorities to commence fluoridation. We have worked with four water supply authorities to commence construction of fluoridation facilities. I also know from my discussion with many members of the community that there is widespread support for fluoridation in New South Wales; indeed, it is very high.

Based on recent discussions with local councils, the New South Wales Government believes that the most appropriate way forward is for local government to retain responsibility for water fluoridation in New South Wales. However, the strong arm approach that this bill would take will in no way be helpful to community acceptance, so we oppose it. At present, the director general is required to seek advice from the Fluoridation of Public Water Supplies Committee to specify the level of fluorine that is added to the water supply and the start date for the addition. This bill would not adequately provide the same provision for a direction by the Minister. As part of the Government response to increase fluoridation, the Chief Health Officer will increase support to local clinicians and public health units in working with local councils to promote the benefits of fluoridation, and will increase monitoring of councils that have not yet begun fluoridation.

The member for Macquarie Fields stated in his second reading speech that the previous Labor Government had increased the amount of fluoridation, which is commendable. He reminded me that there had been a seven-year battle in Lismore to fluoridate the water supply. It strikes me as very odd that legislation was not put in place under Labor stewardship to mandate water fluoridation under the direct authority of the Minister and that they did what this Government is undertaking to encourage councils to fluoridate their water supplies.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Gareth Ward): Order! The member for Macquarie Fields will come to order. He will have an opportunity to contribute to the debate.

Mrs ROZA SAGE: To achieve this there will be a financial commitment as well as an educative approach from NSW Health. Funding of more than \$18 million has been allocated for the capital costs of

implementing water fluoridation in New South Wales. In addition, \$5 million has been committed for the 2014-15 budget to support the construction of fluoridation plants and associated capital works in areas where there is currently no approval to fluoridate. An additional \$2.5 million has been committed for the implementation of technological advancements allowing fluoridation to be introduced in smaller communities whose water utilities have current approval for fluoridation.

Those opposite want the Minister to force councils to fluoridate their water supplies when they had the opportunity to do so for 16 years but did nothing. Obviously they did not feel as concerned then about the community's dental health as they do now. The evidence is very clear that water fluoridation is a most beneficial and cost-effective public health measure to address dental health. According to the National Health and Medical Research Council in 2007, "Fluoridation of drinking water remains the most effective and socially equitable means of achieving community-wide exposure to the caries prevention effects of fluoride." In fact in 2006 the World Health Organisation put the case for water fluoridation in even stronger terms:

Universal access to fluoride for dental health is a part of the basic human right to life.

Those that are affected most severely are predominantly in the low socio-economic category and it is these people who are most resistant to heed health education and the least likely to be able to afford dental treatment. It is this portion of the population that receives the most benefit. I would like briefly to outline how fluoride works to protect against decay. The effect of fluoridation is widely known to be most beneficial to children as the fluoride is incorporated into the tooth enamel, which is the outside mineralised layer, as the tooth forms. This makes the enamel more resistant to acid attack in the oral environment. The hard enamel layer of teeth is impenetrable to oral bacteria, but is vulnerable to acid demineralisation. It is the breach in the enamel layer which allows bacteria into the soft second dentinal layer and, if left long enough without treatment, to the pulp or nerve of the tooth, resulting in an abscess usually accompanied by considerable pain. Dental decay in simplistic terms is essentially a bacterial infection of the tooth.

The most effective way of ensuring the protective effect of fluoride is with consistent small topical doses, as one finds with the consumption of water throughout the day. The use of fluoride drops or tablets and toothpaste is good, but not as effective as water. Fluoride can stop decay but this is most effective in early decay lesions and, importantly, with a change of diet. It is a less well-known fact that the surface or topical effect of fluoride in contact with the tooth surface provides a surface hardness and protection to all teeth, including adult teeth. This is the way that fluoridated toothpaste, or the fluoride treatment our dentists give us, works. Water fluoridation benefits all Australians.

I can speak on the benefits of water fluoridation from firsthand experience. When I first started dental practice in the Blue Mountains, the lower mountains area up to Springwood was supplied by reticulated water from the Warragamba fluoridated water supply. The upper mountains supply was unfluoridated, while parts of Yellow Rock and Hawkesbury Heights had no reticulated water supply and used tank water. The difference in the teeth of especially the young was stark. The rate of decay in the teeth of those children from unfluoridated supply areas was significantly higher, and I performed many more complex restorative procedures. After the Blue Mountains City Council decided in 1992 to add fluoride, in a few short years the rate had dramatically decreased. There is nothing worse than seeing children—and sometimes very little children—in pain with a toothache—a condition that is entirely preventable.

A comprehensive study done on the results of fluoridation in the Blue Mountains showed that from 1993 to 2003 the rate decreased from 4.22 to 2.48 decayed, missing and filled teeth per child. The beneficial effects of decreasing dental decay and therefore increasing dental health are clearly documented. It is very disappointing but not unpredictable that Labor has chosen to play politics with this important public health measure to improve the dental health of New South Wales residents, especially in regional and rural areas—and I have seen the way Labor members play politics. As I have said before, the previous Labor Government did not legislate to mandate the Minister for Health to insist that recalcitrant councils fluoridate their water supplies when they had the chance. The member for Macquarie Fields said that there had been a seven-year battle in Lismore to fluoridate the water supply. If my maths are correct that is four years prior to this Liberal-Nationals Government coming to power.

I reiterate: Why did Labor not pass legislation? This bill demonstrates that Labor is incapable of working in a bipartisan way for the public good. On the other hand, the New South Wales Government actively supports the introduction of fluoridation into community water supplies, which prevents dental decay in all age groups. Nine water utilities are currently progressing towards implementing water fluoridation. Three more

councils have recently sought implementation advice. The Chief Health Officer presented on the benefits of water fluoridation to both Lismore and Ballina councils with the support of local health professionals. Both councils agreed to support fluoridation of their water supply. Byron Shire Council also requested a workshop to discuss fluoridation but subsequently voted against fluoridating the water supply.

Based on recent discussions with local councils, the New South Wales Government believes that the most appropriate way forward is for local government to retain responsibility for water fluoridation in New South Wales. Byron Shire Council had previously made a decision not to fluoridate the town's water supply. The Chief Health Officer attended a workshop for Byron shire councillors on 24 October 2013. Byron Shire Council subsequently voted against fluoridating its water supply. In summary, enabling the Minister to direct a water supply authority to add fluoride to a public water supply under its control and then imposing a penalty on the water supply authority if it fails to comply with the order removes the power of local councils to make local decisions. Supporting local councils to make local decisions was a key election commitment of the New South Wales Liberals and Nationals. We oppose the bill.

Mr BARRY COLLIER (Miranda) [10.31 a.m.]: I am pleased to speak in support of the Fluoridation of Public Water Supplies Amendment Bill 2013 introduced by the member for Macquarie Fields and shadow Minister for Health. The aim of the bill could not be simpler. It gives the Minister for Health authority to direct water authorities to fluoridate drinking water. If passed it will mean that the Minister for Health can follow government policy and that is the public expectation of every Cabinet Minister in the Westminster system worldwide. It is notable that the Minister for Health, and Minister for Medical Research is not in the House. Why should we have fluoridation? I will give the House some facts. A document by NSW Health entitled "Population Health", dated September 2013 states:

- **Fluoride is a natural substance** found in water, soil and common foods.
- **Water fluoridation prevents dental decay in all ages.**
- It is a **safe, legal and ethical way of providing benefit to everyone** in the community, especially those who are disadvantaged.
- Even though fluoride toothpaste is widely available, there is still substantially more **tooth decay in un-fluoridated areas compared to fluoridated areas of NSW.**
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in America have recognised water fluoridation as one of the **top 10 public health achievements** of the 20th century.

Fluoride is a natural substance found in water, soil and common foods, but does it work? The document further states:

Tooth decay can be very serious.

as the member for Blue Mountains pointed out—

Each year in NSW over 3,700 children aged under eight years of age are admitted to hospital because of dental decay. Some of these children, such as the three-year-old in the photo below—

an appalling photograph in a government document—

need all their teeth removed because of dental decay.

Obviously making a decision about fluoridation is significant. Despite this evidence, on 12 September 2009 the Deputy Premier opposed the introduction of fluoridation at Wauchope on YouTube. The Australian Dental Association gave its views on fluoridation as follows:

A major 2012 Australian study—

after the Coalition came to office—

analysed all studies published worldwide from 1990-2010 ... Thirteen of the studies were conducted in Australia.

There were 59 all up and without exception they showed a significant reduction in tooth decay as a result of water fluoridation, with most showing reductions of around 20 to 60 per cent. Probably half the members of this House aged 35 and upwards would have half their teeth filled with amalgam fillings. Those fillings wear out and

have to be replaced. In comparison, members with children and grandchildren would realise that most of them have no fillings at all. Despite the Government and the Minister for Health having a duty of care they, and the Deputy Premier, still oppose the bill.

I turn now to the costs of fluoridation. It is considered extremely cost effective and according to several recent studies every one dollar spent on fluoridation equates to an \$8 to \$17 saving in treatment costs. Those are not my figures; they are figures from the Department of Health, so clearly the benefits outweigh the costs—and the Treasurer would know about cost-benefit analysis. There are enormous cost savings from fluoridating water. Why do the Government and the Deputy Premier oppose the bill? The member for Blue Mountains quoted paragraph (1) of the Department of Health document, which states:

The New South Wales Government believes that the most appropriate way forward is for local government to retain responsibility for water fluoridation in New South Wales.

That is buck-passing at its very best. The member for Blue Mountains spoke about a seven-year battle in Lismore that went to the High Court. How many children in those seven years suffered from dental caries? It was probably thousands. We have a situation where some lone councillor in a small local government area has a responsibility to make decisions about public health, which is the responsibility of the State Government and the State health Minister. The poor old local council in Upper Cumbuckta West or wherever it is has all the political pressure and responsibility of making a decision that should be the Government's responsibility. This is gutless government at its very best. Government members crow and say, "What did you do when in government? Why didn't you do it?" They keep carping about it. The Government has been in office for three years yet it has done nothing. It will go to the next election blaming everything on the former Labor Government but it will get a hiding. People will ask what this Government has done and the answer will be nothing, and this legislation is a very good example of that. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

The Government simply cannot continue to blame past Labor governments. The Coalition is in Government; it should get that through its thick head. It is in Government. It has to make decisions, not continue to live in the past and blame the Opposition for everything that went wrong.

The ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Andrew Fraser): Order!

Mr BARRY COLLIER: Thank you, Mr Assistant-Speaker for that timely intervention. Those opposite continue to crow, but they have the power to make a decision that affects every child in this State and yet they pass the buck to a councillor in a remote corner of New South Wales. The member for Blue Mountains spoke about what the Government is doing. The Government should go just one step further. The member for Blue Mountains should not be the one to put the Government's case. Where is the Minister for Health, and Minister for Medical Research? The Minister for Health, and Minister for Medical Research is not even in the House. What a disgrace that is. This is her portfolio and her responsibility, not that of the member for Blue Mountains. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr NICK LALICH (Cabramatta) [10.42 a.m.]: I support the Fluoridation of Public Water Supplies Amendment Bill 2013, which would give the New South Wales Government the power to direct water authorities to add fluoride to our drinking water. Under these amendments section 6AA would state:

6AA Ministerial direction

- (1) The Minister may, by order published in the Gazette, direct a water supply authority to add fluorine to a public water supply under its control.
- (2) A water supply authority that fails to comply with a direction given by the Minister under this section, or any terms attached to that direction, is guilty of an offence under this Act.

These powers will enable the Minister to direct a water supply authority to add fluoride to water, which is needed for several reasons and I will go through those facts shortly. In 1956, fluoride was added to the water in Yass and it has now been added to most water supplies in New South Wales. It is a fact that New South Wales has the highest level of water fluoridation with approximately 96 per cent of the New South Wales population having access to fluoridated water, which is one of the highest levels in the country. Oral health is one of the benefits of water fluoridation as it protects the teeth of both children and adults and prevents decay, which can cause severe pain and discomfort.

Furthermore, scientific studies have shown that water fluoridation is a safe and effective way to combat tooth decay. Studies have also shown that children living in fluoridated water areas experience significantly less

tooth decay than those in the areas without water fluoridation. It is reported that 300,000 people in New South Wales alone still do not have access to fluoridated drinking water and this is a major concern. We know that The Nationals Leader and Deputy Premier, Andrew Stoner, publicly opposed fluoride being added to water at a meeting in 2009 at Wauchope, contradicting New South Wales Health policy, which states that it supports the continuation of water fluoridation in New South Wales. It remains an effective, efficient, socially equitable and safe approach to the prevention of tooth cavities in Australia. Water fluoridation is supported by a number of major health organisations in Australia and around the world such as the World Health Organization, the Australian Dental Association and the Australian Medical Association.

Recently the media reported that the waiting list for children to see a public dentist in south-western Sydney has risen 22 per cent to 1,584 children. I request the Minister for Health to look into this matter as the dental and oral health of our children is obviously very important and I find these statistics alarming. If our children's dental problems are not fixed while they are young we will handicap them with major expenses as they get older. I can speak about this from personal experience. When I was a young child in the 1950s I went to the dentist every year and I went there with great terror because the needles were recycled and if the dentist had not sharpened the needle it was agony when that needle entered one's gum. These days they anaesthetise one's tooth with a chemical and the needles are not recycled; they are one-off injections, which helps a lot.

I am concerned that the Liberal Party does not support this bill. The member for the Blue Mountains was, or is, a dentist and would know the benefits of fluoridation of water. When I was younger I had almost all my teeth filled. As I got older and fluoride was added to the water that decay halted, I looked after my teeth and I now visit my dentist every 12 months to make sure that my teeth are held in place. I do not mind smiling as broadly as I can whenever I have a photo taken because my teeth are my own and will not drop, which some people are scared of. I am surprised the Liberal Party is opposing this bill. There are only a few councils in New South Wales that have not fluoridated their water. The Minister has provided a \$2.7 million incentive to encourage councils to fluoridate their water. All the evidence over the years has proved that fluoridating water helps save children from dental decay. I am very surprised that the Liberal Party is persisting in its opposition to the bill.

It is important for the people of New South Wales to have access to fluoridated water and through these amendments they will receive another means to assist with their dental hygiene. These amendments are aimed at providing an extra layer of care to assist the residents of New South Wales and as such I urge all members to support this bill to help ensure the people of New South Wales are well looked after. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr ALEX GREENWICH (Sydney) [10.46 a.m.]: I support the Fluoridation of Public Water Supplies Amendment Bill 2013, which will help increase access to fluoridated water in New South Wales by giving the Minister for Health power to direct a water authority to fluoridate its supply. We are not discussing a radical shift in policy. Fluoride was first added to water supplies in New South Wales in 1956 and 96 per cent of the State's population now has access to fluoridated water. Water fluoridation is a tried and tested preventative health care measure that is referred to by the American Center for Disease Control as one of the top 10 great health achievements of the past century.

Poor oral health can be painful, costly and embarrassing. It can impact on diet and social inclusion and has been linked to serious conditions including cardiovascular disease, the leading cause of death in Australia, stroke and reduced birth weight. In fact, without medical treatment through antibiotics dental caries can be lethal. According to NSW Health, dental caries are a major contributor to diet-attributable morbidity and poor dental health has been the biggest cause of acute preventable hospital admissions nationally.

Fluoride protects against dental cavities and tooth decay and significantly reduces the need to extract teeth under anaesthetic. The Australian Dental Association recommends drinking fluoridated water, citing numerous studies indicating that this leads to an 18 to 40 per cent reduction in tooth decay. Fluoride has been proven to protect enamel from acid, a main cause of tooth decay, reduce the ability of bacteria to produce acid, and re-mineralise areas of damage. Without water fluoridation the risk of poor oral health, especially for children, is significantly increased. In areas with a low rate of fluoridation such as in Queensland and some northern New South Wales towns, the rate of dental caries is significantly higher than the national average.

The *Daily Telegraph* reported comments by a Lismore doctor that the district has almost three times the rate of tooth extraction under anaesthetic for children. It is the most vulnerable members of our society that get hit the hardest. The 2005 Child Dental Health Survey demonstrated that young children from the lowest socio-economic areas had almost 70 per cent more dental decay than children from the highest socio-economic

areas. The Office of Communities reports that in 2007 more than 48 per cent of children examined in New South Wales primary schools had a history of past tooth decay. The Council of Social Service of New South Wales supports this amendment stating that fluoridating public water "has the greatest benefit for low income and disadvantaged people, in particular children, who are most at risk of dental disease".

Fluoridation is an incredibly cost-effective public health policy, leading to savings in dental and other medical treatments. Indeed, the Australian Council for Social Services estimates that for every dollar spent on fluoridating Australia's water supply, up to \$80 is saved in dental treatment costs. Water fluoridation is supported by every reputable health organisation worldwide including the World Health Organization, the National Health and Medical Research Council, the World Dental Federation, the Heart Foundation and the International Association for Dental Research. Water fluoridation is a health and social equity issue that should be under the control of the government health department. It is important that all New South Wales residents, especially children, have access to fluoridated water. I support the bill.

Mr JAMIE PARKER (Balmain) [10.49 a.m.]: I address the Fluoridation of Public Water Supplies Amendment Bill 2013 on behalf of The Greens. I support the bill but will outline some important points to explain the issues concerning fluoridation. The Fluoridation of Public Water Supplies Act 1957 largely leaves decisions to fluoridate water in the hands of local water supply authorities, such as Sydney Water. In regional New South Wales such as in the Illawarra, Lower Hunter, the Central Coast and the Blue Mountains, supply authorities are owned and controlled by local councils. Under the Act, the director general can only approve or order an authority to fluoridate on the request of the local council. The bill, introduced by Labor's shadow Minister for Health, Dr Andrew McDonald, inserts a provision that would allow the Minister for Health to direct an authority to fluoridate water supplies. It is unfortunate that the Government opposes this bill because it provides opportunities to improve public health and promote discussion and debate within the community.

Some aspects of the bill can be improved. If the bill were to be supported by the House, The Greens would draft amendments about consultation. In our view, before the Minister issues any directive, affected communities should be engaged in genuine and detailed consultations in the decision-making process. This would include being given accurate and independent information about the benefits and potential adverse effects of fluoridation and the opportunity to express their opinions and for their questions to be addressed. It is important that communities that are subject to direction are involved fully and intimately with the decision-making process, and that the consultation is genuine and includes all the facts and independent evidence. It is our view that on the basis of that evidence the health outcomes support the introduction of fluoride into water supplies.

There are arguments against fluoridation of water. Some people say it is a form of mass medication and thus contrary to the rights of an individual to choose his or her own medication. Others say it is inappropriate to impose fluoridation on a population and that if people want to use fluoride they should use toothpaste containing the chemical or take tablets. Many believe there are adverse effects from the use of fluoridation, that the chemicals used are industrial by-products and consequently unsafe, that the benefits are either non-existent or overstated, and that the decrease in dental cavities observed since the introduction of fluoridation can be largely explained by improvements in preventative dental care. The concerns and views that are raised by the community need to be heard and understood. Whether it is climate change or fluoride in water, we need to look at the science and the evidence to determine how the matter should be settled.

I have spoken to people in my electorate who are concerned about fluoride in water. I have reviewed the information that I have received. On the balance of that evidence, it is clear to me that there is a substantial reduction in dental cavities, particularly among young people, and there are long-term health benefits in having healthy teeth, including reduced heart disease. The National Health and Medical Research Council continues to recommend fluoridation of water supplies as stated in its systemic review of fluoride health, "The Efficacy and Safety of Fluoridation 2007." A number of public health bodies, including professional dental organisations, and independent academic studies have found that the adverse impacts are minor and infrequent and are outweighed by the public health benefits. That is the challenge facing members: We need to look at the balance of the evidence and decide whether the benefits outweigh the negatives. Science has proved that fluoridating water, vaccination and accelerated global warming are supported by evidence.

It is important to recognise that results from comparisons within New South Wales and across other countries show that water supply areas without fluoridation have higher rates of dental cavities than those with fluoride. Fluoridating water supplies creates a more effective delivery of the chemical present in the mouth at consistent low concentrations than toothpaste or tablets, which deliver short bursts of fluoride in high

concentrations. It is important that community consultation be significantly beefed up. Legitimate issues in a range of communities need to be fully aired and respected. As a decision-maker in this House, The Greens believe the bill has merit. I support the bill.

Mr GREG PIPER (Lake Macquarie) [10.54 a.m.]: I contribute to debate on the Fluoridation of Public Water Supply Amendment Bill 2013, introduced by the Opposition spokesman, the shadow Minister for Health, Dr Andrew McDonald. I will not go into the detail that members have raised—it has been well documented—about the efficacy of fluoride supplements in town water supplies, thus reducing dental cavities and the impact on physical health, people's sense of wellbeing and their mental health as they progress through life. It is clear that even Government members overwhelmingly support the fluoridation of water supplies to improve the health of our society. Perhaps in the passage of time the Government will review its position. I am sure the member for Murray-Darling and the member for Blue Mountains support ensuring that people in our communities, particularly children, have the best outcome by using fluoride. I know the member for Murray-Darling is a big supporter of fluoridating water supplies and was concerned about the opposition to fluoridation in town water supplies.

I note the support from the member for Balmain, representing The Greens. The Greens have been mentioned as opponents of fluoridation in northern New South Wales, in particular, and I have had discussions with some of those people. I do not accept their position that fluoridating water supplies is a form of mass medication and should be ruled out. Science has proved that it works. The side-effects are inconsequential, if noticeable at all. Unfortunately, it is these people who are impacting on the future wellbeing of children in their community by not making a decision about whether they accept the fluoridation of their water supply.

Clearly this issue accords with Government policy. I have not heard anybody from the Government seriously arguing against fluoridation. What they are arguing about is whether this bill should originate from the Opposition. The Government might look at whether it can reintroduce this legislation in some other form. I think that would be a good thing for the Government to do. This is an issue that should not be left to the whim of small councils that are at the mercy of local political arguments. They can be difficult. Lismore City Council Mayor Jenny Dowell supports the decision-making process being removed from local governments and returned to the State Government. The State Government mandates other areas of public health such as vaccinating our communities. That debate has also taken place here. This issue is similar and I ask that the Government look at fluoridation and determine whether it can accommodate the good intention of the bill that has been introduced by Dr Andrew McDonald.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS (Murray-Darling) [11.00 a.m.]: I have been witness to a great deal of dissent about local government decisions to provide fluoridation and I have dealt with all the issues. There is no doubt that the opposition to fluoridation has been driven by an internet campaign without any scientific support. The World Health Organization supports fluoridation of water supplies. Unfortunately, governments are forever criticised about imposing their will on local governments and removing their decision-making powers. Most local governments have decided to provide fluoridated town water. The well-respected member for Balmain—who I hope will retain his seat at the next election because I do not want the ghost back—should communicate with The Greens councillors on the North Coast.

Mr Greg Piper: You'll be in the upper House.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS: At least the current member for Balmain has a sense of humour. He brings a bit of life into the House. We do not need the kiss of death again with the former member's return. The Greens councillors on the North Coast won office under The Greens' banner and, given that, they must have accepted The Greens' policies. The member for Balmain and his fellow party members should remind those councillors that their party supports fluoridation. Those councillors are causing all these problems. As has been stated already in this debate, the community of Lismore is experiencing a higher rate of tooth decay in young people than that recorded anywhere else in the State, and that is primarily because of the lack of fluoridation. This is about our democratic right to vote or not to vote. However, if The Greens support fluoridation of the water supply, councillors elected under that banner must come into line and accept that it is good for the community.

Those councillors are running around like rabid dogs. I am not putting the member for Balmain in that category, but plenty of his colleagues fit the bill. They are the downstream end of society and they are running any campaign they want under The Greens' banner and their colleagues are letting them. It is about time they were pulled into line. The member for Balmain should talk to these mad dogs and bring them to heel. They are causing all the problems and they are the reason the Opposition spokesman on Health has introduced this bill.

The Greens have not called their members to order. They are being allowed to run rampant under The Greens' banner and to make statements on the party's behalf. They should be controlled. If they were, this legislation would not be necessary.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields) [11.04 a.m.], in reply: Today is a red-letter day for members of the anti-fluoridation lobby. It is a victory for them because they have stared down the Minister for Health and intimidated her such that children in the shire of Byron will have worse dental health than other children in the State for many years. I am very disappointed that the Government has chosen not to take responsibility for the enforcement of a valid New South Wales health policy that has minimal costs and clear evidence of benefits. As for its laughable views about so-called strongarm tactics, State governments impose their policies on local governments every day of every week. If that is truly the Government's attitude, why do we bother having a Minister for Health and a health department if they cannot enforce valid State government policy? Even the Government's own dental plan—NSW Oral Health Strategic Directions Plan 2011-20—has as its goals reducing the disparities in the oral health status of people in New South Wales and increasing fluoridation to 98 per cent of New South Wales residents. This is a valid New South Wales policy that has the support of every member of this House. The Government is failing in its duty today.

It is inevitable that there will be increased preventable dental caries in populations that do not have access to fluoridated water. That will be a cost to the New South Wales health system and taxpayers. There will also be an increased cost because of the need to separate the water supply in areas such as Byron Bay that choose not to have fluoridated water. The initial support for fluoridated water for constituent councils offered by Rous Water was announced in June 2006. Failure to support this bill will mean that Rous Water will need four rather than two fluoride dosing plants. The capital cost of four rather than two plants will be an extra \$1 million. Members must accept that by opposing this legislation they will burn \$1 million of taxpayers' money. That is a complete and utter waste of money.

Members opposite cannot claim any credibility in managing the budget if they throw away \$1 million for a principle that they do not support. In addition to the extra capital costs, Rous Water will face extra running costs. It will cost \$293,000 a year to fluoridate the water for three out of the four councils on the North Coast. If all four councils that are serviced by Rous Water were to have fluoridated water, it would cost only \$157,000 a year. We are talking about an impost of \$140,000 a year every year on the people of the North Coast. That money will be wasted because members opposite do not have the courage to support their beliefs in this place. The increase in demand for dental services as a result of increased caries will also be an enormous burden on the health budget. In August last year the Australian Dental Association [ADA] stated:

... in 2007, states children living on the NSW North Coast have the poorest oral health in the State.

Water fluoridation results in a 70 per cent reduction in decay. The Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association states:

Fluoride's safety has been monitored for over five decades and no evidence has ever been found of any health side effects... Water fluoridation provides the greatest absolute benefit to those least advantaged in the community...

That is why the Council of Social Service of New South Wales supports water fluoridation. It states:

The Council of Social Service of NSW (NCOSS) welcomes the Bill currently before NSW Parliament that would increase water fluoridation levels in NSW.

An Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association media release states:

The Australian Dental Association (NSW Branch) (ADA NSW) today offered in principle support for a Bill proposed by the NSW Opposition to promote community water fluoridation in NSW.

The press release of the Minister for Health, which is dated 18 September, states:

The evidence about fluoridation is clear—its role in ensuring good oral health and wider health of the community is absolutely essential.

The Australian Dental Association states:

The ADA calls on the political parties to show their commitment to one of the top 10 public health initiatives of the 20th Century by requiring that water fluoridation of communities be a condition of funding for the States and Territories.

The professionals and the population say it all. Neither the Minister for Health nor the Minister for Healthy Lifestyles made a contribution to this debate. Apart from the courageous member for Murray-Darling who

effectively spoke in favour of the bill and the member for Blue Mountains, no other Government member spoke in this debate. Those opposite know that this is the correct legislation but, like a flock of sheep, they will vote against their conscience because they have been told to do so.

There was yet further abuse of a senior New South Wales government bureaucrat at an angry council meeting at Byron Bay. One has to ask: What is the problem? The science is quite clear about fluoridation. How many bureaucrats or health professionals will be abused before the New South Wales Government acknowledges its responsibility for the public health of every child in this State? It is about time the Government accepted responsibility and did the job it said it would. Byron Bay is only the start of the anti-fluoridation lobby to divide and conquer. If this bill is not passed, it will be only a matter of time before other councils discontinue fluoridating their water supplies. That is happening in Queensland where local councils are using less fluoride.

This bill is a window of opportunity to take control of this issue once and for all. This political cowardice deserves the strongest possible condemnation. Today those opposite will vote against a bill even though the majority of them support it and we have not heard a word in this debate from the Ministers responsible for dental care in this State. Why will this simple piece of legislation not be passed? Where is the Deputy Premier's public opposition to fluoridation? Why has this legislation not been considered by Cabinet? Why is the Government not supporting this bill? The Minister for Health can say whatever she likes about water fluoridation; it is what she does that matters. This is a missed opportunity to correct an anachronism that will cause ramifications not only in Byron Bay but also across the State for years to come. This political cowardice of a health Minister on a public health issue is on a scale unwitnessed in the past 100 years. I commend the bill to the House.

Question—That this bill be now read a second time—put.

The House divided.

[In division]

The ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Andrew Fraser): Order! I have been informed that the division lights at the lifts are not flashing. Therefore, I ask the Clerks to ring the division bells for an additional minute.

Ayes, 23

Mr Barr	Mr Hoenig	Mr Rees
Ms Burney	Ms Hornery	Mr Robertson
Ms Burton	Mr Lynch	Ms Tebbutt
Mr Collier	Dr McDonald	Ms Watson
Mr Daley	Ms Mihailuk	Mr Zangari
Mr Furolo	Mr Park	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Greenwich	Mr Parker	Mr Amery
Ms Hay	Mr Piper	Mr Lalich

Noes, 55

Mr Anderson	Mr Elliott	Mr Patterson
Mr Aplin	Mr Flowers	Mr Perrottet
Mr Ayres	Mr Gee	Mr Provest
Mr Baird	Mr George	Mr Roberts
Mr Barilaro	Ms Gibbons	Mr Rohan
Mr Bassett	Mr Grant	Mrs Sage
Mr Baumann	Mr Gulaptis	Mr Sidoti
Ms Berejiklian	Mr Hartcher	Mrs Skinner
Mr Bromhead	Mr Hazzard	Mr Smith
Mr Brookes	Mr Holstein	Mr Stokes
Mr Casuscelli	Mr Humphries	Mr Toole
Mr Conolly	Mr Issa	Ms Upton
Mr Constance	Mr Kean	Mr Ward
Mr Cornwell	Dr Lee	Mr R. C. Williams
Mr Coure	Mr Marshall	Mrs Williams
Mrs Davies	Mr Notley-Smith	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Dominello	Mr O'Dea	Mr Rowell
Mr Doyle	Mr Page	Mr J. D. Williams
Mr Edwards	Ms Parker	

Question resolved in the negative.

Motion negatived.

Bill not read a second time.

The ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Andrew Fraser): Order! General Business Orders of the Day (for Bills) having concluded, the House will now consider Notices of Motions (General Notices).

ST GEORGE HOSPITAL UPGRADE

Mr MARK COURE (Oatley) [11.25 a.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) Condemns the previous Government for failing to upgrade St George Hospital.
- (2) Congratulates the Premier and the Minister for Health on delivering on the election commitment to upgrade the new \$39 million emergency department at St George Hospital, along with additional nurses and a new \$8 million mental health centre.

This Government continues to invest in St George Hospital where the former Government failed to deliver. St George Hospital will be treating more patients this financial year and will be treating them more efficiently. Actions speak louder than words and we are getting on with the job of rebuilding St George Hospital with a new \$39 million emergency department. As I have mentioned in this House many times, Labor is no friend of St George Hospital. For nearly 20 years while in government in New South Wales Labor failed to build any significant clinical building on the hospital site. We are getting on with the job of building a brand-new emergency department by relocating the current emergency department from Kensington Street to Gray Street. The new emergency department at St George Hospital will provide increased capacity and will improve facilities for patients with up-to-date systems and models of care, not just for the St George community but also throughout the southern part of Sydney.

Mr Barry Collier: You can't get trains there.

Mr MARK COURE: This project has a capital budget of \$39 million and is funded by the New South Wales Liberal-Nationals Government. Construction for the early works has already commenced—we turned the first sod in early 2012—and construction for the main works for a new facility has commenced and will be completed later in 2014. This project includes—and the member for Miranda should listen to this—five resuscitation bays, a paediatric acute zone with 12 treatment spaces, an adult fast-track zone, an acute hall with 34 beds, an emergency medical unit, the relocation of the psychiatric emergency care centre, satellite imaging, expanded waiting and triage areas and eight off-street ambulance drop-off zones, where currently at the existing emergency department at St George Hospital there are only four. Importantly, we are building for the future and there is the potential of up to six additional floors for future projects.

For nearly 20 years the former Government, the Labor Party—let us not call it the Labor Party when it comes to St George Hospital; let us call it the guilty party—failed to deliver any clinical building at St George Hospital. Actions speak louder than words. We are getting on with the job of building a brand-new emergency department. I thank the Premier, the Treasurer, the Minister for Health and the member for Rockdale. We form a great team for St George Hospital.

Mr John Williams: What about the member for Kogarah?

Mr MARK COURE: We are getting on with the job while the member for Kogarah will be spending the next 12 months on the backbench seeing out this term until retirement. We are getting things done at St George Hospital.

Ms Cherie Burton: Point of order: The member for Oatley has strayed from the leave of the motion because he has run out of material. He has nothing left to say so he is making personal insults.

The ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Andrew Fraser): Order! There is no point of order.

Mr MARK COURE: I am not making personal insults; I am speaking the truth. I will give members opposite some new information. This Government has recruited 200 extra nurses in the South Eastern Sydney

Local Area Health District, which includes St George Hospital. That is new information. It is also worth noting that the St George Hospital expenditure budget has increased by \$12 million for the 2013-14 financial year. Let us recap: We are getting on with the job of building the new emergency department that members opposite failed to deliver. Labor is no friend of St George Hospital.

Mr Barry Collier: Give us some trains to get there.

Mr MARK COURE: I inform the member for Miranda that the previous major hospital redevelopment took place under another Liberal-Nationals Government, when Ron Phillips was the Minister for Health.

Mr Barry Collier: Point of order: The last major redevelopment was to Sutherland Hospital and I did that.

The ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Andrew Fraser): Order! There is no point of order. I call the member for Miranda to order for the first time.

Mr MARK COURE: The last major redevelopment at St George Hospital happened under the Greiner-Fahey Government when Ron Phillips was the Minister for Health. There was no major upgrade to St George Hospital for nearly 20 years, until we came to government. Members opposite were asleep and they failed the St George community.

Ms CHERIE BURTON (Kogarah) [11.32 a.m.]: It is a sad day when the member for Oatley cannot speak about a hospital for a mere seven minutes. What a joke. The member for Oatley well knows that Labor governments delivered record Health budgets every year for 16 years. When Labor left office the recurrent Health budget was at a record high of \$16 billion, which represented a 192 per cent increase from the last time the Liberal-Nationals were in office. The Labor Government also employed an additional 40,000 nurses across the State. At St George Hospital we provided \$10 million for a medical research centre, \$8.2 million for a mental health unit, \$5 million for a day surgery unit and \$1 million for planning the new emergency department. The money required to build the emergency department for which the member is taking credit was secured in the budget prior to the election.

Mr Mark Coure: Only \$20 million, not \$39 million.

Ms CHERIE BURTON: It is my turn to speak. The member for Oatley said that all those buildings are insignificant. In fact, he says they are not even there. His constituents will be interested to learn that. I think the member needs to go and have a look at St George Hospital. As I said, the Labor Government upgraded and rebuilt every major hospital in New South Wales, including St George Hospital. We also spent \$1 billion to rebuild Royal North Shore Hospital and spent \$500 million on Liverpool Hospital. In addition, we spent \$80 million rebuilding Canterbury Hospital, which the Government is planning to close, and \$400 million completely rebuilding Royal Prince Alfred Hospital.

Mr Mark Coure: Point of order: My point of order is relevance. The motion is about St George Hospital, not Canterbury Hospital.

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

Ms CHERIE BURTON: We gave Sutherland Hospital \$100 million in funding and we brought Port Macquarie hospital back into public hands after members opposite sold it off. I will remind the House about what the past three years of an O'Farrell Government has meant for health in New South Wales. It has meant \$3 billion worth of cuts, and \$43 million of that—

Mr Mark Coure: Point of order: My point of order is again relevance. The motion is about St George Hospital and the achievements of this Government. It is not about any other hospital. Our achievements at St George Hospital are the new \$39 million emergency department, the new \$8 million mental health unit—

Ms CHERIE BURTON: The member has stated his point of order. He does not get to make another speech. Sit down, you grub.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! I refer the member for Kogarah to the motion—

Mr Mark Coure: Point of order—

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! I have not ruled on the previous point of order. I remind the member for Kogarah that the motion is about the St George Hospital upgrade and she should stick to that.

Ms CHERIE BURTON: I will stick to it all right.

Mr Mark Coure: Point of order—

Ms CHERIE BURTON: The member for Oatley does not want to hear it. That is so typical of members on his side of the House: They do not want to hear the facts.

Mr Mark Coure: I have been called a "grub", which is unparliamentary. I ask the member for Kogarah to withdraw that comment.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! The member for Oatley has requested that the member for Kogarah withdraw the remark.

Ms CHERIE BURTON: I will not withdraw it because it is my right to have seven minutes to respond to the scurrilous allegations and misleading statements made by the member for Oatley. Let me get back to discussing St George Hospital.

Mr John Williams: Point of order: The member for Kogarah should review her decision not to withdraw the statement. The remark was unparliamentary and is unacceptable in this House.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! I can only ask the member for Kogarah to withdraw the remark. She refuses to do so.

Ms CHERIE BURTON: An amount of \$43 million from that \$3 billion came from the area health service that funds St George Hospital. Let us now consider staff cuts. A document leaked from the health department reveals:

... an annual labour funding cut of \$2.206 million, \$8.824 million over the next four years will occur at St. George ...

The member for Oatley says that he is a friend of St George Hospital. He recently circulated a pamphlet calling on people to join his campaign to upgrade St George Hospital. The campaign has been going on for a year, as newspaper articles demonstrate. In April last year the *St George and Sutherland Shire Leader* published an article entitled, "Hospital's code red". Where was the member for Oatley? Last year the newspaper also published the following articles: "Patients 'at risk' from dilapidated hospital," dated 28 February; "Hospital is short changed", dated 22 August; "No extra cash for ageing hospital," dated 20 June; and, "Health priority surprise", dated 12 September. Again, where was the member for Oatley?

The Government decided to fund Sutherland Hospital over St George Hospital, which was welcomed by the member for Cronulla, when Sutherland had already received a \$100 million upgrade under the Labor Government. What an absolute disgrace. The member for Oatley has voted against the St George Hospital upgrade four times in this House but he has the gall to try to take the credit in his community and make out that he supports the upgrade. He does not support it. His constituents and the Medical Staff Council know exactly what the member for Oatley is about. His constituents tell me day in, day out that he promises everything but delivers very little. They know that he says one thing in this Chamber and then goes out to his community and says another. When he comes back to this place he votes a completely different way.

It is an absolute joke for the member for Oatley to suddenly say that he is on board for an upgrade to a hospital when he has ignored the community and the campaign for the past 12 months. The community collected thousands and thousands of signatures. The member for Oatley thought he could get away with his smoke and mirrors routine about how much he loves St George, but the community was onto him and the pressure got too great. He has now bowed to that pressure because he has realised that people are onto his smoke and mirrors and misleading statements. They know that he says one thing in his community and does another thing in this place. What an absolute disgrace. For members opposite to stand in this place and try to blame Labor for any of this is a joke. They have been in government for three years.

Mr Mark Coure: You were in government for 16 years.

Ms CHERIE BURTON: Yes, and we upgraded all the other hospitals. St George Hospital is the only one left.

Mr JOHN FLOWERS (Rockdale) [11.39 a.m.]: I thank the Premier and the Minister for Health for their support for St George Hospital. They have made numerous visits to the hospital, and in successive budgets they have allocated substantial funds to the upgrade of the hospital. I will confine my remarks to St George Hospital. The New South Wales Government continues to invest in St George Hospital. St George Hospital will be treating more patients this financial year and treating them more effectively. The St George Hospital expenditure budget increased by \$12 million in the 2013-14 financial year. In March 2013 the Premier and I, together with the member for Oatley, attended the new site of the St George Hospital emergency department, where we toured the building works.

Delivering the \$39 million upgrade to the emergency department at St George Hospital demonstrates the New South Wales Government's commitment to improving hospitals in this State. The new \$39 million emergency department will deliver expanded treatment areas and will improve patient care and efficiency. The new emergency department will be a significant boost to St George Hospital, which has one of the busiest emergency departments in New South Wales, seeing more than 62,900 patients—including 13,000 paediatric presentations—and admitting about 22,000 patients each year. As the level 1 trauma centre for the South Eastern Sydney Local Health District, the benefits provided by this facility will be far-reaching. The new emergency department will be of great benefit to families for many years to come, and will boost the capabilities of St George Hospital in treating more patients at a time when there has been unprecedented growth.

The department is a new purpose-built building and will have expanded treatment areas, which will improve patient streaming and operational effectiveness. As the member for Oatley has commented previously, the relocation of the new emergency department to the main Gray Street entrance will improve relationships to other hospital functions and will strengthen the front entrance of the hospital. The project will provide two designated fast-track zones: one for adults and the other for paediatrics. The adult fast-track zone will feature 14 treatment spaces—eight treatment spaces and six consultation rooms—and is designed for lower acuity patients who can be diagnosed and treated quickly. The paediatric fast-track zone will have three of the 13 treatment spaces dedicated to this function.

A satellite imaging facility will be incorporated within the department. This will eliminate transport delays and improve turnaround times and access to imaging services for patients. A dedicated area will cater for X-ray, CT scan and ultrasound facilities. The project team advises that the project remains on schedule, with the expectation that the department will be operational in late 2014. The existing emergency department on Kensington Street continues to operate without interruption and will do so until the new facility opens. In addition to the new emergency department, the \$8 million, 16-bed subacute mental health unit for older people was opened on 1 November 2013.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields) [11.43 a.m.]: There are some things about which I agree with the member for Oatley. The member for Oatley said that actions speak louder than words. Everybody in the St George area, and particularly the staff, are frustrated about the St George Hospital issue because of the lack of any definitive plan for what everyone knows is needed—that is, a \$600 million redevelopment. In simple terms, this is a case of "Show me the money". There is no shortcut. A \$39 million redevelopment is welcome but will go nowhere near meeting the future needs of St George Hospital. A \$600 million redevelopment would meet that need, but that can occur only with a mixture of Federal and State funding.

Neither the member for Oatley nor the Minister for Health has explained how that redevelopment will be funded. The extra funding from the previous Federal Government for many hospitals such as Nepean, Port Macquarie or the regional hospital in Bega has dried up. The current Federal Government will not put many extra dollars into funding public hospital infrastructure in any State, least of all New South Wales, in the future. How the Minister must miss Tanya Plibersek and Nicola Roxon. If she does not miss them she should come to the Chamber and join the debate, and say how great it is that Peter Dutton is the Federal health Minister.

Staff are frustrated by the lack of commitment to a future St George Hospital by either level of government. I repeat—the staff of St George Hospital need to be aware of this—that at no stage has the extremely high standard of clinical care at St George Hospital ever been called into question. The hospital is

well administered, with a competent and committed administration and high-quality clinicians in all areas—medical, nursing, allied health and support staff. The standard of teaching for students in all the professions is extremely high. St George Hospital is a flagship hospital in the State for one reason: The standard of care for patients at St George Hospital remains extremely high. The St George Hospital community is frustrated because it knows that that standard of care can be maintained into the future only with a new hospital. Today we did not get from members opposite any indication that that hospital will ever happen.

As for enlarging the ambulance drop-off zone, without a new hospital that enlargement will be necessary because off-stretcher times continue to increase. The hospital will need more parking spaces for more ambulances because the ambulances will need to stay there while the patients they transport to hospital are still on stretchers. As for the 200 new nurses, those nurses were introduced on the basis of the ratios award negotiated by the Keneally Government. This Government has refused to negotiate with the Nurses Association for a further increase in the number of nurses needed to introduce ratios in areas such as the emergency department that members opposite crow about building. It is no good if the Government builds a hospital but does not staff it properly. I urge members opposite at least to indicate to nurses that they support nurse ratios in the emergency department. A \$12 million increase in the \$300 million budget, which members opposite crow about, does not even meet increased demand. If the Government released the budget numbers year on year they would show that St George Hospital is underfunded. [*Time expired.*]

Mr BARRY COLLIER (Miranda) [11.47 a.m.]: It is beyond dispute that Sutherland Hospital and St George Hospital go hand in hand and must work hand in hand to deliver comprehensive treatment to the residents of not only the Sutherland shire or St George but both of them together. Clearly, St George Hospital delivers tertiary treatment of a high level, as does Sutherland Hospital. Labor undertook a comprehensive redevelopment of the hospital, including about \$100 million to develop a comprehensive health campus. Sutherland Hospital needs an upgrade—

Mr Mark Coure: Point of order: The motion does not mention Sutherland Hospital.

Mr BARRY COLLIER: You mentioned it.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! I remind the member for Miranda that he is on one call to order. The member for Oatley will direct his remarks through the Chair.

Mr Mark Coure: The motion does not refer to Sutherland Hospital; it refers to St George Hospital.

Mr BARRY COLLIER: I said they have to work together.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! The member for Miranda may continue. However, I remind him that the motion is about the St George Hospital upgrade.

Mr BARRY COLLIER: The St George Hospital upgrade is extremely important. A \$600 million upgrade is underway. The member for Oatley mentioned my predecessor, Mr Phillips, and perhaps I should not go there. But what the member for Oatley must realise is—and he is not even bothering to listen—that people from the Sutherland shire attend St George Hospital for a variety of reasons, including treatment for cancer and to visit the very highly regarded specialists who work at the hospital. One of the problems facing my constituents impacts directly on the hospital: They cannot get a train from the Sutherland shire to St George Hospital.

Mr Mark Coure: Point of order—

Mr BARRY COLLIER: There goes the member for Oatley again. Sit down.

Mr Mark Coure: Point of order—

Mr BARRY COLLIER: Fair dinkum. You can't cop it, can you?

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! I call the member for Miranda to order for the second time.

Mr Mark Coure: My point of order relates to relevance. The motion is not about how good our train system is.

Mr BARRY COLLIER: It is about my constituents.

Mr Mark Coure: It is about the St George Hospital.

Mr BARRY COLLIER: It is about my constituents getting to St George Hospital.

Mr Mark Coure: Shoosh, shoosh.

Mr BARRY COLLIER: Not "shoosh, shoosh"; you are not talking to a dog now, mate.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! There is no point of order. The member for Oatley will resume his seat. I call the member for Oatley to order for the first time.

Mr BARRY COLLIER: It is highly relevant to this debate that my constituents experience difficulty visiting St George Hospital, which is undergoing an upgrade. It is highly relevant that people are standing on station platforms to change trains at Hurstville and arrive at St George Hospital. There is no train from the Sutherland shire to St George Hospital between 6.30 a.m. and 9.30 a.m. after the hospital opens and the specialists begin work. There is no denying that to provide services for my constituents and for the constituents of the member for Oatley, a better train service is needed. Quite clearly, your Government has to begin providing it; you cannot continue to ignore that.

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

Mr BARRY COLLIER: I accept your ruling, Mr Deputy-Speaker. Quite clearly, if health services are to be provided and this Government is to live up to community expectations and the promotional material it is circulating, it must provide appropriate services to enable people to obtain access to treatment. I see people standing on the station platform at Jannali who cannot get to Kogarah. They must visit St George Hospital to obtain outpatient treatment such as cancer therapy, but they cannot get there. They have to change trains—as if they do not have enough to worry about. If we are going to make this important system effective we must give people access to the hospitals.

Mr GUY ZANGARI (Fairfield) [11.51 a.m.]: My contribution to debate on the motion moved by the member for Oatley will be brief. The first part of the motion states:

That this House:

- (1) Condemns the previous [Labor] Government for failing to upgrade St George Hospital.

The front cover of the South Eastern Sydney Local Health District Asset Strategic Plan 2012-2017 has this statement:

Working together to improve the health and wellbeing of our community

I suspect the member for Oatley has not read the plan. Page 20 of the plan states "Overview of Physical Suitability of Facilities to Deliver Future Services" and displays specific categories and ratings: green means good, yellow means fair, and red means poor. The ratings are divided between the northern sector, which covers the Randwick campus and the Sydney Hospital, and the southern sector, which covers St George Hospital and Sutherland Hospital. I will go through the assessment to make the ratings very clear to the member for Oatley. Under the category of location-urban planning, the assessment for St George Hospital is green, which means good—something about which the member for Oatley might jump for joy. However, it is very interesting that in the next four categories—functionality-layout, building condition, compliance issues and overall physical suitability of the St George Hospital—the ratings do not show the hospital in a good light.

Mr Mark Coure: It reflects strongly on your 16 years in government, doesn't it? Sixteen years in government!

Mr GUY ZANGARI: The interjection from the member for Oatley about Labor's 16 years in government, now that the O'Farrell Government has been in office for three years, is absolutely laughable. The plan rates the functionality and layout of St George Hospital as poor. Its rating is shown as red. It is clear that the member for Oatley has not read the document. The hospital's rating for building condition is also poor. Compliance issues are rated as poor as well and are shown in red. The overall assessment of St George Hospital in this document is poor, and that is also shown in red. The member for Oatley can wave his hands around in this Chamber and pretend he is interested in his Oatley constituents, but he should look at reports published by his Government. It is clear he does not understand the assessments that are shown in red. I conclude my remarks at this point because the Government's own report, compiled by the South Eastern Sydney Local Health District, rates St George Hospital's current physical suitability as poor in four categories.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! I remind the member for Oatley that he is on one call to order.

Mr MARK COURE (Oatley) [11.55 a.m.], in reply: First, I acknowledge the member for Rockdale who made a contribution to this debate and who plays a huge part, as I do, in the St George Hospital upgrade. The member for Fairfield referred to a 2012 report that reflects what I said in my speech: how bad the condition of the St George Hospital is and how much the hospital needs to be rebuilt and upgraded. The Government is doing exactly that. We are getting on with the job of building a brand-new emergency department worth \$39 million whereas the former Labor Government spent 16 long, hard years—

Mr Barry Collier: Zzz.

Mr MARK COURE: —asleep. The member for Miranda is exactly right: Labor was asleep in government. The former Labor Government failed to upgrade St George Hospital and did not look after it. Members of the former Labor Government are no friend of St George Hospital. Actions speak louder than words. At the hospital site there are cranes and scaffolding and the building is going up. That is because Government members care about that hospital and about our communities. Government members care about St George Hospital and that is why we are building a brand-new emergency department. But of course it does not stop there.

Last year the Premier and the Minister for Health announced in the presence of the member for Rockdale and me that the New South Wales Government will spend \$800,000 planning a major new redevelopment, which will be the next stage of the hospital upgrade. The new emergency department will be completed by the end of the year but the Government is already planning the next stage of rebuilding the hospital after completion of the \$39 million emergency department in 2014. The redeveloped St George Hospital will accommodate an expansion of high-priority clinical services such as high dependency units, intensive care units, cardiac care units and new operating theatres. Whereas Labor members were asleep at the wheel for 16 years, in just three years this Government is getting on with a major rebuilding project for St George Hospital.

I have begun a campaign already. A petition and a card have been circulated in my community so that I can show the Minister for Health that my community cares and wants an upgrade of St George Hospital. Over the past three years in addition to building a new emergency department this Government has reopened the hydrotherapy pool that was closed by the former Labor Government. The hospital also has a new \$8 million old-person's subacute mental health unit, which was opened in November 2013 by the Minister for Health and the member for Rockdale. That 16-bed facility will provide assessment and recovery based treatment for people over 65 years requiring subacute mental health care. In addition, the St George Hospital is undergoing an upgrade of the hybrid vascular theatre at a cost of \$2.5 million. Two weeks ago I welcomed 55 new nurses at the hospital. I have shown that this Government means business: It will roll up its sleeves and get on with the job of building a brand new emergency department, redeveloping St George Hospital. I commend the motion to the House.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 65

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

Noes, 20

Mr Barr	Mr Hoenig	Mr Robertson
Ms Burney	Ms Hornery	Ms Tebbutt
Ms Burton	Mr Lynch	Ms Watson
Mr Collier	Dr McDonald	Mr Zangari
Mr Daley	Ms Mihailuk	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Furolo	Mr Park	Mr Amery
Ms Hay	Mr Rees	Mr Lalich

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

MINMI ROAD WALLSEND UPGRADE

Ms SONIA HORNERY (Wallsend) [12.11 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) Notes that on Sunday 18 August 2013 a fatality occurred along Minmi Road, Wallsend, when a cyclist was killed.
- (2) Notes that this fatality follows a string of major accidents along this stretch of Minmi Road over the past 10 years.
- (3) Notes that Minmi Road is single lane, with no off-road pathway and is an extremely busy road from the Blue Gum Hills district.
- (4) Notes that the section 94 grants arising from large urban development in the Blue Gum Hills precinct have not been adequately spent on road upgrades and off-road cycleways along Minmi Road to accommodate the rapidly increasing population.
- (5) Calls on the Minister for Roads and Ports and Newcastle City Council to commit to turning Minmi Road into a dual-lane road this year from the corner of Minmi and Sandgate roads, along with an off-road walkway-cycleway to the Minmi township.

The State Government and Newcastle City Council must upgrade Minmi Road as a matter of urgency. The list of accidents on a dangerous stretch of Minmi Road between Maryland and Wallsend reads as a litany of

avoidable tragedy. The death of a cyclist in August last year is just the latest in a long list of accidents on Minmi Road and lends renewed urgency to this important matter. In July 2012 a woman was left in a critical condition after being hit by a car while walking along Minmi Road at Maryland. In November another woman was left in a serious condition after her vehicle collided with a truck. In 2009 a crash caused two cars to catch fire. In 2004 and 2005 there was a pair of motorcycle accidents on Minmi Road, one resulting in a fatality.

With appropriate upgrades, many of these accidents might never have happened. I am calling for expansion of the road to a dual-lane carriageway and construction of an off-road walkway and cycleway, as well as an expansion of public transport in Newcastle's western suburbs. Although the road is owned by and falls under the purview of Newcastle City Council, I believe it is incumbent upon me as the local member to speak in this place in the interests of my constituents. I have made a number of representations to the Minister for Roads and Ports, and to the council on this matter.

Minmi Road is single carriageway road between Wallsend and Maryland and is heavily traversed by vehicles and pedestrians, despite the lack of a kerb and footpath. Cyclists are required to ride on the road where they are forced to compete with enormous trucks making the trek to the Summerhill Waste Management Centre, the major tip in the Newcastle City Council area. Minmi Road is the only road to the tip and it is the major arterial link between Wallsend and the rapidly expanding Blue Gum Hills precinct. The construction of a Bunnings store along the road and the approval by this Government of a 3,300-dwelling development near Minmi means that even more people will be using the road in the very near future. Minmi Road is a significant hazard to drivers and pedestrians alike. Don Williams, a resident of Wallsend, wrote to the *Newcastle Herald* saying:

I and many others have witnessed children walking to school on the two feet of road between concrete barriers and traffic.

This is clearly an untenable and dangerous situation. It is only a matter of time before another accident occurs. Newcastle City Council General Manager Ken Gouldthorp has responded to my representations that the widening of Minmi Road is a council priority, but the commencement of work is dependent on getting enough section 94 grant funding to complete the work, which he classifies as a major project. He warns that, without significant external assistance, the project would not be possible for a number of years, yet just this week the Independent and Liberal councillors prioritised the allocation of \$1.5 million to an inner-city walkway, despite promises from the State Government of this funding and a Newcastle City Council deficit of \$29 million. Many of the councillors view infrastructure projects like this as being a low priority. Maryland ratepayers view funding for Minmi Road as a far greater priority for the cash-strapped Newcastle City Council than building a special walkway along a stretch where a walkway already exists.

We would love to see the walkway, but question whether Newcastle City Council has the funding to prioritise it over a dangerous road. I point out that section 94 funding has been in place for many years, ever since the development of Maryland. Unfortunately, Newcastle City Council seems unwilling or unable to release the funds. Since 2006, when I wrote a letter to the editor of the *Newcastle Herald* on this issue, I have been trying to find the money to get this work done. I urge the Government, specifically the Minister for Roads and Ports, to work closely with the council to take all necessary steps to resolve this issue. Widening the road, however, only goes part of the way towards solving the underlying problem. The western suburbs of Newcastle are growing rapidly and public infrastructure is not being developed at a commensurate rate.

I noted in a private member's statement given in August last year that as far back as 2010 Save Our Rail, a community activist group in Newcastle dedicated to the preservation and expansion of the Hunter's public transport network, called for more buses to service the area, including the development of park-and-ride facilities at key locations such as Minmi Road. Notwithstanding granting approval for a 3,300-dwelling development at Minmi, this Government has failed to meet the transport needs of residents in the western suburbs of Newcastle and ignored my many representations on behalf of our community to provide more bus services for this rapidly growing part of the city.

It is not all bad news, however. Mr Gouldthorp, the General Manager of Newcastle City Council, told me last year that council is investigating the feasibility of providing a separated cycle or shared path on either side of the road. This work, with the will of Newcastle City Council, could be completed within two years and

would go some of the way towards addressing the issues bedevilling commuters travelling on Minmi Road. I once again urge the Government and the Minister to work with council. It is just a matter of time before another accident on Minmi Road claims a life.

Mr GARRY EDWARDS (Swansea) [12.18 p.m.]: Minmi Road is a local road managed by Newcastle City Council. The Government does not support the motion moved by the member for Wallsend. Like everyone else, I was saddened to hear of the tragic accident in August last year on Minmi Road, Wallsend, which resulted in the death of a cyclist. The New South Wales Government regards fatalities on our roads very seriously and is investing a great deal of time and money into reducing our road toll. Minmi Road from Sandgate Road at Wallsend to Minmi is a local road managed by Newcastle City Council. The motion to turn Minmi Road into a dual-lane road from the corner of Sandgate Road, including an off-road walkway-cycleway to the Minmi township is a matter for council to consider.

Crash statistics along this section of Minmi Road are relatively high for a local road. I am advised that from the beginning of 2008 to the end of 2012, 70 accidents were recorded on this 7.6-kilometre stretch of Minmi Road, resulting in 48 casualties. Since the beginning of 2013 to the end of January 2014 there have been 12 crashes, including the fatal crash involving the cyclist in August last year, and four further casualty crashes. Roads and Maritime Services will raise this issue with Newcastle City Council to develop safety proposals for consideration under the Australian Government's Nation Building Black Spot Program.

Councils receive considerable funding from the Australian Government under both the financial assistance grants and the Roads to Recovery program for work on local roads within their area. They can also make funds available from their own rates and section 94 contributions. In the interests of road safety, projects in the NSW Black Spot Program target road locations with a history of crashes. The program reduces the risk of crashes by funding measures such as traffic signals and roundabouts at dangerous locations. Transport for NSW is responsible for the administration of the Australian Government's Nation Building Black Spot Program across New South Wales, with operational input from Roads and Maritime Services.

Roads and Maritime Services collates and reviews all council black spot nominations from across New South Wales on behalf of Transport for NSW and the Australian Government. Councils can nominate a black spot for funding consideration. In addition, councils can also apply for funding under the State Government's Safer Roads program. In my electorate of Swansea major works along Rutleys Road and Cardiff Road are being undertaken. The local council applied for and received almost \$4 million from the State Government to undertake these works. Roads and Maritime Services regularly holds meetings in the Hunter region with various cycle groups and councils to identify cycling issues and priorities in the Hunter. I understand Newcastle City Council is a key participant in these meetings.

Through joint planning and projects with councils, bike access will be enhanced, with extensions and links to existing cycle networks. Roads and Maritime Services works with local councils to develop and fund cycleway networks. I am aware that in March 2012 the City of Newcastle released its Newcastle Cycling Strategy and Action Plan, a strategy that has been referred to and spoken about on a number of occasions in this House. This action plan is designed to be the key document directing the council's future spending on cycling-related programs. Input was provided by the community and the Newcastle Cycling Working Party, which includes representatives from local bicycle user groups, Roads and Maritime Services, the University of Newcastle and interested community members.

The cycle route from Wallsend to Minmi has been identified in the plan as a largely on-road route, with future parallel off-road paths in sections, providing connections to residential developments off Minmi Road and other regional routes. The State cycleways program provided \$368,000 for traffic lights and upgrade of the existing shared path crossing near Throsby Creek. In addition, in August 2013 a \$1.14 million New South Wales Government funded upgrade was finished, improving motorist and cyclist safety on the Pacific Highway and Industrial Drive at Mayfield West—a very busy road location. Another critical location identified in the local area for improvements was along the New England Highway at the Tarro railway overbridge, where work was finished in October 2013 to improve safety and access across the bridge for cyclists.

These are short-term safety improvements while larger-scale improvements are being investigated. Roads and Maritime Services will continue to work with Newcastle City Council in the development and

implementation of its local bicycle network. Local government can also seek contributions from developers who are seeking development approval from councils pursuant to section 94 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979. This assists councils to provide public amenities and services, including roads, which will be needed as a result of the development. Councils try to ensure a strategy is in place for the assessment, collection, expenditure, accounting and review of development contributions on an equitable basis. There does not need to be a link between the area of the development and where a council decides to spend the funds. The adequacy of the allocation of section 94 contributions for developments along Minmi Road is clearly a matter for Newcastle City Council. The Government does not support the motion moved by the member for Wallsend.

Mr GREG PIPER (Lake Macquarie) [12.25 p.m.]: I support the motion moved by the member for Wallsend which, as she stated, was triggered by the tragic death of a cyclist on Minmi Road. This very sad event was probably the most significant of the incidents that have occurred along the road, which we know has a long history of crashes. The member for Swansea said he was advised of 76 crashes on the road since 2008 of which 48 caused some injury. That is a significant number of recorded accidents, and I imagine many other near accidents and incidents would not have been recorded. I know the road quite well as I have family living in the area. Traffic from the Sandgate Road-Cowper Street intersection onto Minmi Road becomes progressively worse as one travels towards Minmi because of significant residential, commercial and industrial development, and significant traffic is generated from the Summerhill Waste Management Centre.

In the future Newcastle City Council may have an opportunity to reduce the volume of heavy vehicles in the area by providing a new entry way into the facility from the Newcastle Link Road. At this stage we are still quite some way from that, yet development is going ahead at a significant pace. Both the member for Swansea and the member for Wallsend have acknowledged that Minmi Road is a local road, but it is a significant part of the local road network: It feeds into and through those residential areas, it links up with important State roads and it is a commuter corridor.

The motion moved by the member for Wallsend does relate to a local road, but I do not think that it can be said that she is being naive. The member is taking up an important cause and fighting for her local community to bring the issue to the attention of Newcastle City Council and seek to have it increase the priority and attention to this particular area of road. The Government has an opportunity to advocate for that as well. It has a role in assisting with finance for Newcastle City Council to address this issue. The member for Wallsend is doing a good job fighting for her local community and bringing this important matter to the attention of the House. I support her fully in her endeavours.

Mr ANDREW CORNWELL (Charlestown) [12.29 p.m.]: I speak to the motion of the member for Wallsend. I have a close personal attachment to this issue. The cyclist who was killed on 18 August 2013 was the much-loved brother of a close friend of mine. The accident has left a devastated family and caused enormous heartache to all of those around him. He was a young man who went out for a ride on his own that particular morning and never came home. This is an issue dear to my heart. I think the motion is well intended but it does have a fatal flaw in that this is a local road. The motion of the member for Wallsend seeks to turn Minmi Road into a dual-lane road from the corner of Sandgate Road, including an off-road walkway-cycleway to Minmi township. However, that is a matter for council to consider.

Crash statistics along this section of Minmi Road are relatively high for a local road. I have been advised that there were 70 accidents recorded on this 7.6 kilometre stretch of Minmi Road resulting in 48 casualties from 2008 to the end of 2012. There have been 12 crashes, including the fatal crash involving the cyclist concerned in August 2013 and four further casualty crashes from the beginning of 2013 to the end of January 2014. Roads and Maritime Services has raised the issue with Newcastle City Council to develop road safety proposals for consideration under the Australian Government's nation building Black Spot Program. The council has received considerable funding from the Australian Government under the financial assistance grants and the Roads to Recovery Program Funding Allocations for work on local roads within their area. They can also make funds available from their own rates income.

Road safety projects in the NSW Black Spot Program target road locations with a history of crashes. The program reduces risk of crashes through funding measures such as traffic signals and roundabouts at dangerous locations. I am advised that Roads and Maritime Services meets regularly with various cycle groups and councils to identify cycling issues and priorities in the Hunter. I understand that Newcastle City Council is a key participant in these meetings. I am also advised that in March 2012 the City of Newcastle released the Newcastle cycle strategy and action plan. This action plan is designed to be the key document directing the

council's future spending on cycling-related programs. Input was provided by the community and the Newcastle cycling working party, which includes representatives from local bike user groups, Roads and Maritime Services, the University of Newcastle and interested community members.

The cycle route from Wallsend to Minmi has been identified in the plan as a largely on-road route with future parallel off-road paths and sections providing connections to residential developments off Minmi Road and other regional routes. The State cycleways program provided \$368,000 for traffic lights and upgraded an existing shared path crossing near Throsby Creek. In addition, in August 2013 \$1.14 million of New South Wales Government funding upgraded and improved motorist and cyclist safety on the Pacific Highway and Industrial Drive at Mayfield West, a very busy road. This is an issue that is very dear to my heart because I know the young man concerned. I think the motion is well intended but it does have a fatal flaw and therefore I am unable to support it. We read far too often in the newspapers in Newcastle of cyclists being injured and killed. I do not diminish the importance of the issue.

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend) [12.33 p.m.], in reply: I thank the members representing the electorates of Swansea, Lake Macquarie and Charlestown for their contributions to the debate. It was heartening. I am sad to say that our Hunter commuters will be disturbed that my local Liberal colleagues are washing their hands of this dangerous stretch of road and passing the buck back to the cash-strapped Newcastle City Council. Members know that the cash-strapped Newcastle City Council needs the assistance of its State Government counterparts to build much of its infrastructure, including some of the infrastructure that it has voted on this week. The purpose of my motion is to raise this issue with the State Government so that it considers that this road is dangerous enough to provide assistance to the local government in order to fix it.

The member for Swansea and the member for Charlestown stated that the cycle route from Wallsend to Maryland is largely an on-road route. That is the crux of the problem. It is an on-road route for cyclists, who are then competing with heavy trucks travelling to and from town to get to the tip, as well as the commuters in the growing community. It is a dangerous road for people to ride their bicycles on. I have tried it. I do not want another hip replacement so I avoid that stretch of road. There is no footpath, walkway or cycleway on that road. The member for Lake Macquarie, agreeing with the member for Swansea, spoke of the long history of crashes on the site—76 since 2008. It clearly indicates that this is a dangerous road for people and it is going to become more dangerous with a growing population and the new Bunnings that is being built and should be open some time this year.

As the member for Lake Macquarie stated, it is an important State road that is an important rail corridor between people that live in Minmi, Maryland and the city. That should not be underestimated. My purpose is not only to bring this to the attention of the Minister for Roads so he can be sympathetic towards allocating funding to Newcastle City Council for this road, but also to raise the issue yet again with Newcastle City Council. This is a message to Newcastle City Council: This is a priority road. Do not place it low on the priority list. The commuters of the western suburbs exist and they are ratepayers. Sometimes Newcastle City Council forgets that they exist and that they are ratepayers. Newcastle City Council must cast its glance wider. The Liberal and Independent councillors must look to the people of Wallsend and their plight and be sympathetic towards the needs of the commuters in the western suburbs in the same way as they are to those in the city. The councillors should look at finding ways to reprioritise funding to upgrade Minmi Road and build a walkway-cycleway for the benefit of all of its ratepayers in the western suburbs, because they deserve it. I ask members to support the motion.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 22

Mr Barr	Mr Hoenig	Mr Robertson
Ms Burney	Ms Hornery	Ms Tebbutt
Ms Burton	Mr Lynch	Ms Watson
Mr Collier	Dr McDonald	Mr Zangari
Mr Daley	Ms Mihailuk	
Mr Furolo	Mr Park	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Greenwich	Mr Piper	Mr Amery
Ms Hay	Mr Rees	Mr Lalich

Noes, 60

Mr Anderson	Mr George	Mr Piccoli
Mr Aplin	Ms Gibbons	Mr Provest
Mr Baird	Ms Goward	Mr Roberts
Mr Barilaro	Mr Grant	Mr Rohan
Mr Bassett	Mr Gulaptis	Mrs Sage
Mr Baumann	Mr Hartcher	Mr Sidoti
Ms Berejiklian	Mr Hazzard	Mrs Skinner
Mr Bromhead	Mr Holstein	Mr Smith
Mr Brookes	Mr Humphries	Mr Speakman
Mr Casuscelli	Mr Issa	Mr Spence
Mr Conolly	Mr Kean	Mr Stokes
Mr Constance	Dr Lee	Mr Toole
Mr Cornwell	Mr Maguire	Ms Upton
Mrs Davies	Mr Marshall	Mr Webber
Mr Doyle	Mr Notley-Smith	Mr R. C. Williams
Mr Edwards	Mr O'Dea	Mrs Williams
Mr Elliott	Mr O'Farrell	
Mr Evans	Mr Page	
Mr Flowers	Ms Parker	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Fraser	Mr Patterson	Mr Rowell
Mr Gee	Mr Perrottet	Mr J. D. Williams

Question resolved in the negative.

Motion negatived.

ARMIDALE TAFE CAMPUS AND COMMUNITY CABINET MEETING

Mr ADAM MARSHALL (Northern Tablelands) [12.49 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) Notes the successful hosting by the city of Armidale of the community Cabinet meeting on Monday 26 August 2013.
- (2) Commends the Premier and the Deputy Premier for taking the Cabinet to Armidale.
- (3) Acknowledges the participation of the people of Northern Tablelands and Armidale in the Cabinet meeting and their considered and thoughtful questions to Ministers covering issues important to country people.
- (4) Acknowledges the official opening by the Premier and the Minister for Education of the new \$7.9 million state-of-the-art educational facilities at the Armidale TAFE campus.
- (5) Congratulates Alison Wood, the Director of TAFE New England Institute, and Peter Fahey, Operations Manager of the Armidale TAFE campus, on their dedication to ensuring that the best training is made available to the people of Armidale and the Northern Tablelands.

It was with great pride that I was able to host the Premier, the Deputy Premier and all of their ministerial colleagues in Armidale just a little over three months after my election to this Parliament. It was a great day for Armidale and all of the Northern Tablelands. More than 250 people attended the Armidale Ex-Services Memorial Club to listen to presentations and, more importantly, to put questions to the Ministers directly. We got through 20 questions at that Cabinet meeting, asked by 10 males and 10 females. The questions were very considered and thoughtful. Having been in this place for only three months at that time, I commended members of the public at the meeting for the standard of their questions. I commented that I thought people at that forum asked better questions of the Ministers than members in this Parliament do during question time.

Mr Andrew Gee: Something in the water.

Mr ADAM MARSHALL: There is something in the water in the Northern Tablelands; the member for Orange is dead right. Everything I have seen in the ensuing six months has only confirmed my view that the

people of the Northern Tablelands asked far more thoughtful, considered and important questions about more relevant issues for country New South Wales than I hear in this Chamber during question time. During the visit the Premier and the Minister for Education opened the \$7.9 million state-of-the-art educational facility, M Block, at the Armidale campus. It is a magnificent facility—a multipurpose commercial kitchen incorporating a fully commercial bakery, a fully equipped training restaurant and a practice bar, which provides a broad range of training options for the hospitality sector. It is a burgeoning sector throughout regional New South Wales, particularly in Armidale, given the cosmopolitan nature of the city, the university city, and the educational and cultural hub that it is for northern inland.

Mr Andrew Gee: The Athens of the north.

Mr ADAM MARSHALL: It is the best city in the north. The member for Orange is dead right again.

Mr Andrew Gee: The Athens of the north.

Mr ADAM MARSHALL: I was not going to say the Athens of the north, but I thank the member for Orange for that interjection. That facility not only has absolutely first-class, brilliant equipment that enables the students to run a fully commercial kitchen and bar facilities where members of the public can go and sample some of the fruits of the labours of the students, but it is also equipped with a fully commercial-grade gymnasium and massage clinic, which enables students from across the New England and north-west areas to develop the practical skills required in those industries. This is TAFE's response to the demands of industry and business in the Northern Tablelands and across the New England area, which want to see more skilled people turned out in those areas. Hence, TAFE and the Government have responded with an investment in these facilities.

The centre also includes a state-of-the-art film and television laboratory. While the Premier and the Minister for Education were touring the facility the students were working on producing a film to commemorate the eightieth anniversary of a huge fire event in Armidale in which two firefighters tragically lost their lives. It was the first time that the Medal for Conspicuous Bravery for the NSW Fire Brigades was struck and eight medals were awarded to firefighters, two of them posthumously. The facility expands the training opportunities for communities throughout the Northern Tablelands and surrounding regions and six months after its opening it attracts students from across New South Wales into the city of Armidale to participate in the practical components of their programs in film and television, fitness, massage and, importantly, allied health. The facility contains a sustainable waste area to reduce landfill and to demonstrate new innovations to local industry.

I acknowledge the efforts of Alison Wood, the Director of TAFE New England Institute. She does a magnificent job and I am very saddened to hear that shortly we will lose her because she is returning to Ultimo in Sydney. She has done a magnificent job leading TAFE and she has been ably assisted by the Project Officer in the Directorate Unit, Lyn Rickard, and by the Operations Manager for Armidale TAFE campus, Peter Fahey. All three of them have definitely left their mark at the Armidale campus in this new facility. It was fantastic to have in attendance at the community Cabinet meeting the Premier, the Deputy Premier and all the Cabinet members, including the Minister for Environment and Heritage, who is present in the Chamber. She fielded her fair share of questions on the day from members of the public. Those in attendance were interested in what is happening in State Parliament and in the State Government initiatives to improve infrastructure and investment for people in rural and regional New South Wales.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields) [12.56 p.m.]: I am pleased that the Cabinet went to Armidale and that some members of the public asked brilliant questions of the Ministers. I wonder how many of those questions concerned Armidale Hospital. I ask the member for Northern Tablelands in reply to inform the House how many questions the Minister for Health was asked and how many of those questions received an accurate answer. I have a question for the Minister for Health: What is the Minister going to do to upgrade Armidale Hospital funding? I asked the Minister the following question on 27 March last year:

When did the Government last apply for federal funding to increase the hospital size to that of a full teaching hospital?

The reply I received on 1 May last year stated:

The Government has committed \$10 million in capital funds towards the redevelopment of Armidale Hospital contingent on federal funding from Round Five of the Health and Hospitals Fund process.

Mr John Barilaro: A total of \$10 million committed by this Government and you sat on your hands for 16 years.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: We actually considerably upgraded Armidale Hospital. This hospital requires a \$50 million investment, but the current Minister for Health prevented it from applying for Round Four of the Health and Hospitals Fund. To make things even worse, the Minister for Health then misled the Parliament by saying that the previous application was outside the criteria. That is complete rubbish. Michael Lorenzo wrote to the Minister and begged to be allowed to apply for a \$40 million upgrade under a future Health and Hospitals Fund. That is on the public record after it was obtained under freedom of information by Tony Windsor.

This local health district was prevented by this Government from applying for that vital funding and the funding was allocated to other hospitals. That is a dereliction of duty. The Minister for Health should have come clean to the people of Armidale at the time as to why this hospital was prevented from applying to the Health and Hospitals Fund for this redevelopment. The Minister now holds out a fifth round of the Health and Hospitals Fund. Well good luck, because the Federal Government has indicated that it is not going to put a lot of money into hospital infrastructure.

Mr Adam Marshall: Because you guys spent all the money. They have got no money left for the hospitals fund.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: As the member for Northern Tablelands says, we have no money left for the Health and Hospitals Fund but the Federal budget is well and truly able to provide adequate funds for health care. I ask all members: What price do you put on health care for the people of Armidale? Armidale Hospital is the most important hospital in the State when it comes to rural health. That is because Armidale Hospital is the only hospital with its own clinical school.

[Interruption]

Despite the interjection of the member for Orange, the medical students at Orange are from the University of Sydney. The medical students at Armidale are from the University of New England. They are rural students who will go to rural positions if there are suitable hospitals. However, the situation gets even worse. The Minister has refused to come clean about why difficulties have been experienced in staffing Armidale Hospital with specialists. Dr Ian Rewell prepared a very detailed report on the reasons why medical specialists were leaving Armidale. The Minister refused a request made under the Government Information (Public Access) Act for a copy of the report. The matter is now on appeal and we are yet to hear. Every person in Armidale needs to know why the report has not even been shown to the doctors who gave evidence to Dr Rewell's inquiry into why some of their colleagues had left.

For a young doctor there is no better town in which to start a practice than Armidale. All the medical staff are of a high standard and the nursing staff in particular are extremely good. Young doctors and medical students should be coming to Armidale to make a future because it is a great town with enormous potential. It could only be improved if this Government were to fund the hospital expansion that is vital for the future of health care in Armidale and which will support the University of New England medical school. Armidale paediatricians Keith Power, Catherine Wiles and Liz Rood are among three of the best in the State. Last time I was at Armidale a resident who was on rotation from Newcastle gave a brilliant presentation about a medical problem. The presentation was as good as any seen at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital.

Armidale has a very high standard of medical student and junior doctor as well as a great coterie of highly qualified senior doctors. In addition, the nurses are extraordinary and incredibly committed. They are used to working with less medical support because Armidale Hospital is smaller than a major Sydney hospital. They have learnt to be independent and they are extremely good and very dedicated to the local community.

Mr Adam Marshall: We've just put seven new nurses in.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: The extra nurses are employed on the basis of the award signed in 2010 by the Keneally Government. If the member for Northern Tablelands really believed in providing new nurses and if Government members were serious they would give the Armidale nurses what they want, which is nurse to patient ratios adequate to meet demand in the emergency departments.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Gareth Ward): Order! Government members will come to order. The member for Macquarie Fields will be heard in silence.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: The nurses are right when they ask: What price safe patient care? I bet the Minister has been asked that question and that she gave a similar answer to the one I received, which was meaningless. If the Minister was serious she would have committed to the long-term upgrade of the hospital that is vital to the future health of the people of Armidale and northern New South Wales. A major teaching hospital would be an important centre for all northern New South Wales and it would support the excellent expansion of Tamworth. It is about time that the Minister came clean and said why they were prevented from applying last time and when she will allow them to apply again.

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

COMMITTEE ON LAW AND SAFETY

Report: Driver Licence Disqualification Reform

Question—That the House take note of the report—proposed.

Mr JOHN BARILARO (Monaro) [1.04 p.m.]: The Committee on Law and Safety report entitled, "Driver licence disqualification reform," was tabled in this House on 21 November 2013. The inquiry raised a number of significant issues concerning the complexities of the current laws on unauthorised driving offences and how this has adversely impacted on a range of community groups to date. The committee's report has recommended comprehensive reform of these laws.

A key issue the inquiry highlighted was the prevalence of unauthorised driving offences. In 2012 these offences were the third most common principal offences of which individuals were found guilty in the Local Court. Other key issues were: the current penalties and licence disqualifications can be disproportionate to the seriousness of the offences; the limited discretion courts have to determine licence disqualification periods; the complexities of the Habitual Traffic Offenders Scheme; the impacts of lengthy disqualification periods and licence suspensions and cancellations for fine default on particular sectors of the community; and the difficulties some communities face in obtaining a licence in the first place.

In 2012, 694 individuals were sentenced to full-time imprisonment for unauthorised driving offences. The committee's report shows that some of the disqualification periods and penalties for unauthorised driving offences, which include fines and imprisonment, are disproportionate to the seriousness of these offences. Some unauthorised driving offences carry penalties and disqualification periods that are similar to or greater than offences such as drink-driving and certain dangerous driving offences. Under the current system licence disqualification periods are mandatory for unauthorised driving offences. This means that the disqualification period specified for the relevant offence will apply irrespective of the circumstances of the particular case. Courts have little to no discretion to impose a shorter disqualification period but this is not the case for other road traffic offences such as drink-driving offences or negligent driving occasioning death or grievous bodily harm.

Furthermore, the committee received evidence that licence disqualification periods for unauthorised driving offences are cumulative. That is, if an offender is serving a two-year disqualification and is convicted of a subsequent offence that carries a further two-year disqualification, the second disqualification period will not commence until after the first period has been served. This often results in lengthy disqualification periods, with some individuals being disqualified for more than 10 or 20 years. The committee heard that these disqualification periods do not always act as a deterrent to reoffending.

The report also highlights inquiry participants' concerns with the impacts that lengthy disqualification periods have on community groups. In particular, a number of participants spoke of the importance of having a driver licence in regional, remote and rural communities where people may have little or no access to public transport. Without a driver licence, everyday tasks such as commuting to work, taking children to school, doing the grocery shopping and attending medical and other appointments can be incredibly difficult and sometimes impossible. This can lead to social isolation and financial problems due to difficulties in maintaining employment. It can also result in further interaction with the criminal justice system. The report demonstrates that Aboriginal communities, young people and vulnerable groups are especially affected.

A particular issue that participants raised as contributing to lengthy licence disqualifications for some individuals was licence suspension and cancellation for fine default. Individuals can have their driver licence

suspended for outstanding fines that may or may not be related to driving or driver licensing. The fine may be imposed because the individual failed to vote or because he or she travelled on a train without a ticket. The committee heard alarming statistics that 52 per cent of licences are suspended for non-payment of fines. Those who drive while suspended will have their licence disqualified. The committee recognises the importance of drivers being licensed and that licensed drivers impact positively on the safety of the community and set a standard in protecting the public, and that driver licences can encourage disadvantaged groups to gain fully their independence and sense of wellbeing.

The committee has addressed the problems I have mentioned today. First, the committee has recommended that a right be established for people who have been convicted of road traffic offences to apply to have licence disqualification periods removed or reduced after they have completed a minimum offence-free period. Secondly, the committee has recommended that courts be given more discretion to impose appropriate disqualification periods that take into account the circumstances of the offender's case. Thirdly, the committee has recommended that the current maximum penalties for these offences be reviewed.

The committee also examined the implications of unauthorised driving offences being part of the Habitual Traffic Offenders Scheme. The committee noted that tying these offences in with the Habitual Traffic Offences Scheme can merely exacerbate lengthy disqualification periods for some individuals. The report therefore recommends removing these offences from the scheme. The report also recommends introducing vehicle sanctions for those who repeatedly drive while disqualified and, crucially, that further research be carried out to determine whether vehicle sanctions should be imposed by the police, the courts, or both. The committee's recommendations seek to improve the lives of those who are disproportionately affected by the current unauthorised driving offences system while also ensuring that offenders who are a risk to public safety can be given serious penalties and lengthy licence disqualifications.

In conclusion, I thank all those who took part in the inquiry. The committee is grateful to those who gave excellent evidence on short notice, given the speed with which the committee needed to produce and table this report. In addition, the evidence assisted the committee greatly with preparing this report and its recommendations. I thank my committee members—the member for Fairfield, the member for Cabramatta and the member for Swansea—for their focus when having to work to such a tight deadline. All members identified the challenges and difficulties faced by many in the community with the current system. I also thank the committee secretariat for, as always, carrying the load and offering fantastic support not only to me as Chair but also to all members. Most importantly, I acknowledge their professionalism, conception and work ethic.

Mr GUY ZANGARI (Fairfield) [1.10 p.m.]: I acknowledge my fellow members of the Legislative Assembly Committee on Law and Safety: the member for Monaro, the member for Swansea and the member for Cabramatta. The committee was tasked with inquiring into and reporting on whether or not it is appropriate to reform the law related to unauthorised driving offences, including driving while the licence is disqualified, cancelled or suspended; the licence is cancelled or suspended due to fine default; and having never been licensed in the first place. Following the committee's investigation, we made 15 recommendations to the Government. The recommendations include that the New South Wales Government establish a right for those who have been convicted of road traffic offences to apply to have the disqualification period removed or reduced after having completed a minimum offence-free period, administered by the New South Wales courts. When determining whether the disqualification period should be removed, the courts should consider the individual's character, conduct, the nature of the offence, public safety and any other relevant circumstance.

The committee further recommended that the New South Wales Government amend the Act in relation to the Habitual Traffic Offences Scheme to remove the unauthorised driving offences referred to in sections 53 (3) and 54 (1) (3) and (4); that the Government introduce amendments to the Road Transport Act 2013 to specify that offences dealt with under section 10 of the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act 1999 do not count towards a Habitual Traffic Offender Declaration; that the Government review the Habitual Traffic Offenders Scheme as it applies to the remaining relevant offences to determine whether or not the scheme should be abolished; and that the Government introduce amendments to the Road Transport Act 2013 to remove mandatory licence disqualification periods for unauthorised driving offences and replace them with automatic minimum licence disqualification periods.

The committee also recommended that the Government ensure that when prescribing minimum and default disqualification periods, driving while disqualified is treated as more serious than driving while a licence is suspended or cancelled or while having never been licensed; that licence disqualification periods run from the date of conviction unless otherwise ordered by the court; that the maximum penalties for unauthorised driving

offences be reviewed; and that vehicle sanctions for those who repeatedly drive while disqualified be introduced. However, the Government should take into account whether vehicle sanctions may cause undue hardship to particular offenders; the extent to which offenders pose a serious risk to community safety; any impacts on third parties who may have the vehicle, have an interest in it or rely on it against the proposed sanction; and any other relevant matter. For repeat offenders who drive while disqualified, the possibility of confiscation of numberplates or vehicles for up to three months, but not vehicle forfeiture, should be considered. I thank everyone involved in this report and special thanks go to the secretariat staff, as well as the community members who participated in the inquiry. Once again I thank the committee members, particularly the Chair, the member for Monaro. I commend the report to the House.

Mr GARRY EDWARDS (Swansea) [1.14 p.m.]: I speak in debate on the recent inquiry undertaken by the Legislative Assembly Committee on Law and Safety relating to laws governing unauthorised driving offences and whether said laws should be reformed. The inquiry culminated in the committee submitting 15 recommendations to the Government in relation to the current unauthorised driving offences laws. I thank my fellow members of the committee, the member for Monaro, the member for Fairfield, the member for Cabramatta and the member for Wollondilly, the committee staff and the many witnesses who appeared before us.

In 2012 unauthorised driving offences were the third most common principal offences of which offenders were found guilty in the New South Wales Local Court after driving offences such as speeding, drink-driving and assault. In that year 694 individuals were sentenced to full-time imprisonment for unauthorised driving offences. This number represents significant costs to the criminal justice system through the prosecution and management of these offenders. There are a number of key issues of concern relating to penalties for unauthorised drivers. Some unauthorised driving offences carry penalties and disqualification periods that are similar to, or greater than, those for offences such as drink-driving and certain dangerous driving offences. However, unauthorised drivers are not always unsafe drivers and hence unauthorised driving offences generally do not pose the same risk to public safety as offences such as drink-driving and dangerous driving.

Unauthorised driving offences do not have the same level of discretion in our courts because licence disqualification periods are mandatory for unauthorised driving offences. The only discretion a court can impose on offences such as these is dismissing the matter under section 10 of the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act 1999. However, this is not appropriate in all cases, especially for repeat offenders. By contrast, not all road traffic offences carry mandatory disqualifications. Drink-driving offences, negligent driving occasioning death or grievous bodily harm, and driving in a furious or reckless manner or at a dangerous speed do not carry mandatory licence disqualifications. Courts have more power to impose a suitable disqualification period.

Road traffic offences are also usually concurrent, while unauthorised driving offences are cumulative, which can have far-reaching impacts on a person's life. Unauthorised driving offences can result in some offenders not only receiving fines and/or imprisonment but also serving very lengthy disqualification periods, in some cases for more than a decade. Most adults need a driver licence. The importance of having a driver licence, particularly in regional, rural and remote communities which may have little or no access to public transport is paramount. Without a driver licence everyday tasks such as commuting to work, taking children to school and attending medical and other appointments can become very difficult. This can lead to social isolation, financial problems, further interaction with the criminal justice system and a sense of hopelessness. Aboriginal communities, young people and vulnerable groups are other sectors of the community that are particularly affected by the current laws.

Another concern relating to the current laws regarding unauthorised driving is the fact that the State Debt Recovery Office can direct Roads and Maritime Services to suspend a driver licence if an individual has outstanding fines, and these fines could be not only for traffic offences but also for failing to vote in an election. Those who then drive while suspended will have their licence disqualified. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

The committee has made a number of recommendations to reform the law relating to unauthorised driving offences to ensure that courts have more discretion to impose appropriate disqualification periods that take into account the circumstances of the offender's case—penalties and disqualification periods for these offences are proportionate to the offence. Unauthorised driving offences will no longer be part of the Habitual Traffic Offenders Scheme, vehicle sanctions are available as a possible penalty for those who repeatedly drive while disqualified, and offenders who have served a minimum offence-free period will have the opportunity to apply to the court for it to consider whether it is appropriate to remove their outstanding disqualification.

The committee's recommendations, if implemented, will ensure that offenders receive penalties and disqualification periods that more appropriately suit the severity of their offence. The courts will have the discretion to impose a serious penalty and a lengthy disqualification period where someone is a serial and wilful offender who poses a significant risk to public safety. The committee considers that these recommendations will assist in minimising the significant number of unauthorised driving offences each year and will address some of the impacts of lengthy disqualifications on the community.

Mr NICK LALICH (Cabramatta) [1.19 p.m.]: I acknowledge my fellow members of the Legislative Assembly Committee on Law and Safety: the chairman, Mr John Barilaro, Mr Garry Edwards and Mr Guy Zangari. The committee's task was to inquire into and report on whether it is appropriate to reform the law related to unauthorised driving offences including driving while a licence is disqualified, cancelled or suspended, a licence is cancelled or suspended due to a fine default, and a driver never having been licensed. Following an investigation, the committee made 15 recommendations. My speech will focus on recommendations I consider to be important. The committee recommended that the New South Wales Government establish a right for those who have been convicted of road traffic offences to apply to have licence disqualification periods removed or reduced after they have completed a minimum offence-free period, and that the scheme be administered by the New South Wales courts.

The committee also recommended that the New South Wales Government, in establishing the right to apply to the court and the relevant offence-free period, balance the possible impacts on court workloads of the decision. We all know that New South Wales courts are inundated with work that concerns more serious offences than those related to driving, such as driving without a licence. We must remember that many driving offences are committed in country areas where the public safety aspect is minor compared with the public safety aspect of driving offences in areas with large populations. It is often the case that drivers are caught out on country roads when they are travelling to work sites or between farms, but they need their driver licence to maintain their employment. In country areas, distances are very great and time lines are imperative.

The Government should also balance the possible impacts of the level of seriousness of different road traffic offences and of providing an incentive for offenders to be of good behaviour during the licence disqualification period. Essentially, maintaining good behaviour means that drivers do not commit other driving or alcohol offences during a period of disqualification. The impacts of penalties should be taken into account when relatively minor driving offences are being considered. Offences related to driving while never having been licensed could be considered to be more serious than driving while a licence has been disqualified, cancelled or suspended, if offenders have not done driver training and have not passed a driving test. But in country areas, drivers sometimes are forced into driving when their licence has been disqualified, cancelled or suspended because of the tyranny of distance and the pressure of time constraints.

The committee also recommended that the New South Wales Government ensure, in determining whether a licence disqualification period should be removed, that the courts consider the character of the individual, the individual's conduct since the original licence disqualification period was imposed, the nature of the offence, public safety and any relevant circumstances surrounding the offence. In conclusion, I thank the committee staff, without whose support the committee would have been unable to compile the report as efficiently as it might wish to do.

Mr John Barilaro: And the chairman.

Mr NICK LALICH: Of course I thank the top chairman of the committee, Mr John Barilaro, without whose help the committee would have been unable to arrive at its recommendations and inform the Parliament of the effect of legislation.

Mr CLAYTON BARR (Cessnock) [1.23 p.m.]: I read the "Driver licence disqualification reform" report of the Legislative Assembly Committee on Law and Safety with interest because in regional areas of New South Wales, such as Cessnock and other places farther north, south and west, the impact of the loss of a driver licence is more significant for people in those areas than it is for people who live in cities. During my term as a member of this Parliament, I have had conversations in my electorate office with approximately seven young men or women who have lost their licences for various reasons, such as P-plate drivers having very few points or leeway to begin with and fully licensed drivers making a mistake and being penalised for low-range drink-driving. I do not condone drink-driving at all, but the impact of the loss of a driver licence in the Cessnock electorate could mean that drivers also lose their job, their income, continued gainful employment and prosperity. In those circumstances, people are faced with a choice of complying with laws and penalties

imposed upon them or losing their job, their income, their home and possibly their family. The situation can lead to disqualified drivers becoming habitual offenders. The impact of the penalty on people who live in country areas is unbalanced and unfair compared to the impact on people in city areas.

I spend a fair bit of time in Sydney and I enjoy the use of public transport. The reality is most places in Sydney can be accessed by public transport with minimal inconvenience unlike regional areas of New South Wales that have no public transport facilities. In the Cessnock electorate there would not be a form of public transport that goes within five or 10 kilometres of 90 per cent of the electorate I represent. That highlights how unfair and unfortunate the situation is currently. I recall very vividly when I was a child that when some people lost their licences, they could make an application for a restricted licence that would allow them to travel directly from their home to their place of work and return. I am not sure whether that concession still exists, but if it does, I believe it applies only in exceptional circumstances. I have made applications for that concession on behalf of the young people who have visited my electorate office, but all the applications were rejected.

In regional areas of New South Wales where public transport is minimal, if it exists at all, application of the laws of the State and rules relating to driver disqualification make it obvious that the impacts of a loss of a driver licence in country areas compared to the loss of a driver licence in city areas are vastly different. We are not comparing apples to apples; we are dealing with two entirely different sets of circumstances. I welcome the committee's report. I hope that the Government will soon adopt the committee's recommendations.

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

Report noted.

LEGISLATION REVIEW COMMITTEE

Report: Legislation Review Digest No. 50/55

Question—That the House take note of the report—proposed.

Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD (Myall Lakes) [1.26 p.m.]: It is with pleasure that I participate in the take-note debate on the report of the Legislation Review Committee, Legislation Review Digest No. 50/55, which was tabled on 25 February 2014. The committee considers any bill that is introduced to Parliament and reports to both Houses of Parliament on whether any bill trespasses unduly on personal rights and liberties, or makes rights, liberties or obligations unduly dependent upon insufficiently defined administrative powers, or makes rights, liberties or obligations unduly dependent upon non-reviewable decisions, or inappropriately delegates legislative powers, or insufficiently subjects the exercise of legislative power to parliamentary scrutiny. In the fiftieth digest of the Fifty-fifth Parliament, the committee reported on eight bills. The committee made no comment on one of those bills, which is the Protection of the Environment Operations Amendment (Prosecutions) Bill 2013.

In relation to the Bail (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2013, the committee considered that legislation should commence on a fixed date or on assent whereas that bill does not. The committee also considered the Child Protection Legislation Amendment Bill 2013 and the right of children to be restored to a family unit in appropriate circumstances. The committee noted that a court has discretion to make decisions outside certain time frames and made no further comment on that aspect of the bill. The committee noted that the amendments affecting parent responsibility contracts will have retrospective effect. The committee always comments on legislation that has retrospective effect. The committee also examined the Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Amendment Bill 2013 and noted that it exempts the Surveillance Devices Act 2007 from operating in a prisoner's cell call alarm system, and that that may be considered to be an interference with a prisoner's privacy. The committee also considered procedural fairness, the right of reply and prejudice when there is a prohibition on disclosing information relating to the content of a report or document.

The committee also examined the Crimes and Other Legislation Amendment (Assault and Intoxication) Bill 2014 and the Liquor Amendment Bill 2014 and made a number of comments, although none has been referred to Parliament for further consideration other than mandatory sentencing. The committee merely stated that mandatory sentencing as proposed is always noted by the committee and referred to Parliament for its further consideration. The committee looked at the Mining Amendment (ICAC Operations Jasper and Acacia)

Bill 2014 and noted that this followed the recommendations and findings of the Independent Commission Against Corruption which formed the basis for cancelling the exploration licences in respect of Doyle's Creek, Mount Penny and Glendon Brook. The committee noted that cancelling the licences prior to the outcome of legal proceedings may be premature. The committee also noted that licences are cancelled under the bill without compensation. Considering the importance of and the background to this legislation the committee made no further comment and did not refer it to Parliament.

In relation to the Mining and Petroleum Legislation Amendment (Public Interest) Bill 2013 the committee looked at the fact that mining rights and petroleum titles may be cancelled without compensation. The committee also noted that the bill allows the Government to cancel mining rights and petroleum titles if it is in the public interest, but "public interest" is not defined in the bill. In relation to the Public Interest Disclosures Amendment (Extension of Protections) Bill 2013 the committee noted that the bill broadens the offence of taking detrimental action against a person in reprisal for a public interest disclosure to capture a broader range of behaviour, and increases the maximum penalty for the offence. The committee also said the bill may violate a person's right to the presumption of innocence, in that the presumption of guilt is shifted to the person who has taken action against a whistle-blower. I commend the digest to the House.

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

[Acting-Speaker (Mr Gareth Ward) left the chair at 1.31 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of Motions

Private Members' Business Notices of Motions (for Bills) given.

QUESTION TIME

[Question time commenced at 2.18 p.m.]

WALLARAH 2 COAL PROJECT AND MR NICK DI GIROLAMO

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON: My question is directed to the Premier. Given he was forced to correct the record twice for misleading the Parliament yesterday, why does he claim he only attended a meeting on 28 February 2012 with lobbyist Nick Di Girolamo and Kores to apologise for not previously meeting with them, when by his own admission they did not request a meeting with him on Wallarah 2 until November 2012?

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Wrong on both counts, but let me take the House through it. We need to understand that the Wallarah 2 Coal Project process began in 2009 under the former Government and the corrupt part 3A process.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will come to order. Those members who continue to interject will be placed on calls to order.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Just one day before Labor went into caretaker mode before the 2011 election, a decision was made on the project by the then planning Minister, Tony Kelly—another of the Labor Ministers found corrupt by the Independent Commission Against Corruption. That decision flew in the face of assessments made by the independent Planning Assessment Commission.

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Revelations at the Independent Commission Against Corruption about that decision and other decisions by Ministers Obeid and Macdonald saw my Government, when elected, receive requests for meetings to discuss our merit-based planning assessment process—that independent arms-length process that I have spoken about over the past two days.

Ms Linda Burney: That is going well.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Pluto, the smallest planet—the member for Canterbury—accepts that there is such a process we put in place after the election. I thank her for that.

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind the member for Canterbury that this is not a debate or an argument.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Kores and the Korean ambassador were concerned at the processes that had operated under Labor. I did not agree to any meeting, whether from Kores or the ambassador, after the change of government. On 13 October 2011 the proponent, Wallarah 2 Coal Project, requested the director general's requirements. On 12 January the director general's requirements were issued. On 17 February Mr Di Girolamo requested a meeting and advised that his company had been placed on the New South Wales Government Register of Lobbyists. That meeting was declined.

As I informed the House, on 28 February, during his visit to Sydney, I dropped in for five minutes to a meeting between the president of Kores, Mr Kim Shin-Jong, and the Minister for Resources and Energy. Attendees at the meeting in the Minister's office included his staff, representatives of Kores and their adviser, Mr Di Girolamo. It is not unusual for me as Premier to attend meetings to meet with organisations and individuals who invest in this State. As I said in the House yesterday, I dropped in to say hello to the president and to apologise for the fact that I had previously not been able to see him because of those requests for meetings that I had rejected, including the two that were subsequent that I mentioned in the House yesterday.

Mr John Robertson: How do you apologise in advance?

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Because the meeting requests that I referred to—

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Yesterday I referred to two that occurred after this meeting and what I have just said is that I had meeting requests from the time we came to government because there were some out there that still believed that it was all about Labor's winks, Labor's nods and Labor's mates.

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: There were successive requests by Kores and the Korean Ambassador to meet, none of which were agreed to by me. What was agreed to by me was to drop by and say hello to the president as he was visiting Sydney, in part to apologise for the fact that I was not meeting. It is not unusual, as I said, for me to drop by Minister's meetings at their request. At the time of the drop-by neither my staff nor I were aware that Mr Di Girolamo was not on the lobbyist register. It was only after media inquiries in March 2013 that the office became aware that Mr Di Girolamo's declaration that Western Resources was on the register at the time of the drop-by may have been incorrect. My then chief of staff immediately informed the Director General of the Department of Premier and Cabinet. The director general found Western Resources applied to be on the register on 17 February 2012 and was listed on the register on 6 March 2012. The director general wrote to the parties, including the then Minister, and Mr Di Girolamo to remind them of their obligations under the code. I also reminded my staff about the importance of complying with the code at all times. Before and since that five-minute meeting I have had no meetings with Kores or any of their representatives in relation to the Wallarah 2 coal project.

Ms Noreen Hay: What about drop-ins?

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: No, not at all. What is extraordinary about this is that yesterday I was condemned by those opposite for not interfering and I am being accused of the opposite today but the fact remains that this matter is still part of an arms-length independent approach being undertaken by the Planning Assessment Commission—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Maroubra will cease interjecting.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL:—which will weigh social, economic and environmental issues in making this decision.

Mr Michael Daley: Guarantee.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will come to order. I remind members that interjections are disorderly at all times.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: No, that is not what I said.

ALCOHOL- AND DRUG-RELATED VIOLENCE

Mr BRUCE NOTLEY-SMITH: My question is addressed to the Premier. What steps are being taken for the first weekend of the New South Wales Government's new alcohol restrictions in the Sydney central business district and Kings Cross?

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: This Government is determined, as we have made clear in recent weeks, to crack down on drug-and alcohol-fuelled violence and improve safety for people who come into the Sydney central business district to have an enjoyable night out. A number of recent violent and tragic incidents demanded strong action and we make no apologies for the fact that we have introduced a range of tough new measures, including 1.30 a.m. venue lockouts and 3.00 a.m. last drinks in the Sydney CBD Entertainment Precinct and Kings Cross.

There is no doubt this will be a challenging weekend for police as people get used to the new lockouts and the last drinks laws. The new laws came into force on Monday. Under the changes licensed venues in the CBD Entertainment Precinct and at Kings Cross will have 1.30 a.m. lockouts imposed. That means no new patrons will be admitted after that time. Those venues that continue to operate will have to stop serving alcohol at 3.00 a.m. In addition, all New South Wales bottle shops, liquor stores and venues will have to stop selling takeaway alcohol after 10.00 p.m.

Police have not reported any major issues so far but the first major test of these new laws will be this weekend. Hundreds of thousands of people are expected to head into the city for the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Parade on Saturday. I think last year the estimate was that 29,000 interstate and overseas visitors came to Sydney for that. Many will stay in and around the city afterwards, adding to the already large crowds who head into the central business district on the weekends. Police have been quite open about the challenges that officers will face as the lockouts are put to the test this weekend. I expect there to be teething problems. I understand it will take some time for people to be aware that this new system operates, particularly those coming from interstate and overseas, and it will take quite some time for people to adjust to these new changes. But I want this to be clear: Police will be out in force this weekend, cracking down hard on those who do the wrong thing.

Extra officers will flood the streets, conducting high-visibility operations across the central business district and Kings Cross. On Saturday night hundreds of extra police will be on duty to deal with the huge Mardi Gras crowds. I am delighted to say that in the lead-up to Mardi Gras this year we were able to put in place a memorandum of understanding with NSW Police in the hope that we ensure we will not see a repeat of some of the incidents we have seen in the past. NSW Police have always supported this event and it is important that this event continue to receive practical support from NSW Police. Police will also be running covert operations on Saturday night, with plainclothes officers observing the serving practices and levels of intoxication in pubs and clubs, and taking necessary action when breaches are committed. Police will be joined by officers from the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing, who will be conducting compliance checks to ensure venues adhere to the new laws.

Licensees have been warned that if they fail to comply with the new conditions it can result in fines of up to \$11,000 and/or imprisonment of up to 12 months, as well as strikes under this Government's three strikes disciplinary scheme. To make sure people are aware of the changes we have rolled out an information and awareness campaign, which has included notifying affected licensees, radio and newspaper advertisements, briefings for industry peak bodies and liquor accords, and flyers and signage for venues. But I say again: I am conscious that not everyone who will be in the city this weekend, particularly those coming from interstate and overseas to enjoy Mardi Gras, may have got the message. There is likely to be a great deal of frustration at the time of the lockouts at 1.30 a.m. and at the times that alcohol will no longer be served.

To assist people getting home free buses are now running every 10 minutes from Kings Cross to the central business district to connect with existing NightRide services on Friday and Saturday nights. The Government has introduced additional NightRide bus services to help people get home to the suburbs after a night out. We expect it will take some time for people and venues to adjust to these laws but the changes we have introduced are designed to make the streets safer for the vast majority of people who do the right thing and

want to have an enjoyable night out in the Sydney central business district or Kings Cross, whether or not it is this Saturday night. I again say that the Mardi Gras is part and parcel of the fabric of this city's events. Last year it was estimated to have contributed \$30 million to the State's economy, with 29,000 interstate and overseas visitors, and we hope that it goes well. We have put in place a memorandum of understanding with police to try to ensure that. We do not walk away from the fact that we are determined to stamp out the unacceptable level of drug-and alcohol-fuelled violence that has been occurring on our streets.

WALLARAH 2 COAL PROJECT AND MR NICK DI GIROLAMO

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: My question is directed to the Premier. Does the Premier admit he breached the Ministerial Code of Conduct by attending a meeting with Wallarah 2 proponent Kores and Nick Di Girolamo before his name even appeared on the Government's Register of Lobbyists?

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: I have already addressed that matter. He applied on the seventeenth and was listed a few days later. I made the point that even though he presented himself as being on the register, he was not when we checked a year later. That matter was investigated by the director general and he has taken the action that I outlined. The alacrity with which we reported the matter after we discovered the breach—

Mr Michael Daley: It is a breach.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: It is a breach by—

Mr Michael Daley: By you.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: —by Mr Di Girolamo in claiming he was on the register.

The SPEAKER: Order! Opposition members will cease interjecting.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: But that stands in stark contrast with the actions of at least one of those opposite—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Canterbury will come to order. The member for Maroubra will come to order. I call the member for Canterbury to order for the first time. She will cease interjecting.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: —at a time of a more serious breach.

Ms Linda Burney: That does not relate to the question.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Canterbury to order for the second time. She will cease interjecting.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: It does relate to the question because it goes to standards.

Ms Linda Burney: Yes, it does.

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Was that the Leader of the Opposition who interjected? Is this the same Leader of the Opposition who when offered a \$3 million bribe offer did not report it to police? The first person he reported it to was Andrew Cornell a couple of years later. Thanks to the *Daily Telegraph* everybody then knew. Let us be clear: As I said on Monday, when issues around electoral donations on the Central Coast came to the attention of the Liberal Party they were reported, and there is now an Independent Commission Against Corruption inquiry centred on those matters. What did the Leader of the Opposition do when he sat in Cabinet and there were allegations on the front page about ministerial colleagues past and present? He did not lift a finger. I will not be lectured by those opposite. I have explained the facts, as I sought to yesterday.

Mr John Robertson: Very poorly.

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

Mr John Robertson: Every time you do so just to distract from your own failings.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the Leader of the Opposition to order for the first time. He will cease interjecting.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: You always play a better tennis game against good players. If I had a poor day yesterday it reflects on those opposite. After three years the Opposition should at least have a strategy. Yesterday I was criticised for standing behind an arms-length independent process by the Planning Assessment Commission in relation to the Kores application—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Cessnock and the member for Maroubra will cease interjecting.

Mr Michael Daley: Point of order: I refer to Standing Order 129. Paragraph 4 of the Government's Lobbyist Code of Conduct is very clear. The Premier has breached his own Government's code of conduct.

The SPEAKER: Order! That is an inappropriate use of documents. There is no point of order. The member for Maroubra will resume his seat.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Having yesterday sought to criticise me for standing behind an independent arms-length process that was put in place to avoid the corruption exercised by those opposite and dealt with by the Independent Commission Against Corruption, today the Opposition is arguing the opposite. The facts are that the decision will be made by the Planning Assessment Commission on the basis of its weighing up environmental, social and economic matters. Those opposite do not accept that Labor's approach to approving these projects no longer exists. There are no longer Labor winks, nods or pay-offs involved in the assessment of major mining projects.

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: This Government scrapped part 3A; Labor corruptly used part 3A. This Government ensures that these projects are assessed by an independent planning commission.

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Under Labor they were determined by Labor Ministers.

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: The Independent Commission Against Corruption is revealing the extent of the corruption involved in that process.

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Projects are now assessed independently on their environmental, social and economic merit.

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Under the former Government these decisions were based on Labor politics and power. This Government always puts the public interest to the fore. Labor always placed the Australian Labor Party's interests to the fore.

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: We increased the Independent Commission Against Corruption's powers and budget. Under the former Government, the Independent Commission Against Corruption commissioners complained to the parliamentary committee about the lack of resources to support their efforts to stamp out corruption.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will come to order.

DEFENCE INDUSTRY

Mr KEVIN ANDERSON: My question is addressed to the Deputy Premier. How is the Government supporting the defence industry in New South Wales?

The SPEAKER: Order! Opposition members who do not want to hear about rural and regional issues can leave the Chamber.

Mr ANDREW STONER: I thank the member for Tamworth for a very good question. Being a regional-based member, Madam Speaker knows how important these issues are to regional economies, jobs and families, unlike the rump of the Labor Party which no longer has any country representation. Members on this side of the House will recall last year when the Government released the New South Wales position paper on defence, which outlines the importance of the defence industry. I know the Opposition is not interested in this but Government members are.

The SPEAKER: Order! Opposition members who continue to interject will be placed on calls to order.

Mr ANDREW STONER: I know that Madam Speaker is aware of the significant defence presence in her region.

The SPEAKER: Order! That is why I am intolerant of interjections.

Mr ANDREW STONER: That naval presence includes HMAS *Albatross*. The defence industry contributes to the New South Wales economy approximately \$5 billion annually, including \$1.4 billion in value-add, and directly employs more than 34,000 people in this great State. We value our defence industries in New South Wales, including the Australian Defence Force Basic Flying Training School located at Tamworth. The member for Tamworth and I revisited this very fine facility late last year. It has been in operation for 20 years, training pilots from the Australian Navy, Army and Air Force and around the world. While we were there we saw some Singaporean pilots learning how to fly. This facility benefits the local economy; it is wonderful to have defence industries of such significance in our State.

Who could forget during the Federal election campaign the debate about defence assets in New South Wales? The Premier and I were out for a stroll towards Mrs Macquarie's Chair—as we do—talking about another economic win for New South Wales—as we do—and who should we bump into but Kevin Rudd. Kevin Rudd was announcing a Federal Labor policy.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is too much audible conversation in the Chamber. The Deputy Premier will be heard in silence.

Mr ANDREW STONER: Kevin Rudd was announcing a Federal Labor policy to strip away one of the mainstays of our defence industries in New South Wales, the naval base. Listen to those opposite.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Monaro will come to order. The Leader of the Opposition will come to order. This is not an opportunity to argue with the Deputy Premier.

Mr ANDREW STONER: Kevin Rudd was like a rabbit in the spotlight when the Premier and I confronted him. He could not give an explanation for what he was doing to New South Wales. He said he had to zip—and zip he did, all the way out of office.

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

Mr ANDREW STONER: We are hearing a lot of noise from those opposite. Funny, there was not a peep when Kevin Rudd wanted to remove the naval base from Garden Island and relocate it in Brisbane. They stood by and were happy to see it go.

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

Mr ANDREW STONER: Courtesy of the Federal Labor Government, we now have another issue with the Department of Defence seeking to let a new contract for the Tamworth Basic Flying Training School.

Tamworth must compete against airports in other States, in particular the Royal Australian Air Force Base at East Sale in Victoria. I am happy to announce that this Government and Tamworth Regional Council are right behind Tamworth's bid for this contract for another 25 years. The contract involves jobs for 100 people in Tamworth and that is why I was happy to announce today that the New South Wales Government will assist with a grant of \$7.86 million under the Regional Industries Investment Fund for the upgrade of the second runway to meet the Department of Defence's requirements and standards. The Government believes that Tamworth has many competitive advantages. In fact, it has perfect flying weather with beautiful clear blue skies. Over the 25 year contract it is estimated that Tamworth will have 2,000 more clear flying days than Sale. [*Extension of time granted.*]

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

Mr ANDREW STONER: Members opposite say "No, no, no" because they do not support Tamworth or the defence industry. The Government believes that Tamworth has competitive advantages, but the second runway must be upgraded. That is why the Government and the council are making a significant contribution to ensure that Tamworth wins this new contract. Retired Lieutenant-General Ken Gillespie, the New South Wales Government's defence adviser, is working to secure the contract with the member for Tamworth and the member for Newcastle, who served the Australian people for a long time in the Royal Australian Air Force and who is now serving the people of New South Wales in this Parliament. The member for Tamworth has been to Canberra to knock on doors and to visit the Defence Materiel Organisation to put the case for Tamworth. In pursuit of a healthy defence industry and a strong regional economy, this Government has put its money where its mouth is and provided \$7.86 million for the upgrade of Tamworth airport.

WALLARAH 2 COAL PROJECT AND MR NICK DI GIROLAMO

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON: I direct my question to the Premier. Given his admission about meetings between him, his Minister and Kores, does he stand by his Government's handling of Wallarah 2 as being at arm's length and his statement that it is not affected by matters relating to the former Minister for Resources and Energy and Nick di Girolamo which are currently before the Independent Commission Against Corruption?

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: The second part of that question is a matter for the Independent Commission Against Corruption. As someone who has always respected that organisation and as a member of a government that has increased the commission's powers and provided it with a record level of funding, I am happy for it to do the job it was established by a former Liberal-Nationals Government to do. If this State is to attract investment and if the community is to have confidence that decisions are made in the public interest—not in the interests of the Labor Party powers as described by the commission in a recent hearing—we need a vigorous and independent process, and that is being delivered by the Independent Commission Against Corruption. I make the point again that it is not unusual for a Premier to drop into meetings at the request of Ministers to meet major investors.

The SPEAKER: Order! Opposition members who continue to interject will be placed on calls to order and removed from the Chamber. I call the member for Maroubra to order for the second time. I call the member for Cessnock to order for the second time.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: I am asked by a variety of Ministers—

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Cessnock to order for the third time. Members will cease interjecting.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: —to speak to peak interests and also to investors in this State. I have made the point that on 17 February 2012, Mr de Girolamo requested a meeting and advised that his company was on the Register of Lobbyists. That meeting request was declined by my office. As I have informed the House, on 28 February, during his visit to Sydney—

Mr John Robertson: Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129, relevance. The question was straightforward. I asked the Premier whether he stands by his statement that the process is at arm's length.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Premier answered the question at the beginning of his response. There is no point of order.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: As I said, on 28 February, during the visit by the president of Kores I dropped into the meeting for five minutes to say hello and to apologise that I had refused earlier requests for meetings. All the requests that I received up to that point from Kores and from the Korean ambassador had been refused, as were the subsequent requests which I detailed yesterday. In fact, the only person I can remember talking to about the project is the Korean consul-general at our first meeting after I was elected. I explained to him the arms-length major assessment process conducted by the Planning Assessment Commission. This Government's consistent message has been that major mining projects will be assessed at arm's length and independently by the Planning Assessment Commission.

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: The commission weighs social, economic and environmental factors. That is an independent process. If anything untoward happens, that is a matter for the Independent Commission Against Corruption. I am absolutely committed to the process put in place by the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, which included the scrapping of part 3A—a corrupt practice used by the Labor Party. The Leader of the Opposition argued yesterday that I should have used part 3A in relation to this project.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Maroubra will come to order. The Leader of the Opposition will come to order. I call the Leader of the Opposition to order for the third time.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: The Coalition made a commitment during the election campaign to put an end to Labor's corrupt part 3A.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Kogarah to order for the first time.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: We did that within the first 100 days we were in office. We overturned Labor's processes for dealing with mining exploration licences and mining approvals.

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: A day before the caretaker period started, a Minister subsequently deemed by the Independent Commission Against Corruption to be corrupt made a decision. Was that decision based on planning merit? No, it was based on the Labor Party's usual approach—it was either about politics or Labor Party interests and powers. This Government put an end to that. Although the Apex Energy coal seam gas exploration application in the southern catchment area was refused by the Planning Assessment Commission, other projects have been approved because they have been assessed by the commission as posing no risk environmentally, socially or economically or, indeed, as being of benefit to the State. That is the system we have in place and it is at arm's length. It involves the Planning Assessment Commission and not a Minister making decisions. It separates the politics from these matters and I stand behind it.

MURRAY-DARLING BASIN INTERGOVERNMENTAL AGREEMENT

Mr DARYL MAGUIRE: I address my question to the Premier. How has the Government helped to secure the future of the Murray-Darling Basin?

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: I thank the member for his question on this historic day for communities across the Murray-Darling Basin and this country. For the first time we are treating the Murray-Darling Basin as a single water system rather than as three systems managed by three different States. For the first time, the interests of farmers and the environment will be managed across the entire length of that magnificent basin system. I was delighted to join the Prime Minister in Canberra this morning to sign the historic Murray-Darling Basin Intergovernmental Agreement. Once again, we have shown that positive outcomes can be achieved for the people of New South Wales by working sensibly and cooperatively with a Federal government.

This agreement has been a long time coming. I am delighted to have finally locked in an agreement that will allow farmers and regional communities to plan for the future with certainty and confidence. The New South Wales Liberals-Nationals approached this agreement determined to protect the interests of the State's farmers and irrigators. Before signing up, we wanted the Federal Government to ensure that the agreement addressed key issues for rural and regional communities whose livelihoods and future depend on the Murray-Darling Basin. Of particular importance was the need for the Commonwealth to give priority to infrastructure investment and the better use of available water over licence buybacks to achieve the lower extraction limits required under the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

As repeatedly championed by the Deputy Premier and the Minister for Primary Industries, New South Wales has always maintained that managing and securing water for the Murray-Darling Basin and infrastructure projects should be prioritised over water buybacks. The agreement approved by Cabinet and signed today in Canberra secures an additional \$80 million for the Murray-Darling Basin over the next 80 years. The president of the Ricegrowers Association, Les Gordon, issued a release today noting that the historic signing was "evidence that the conditions set by New South Wales had been achieved". He rightly applauded the efforts of the Minister for Primary Industries in these negotiations and I join him in praising her for her efforts.

The additional \$80 million in funding secured by this agreement will go towards developing further infrastructure and water management projects, water resource plans and other activities implementing the plan across the State. We have already achieved Federal agreement in recent times to a number of important projects, including improved environmental water delivery at Nimmie Caira and further work on the Menindee Lakes water-saving project. These projects will help substantially to bridge the gap to the Murray-Darling Basin Plan extraction limits. The funding we have secured today will go towards investigating projects that could offset the extraction limit reductions by using water more efficiently. We also want to see limits on buybacks to allow communities and industries time to adjust to the lower volumes available for production.

The Federal Government has now agreed to implement its own cap on water licence buybacks of 1,500 gegalitres. We believe that with the volume of water that the Federal Government has already purchased and with some more infrastructure proposals any further purchases in New South Wales should not be significant. We know that this is a difficult time for the State's farmers. The Murray-Darling Basin agreement will not help farmers battling the current drought, but I am hopeful that it will go some way towards helping farmers prepare for the next one. Farmers now know that governments at both State and Federal levels are working in their best interests and not playing politics on the important issue of water. The Murray-Darling Basin Plan provides a high level, adaptive framework to manage water resources in a coordinated and sustainable way.

We are confident that the Federal Government will work with the New South Wales Government to achieve a balance between environmental, economic and social considerations when implementing the plan. We can all move on now with certainty that the New South Wales Government will be able to work within the Murray-Darling Basin Plan process to ensure that New South Wales' interests are protected and that farmers, irrigators and others can have confidence that the framework is in place for us to manage the whole system across its entire length for the first time in this continent's history. This has to be a genuinely historic day.

WALLARAH 2 COAL PROJECT AND MR NICK DI GIROLAMO

Mr PAUL LYNCH: My question is directed to the Premier. Will the Premier come clean with the House about the full extent of the relationship and contact between him and his office, including current and former staff, with Nick Di Girolamo, who is currently facing corruption allegations before the Independent Commission Against Corruption?

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Most of those issues may well be the subject of the Independent Commission Against Corruption's inquiry and I will not interfere with that. I have revealed again today the process as far as I was concerned. Again I make the point that no meetings took place with Kores and the Korean ambassador. However, I wish to clarify that I did meet with the ambassador in May 2011 to discuss a range of issues and during that meeting the ambassador did raise the issue of Wallarah. But I reiterate that it was independent and at arm's length of the Planning Assessment Commission.

Dr Andrew McDonald: Did you tell them you campaigned against it?

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Macquarie Fields will cease arguing with the Premier.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: I suspect that embassies and consulates follow these matters. If they had followed this matter closely they would have seen two things. First, that we had committed to scrapping part 3A and that following the election we had announced a major project assessment process which ensured that the Planning Assessment Commission, as I have detailed previously, would decide these matters on the basis of social, economic and environmental considerations, not on the basis of any Labor wink, nod or pay-off, as we have seen happen previously. This is an arms-length process that was established by the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure. It is a process that has seen projects approved and projects rejected—

Mr John Robertson: Point of order: I refer to Standing Order 129, relevance.

Mr Brad Hazzard: You are not relevant, you know that.

Mr John Robertson: I love it when you protest, Brad, because then I know I am onto something.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will ignore interjections.

Mr John Robertson: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129, relevance. The question was specifically about relationships and contacts with the Premier, his former staff and Nick Di Girolamo.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Premier is answering the question.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: I repeat what I said yesterday. There were no private meetings with me and Mr Di Girolamo about Wallarah.

Mr John Robertson: It was not about—

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will not argue or debate the issue.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: As I said yesterday, records show no contact between my staff and Mr Di Girolamo on those matters.

HOSPITAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr THOMAS GEORGE: My question is directed to the Minister for Health, and Minister for Medical Research. How is the Government rebuilding our hospital infrastructure to deliver better patient care?

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: I thank the member for Lismore for his question. I am delighted that recently the member for Lismore was able to announce \$100,000 funding to plan for the next stage of the upgrade of Lismore Hospital. That is on top of the \$80 million currently being spent on the redevelopment of Lismore Hospital. I have said frequently that the emergency department in that hospital was probably one of the worst in the State. The former Labor Government should have hung its head in shame for having allowed it to continue.

Ms Cherie Burton: We put a lot of money into it.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: There was no money put into the Lismore Hospital emergency department upgrade.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Kogarah will cease interjecting.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: I am very pleased that this money will significantly upgrade the emergency department at Lismore Hospital.

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

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: Thirty-one treatment spaces will be provided in the new expanded emergency department, as well as an emergency medical unit with 12 treatment spaces, a new ambulance drop-off bay and a new renal dialysis unit. This new tranche of money will go towards planning for the further redevelopment of the hospital. It is all part of the O'Farrell Government's plan to continue rebuilding our hospitals.

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

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: The recently announced money at Lismore is matched by announcements for other hospitals, with \$9 million to be spent across the State on further upgrades. For example, Westmead Hospital will receive \$1 million for planning, which will give that hospital up to 12 new operating theatres, extra inpatient beds and a further expansion of the emergency department. That is on top of the wonderful redevelopment and improvements that have already taken place at the hospital. Hornsby Ku-ring-gai Hospital

will have \$500,000 for the next stage of the hospital's upgrade—on top of the \$120 million worth of work currently underway. We have announced \$600,000 planning money for Goulburn Hospital for major work, which will commence early this year. At Dubbo we have announced \$600,000 extra planning money on top of the \$80 million upgrade that is currently underway at Dubbo Hospital. I know that the member for Dubbo is overwhelmed by letters of support from the clinical staff and residents in Dubbo and surrounding areas. The great redevelopment of Wagga Wagga Hospital was promised for decades by those opposite but was never delivered.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is too much audible conversation in the Chamber. The Minister will be heard in silence.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: Wagga Wagga Hospital has already got \$282 million worth of upgrades underway. We have now announced \$400,000 to carry out stage two of the redevelopment. The upgrade has provided car parking and a mental health facility, and a new acute hospital building is currently underway. I am thrilled that the major work at the hospital is commencing early next year and it is anticipated it will be finished later in the year. We have allocated \$139 million to Campbelltown Hospital. It is an amazing facility, seven storeys high. We were recently on the top of that building to place the topping-out tree.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is too much audible conversation in the Chamber. Members will come to order.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: The clinical staff at the hospital are absolutely thrilled. An additional \$800,000 planning money has been announced to get on with stage two. The cynics on the other side of the House did absolutely nothing to redevelop Campbelltown Hospital, despite it being in Labor's heartland. We have got on with the work at the hospital. We have put forward \$1.8 million in planning money for the next stage of Gosford and Wyong hospitals, and \$1.2 million to progress planning for Sutherland Hospital. We are also getting on with the job of the second redevelopment of St George Hospital. Thanks to the wonderful work of the member for Oatley, Mark Coure, we have the \$39 million emergency department upgrade.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is too much audible conversation in the Chamber. Members will come to order. I call the member for Kiama to order for the first time.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: We have also allocated extra money for the next stage of Blacktown Mount Druitt Hospital and Bankstown-Lidcombe Hospital. Significant progress is also being made at Bega, Kempsey and many other hospitals.

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

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: I am proud of the fact that this Government does not just make promises to upgrade hospitals; it delivers.

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

LOWER HUNTER AIR QUALITY

Mr GREG PIPER: Madam Speaker—

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will come to order. The member for Lake Macquarie will be heard in silence.

Mr GREG PIPER: My question is directed to the Minister for Environment and Heritage. Will the Minister elaborate on her recent media comments relating to the establishment of new air quality initiatives in the lower Hunter, including in western Lake Macquarie, and outline how these measures will address the concerns of residents in that part of Lake Macquarie?

Ms ROBYN PARKER: I thank the member for Lake Macquarie for his question and note his interest in air quality in the Hunter.

Ms Noreen Hay: It's more than you have.

Ms ROBYN PARKER: The member for Wollongong is full of hot air. People in Lake Macquarie are interested in air quality even if people in the Illawarra are not. We are passionate about air quality in the Hunter and we are doing a lot about it. The former Labor Government shut down air quality monitors but we are increasing them. Members opposite should not be proud of their record. I recently announced about \$4 million worth of funding for air quality studies in the Hunter, which was included in the last budget.

The first initiative is the lower Hunter particle characterisation study. This project will collect data from four sites in the lower Hunter over 12 months. I met with a number of community groups and the member for Lake Macquarie to seek input into the framing of the terms of reference and how the models will be prepared. The information collected will be used to prepare models of particle sources and distribution and will provide valuable information on the composition and likely sources of particle pollution in the lower Hunter, including Lake Macquarie. We have consulted with the Newcastle Community Consultative Committee on the Environment. The study is based on the successful Upper Hunter Air Particle Characterisation Study and the design of the study has been scientifically peer reviewed. As I said, it was foreshadowed in the budget and modelling for Lake Macquarie will be included in the study.

The second initiative is a dust deposition study, which is the visible dust people talk about. It will focus on the rail corridor. It is a community-based program that will commence shortly and will aim to provide information that increases community understanding about dust deposition in the region, especially along the rail corridor. The study will measure rates of dust deposition to identify what makes up the visible dust that is deposited along the corridor. These studies are critical to our understanding of particle pollution and dust, and will help to inform actions to improve air quality. The findings from this study will have application to other areas along rail corridors or adjacent to major industrial facilities such as coal loaders. I note that the member for Lake Macquarie has asked whether a site at Toronto can be included in the study. I will ensure that the Environment Protection Authority brings that to the attention of the reference group when it is considering study sites.

I also recently announced comprehensive reporting on air quality in the Newcastle area. We will expand the monitoring and include information from Lake Macquarie. We now have three sites for air quality monitoring stations. They will provide continuous high-quality measurements of pollutants, including particles with a diameter of 10 micrometres or less [PM-10] and particles smaller than 2.5 micrometres in diameter [PM-2.5]. That information will be made publicly available in near real time. I know that the community is engaged in that process. Industries with environment protection licences that emit these pollutants will fund the monitoring network. The data from the network will mean that we can monitor long-term trends in the air sheds. That will provide valuable information for Lake Macquarie and it will decide once and for all the course of government policy and action. The reports will be publicly available.

Coal-fired power station emissions of PM-2.5, sulphur dioxide and oxides of nitrogen in the region, including at Lake Macquarie and the Upper Hunter, travel large distances. The results from the study will be able to model particle movements, including in the Lake Macquarie area. This will give us important air quality data for the lower Hunter region, which will add to the air quality monitoring we are doing at Wyong. It will give us good strategies for the best long-term reductions in particle pollution to provide the greatest health benefits. As I said, the dust deposition study is about visible dust. The information we collect will be brought together to form a comprehensive review of the best data that is available. It will be peer reviewed and we will make sure that the community is involved. We will work out once and for all what we should do if action is needed. A number of people are jumping to conclusions. The only conclusion they need to jump to— [*Extension of time granted.*]

The only conclusion people need to jump to is that this Government is doing more for air quality monitoring in the Hunter, particularly the lower Hunter, than has been done before. It is certainly doing much better than the last Government.

WESTERN SYDNEY PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Mr TONY ISSA: My question is directed to the good Minister for Transport.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Granville will be heard in silence.

Mr TONY ISSA: How is the Government improving public transport journeys in Western Sydney?

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Kiama will come to order. The Minister does not require assistance.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: I thank the great member for Granville for his question. He is a strong advocate for public transport. Recently I was pleased to visit Granville not only to talk about the commuter car park we are building but also to talk about the rollout of the Opal card.

Mr Guy Zangari: Give us a look.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: You should have one by now. The Opal rollout is progressing extremely well and tomorrow it will be extended to more parts of Western Sydney. I thank our customers for their overwhelming response to the Opal ticketing system. I was able to announce recently that 85,000 Opal cards have been registered. That number is growing by the day and I will provide a further update on that. I am proud to say that more than 10,000 people on average are signing up every week. I am also proud to say that so far our customers have made about three million journeys using the Opal card—all before it has been rolled out to the entire network. I was pleased that the Opal card became available in Western Sydney earlier this month. The system was extended to 22 train stations from Homebush to Casula via Granville as well as along the Carlingford line and to Olympic Park.

Mr Gareth Ward: Couldn't do that with the Tcard, could you?

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: I am getting to the Tcard. From tomorrow an additional 26 stations in Western Sydney—from Harris Park to Emu Plains and also to Richmond via Schofields—will be online with the Opal system. I am proud that we are delivering to the people of Blacktown what the Leader of the Opposition could not deliver when he was Minister for Transport. I am pleased that we will be delivering to the Keira electorate by the end of the year—

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

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: —what the former Labor Minister and the former Director General of Transport could not deliver to Keira.

The SPEAKER: Order! Opposition members will contain their excitement. The member for Kiama will come to order.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: I am pleased that we have already delivered to Ryde what the former Minister for Transport could not deliver—before the other two Ministers I mentioned. Similarly, this year we will be delivering the Opal system to Smithfield and the Hunter—again, announcements that previous Ministers had made since 1997 and failed to deliver on. Labor promised to have the Tcard for the Olympic Games. I am pleased that as the curtain comes down on the Sochi Winter Olympics the Government is delivering what members opposite were unable to deliver for the Sydney Olympic Games.

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

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: Members opposite had years to deliver. As I was going through what they had to say about the Tcard I found an interesting comment by the member for Canterbury back in 2006. Almost eight years ago today the member for Canterbury said, "Like most members in this Chamber, I have had considerable experience setting up new systems and government arrangements. I have confidence in the Government's arrangements to oversee the implementation of the Tcard system." Not only did those opposite fail to deliver the Tcard; they left taxpayers with a bill for \$100 million and a court case, which we had to resolve when we came to office. I am pleased that by the end of this year the Opal ticketing system will be available on all trains, buses and ferries. [*Extension of time granted.*]

I am grateful for the extension of time, but I know that there will be many opportunities during the year to talk about this great card. What gives us most pleasure is that it means no more Monday morning queues for our customers. We know what that means: cheaper fares. It also means that after eight journeys a week customers are encouraged to use public transport on weekends because travelling on Friday, Saturday and Sunday will be free. When we came to office we put in a team that we were confident would be able to deliver this system, which Labor failed for years to deliver. There are many examples of Labor's incompetence but the

failed Tcard project versus the Opal ticketing system is a demonstration of what the O'Farrell Government can do when it puts its mind to it. I will be pleased to provide the House with further updates in the future. [*Time expired.*]

Question time concluded at 3.13 p.m.

PETITIONS

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

Sydney Electorate Public High School

Petition requesting the establishment of a public high school in the Sydney electorate, received from **Mr Alex Greenwich**.

Oxford Street Traffic Arrangements

Petition requesting the removal of the clearway and introduction of a 40 kilometre per hour speed limit in Oxford Street, received from **Mr Alex Greenwich**.

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 **Mr Alex Greenwich**.

Pymont and Ultimo Bus Services

Petition requesting the improvement and expansion of bus services to Pymont and Ultimo, received from **Mr Alex Greenwich**.

Pet Shops

Petition opposing the sale of animals in pet shops, received from **Mr Alex Greenwich**.

Pig-dog Hunting Ban

Petition requesting the banning of pig-dog hunting in New South Wales, received from **Mr Alex Greenwich**.

Same-sex Marriage

Petition supporting same-sex marriage, received from **Mr Alex Greenwich**.

Inner-city Social Housing

Petition requesting the retention and proper maintenance of inner-city public housing stock, received from **Mr Alex Greenwich**.

Container Deposit Levy

Petition requesting the Government introduce a container deposit levy to reduce litter and increase recycling rates of drink containers, received from **Mr Alex Greenwich**.

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

Casino to Murwillumbah Rail Corridor

Petition requesting support for the conversion of the disused rail corridor from Casino to Murwillumbah into a multi-use cycleway and walkway, received from **Mr Donald Page**.

**SNOWY HYDRO CORPORATISATION AMENDMENT (SNOWY ADVISORY COMMITTEE)
BILL 2013**

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 16 October 2013.

Mr PAUL LYNCH (Liverpool) [3.15 p.m.]: I lead for the Opposition in debate on the Snowy Hydro Corporatisation Amendment (Snowy Advisory Committee) Bill 2013. The shadow Minister with carriage of the bill is the Hon. Steve Whan in the other House, and he will deal with the issues in more detail. The Opposition opposes the bill. The object of the bill is said to be to amend the Snowy Hydro Corporatisation Act 1997 to establish the Snowy Advisory Committee to advise the Water Administration Ministerial Corporation each year on the timing and pattern for the release of water for environmental reasons under the Snowy water licence. The Snowy Advisory Committee replaces the Snowy Scientific Committee, which is to be dissolved by the new Act.

The Snowy Hydro Corporatisation Act put in place a scientific committee to provide advice on the regime and adequacy of environmental flows down the Snowy River. This was part of the agreement to return 21 per cent of the natural flow to the Snowy River. The committee was established originally when the environmental flows started to become available from the river. The committee operated independently and provided advice that was held in high regard by the community and the Government. The terms of the original committee expired at about the time of the last election, and Minister Hodgkinson delayed taking any action to reappoint the committee until finally announcing a discussion paper, public consultation and subsequently this legislation. As a result, there has been no scientific committee in place for more than 2½ years. Originally, the scientific committee's functions under then section 57 of the Snowy Hydro Corporatisation Act were as follows:

- (3) The principal functions of the Committee are as follows:
 - (a) To advise the Water Administration Ministerial Corporation each year on the regime for the release of water for environmental reasons under the Snowy water licence,
 - (b) To advise that Corporation from time to time on the adequacy of those releases and the programs for management and restoration of the catchments (and the Snowy River and other rivers and streams) receiving water from those releases, including the arrangements for consultation, monitoring and on-going research about those programs.
- (4) The Committee is to produce every year a public state of the environment report on the catchments (and the Snowy River and other rivers and streams) affected by the Snowy Mountains Hydro-electric Scheme. The report is to include an executive summary of its contents. The Committee is to provide a copy of each such report to the Water Administration Ministerial Corporation.

The bill proposes to omit section 57 of the existing Act. The Government's proposal is to reconstitute the committee with the function only of "advise the Water Administration Ministerial Corporation each year on the timing and pattern for the release of water for environmental reasons under the Snowy water licence". That is section 57 (2). In other words, issues such as adequacy and environmental reporting will be deleted. This reflects the Government's actions already in terminating the employment of most of the staff working on environmental monitoring of the river. The make-up of the committee is far more at the behest of the Minister, with no direct representatives from the Environment Protection Authority, the National Parks and Wildlife Service or what was the Catchment Management Authority and is now a local land service.

In addition, there is now no requirement for an independent scientist nominated by the environment committee—that is, no requirement for a scientist to be on the committee. The scientific committee does not have a scientist. I am slightly surprised the bill does not also state that the earth is flat! There is no mention of funding for the committee. The Minister's original proposal was for the committee to be funded by Snowy Hydro. That is not appropriate as the committee should be independent of Snowy Hydro. This bill is nonsense. The Opposition opposes it.

Mr JOHN BARILARO (Monaro) [3.18 p.m.]: It is always fantastic to speak in this House about my region—the Monaro—and the jewel in the crown, which is of course Kosciuszko, Jindabyne and the great lake. The Snowy River is an iconic river in south-eastern Australia. It rises near Mount Kosciuszko and until construction of the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme it was the largest snow-melt river in Australia, renowned for its spring flows, particularly when in flood. The Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme was built jointly by the New South Wales, Victorian and Commonwealth governments over a 25-year period from 1949 to 1974. It was a great nation-building project that initiated the concept of multiculturalism on the back of

strong immigration to this country. Multiculturalism thrived and the benefits of the strong community of immigrants who were part of the construction project are still evident in my electorate. The scheme collects and stores water from the headwaters of the Snowy River and diverts it westward through trans-mountain tunnels and power stations to the Murray and Murrumbidgee valleys.

Construction of the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme resulted in diversion of 99 per cent of the Snowy River's mean natural flow at Jindabyne. For 50 years, the Snowy Mountains scheme has met critical demands for electricity generation and provided water for irrigation. The Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme is regarded worldwide as an engineering feat. The electricity it provides typically feeds into the nation's electricity grid at peak times when base loads from coal-powered generation may struggle to meet demand. The scheme was designed after one of the worst droughts on record, from 1939 to 1945, to provide approximately 1,000 gegalitres of water to each of the Murray and the Murrumbidgee river valleys each year. This annual supply of reliable, high-quality water enabled the expansion of irrigation development in inland areas. However, the reduction in flows to the Snowy River and other man-induced changes impacted on the health of the river. There has been a build-up of sediment and weed infestation in the riverbed and loss of habitat for native plants and animals.

As a consequence, in 2000 the New South Wales, Victorian, and Commonwealth governments agreed to release environmental flows to the Snowy River in four stages. An environmental flow allocation of 21 per cent annual natural flow was agreed to be released by year 10 following the first flow release, which commenced in August 2002. However, those environmental water allocations are dependent on water savings in the Murray-Darling River Basin. Since corporatisation of the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme in 2002, much of south-eastern Australia has been subject to the worst drought on record. This has reduced water availability for the Snowy River and for the Murray, Murrumbidgee and Goulburn-Murray river systems, making it difficult to meet the water needs of the environment, water users and the communities that depend greatly on these river systems.

The New South Wales, Victorian and Commonwealth governments agreed to a major program of reform in the 1990s, giving rise to the Snowy Hydro Corporatisation Act 1997 in New South Wales and concurrent legislation in Victoria and the Commonwealth. The Snowy Hydro Corporatisation Act provides for a corporatised entity to operate and maintain the Snowy Mountains Hydro-electric Scheme through a water licence, a Snowy water inquiry to examine the environmental impacts of the scheme and the options for dealing with them, and a scientific committee to advise on the pattern of environmental releases. The environmental objectives for the Snowy River and for the Snowy Montane rivers from increased flows are to improve the habitat for a diverse range of plant and animal species through a combination of improving the temperature regime of river water, achieving channel maintenance and flushing flows within the rivers, restoring connectivity within rivers for migratory species and for dispersing, improving triggers for fish spawning, and improving the aesthetics of currently degraded riverine environments.

For the Snowy Montane rivers, the environmental objectives of the increased flows are, in order of priority: to protect endangered or threatened species, to maintain natural habitats, and to maintain wilderness and national park values. To achieve increased water releases, Snowy Hydro Limited completed the upgrade of outlet works at Jindabyne Dam. The outlet works, that include a multi-level offtake, allow the release of sufficient volumes of water to enable scouring of the riverbed, channel maintenance and flushing flows, and to improve the quality of the water released to the Snowy River. Additionally, a mini generator was installed to generate hydropower. The total investment in those upgrade works was about \$92 million. Over the past years this has resulted in increased flows, achieving benchmarks and objectives. The Office of Water confirmed that the 2013 Snowy River flushing flow, which commenced in early October, resulted in 96.6 gegalitres being released into the Snowy River below Jindabyne.

A new release pattern is being trialled over the 2013-14 water year and is designed to better mimic the natural flow characteristics that are seen in the Snowy Montane rivers. This includes a higher degree of daily and seasonal flow variability, but still maintaining the need to ensure flood events occur in the Snowy. Over the course of this water year, 190.6 gegalitres will be delivered to the Snowy River below Jindabyne. The release regime will differ from previous years, with several high-flow events scheduled during spring and early summer. Five of these events, including the flushing flow, will involve an eight-hour peak through the day that will cause the river level downstream to fluctuate substantially—much like a natural high-flow event in an unregulated catchment.

But to maintain those achievements we need to be sure we include wider stakeholder groups in partnering with government to continue meeting wider objectives. That necessitated making changes to the

function, role and membership of the Snowy Scientific Committee. It is important that the Snowy Advisory Committee reflects the wide range of technical and community expertise. The former Snowy Scientific Committee had a limited membership and was focused only on ecological and scientific issues surrounding the environmental flow releases from Jindabyne Dam. Community interests, such as the local council, the chamber of commerce, fishing, recreational and Aboriginal cultural concerns are aspects that also need to be considered. I understand that Aboriginal groups, in particular, have been concerned about the lack of recognition and consultation regarding their cultural needs.

The Office of Water has initiated a cultural water assessment of the Snowy River, with the local community informing the new committee. I am pleased that a wide range of relevant groups will now have a voice and input into the development of an environmental flow strategy for the Snowy and Snowy Montane rivers. We all want to see a healthy Snowy River. This needs to be achieved in a balanced way that recognises all interests and uses of the river. While there may be some concerns about removing the absolute independence of the committee, the committee will still have an independent chair outside of government and the Minister will have no influence over the content of the advice it provides. But, quite rightly, the committee needs also to have the relevant government experts involved to ensure that a balanced and practical environmental water strategy can be implemented.

It makes little sense to have a separate advisory committee that does not have access to the expertise, resources and information that government officers will have and their practical knowledge of how water can be released, and the limitations on the size and pattern of releases. The New South Wales Government has also invested considerable resources in the science and modelling of the waterways of the Snowy Mountains that will be brought to the committee's table. Elsewhere in the State, such advisory committees on environmental releases comprise a range of community and government representatives. I commend the Snowy Hydro Corporatisation Amendment (Snowy Advisory Committee) Bill 2013 to the House as long overdue and eminently sensible legislation.

Mr ALEX GREENWICH (Sydney) [3.26 p.m.]: My contribution to debate on the Snowy Hydro Corporatisation Amendment (Snowy Advisory Committee) Bill 2013 will be brief. The bill replaces the existing Snowy Scientific Committee with a new Snowy Advisory Committee. The role of the committee will remain the same, which is to advise the Government on the timing, volume and effectiveness of environmental flows to the Snowy River and other streams affected by the operation of the Snowy scheme. The entire aquatic ecological community of the Snowy River is an endangered community and the Snowy River catchment includes populations of the river blackfish, *gadopsis marmoratus*, which is an endangered species. Both rivers rely on the right volume and timing of environmental flows.

The State's biodiversity is under threat and we must urgently protect what is left. It is fundamental that when and how much of environmental water released from water recovered under the Snowy water licence is determined by science, with an aim to protect this unique and delicate ecosystem. But under this bill representation on the committee will change to replace independent scientific experts with members who are subject to the control and direction of the Minister for Primary Industries. Furthermore, the committee will be funded by, and therefore will be dependent upon, Snowy Hydro Limited—a company that I understand has opposed environmental flows and has an interest in resisting the release of water for environmental purposes.

I share community concern that over time the new make-up of the committee will not guarantee the best environmental flows to protect biodiversity and river health. The Snowy River's biodiversity would be best protected by the existing committee representation. The Snowy River holds deep significance for all Australians and is home to unique wilderness and much beauty. Surely science should dictate environmental water flows that support it. The bill is about removing the independence and scientific input of the committee that is necessary to protect the Snowy River, and I cannot support it.

Mr GREG APLIN (Albury) [3.30 p.m.]: I support the Snowy Hydro Corporatisation Amendment (Snowy Advisory Committee) Bill 2013. Although part of the 1997 Act, I understand that the Snowy Scientific Committee was not even set up by the former Labor Government until 2008. The committee was not reappointed after its initial three-year term, and lapsed in 2011. That soundly demonstrates that the Snowy Scientific Committee is not really the right committee for the job and it is time for it to be replaced. I also understand that the role of the Snowy Scientific Committee was to advise on the adequacy of environmental releases and on programs for the restoration of the catchments, to conduct ongoing monitoring and reporting, and to produce a public state-of-the-environment report on the catchments.

In 2014 those roles are no longer appropriate for the Snowy Advisory Committee. The size of the environmental releases is determined by, first, the recovery of the entitlements, which is 212 gigalitres as targeted under the Snowy Initiative and, secondly, the amount of allocated water available each year under these entitlements. Ongoing restoration and management of catchments is the role of the National Parks and Wildlife Service in the National Park Estate. Elsewhere, this role is undertaken by catchment management authorities, which are now part of the Government's reformed Local Land Services. Monitoring, modelling, researching and reporting on these environmental flow releases are mostly undertaken by the Office of Water.

On 3 August 2013 Snowy Hydro Limited was awarded the Australian Business Award in the category of Community Contribution for 2012. I believe this was the third consecutive year in which this award was given to Snowy Hydro. Clearly this organisation has found its place in its local community. In another positive move, last year Snowy Hydro appointed Paul Broad as its new Chief Executive Officer. Mr Broad was formerly Chief Executive Officer of AAPT and Infrastructure NSW; he has also led organisations such as Sydney Water, Hunter Water and Energy Australia. His experience in energy businesses and services will help Snowy Hydro to develop to meet the challenges of the energy sector.

Now we have the bill before us, it is yet another sign of a Government organisation reshaping itself to provide better service to stakeholders. It has been pointed out that the Snowy Scientific Committee did not produce an annual state of the catchment report in its three years of operation. This work is undertaken as part of the Government's State of the Environment reporting program. Therefore, it is timely to refine the role of the committee, ensure that it is not duplicating work being carried out by other agencies and bring it into line with other such committees across the State. New section 57 (2) establishes the Snowy Advisory Committee and states its function clearly:

The function of the Committee is to advise the Water Administration Ministerial Corporation each year on the timing and pattern for the release of water for environmental reasons under the Snowy water licence.

My electorate of Albury has close ties to the Snowy Hydro scheme. Indeed, landholders talk to me about water releases and the impact on their farms adjacent to the river. I also keep up to date, as I did last Friday, with Snowy Hydro's development and toured the Murray 1, and Murray 2 power stations in company with the Chief Operating Officer, Mr Ken Lister. I thank him for his time last Friday. However, it is important to understand that this committee will not set timings for releases of water down the upper Murray above Hume or below Hume. Its sole focus, I am informed, is on releases and timings down the Snowy River. Water that has been bought back from the Murray Darling Basin will be released down the Snowy. We must find ways to maximise benefits to the environment and communities downstream, including irrigation and environmental entitlement holders. It is therefore critical that committee membership is broadly representative of stakeholders and people with relevant skills. New section 57 (4) states:

- (4) The membership of the Committee is to comprise the following:
 - (a) at least 2 members must be community representatives,
 - (b) of the community representatives, 2 are to be nominated by a Minister of the State of Victoria,
 - (c) at least 1 member must be a representative of environmental interest groups,
 - (d) at least 1 member must be a representative of Aboriginal interests,
 - (e) at least 1 member must be a representative of the government of the State of New South Wales,

As an organisation now noted for its award-winning community contribution, it is good to see that the bill brings diverse interests into membership of the Snowy Advisory Committee. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr CHRIS PATTERSON (Camden) [3.34 p.m.]: I support the Snowy Hydro Corporatisation Amendment (Snowy Advisory Committee) Bill 2013. On 7 July 1949 the Commonwealth passed the Snowy Mountains Hydro-electric Power Act 1949 establishing the Snowy Mountains Hydro-electric Authority that would operate the Snowy Mountains Scheme. Construction started on the scheme on 17 October 1949 at Adaminaby and was completed in 1974. The scheme consisted of seven power stations, 16 major dams, 145 kilometres of inter-connected tunnels and 80 kilometres of aqueducts. Snow and rainfalls go into the catchment for the scheme. This water is collected and stored behind dams, in lakes and reservoirs, and diverted through tunnels and pipelines to power stations to spin turbines to create electricity.

The Snowy Mountains Scheme is recognised as one of the modern civil engineering wonders of the world. I am proud to say that both my father and grandfather worked on the scheme in Cooma and then at

Cabramurra in the mid 1950's. My grandfather led a gang and my father undertook his electrical apprenticeship with the scheme and became a qualified electrician. The scheme provides electricity to the national electricity market and drought security for Australia's inland farmers. This bill seeks to amend section 57 of the Snowy Hydro Corporatisation Act 1997 to replace the existing Snowy Scientific Committee with the new Snowy Advisory Committee.

The Act created a corporatised entity to operate and maintain the Snowy Mountains Hydro-electric Scheme through a water licence. This water licence forms part of Snowy Hydro Limited's agreements, regulatory instruments and licences. The licence ensures that Snowy Hydro Limited can collect, divert, store and release water from the works of the Snowy scheme. Currently the Snowy Scientific Committee established in 2008 under the Act, advises on the regime and adequacy of environmental releases and restoration programs in the Snowy catchments. It is an independent committee with six members. After the release of a discussion paper in February 2013 and the receipt of submissions, it was clear that a new approach was needed to build on the strengths of the Snowy Scientific Committee and that a new committee should be a more representative advisory body with contemporary governance arrangements.

The new Snowy Advisory Committee will be established so that it is more specifically an advisory committee for government. Membership will be broadened and will draw on expertise of the community, Aboriginal and environmental groups, and government representatives. This ensures that the new committee will be more responsive to community and government needs by being practical, avoiding duplication in roles, and putting to best use community and government resources. Membership will be specified in the regulations to allow for changes to membership to be changed if needed.

This bill will clarify that the committee is not independent, but reports to the Minister responsible for water and that the Minister can request the committee to undertake certain work if required. However, the contents of any advice from the committee cannot be influenced by the Minister over the nature of that advice. The committee will now be more focused on the actual pattern and release of water every year. A new pattern of release has and is already being trialled to improve the river for fish and other animals. The Office of Water has reported good results so far. The new committee will review and adjust, if needed, these patterns in the future.

As can be seen, this is a common-sense approach. The new formation of the committee, which will incorporate a lot more user groups and is a lot more representative of the wider community, makes sense. I commend the Minister for making the appropriate changes that are before us today. A lot has been said thus far and the Minister's introduction clearly covers all the amendments, changes and desires of this bill. For those reasons, I commend the bill to the House.

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK (Bankstown) [3.40 p.m.]: The object of the Snowy Hydro Corporatisation Amendment (Snowy Advisory Committee) Bill 2013 is to amend the Snowy Hydro Corporatisation Act 1997 to establish the Snowy Advisory Committee, which will advise the Water Administration Ministerial Corporation each year on the timing and pattern for the release of water for environmental reasons under the Snowy water licence. The Snowy Advisory Committee will replace the Snowy Scientific Committee, which will be dissolved by the proposed Act. The Snowy Scientific Committee has provided independent and informed advice to the New South Wales Government since its establishment in 1997. The terms of the original committee expired at about the time of the last election and the Minister delayed taking any action to reappoint the committee until releasing a paper and going through a consultation process. This delay pre-empted the Government's intention to undermine the authority of the scientific committee.

Schedule 1 [2] to the bill will replace the existing provisions of section 57 of the current Act. Schedule 4 to the bill will dissolve the existing scientific committee to enable it to be replaced by the Snowy Advisory Committee. A key point of distinction between the construction of the new section 57 and the existing section 57 is the removal of the word "adequacy" from section 57 (3) (b). Whilst the scientific committee has to advise on the adequacy of environmental releases, the reconstituted Snowy Advisory Committee will simply have to advise, with no regard to the adequacy of such advice. That is a very clear distinction. New section 57 (2) states:

The function of the Committee is to advise the Water Administration Ministerial Corporation each year on the timing and pattern for the release of water for environmental reasons under the Snowy water licence.

This is a lesser standard than that in the current construction of section 57 (3) (b), which states:

... to advise that Corporation from time to time on the adequacy of those releases and the programs for management and restoration of the catchments (and the Snowy River and other rivers and streams) receiving water from those releases, including the arrangements for consultation, monitoring and on-going research about those programs.

This change in standards is just a reflection of the Government's contempt for the environment. The Government has terminated already the employment of most of the employees who have worked on the environmental monitoring of the Snowy River. The make-up of the committee is far more at the behest of the Minister, with no direct representatives of the Environment Protection Authority, Parks and Wildlife or catchment management authorities, now Local Land Services. In addition, there is now no requirement for an independent scientist to be nominated.

The Minister will appoint at least six members of the new committee according to new section 57 (3) (a). Under section 57 (6) of the current Act, "the scientific committee consists of at least two nominees by a Minister of the State of Victoria" and one nominee who is an independent scientist with expertise in aquatic environments nominated by the Minister for the environment. The bill will remove representatives from the Environment Protection Authority, and Parks and Wildlife. Furthermore there will not be a requirement for an independent scientist to be nominated by the Minister for the Environment. This is a continuation of the contempt that this Government has for the environment and for due process. I oppose the bill.

Mr ROB STOKES (Pittwater—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.44 p.m.]: I contribute to debate on the Snowy Hydro Corporatisation Amendment (Snowy Advisory Committee) Bill 2013. I will divide my comments into two parts. The first will look broadly at the importance of Snowy Hydro from a renewable energies perspective. I note that most of this debate is focused on environmental flows, which is certainly a fundamental aspect of the role of the committee, but it should be understood in the light of the wider purpose of Snowy Hydro and its environmental utility as providing a reliable and cheap form of renewable energy. The second part of my comments will refer specifically to new section 57.

The importance of Snowy Hydro is clearly demonstrated by its role in providing a cheap and reliable form of renewable energy for electricity generation. We know from the Australian Energy Resource Assessment that was completed a few years ago that hydropower accounts for about 16 per cent of electricity generation worldwide. It is very significant technology. The international energy agency's global energy outlook anticipates a steady increase in the use of hydropower globally at rates of more than a 3 per cent increase in capacity annually for the next 25 years. It is a very important part of our energy mix. It has strong advantages in the Australian context. It is a very low cost form of energy that has low operating costs, and these plants typically have a very long life. We have heard the debate previously that Snowy Hydro dams and associated generators have been around for decades and they have decades more life left in them. Typically, a hydro plant can happily survive for 50 to 100 years, which compares very favourably with other forms of electricity generation.

One of the key strengths of Snowy Hydro and hydro generally is flexibility. It has a predictable load factor and it is able to backup variable generators, such as wind farms and solar photovoltaic [PV]. That is one of its real strengths. It is also an energy source that can be used for a multiplicity of purposes. We are seeing through the environmental flows and so forth, particularly the subject of this bill, that there are a variety of environmental uses to which water storage can be put, but it is important in this debate to recognise Snowy Hydro's importance in providing a cheap and reliable source of renewable energy. Hydropower is also very clean.

A number of studies have indicated that hydropower is among the very cleanest, even among the renewable energy sources of electricity generation. Part of the reason for this is that its long lifespan means that the embodied costs in construction are amortised over a long period and so it is a very cheap and very clean form of energy that avoids any of the flued gases associated with burning of fossil fuels for the creation of electrons. Snowy Hydro is also the reason that New South Wales is the biggest generator of renewable energy in Australia. We should recognise the importance of this nation-building infrastructure in providing reliable and cheap renewable energy. It is also a mature technology.

We know that there are not that many opportunities to expand large-scale dams in New South Wales and I do not think that the community would necessarily be supportive of that, but the lessons that we have learned in Snowy Hydro have been very important in providing opportunities for micro and mini hydro companies, including Waratah Power and the great work Andrew Jones is doing there, and Pelena Energy. I was in Dorriggo recently to talk with Peter Lynch and Salena Bryce, who are doing terrific work exporting micro hydro energy systems to our near neighbours in the Pacific. It is an important export market. The research and development have been evolving from lessons learned through the Snowy Hydro power generators and work being done at institutes such as the University of New South Wales by people like Professor Bill Peirson and Dr Grantley Smith.

I will now deal with comments made by the member for Liverpool and the member for Bankstown that this bill will somehow water down environment performance or monitoring. I suggest that those comments exhibit a fair degree of verisimilitude because although the former Labor Government was empowered under the legislation to appoint a scientific committee, it never really bothered to do so for many years and only had a committee between 2008 and 2011. It is all very well for Labor members to suggest that somehow this is a weakening of a standard; the fact is that the opportunities opened up in section 57 of the Act were not properly utilised by the now Opposition when in government. Therefore, it is a bit rich for those opposite to criticise us for seeking to ensure that the legislation reflects the aspirations of the community and the need to maintain appropriate environmental flows, as the member for Albury said. The need to ensure good environmental outcomes is an important part of that.

We should not forget that Labor members, although in government for many years, did not bother to set up the committee they are suggesting we are somehow dismembering. I take the point about the minor semantic changes to the scope of things the committee can examine, but my reading of new section 57 (2) suggests that it does not limit the functions of the committee, as implied by the member for Bankstown. Rather, it broadens the ability of the committee to look into a variety of things; it gives the committee more flexibility. In no way does it limit what the committee can examine.

The fact that the committee is being moved from a technocratic constitution to a more community-focused constitution is a good thing. As an observation, it would be a terrific idea to ensure the committee has properly trained environmentalists and scientists who are able to give proper advice. On the basis of community feedback through the discussion paper, which the member for Camden spoke about, the Government has listened to community concerns and is returning some power back to communities that will be affected by the decisions and advice of the committee. I commend the bill to the House and commend the role of hydropower in providing renewable energy for our nation.

Mr RICHARD AMERY (Mount Druitt) [3.52 p.m.]: As my colleagues have indicated, the Opposition will oppose the Snowy Hydro Corporatisation Amendment (Snowy Advisory Committee) Bill 2013 for the reasons outlined by the member for Liverpool, who led for the Opposition. That opposition basically relates to the composition of the Snowy Advisory Committee. The member for Camden referred to the history of the Snowy Hydro Scheme back to 1949, stating that members of his family had worked on that project. However, he omitted to say that the Snowy Mountains Scheme was another one of those great iconic Labor Party projects, a project of the New South Wales McKell Government and the Federal Chifley Government. Like so many other iconic Labor Government projects of the time, it was condemned by then Leader of the Opposition, Robert Menzies, who later officiated at the opening during the 1950s. We consistently see great iconic Labor Government projects that are world-renowned parts of the landscape of this country and this State.

The Snowy Mountains Scheme was constructed to provide water and electricity for local and inland parts of the State; it has done so for more than half a century and will continue to do so into the future. The positive impacts of the scheme have been to provide hydroelectricity and supply water to inland areas, allowing for the development of agricultural industries and townships, the introduction of flood mitigation and the construction of dams. However, some of the negative impacts at that time were not apparent, given the scientific evidence available today. The management of water has resulted in salinity in some parts of the State, with another negative being the impact on the Snowy River itself. Establishment of the dams in the Snowy River system has had a major environmental impact on the river, which is why in the late 1990s the Carr Government set up the process of restoring environmental flow to the Snowy River.

As Minister for Land and Water Conservation, I accompanied Bob Carr down to the Snowy River. I must say that the river I saw that day looked nothing like the way it is portrayed in poetry, books, movies and our imaginations. It looked more like Green Valley Creek at the back of Fairfield where I grew up than the iconic Snowy River that is so much a part of our history. The Carr Government set up a process to restore environmental flows. The legislation introduced in the 1990s and into the twenty-first century involved the establishment of a committee. The conservative side of politics has criticised Labor for that terrible term "environmental flows". An environmental flow, I think it was 21 per cent, for the Snowy River was to be a natural flow as part of the process we established in the late 1990s. The irrigation industry was alarmed that Labor was seeking to return 21 per cent natural flow to the Snowy River and sought representation on the committee. This was still a comparatively small amount of water compared with the original amount of water flowing through the river before the Snowy Mountains Scheme was constructed.

Criticisms were made about the make-up of past committees and some members have said this new committee is more a representative committee than a technical committee. I believe there are grounds for both.

The irrigation and environmental communities, commercial interests, towns and residents want to be represented when decisions are made about environmental flows to the river. It is appropriate for some of the organisations to be represented and for their voices to be heard. However, we cannot ignore the scientific side. Indeed, every time we have raised environmental flows in the Murrumbidgee River, the Murray River or the Murray-Darling Basin the greatest criticism alleging that we did not go down the scientific path has come from the conservative side of politics.

How many times did the Coalition say, "How can you make these decisions on green policies and not on science?" Now in government the conservatives are moving away from science and more towards a representative model. I question why that is the case and it is the reason the Opposition is opposing the bill. We do not trust the Coalition when it comes to protecting environmental flows. Labor does not distrust this Government because of this bill or the processes leading up to it; we do not trust it based on its past form. Environmental flows that were introduced into this country and this State by various Labor governments were strongly and passionately resisted by Coalition members throughout the ages.

As a former Minister for Agriculture and for a short time Minister for Land and Water Conservation, I heard the debates by the Coalition and particularly National Party members. Why should Labor trust a Coalition bill that sets up a new committee? There are a couple of vague appointments, for example, at least one member must be a representative of the Victorian Government. There is an opportunity for some of those governments to appoint people with some scientific nous, but the bill does not require them specifically to have that sort of scientific knowledge. In effect, the Opposition does not trust the Government when it comes to protecting the environmental flow for the Snowy River that Labor secured in government. Unintentionally, but obviously, in the 1940s when this program was planned, river and water quality was a debate superseded by the stronger argument for inland development, flood mitigation, water storage and the like. But those are debates of the past.

The program impacted on the Snowy River and issues arose such as salinity on which we are now spending millions of dollars over many years to resolve—a retrograde step. The advice coming to Coalition governments in Victoria and New South Wales will not be based on science but on representations from people who may not have the interests of this iconic river and fantastic part of Australia's natural history at heart. The Snowy River must be preserved as much as it can be, balancing its preservation with the need for inland development, flood mitigation, and the like, which has come about as a result of the construction of the Snowy Mountains Scheme. I conclude my speech with similar words to those that I used to commence it: The Snowy Mountains Scheme is another of those great projects of past State and Federal Labor governments.

Mr JOHN FLOWERS (Rockdale) [4.01 p.m.]: I support the Snowy Hydro Corporatisation Amendment (Snowy Advisory Committee) Bill 2013. As has been said, many migrants worked on the original Snowy Mountains Hydro-electric Scheme and many of my constituents have told me that their relatives worked on this scheme. The object of the bill states:

The object of this Bill is to amend the Snowy Hydro Corporatisation Act 1997 to establish the Snowy Advisory Committee to advise the Water Administration Ministerial Corporation each year on the timing and pattern for the release of water for environmental reasons under the Snowy water licence. The Snowy Advisory Committee replaces the Snowy Scientific Committee, which is to be dissolved by the proposed Act.

This bill has been introduced to allow the new committee's arrangements to be consistent with other environmental water advisory committees across New South Wales, which include both community and Government representatives. While building on the strengths of the previous committee, the amendments will ensure the committee is a more representative advisory body with contemporary governance arrangements. As a result the committee will be more responsive to the needs of the community and the Government.

It is important that the Snowy Advisory Committee reflects a wide range of technical and community expertise. The former Snowy Scientific Committee had a limited membership and was focused on ecological and scientific issues surrounding only environmental flow releases from Jindabyne Dam. Community interests such as the local council, chamber of commerce, fishing, recreation and Aboriginal cultural concerns are aspects that also need to be considered. It has been noted that Aboriginal groups in particular have been concerned at the lack of recognition of and consultation on their cultural needs.

The role of the Snowy Advisory Committee will be to advise on the timing and patterns of the release of environmental water each year from that recovered under the Snowy water licence. Membership of the Snowy Advisory Committee will draw on expertise from community, Aboriginal and environmental groups as

well as government representatives. Drawing on this extensive knowledge base will ensure that comprehensive advice is provided to the New South Wales Government. The committee also will be practical and ensure that resources are not duplicated. The new committee's arrangements will be more consistent with other environmental water advisory committees across New South Wales, which include community and government representatives. This allows greater flexibility and prevents the need for legislation if future changes to the committee are required.

The Office of Water has initiated a cultural water assessment of the Snowy River with the local community to inform the new committee. The Minister can ask the committee for advice on other aspects of timing and pattern of release of water as needed. The amendments state that the committee will be subject to the control and direction of the New South Wales Minister responsible for water. The exception to this relates to the contents of any advice given by the committee, ensuring the Minister will not have any influence over the nature of this advice. There has been general recognition that a new approach to the committee is needed. This bill delivers that new approach.

The Government has managed obligations to recover the water for the Snowy. The role of the committee will now be more focused on the regime and pattern of its release each year. The Office of Water is already seeing good results from this new pattern of variable releases. The new committee will work hand in hand with government experts to review and refine the release patterns into the future. It is important that the Snowy Advisory Committee reflects the range of technical and community expertise. It makes little sense for a separate advisory committee to exist with no access to expertise, resources and information that government officers have and their practical knowledge of how water can be released and the limitation on the size and pattern of releases.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Lee Evans): Order! There is too much audible conversation in the Chamber. Members who wish to have conversations will do so outside the Chamber.

Mr JOHN FLOWERS: While there may be some concerns about the committee becoming an advisory rather than an independent body, it will still have an independent chair and the Minister will have no influence over the content of the advice it provides. Quite rightly, the committee needs to have the relevant government experts involved to ensure a balanced and practical environmental water strategy that can be implemented. The New South Wales Government has invested considerable resources on the science and modelling of the waterways of the Snowy Mountains, which will be brought to the committee's table. Elsewhere in the State such advisory committees on environmental releases are made up of a range of community and government representatives. Ongoing restoration and management of catchments is the role of the National Parks and Wildlife Service in the national park estate.

Elsewhere catchment management authorities are now part of the Government's reformed Local Land Services. Monitoring, modelling, research and reporting on those environmental flow releases are mostly undertaken by the New South Wales Office of Water. It is timely to refine the role of the committee to ensure it is not duplicating work carried out by other agencies and to bring it into line with other committees across the State. Times have changed since the original section 57 of the legislation was incorporated into the Snowy Hydro Corporatisation Act 1997.

When the Snowy hydro-electric scheme was corporatised in 1997, it was envisaged that there would be environmental releases into the Snowy River and the other montane stream affected by the Snowy scheme. However, the size and nature of these were not known. From the time of its establishment in 2008, the Snowy Scientific Committee provided advice on environmental releases. In the main, the advice has been adopted and it has influenced the water release patterns over the past few years. Prior to 2010 only small volumes of water were available to be released because not all the entitlements had been recovered and the allocations to these entitlements were low because of the drought.

From November 2010 significant flushing flows, which was the primary short-term ecological objective of the environmental flows, have been able to be released. It is now time for aquatic scientists, government experts, water resource managers and the community to work together to advise on the strategy for the environmental releases. It is pleasing to see that a wide range of relevant groups will now have a voice in the development of an environmental flow strategy for the Snowy and the Snowy Montane rivers. We all want to see a healthy Snowy River. This needs to be done in a balanced way that recognises all interests and uses of the river. The new committee will reflect this. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr BARRY COLLIER (Miranda) [4.11 p.m.]: When we speak of the Snowy River and the Snowy River hydro-electric scheme, the word "iconic" comes to mind. It is an infrastructure project and so whenever the word "infrastructure" is mentioned, we think of the Snowy River Hydro-electric scheme. As a young boy in the 1950s I saw pictures of the Snowy Mountains Scheme and thought it was a wonderful thing. Later, migrants arrived in our country and helped to develop our culture, which was a fantastic contribution to the Australian economy. When I was a teacher in the 1970s I took year 11 and 12 students to stay in huts at the field study centre at Jindabyne for a week. Earlier in their high school years the students had learnt a magical poem by Banjo Paterson called *The Man from Snowy River*. When we walked along the roads to see the Snowy River, we saw only a trickle that could be stepped over. Not only were the students disappointed; I too was disappointed at my first sight of the magnificent Snowy River. The talk for the week included the question: What happened to the Snowy River?

In 1997 the Carr Government introduced the Snowy Hydro Corporatisation Act to establish the Snowy Advisory Committee to advise the Water Administration Ministerial Corporation each year on the time and a pattern for release of water for environmental reasons under the Snowy water licence. This bill replaces the Snowy Scientific Committee that will be dissolved by the relevant Act which, of course, is the great shame of the bill. The original legislation put in place a scientific committee to provide advice on the regime and adequacy of environmental flows—part of the agreement was to return 21 per cent of the natural flow to the river. The committee was established originally when the environmental flows started to become available for the river and it operated independently to provide advice that was held in high regard by the community and the Government. The terms of the original committee expired around the time of the last election and the present Minister delayed reappointing the committee until finally announcing the discussion paper, public consultation and then the current legislation before the House.

The result is that no scientific committee has been in place for our iconic Snowy River for the past two years. I am advised by the Hon. Steve Whan in the other place, who lives closer to the Snowy River than some of the members opposite, that the principal functions of the committee were to advise the Water Administration Ministerial Corporation each year on the release of water for environmental reasons under the Snowy water licence, and to advise the corporation from time to time on the adequacy of those releases, the programs for management and restoration of the catchments, and the Snowy River and other rivers receiving water from those releases, including arrangements for consultation, monitoring and ongoing research about those programs. Members should note the words "consultation, monitoring and ongoing research". The science was there. Sadly, the bill ignores the presence and importance of science in the management of our water supplies and river systems.

The Government's proposal is to reconstitute the committee with the function only of advising the Water Administration Ministerial Corporation each year on the timing for the release of water for environmental reasons under the Snowy water licence. Issues such as adequacy and environmental reporting will be a thing of the past. When reviewing the membership of the committee, the word "scientist" is not mentioned. It might be representative because the member for Pittwater said that the Government values science. As the member for Mount Druitt correctly said, why could we not have on the committee somebody with a scientific background? Why was the word "science" not mentioned? Surely there is room for both. I do not think anybody in this Chamber would disagree. We are supposed to be the smart nation that values our scientific intellectuals and their research, yet they have been ignored in the bill. Once we start changing the nature of the bill and abandon our hardworking scientists, we start losing jobs and the hardworking staff who are involved in monitoring the environment of the river.

The make-up of the committee is at the behest of the Minister, which takes emphasis away from the independence of the committee. The member for Mount Druitt said, "We do not trust Government members when legislation such as this is introduced." Members can scoff and carry on about that, but he is dead right. When it comes to science, I do not trust the Government either. The Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre in Sutherland shire, a 100-year old establishment, has closed and we have lost some of the finest marine scientists in the world who conducted first-class scientific research. It has now been trashed; there are no plans for it. Some of our great scientific minds will again be lost. To his credit the member for Cronulla fought against the closure of that scientific facility because he knows the value of science and employment in our area. He also knows how important science is to the future of Australia. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

There is no mention of how this change will be funded, which should be an important factor when considering how the committee will be set up and whether it will be independent of the Government. The bill does an injustice to our Snowy River and to scientific minds across Australia. It also does a great injustice to our community. I concur with the member for Mount Druitt. I oppose the bill.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS (Murray-Darling) [4.23 p.m.]: It was interesting to hear the contributions of members opposite. They are concerned about the membership of the Snowy Advisory Committee; they think the committee will be run by a bunch of rednecks. The bunch of rednecks who were in government in 2006 tried to privatise Snowy Hydro. Who would have been on the board of a privatised Snowy Hydro? If it had not been for what The Nationals did in the southern Riverina and if we had not forced John Howard to stop the sale, members opposite would have handed it over to private enterprise. In typical Labor fashion, the Labor Government let infrastructure run down and froze investment, and when it was beyond repair it wanted to sell it and walk away. Members opposite wanted to hand over this icon to private enterprise. They destroyed their credibility with regard to Snowy Hydro in 2006.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Gareth Ward): Order! The member for Murray-Darling needs no assistance from Government members.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS: They should not now try to demonstrate how attached they are to Snowy Hydro, given that they wanted to detach it from government ownership in 2006. This bill will be much better for the State than Labor's 2006 privatisation bill. The Murray-Darling Basin Plan contains benchmarks and regulated flows so that everyone knows where the water will go. It delivers the integration we need for the river system in the Murray-Darling Basin. No member of the new Snowy Advisory Committee will change the flow regime, and the suggestion that that will happen is yet another conspiracy theory from the member for Liverpool, who is suspicious of everything. If his front door were painted he would be suspicious. He would want to know why.

Mr Barry Collier: Particularly if it were painted blue.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS: It would be painted red—deep red. From my experience, there is no better way to manage this system than to have the key stakeholders sitting around a table and understanding how the system works. The committee members will be representatives of the people who live in the basin; they will not be people who have no connection with it.

Mr Clayton Barr: What about scientists?

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS: I am sure we can get some scientific advice from Opposition members, but we have seen the results of their advice. The fact remains that this bill implements a practical structure. As I said, the guidelines are set and the committee will not have free rein; it will be restricted in what it can do. Members opposite are constantly screaming about privatisation. The Coalition opposed the legislation that members opposite introduced to create a hybrid electricity system in this State that would have wrecked our power supply. Unlike members opposite, Coalition members also opposed legislation that would have allowed the sale of Snowy Hydro. The Government controls the vital electricity infrastructure in this State that can generate electricity immediately during peak demand periods. If the Labor Government had been successful in its push to privatise Snowy Hydro, a private company would have been left to determine how it would distribute electricity.

There is scope for improvement within the Snowy Hydro structure, and the committee does not need scientists to determine what those improvements should be. Most of the members will have long-term, practical experience in managing resources. They will be able not only to manage water resources but also to understand the benefits provided by Snowy Hydro. We have already been convinced of the need for environmental flows in the Snowy River. They already happen and there are structures in place to ensure that they continue. The new committee will never be charged with the responsibility of changing the flow regime. Members opposite speak emotionally about the Snowy Hydro being an icon, but they wanted to sell it. A former member for Monaro sold the virtues of buying shares in Snowy Hydro. They call him "Second Chance Steve".

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Gareth Ward): Order! I call the member for Wollondilly to order for the first time.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS: He promoted the privatisation of this icon. He supported Morris Iemma's privatisation plans because he wanted some brownie points. Members opposite did not care about Snowy Hydro then but they are shedding crocodile tears now. They could not give a damn about it in 2006 so they should not now say they do.

Mr GEOFF PROVEST (Tweed—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.27 p.m.]: I support the Snowy Hydro Corporatisation Amendment (Snowy Advisory Committee) Bill 2013. This iconic legislation reflects the

O'Farrell-Stoner Government's commitment to openness and transparency. The legislation refers to community interest groups such as local councils and chambers of commerce, and fishing, local Aboriginal and cultural issues. A very good friend of mine, Licio Fornasari, was a chef on the Snowy Mountains Scheme many years ago. Like many immigrants, he made a valuable contribution to Australia. I acknowledge the immigrants who came to this country and built this icon.

The membership of the Snowy Advisory Committee should reflect a wide range of technical and community expertise. Much has been said in this place about fast-tracking projects and I am pleased that the Government is recognising the wide range of technical and community expertise available to it to achieve that. The Snowy Scientific Committee focused only on ecological and environmental issues related to water releases from Jindabyne Dam, and this bill expands that focus. I understand that Aboriginal groups, in particular, have been concerned about the lack of recognition of and consultation about their cultural needs. That is a very important issue. The Office of Water has initiated a cultural water assessment of the Snowy River with the local community to inform the new committee. I am pleased to see that a wide range of relevant groups will now have a voice and some input into the development of the environmental flow strategy for the Snowy River and its montane tributaries. We all want to see a healthy Snowy River. This will be done in a balanced way that recognises all the uses of the river.

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

COMMUNITY RECOGNITION STATEMENTS

MYALL LAKES ELECTORATE AWARD RECIPIENTS

Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD (Myall Lakes) [4.30 p.m.]: I inform the House that 16-year-old cyclist Chris Bryan from Forster led the New South Wales team to a narrow second place finish at the 2014 Cycling Australia Elite Track National Championships in the under 19s junior men's sprint. The New South Wales team was beaten by just three-hundredths of a second. Chris competed at the same championships in 2013 and won a silver and two bronze medals; in both series he was the youngest competitor. Chris moved to Sydney to train four weeks prior to the championships. He will concentrate now on completing year 12.

Arlene Blencowe from Taree has been named the Ken McDonald Memorial Sportstar of the Year in recognition of her achievements in boxing. Arlene is the first boxer athlete to win the award in its 53-year history. Arlene won the World Boxing Association and World Boxing Association Lightweight titles against a New Zealand opponent in Auckland. This was only her third professional fight. She received notification of the fight seven days beforehand, when the original boxer withdrew. Arlene intends to fight for the Australian lightweight title in Brisbane in March.

CHRISTINE BIRD, CROSSROADS COMMUNITY CARE COORDINATOR

Mr BARRY COLLIER (Miranda) [4.31 p.m.]: Today I ask the House to acknowledge the outstanding contribution of Christine Bird of Crossroads Community Care Miranda to our shire community. Christine has been the coordinator and the driving force behind Crossroads for the past 25 years. Christine has led this local not-for-profit organisation with a depth of compassion, commitment and caring that is truly inspirational. Based in Westfield Miranda, Crossroads can best be described as a life raft for the needy in the sea of perceived affluence that is the Sutherland shire. It provides emergency relief, counselling, assistance and support to some of the most vulnerable members of our community, including women and children who have been victims of domestic violence and abuse.

Crossroads, under Christine's leadership, relies heavily on volunteers and supporters to meet its astonishing local workload. Beyond that, Christine's commitment to the needy is such that she went to New Zealand, in her own time, to help counsel victims of the devastating Christchurch earthquakes. I am pleased to have been able to nominate Christine Bird of Crossroads as the 2014 Miranda Woman of the Year.

MULGOA ELECTORATE AWARD RECIPIENTS

Mrs TANYA DAVIES (Mulgoa) [4.32 p.m.]: Each year Penrith City Council celebrates the achievements of a special group of citizens. Peter Camilleri is Penrith's Citizen of the Year. Peter runs a

successful small business and is a local hero. During the recent bushfires in the Blue Mountains he worked tirelessly, turning his Penrith Storage King business into a collection point for donated goods to help those who had lost so much during the fires. Mr Bede Johnston is the Penrith Sportsperson of the Year. Bede raised funds to support the Leukaemia Foundation in memory of his sister, Kate, who lost her battle with juvenile xanthogranuloma [JXG] in 2012. Local Appreciation Awards were issued also to Mr Robert and Mrs Joyce Moynahan; Mr Phil Lacey, who has worked tirelessly within the Rotary organisation for decades; Ms Elizabeth Reibelt, who has served the local scout movement for over 30 years; and Mrs Gina Field for her outstanding business acumen and leadership in a traditionally male-oriented industry

TRIBUTE TO THE LATE MOST VENERABLE THICH PHUOC HUE

Mr NICK LALICH (Cabramatta) [4.32 p.m.]: Today I inform the House that on Sunday 5 January 2014 I attended the second annual memorial service for the Most Venerable Thich Phuoc Hue, the spiritual leader of the Vietnamese community in Australia and New Zealand. The Most Venerable Thich Phuoc Hue had dedicated his life to the Buddhist faith and to his Vietnamese community; his legacy will live on. The Phuoc Hue Temple at Victoria Street, Wetherill Park, was built through the inspirational leadership of the Most Venerable Thich Phuoc Hue and stands as a monument to his great work within our community. The Most Venerable Thich Phuoc Hue will always be remembered as a kind and gentle man, full of compassion and understanding. May the Lord Buddha give him eternal peace.

BERRY PUBLIC SCHOOL

Mr GARETH WARD (Kiama) [4.33 p.m.]: I acknowledge Berry Public School for its local cookbook, which has sold more than 2,000 copies and raised more than \$70,000 since being published in November 2013. *Our Berry Cookbook*, of which I have a copy, includes hundreds of recipes from local bars, restaurants, cafes and residents. It took 18 months to produce. The aim is to raise \$140,000 to help renew the heritage listed Berry library inside the school. I acknowledge the enormous efforts of Jo Jorgensen, who has driven this project, and Bob Willetts, principal of Berry Public School, for his vision and leadership on this important local project.

LAKEMBA ELECTORATE SCHOOL CITIZENSHIP AWARDS

Mr ROBERT FUROLO (Lakemba) [4.34 p.m.]: Late last year it was with much pleasure that I sponsored and presented citizenship awards to students from local schools across my electorate. On behalf of the school communities and the broader community of the electorate of Lakemba, I acknowledge and congratulate the following recipients of my citizenship award: Alicia Fifita, Wiley Park Girls High School; Cassius Lafeta, Riverwood Public School; Noor Elkouzi, Punchbowl Public School; Stefano Athanasiou, Beverly Hills North Public School; Huzaifa Khader, Lakemba Public School; Donna Nguyen, St Joseph's Primary School, Riverwood; and Mariah Moshovis, All Saints Grammar School, Belmore. I congratulate all the students on their leadership and great community spirit and wish them continued success in the future.

PENRITH STATE EMERGENCY SERVICE VOLUNTEERS

Mr BART BASSETT (Londonderry) [4.35 p.m.]: I was delighted to join my colleagues Tanya Davies, the member for Mulgoa, and Stuart Ayres, the member for Penrith, at an awards presentation held at Penrith Council Chambers on Wednesday 4 December. Eight selfless volunteers were duly recognised for their service to the community through Penrith State Emergency Service. Today I again recognise them: Daryl Jones and John Vickers received national medals and awards for 15 years of service; Peter Todd received an award for 25 years of service; Neil Horsley, Shannon Firman and John Burns received awards for 15 years of service; Kim England for 10 years of service; and John Neville for five years of service. I thank all emergency service volunteers who contribute so much to our community.

ST CHARBEL'S COLLEGE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENTS

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK (Bankstown) [4.36 p.m.]: I was delighted recently to attend the St Charbel's College opening mass and Higher School Certificate achievement ceremony. In 1984 the Lebanese Maronite Order established St Charbel's College, Punchbowl. Since then the school has made an outstanding contribution to education in Bankstown and the broad community. I take this opportunity to thank the Reverend Father Joseph Sleiman and Reverend Father Challita Boustani for their kind invitation and congratulate the following students on achieving an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank [ATAR] of more than 90 in the Higher School

Certificate: Chanelle Boustani, Ashley Saba, Tony Boutros, Charbel El-Azzi, James Mina, Patrick Darjani, Andrea Aoun, Justin Akiki, Celine El-Azzi, Nancy El-Kazzi, Amanda Boumansour, Louis Abou Saleh and Lauren Bassil.

KAY AND ANTHONY GORRINGE, NSW SENIORS WEEK AMBASSADORS

Mr ANDREW GEE (Orange) [4.36 p.m.]: I inform the House that Kay and Anthony Gorringer of Orange have been selected as NSW Seniors Week ambassadors by the Minister for Ageing and Minister for Disability Services, the Hon. John Ajaka. Mr and Mrs Gorringer have lived in Orange for more than 40 years. They are two of the 11 ambassadors selected from across NSW to share their unique story and wisdom during NSW Seniors Week. Mr Gorringer is a keen sportsman, having played lawn bowls for more than 47 years, including at an international level. Anthony is also a board member and past president of the Deaf Society of New South Wales. Mrs Gorringer not only learned how to drive in her 50s, but also took up painting. Kay now exhibits and sells her artworks around New South Wales. With seven grandchildren and one great-grandchild, Mr and Mrs Gorringer believe the secret to being happy in later life is to never let oneself become bored. Congratulations to Kay and Anthony who are very worthy recipients of this honour.

BEC WARREN, BLACKBUTT RESERVE VOLUNTEER

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend) [4.37 p.m.]: Today I acknowledge Bec Warren, an 18-year-old girl from Macquarie Hills, who volunteers her time and effort tirelessly at Newcastle's Blackbutt Reserve. Blackbutt provides a natural space in the heart of Newcastle, putting on animal shows and allowing people of all ages to appreciate Australia's unique and varied wildlife. Volunteers are a crucial part of Blackbutt's activities. Bec is studying a certificate III in Captive Animals at TAFE and aspires to one day work with big cats. A very worthy goal, and better her than me.

BAULKHAM HILLS ELECTORATE STATE REPRESENTATION

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT (Baulkham Hills) [4.37 p.m.]: In the past week I have had the privilege to present State representative awards to some of Baulkham Hills finest and most promising athletes. On Friday 21 February I hosted an afternoon tea for Brooklyn Jack, who was in the New South Wales Primary Schools Sports Association under-12s netball; Chris Bednar, a diver, who competed in the boys 12/13 one metre; Belinda Swinnerton, who competed in the School Sports Australia netball championship, Mickey Lee, a swimmer who competed in the 50-metre freestyle; Matisse Letherbarrow, who competed in the New South Wales Primary Schools Sports Association netball; and, Shaun McCann, who competed in the New South Wales Paralympic seven-a-side football.

On Monday, I attended Model Farms High School, where I presented State representative awards to Dylan Wright, who competed in the New South Wales Country team, national youth baseball championships; Austin Scott, who competed in the under-16 Junior Tri-Series, New South Wales Light Oztag; Matthew McVey, who was in the 2013 Australian All Schools New South Wales athletics team; and Katelyn Boyd, who was in the under-40 kilos senior girls. Representing the State is a great privilege. It is pleasing to see the youth of Baulkham Hills doing such a wonderful job in their sporting endeavours. I congratulate all those mentioned on their achievements.

IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE WOMEN'S NETWORK

Mr GUY ZANGARI (Fairfield) [4.38 p.m.]: On Friday 29 November 2013, I attended a symposium hosted by the Immigrant and Refugee Women's Network to show my support for their campaign, 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence. This campaign is to help raise awareness about gender-based violence in the hope of ending violence against women. The symposium was a great success and I congratulate the Immigrant and Refugee Women's Network on hosting yet another successful event. I commend also the Immigrant and Refugee Women's Network for their ongoing dedication towards providing ongoing assistance, services and encouragement to women who come from non-English speaking backgrounds.

FAIRFIELD HOSPITAL TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY

Mr ANDREW ROHAN (Smithfield) [4.39 p.m.]: I congratulate Fairfield Hospital on reaching its twenty-fifth anniversary at its current site. In 1988 Fairfield Hospital was relocated from The Horsley Drive, Fairfield, to its current location on Polding Street, Prairiewood. In celebration of this milestone, Fairfield

Hospital held its twenty-fifth anniversary ball on 29 November 2013, which I was honoured to be invited to and at which I represented the Minister for Health. Along with the fantastic dinner at Club Marconi in Bossley Park, staff recognition awards were presented to staff members for their outstanding work. I extend my sincere gratitude to the hardworking staff of Fairfield Hospital for providing quality health services to residents in my electorate of Smithfield and to the Fairfield area in general. I also thank the general manager, Arnold Tammekand, for inviting me to this momentous occasion. It is fantastic to see how far Fairfield Hospital has come from its humble beginnings in 1956.

MOUNT DRUITT TOWN RANGERS FOOTBALL CLUB

Mr RICHARD AMERY (Mount Druitt) [4.40 p.m.]: I am happy to report to the Parliament that the Mount Druitt Town Rangers under-15s football team will compete in an international football tournament in Portugal. Last Sunday, along with Councillor Charlie Lowles of Blacktown council, I was pleased to be at the Town Rangers football ground to inspect the increased seating at the ground provided by the Community Building Partnerships Program. The increased seating is part of a Football Association requirement to increase seating for teams in premierships grades of the game.

Quality football was on display at Mount Druitt on Sunday when Town Rangers defeated Fraser Park 6-0 in a pre-season game. As the local member I am proud to see the success of the Mount Druitt Town Rangers and wish them well on their tour of Portugal this April.

PHOEBE CRANE, LIFELINE MID COAST VOLUNTEER

Mrs LESLIE WILLIAMS (Port Macquarie) [4.40 p.m.]: I take this opportunity to congratulate Phoebe Crane of Port Macquarie who worked all her life until a disability forced her out of the workforce. This kickstarted her journey as a volunteer telephone crisis supporter for Lifeline Mid Coast. In the past 12 months Phoebe has talked 53 people back from the verge of suicide. As Phoebe says:

I want to live in a suicide safer community where we all look after each other and I know that support starts with me.

Although most would find the role of a telephone crisis supporter very confronting, Phoebe finds it a rewarding experience, believing that every person matters, especially those with no-one to listen to their stories. Congratulations to Phoebe Crane, who is making a difference and truly saving lives in her community.

HOMELESS PERSONS LEGAL SERVICE

Mr ALEX GREENWICH (Sydney) [4.41 p.m.]: I commend the Public Interest Advocacy Centre's Homeless Persons Legal Service for making sure that people without a home get help to sort out legal problems. I attended the launch of a new clinic at Mission Australia's Surry Hills centre along with the Attorney General. I learned that 350 pro bono lawyers have provided more than 1,300 hours of legal advice worth more than \$1.5 million. There are now 11 clinics at The Station, the Matthew Talbot Hostel, the Women and Girls Emergency Centre, Salvation Army Streetlevel Mission, the Wayside Chapel, Edward Eagar Lodge and Vincentian House, taking legal help to where people are connected.

A consumer advisory committee ensures that services, policy and advocacy are based on lived experience. The key matters are debt and tenancy, which are big barriers to people getting off the street and into a home. This work is vital and the Public Interest Advocacy Centre is to be commended for this effective way of ensuring that homeless people can get access to justice.

GOSFORD RACE CLUB CENTENARY

Mr CHRIS HOLSTEIN (Gosford) [4.42 p.m.]: I ask this House to recognise and congratulate the Gosford Race Club on celebrating its centenary on 11 November 2013. Its Chairman, Michael Cusick; Chief Executive, James Heddo; and the entire board are to be congratulated on the sterling work they do in maintaining the club's success and achieving the milestone of 100 years service to the Gosford community.

S.H.I.N.E.2168 EVENT

Mr PAUL LYNCH (Liverpool) [4.42 p.m.]: This afternoon I recognise an event held on Sunday 16 February at Miller at the Michael Wenden Aquatic Centre. It is called S.H.I.N.E.2168 and is an initiative built on the 2168 Community Health and Family Fun Day. The event focused on sport, health, inclusion,

neighbourhood and education in the postcode 2168 area. Funded through the Liverpool Catholic Club—the applying body being Sloosh Kidscare Incorporated—the event enhanced collaboration between service providers and featured social, cultural and information initiatives.

Despite the rain, close to 800 people attended on the day. Important also in the organising of the event was the Community 2168 Resident Action Group. Many volunteers were important to the day and I mention Margaret Parker, Kay Cole, George Smith, Colleen Boler and Margaret Daiken. I especially acknowledge the efforts of Sharyn Henry and Ruth Brisset-Costa. Also present at the event were the Federal member for Fowler, Chris Hayes, and councillors Stanley, Waller and Shelton.

PITTWATER ELECTORATE AUSTRALIA DAY HONOURS RECIPIENTS

Mr ROB STOKES (Pittwater—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.43 p.m.]: Today I acknowledge the many Pittwater residents who were honoured in this year's Australia Day Honours List. Of particular interest and relevance to members in this place is the inclusion on the list of a former member for Pittwater, John Brogden, who was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia for his work in mental health and in public administration. John and his wife, Lucy, continue to be stalwarts of the Pittwater community and I am delighted at his inclusion in the awards.

I also note that Professor Michael Cousins of Palm Beach was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia for his work in establishing the pain clinic at Royal North Shore Hospital and for his work in making pain management an important part of medicine in this country. I congratulate all the other Pittwater residents who were included in the Australia Day Honours List.

BEE ORSINI, YOUNG WOMAN OF THE YEAR FINALIST

Mr JOHN SIDOTI (Drummoyne) [4.44 p.m.]: I congratulate young Five Dock lady Bee Orsini on being named one of four finalists for the 2014 Young Woman of the Year Award. This year there were a record 239 nominations for this award. After having been homeless at a young age, Bee now works with the Salvation Army as a school liaison worker, giving valuable life advice to disadvantaged youth throughout the State and raising community awareness about youth homelessness. She has presented to more than 30,000 students, providing them with valuable insight into building resilience, overcoming adversity and supporting themselves and others.

In raising community awareness about youth homelessness, Bee has shared the stage with His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Sir Richard Branson, and has worked with Cate Blanchett on a youth homelessness initiative. She is currently the 2014 ambassador for Youth Homelessness Matters Day.

ANDREW KERR, MEDAL OF THE ORDER OF AUSTRALIA

Mr MARK SPEAKMAN (Cronulla—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.45 p.m.]: I congratulate Andrew Kerr of Cronulla on receiving the Medal of the Order of Australia in the Australia Day Honours List for service to the community and to water polo. A water polo enthusiast from age 14 at Gunnamatta Bay Baths, he started playing first grade for Cronulla Sutherland at age 16. Andrew is one of only two players to represent Australia in water polo in four Olympics: he captained the men's team at the 1988 Olympics and was a team member in 1976, 1980 and 1984.

He was a member of the national team from 1975 to 1988 and the New South Wales open men's team from 1973 to 1991, during which time the team won 13 Australian championships. He was also captain at the 1986 water polo world championship, and from 1994 to 1998 was a volunteer assistant coach for the Australian women's water polo team. He has volunteered with the Rainbow Club for more than 22 years, providing swimming lessons for children with a disability.

MARGIT ZSOLNAY 100TH BIRTHDAY

NUNZIO AND GRAZIA RIOLO FIFTIETH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

Mr JOHN FLOWERS (Rockdale) [4.46 p.m.]: I take this opportunity to extend special congratulations to Mrs Margit Zsolnay on the celebration of her 100th birthday on 15 February 2014. On reaching this milestone in her life Mrs Zsolnay is to be commended for maintaining her independence and

for her work in the local community. I wish her every happiness on her special day. I also congratulate Nunzio and Grazio Riolo of Monterey on the celebration of their fiftieth wedding anniversary on 25 January 2014.

MAITLAND ELECTORATE AUSTRALIA DAY HONOURS AND AWARDS

Ms ROBYN PARKER (Maitland—Minister for the Environment, and Minister for Heritage) [4.46 p.m.]: I congratulate Michelle Davis of East Maitland on being named the Maitland 2014 Local Woman of the Year in the NSW Women of the Year awards. Michelle is the co-founder and project coordinator for ROADwhyz, a young driver awareness program, and is also the co-founder and secretary of the Helping Other Parents Exist [HOPE] Support Group in Maitland, which offers support and mutual encouragement to those coping with the loss of a child.

I also congratulate Alexis Adams on being crowned Miss Maitland Showgirl 2014. I wish Alexis all the best for the Zone Showgirl finals at Rylstone on Saturday 8 March. I note that Emma Adams, Clare Wilkinson, Grace Rennie and Mel James were also entrants in this year's Maitland Showgirl competition. I thank them for their participation and assistance with the Maitland Show. There were a number of award recipients from the Maitland electorate in the most recent Australia Day Honours List. They included Maddison Elliott of Gillieston Heights; Bill Hopkins of Metford; David Evans, who received a Public Service Medal; and Lance Murray, who was named Maitland's 2014 Citizen of the Year.

GIRL GUIDES AWARDS

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA (Davidson) [4.47 p.m.]: I acknowledge the wonderful activity of Girl Guides in Sydney's north and I was pleased to attend an awards ceremony last Sunday. The ceremony was held at Lindfield and was convened by program adviser Jen Meredith of the Girl Guides Association NSW, Northern Sydney Region. Aiden Baldwin and Emma Meredith did an impressive job in overseeing proceedings on the day as senior guides and shared some valuable insights on Girl Guides, as did Georgia Elliott.

Many young and talented girls from across northern Sydney were honoured with awards presented by First Lady Margie Abbott, State Commissioner Belinda Allen and me. Recipients included Michelle Davies from Belrose Girl Guides in my electorate of Davidson. I congratulate them all.

Community recognition statements concluded.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Barilaro): Order! Community recognition statements having concluded the House will now consider private members' statements.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

HILLIER ROAD, LIVERPOOL

Mr PAUL LYNCH (Liverpool) [4.48 p.m.]: I draw to the attention of the House a serious issue that my constituent Mr Reg Neale has raised with me. Mr Neale lives in Hillier Road in Liverpool. Across the road from his house is a reserve that separates Hillier Road from the Liverpool-Parramatta Transitway. The reserve ground has been raised several feet and various trees have grown there. The hill there was specifically constructed when the transitway was developed. On the other side of the transitway is a large open space. I know the location quite well. The broad open space adjacent to the transitway between Memorial Avenue and Moore Street is known as Barbara Long Reserve. The piece of the reserve between Hillier Road and the transitway has become a considerable problem for Mr Neale and other residents. Mr Neale explained the problem in a letter to me. He said in part:

I would like to complain about the disgusting behaviour of a group of men that frequent the reserve on Hillier Road Liverpool, between Memorial Ave and Moore Street. They play cards, drink alcohol, urinate everywhere they choose and sometimes argue and fight directly in front of resident's houses. As there are no toilets their favourite place for urinating is directly behind the T-way bus station, and in summer the numbers attending increase. Also, there are no rubbish bins provided as it is a reserve not a recreation area, so there are constantly empty beer bottle and cartons left lying around.

These men park where they choose and regularly take up resident parking places, and they seem to park directly in front of my unit forcing me to park in side streets as there is no off street parking available for residents. When it rains, they either erect tents or take over the T-way bus station.

I have seen some of the things about which Mr Neale complains. As recently as last Saturday afternoon I noticed about 20 to 30 men gathered there. On many mornings I have seen litter and debris lying around, including empty bottles of alcohol. I also saw a crowd gathered there on Monday afternoon. According to Mr Neale, the men arrive at about 1.00 p.m. most days and their numbers increase at weekends. Mr Neale tells me that the worst time is from about 4.00 p.m. to 5.00 p.m.

Neither Mr Neale nor I have difficulty with people socialising; however, this location is entirely unsuitable for the purposes for which it is being used. It is a reserve; not a recreation area. These men need to be able to gather somewhere where drinking alcohol is permitted and that has facilities such as public toilets. I repeat, this is not a recreation area. There are council notices in the area prohibiting drinking and leaving rubbish under section 632 of the Local Government Act. That law is constantly breached with no action from the police, the council or any authorities. The no parking signs adjacent to the reserve are also comprehensively ignored by those gathering there.

It is not just their presence that is a problem or the fact that they are breaking the law or using a public space for purposes for which it was never intended. At times they play cards and have set up card tables on the footpath directly outside Mr Neale's front door. This has also happened to other residents. Some residents are elderly. One older woman living in Hillier Road says she likes gardening but stays indoors while this group gathers there because she feels intimidated by them. Mr Neale has been assiduous in prosecuting his concerns with both local police and Liverpool City Council but to no avail. Mr Neale says he is disappointed by the lack of response by both agencies. I have also raised the issue on Mr Neale's behalf. On 9 December I wrote to Liverpool council suggesting some possible actions. I received a substantive reply on 12 February.

I urge council and the police to give this matter the attention it deserves. I am not a wowser but there is a place to have a party—and it is not in front of Mr Neale's house. Nor should it disrupt residents' lives. Mr Neale lives in a block of units that can only be occupied by people who are more than 55 years of age, which gives an indication of some of the difficulties that might arise. Mr Neale tells me that the problem has been getting worse over time. It is now sufficiently serious to cause some residents to think of moving. Quite a number of local residents feel intimidated by what is happening in the area.

TRIBUTE TO MONICA SHEEHAN

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS (Lane Cove—Minister for Resources and Energy, and Special Minister of State) [4.52 p.m.]: I pay tribute to a woman who has made an enormous contribution to the Hunters Hill community within the Lane Cove electorate. Monica Sheehan was well known throughout the community as a larger-than-life personality who made the most of her 95 years. Sadly, she passed away on 12 February 2014. I express my heartfelt sympathies to her family for their loss. Born in 1918, Monica is remembered by those who knew her as a woman of fierce determination, optimism and generosity. Monica left school early and trained as a secretary. She later met her husband, Abe Sheehan, whom she married in 1941. Together they went on to have three children: Lorraine, Kay and Tim. Monica was a member of the Hunters Hill Tennis Club, playing until she was well into her seventies. As secretary of the club—the first female to hold the position—she would go on to play a pivotal role in helping secure the club's financial footing during a period of instability during which the club was looking at selling. She did this through continuous fundraising and she was eventually made a life member of the club for her ongoing contribution over the years.

Monica was involved in numerous interest groups. She founded the Hunters Hill Penguin Club, which taught women the art of public speaking, and often travelled interstate and to country towns to spread the virtues of the club. Monica was a valued supporter of the Hunters Hill Dramatic Society and was known to be able to sell out an entire evening of tickets among her friends alone. Monica was also a staunch supporter of the Women's Electoral Lobby and became a familiar face at council meetings. Monica's most well-known local success, however, was when she and 12 other women from Hunters Hill confronted the Government and saved the local bushland from development by placing the world's first green ban on the site. Because of her role in what would be coined "the Fight for Kelly's Bush", she was awarded the Hunters Hill Rotary Citizen of the Year in 1981.

When her husband, Abe, passed away in 1998 after 57 years of marriage, her spirit and involvement in the community did not depreciate. Monica was in her eighties when she joined the Hunters Hills Bowling Club and was elected to the committee. In 2008 she spoke at the Annual Jean Arnot Memorial Luncheon in Parliament House and she celebrated her ninetieth birthday that same year. Named Citizen of the Year by Hunters Hill Council in 2011, she spent a busy year in service to the role and was also awarded the North

Sydney Community Award in recognition of her outstanding service. At her memorial service on 19 February Monica's daughter recalled how often when they were children there would be a knock at the door, a stranger would enter and another place would be set at the Sheehan table with each of the family passing a bit of food over from their plate to welcome the stranger. It gives me great pride to boast that my electorate was home to a lady who exemplified such personal generosity. She fostered that generosity in her children and also showed it through her public contributions towards the Lane Cove community. I and the people of my electorate mourn the loss of such a dedicated woman. We will be forever grateful to Monica Sheehan for her work in the Hunters Hill community.

COFFS HARBOUR SHOWGROUND

Mr ANDREW FRASER (Coffs Harbour—The Assistant-Speaker) [4.56 p.m.]: The Coffs Harbour Showground recreation reserve is an issue of concern to the people of my electorate. The Coffs Harbour Showground was dedicated in 1928 but the land on which it sits was first set aside as a recreation reserve in the late 1880s and it has been used for agricultural shows and so on since that time. The 100th Coffs Harbour Show will be held this year. That is because the show was not run during the war years. The former Labor Government sacked the Coffs Harbour Showground Trust. I believe it did that to try to set it up in the same way as it sought to do in the 2010 management plan, which would have ultimately seen the vast majority of the 47 acres sold off or leased to commercial interests.

The community's and my desire is to ensure that the Coffs Harbour Showground recreation reserve remains a reserve in perpetuity. I must admit that at one stage I was a trustee of Coffs Harbour Showground. Many years ago the trustees set up a caravan park adjacent to the showground so that the ground would have an ongoing source of funds to ensure it was maintained and upgraded. I have not been able to trace all the financial records but after the administrator was put in place I found that in 2010 the wages to run the caravan park were something like \$190,000 a year. The administrator received more than \$130,000 a year and a mere \$50,000 or \$60,000 was retained as profit from the caravan park and the showground. To me this was clear evidence that the showground was being primed for privatisation.

In 2010 I made a submission objecting to what was being put forward and, I believe, backed by the then council. Thank God we came to government and that was not followed through. I recently agreed with the lands department to allow for the management of the caravan park to be handed over to North Coast Holiday Parks. A huge amount of money was being paid in wages and, from my experience, I believed the park could be run more efficiently and effectively and be updated if North Coast Holiday Parks took it over. In our meetings I made it clear to North Coast Holiday Parks and the director general of the lands department that the showground would need an ongoing income stream from the caravan park to ensure that it was maintained and upgraded. I felt I was given that assurance even though the then head of North Coast Holiday Parks said that he did not think he could proceed along those lines, or he would look at giving us five years income from the caravan park.

I maintain that is totally unacceptable. As a government we should ensure that the showground is maintained by income derived from the caravan park, and that should continue. I accept that the caravan park needs upgrading, but we must have a continued income stream to the showground to ensure that it remains not just as a showground but is able to be utilised by other groups in the community, such as the soccer and netball clubs, the art group and others who have utilised it over the years. It is also available for hire. Currently there is a circus in town that is utilising the showground and is paying rent to the showground trust.

I am pleased with the reception I have received from staff of the Deputy Premier's office, but we need to ensure a continuous income for the showground and we need a public trust in place. I was disappointed that the administrator at the time actively discouraged people who were involved with the showground—members of the show society, the soccer club and the men's shed—from applying for the trust. I would like some of the people who submitted nominations to be appointed as members of an interim trust, the readvertising of trust positions and the active encouragement of people who utilise the showground to apply for membership of the trust. The Coffs Harbour Showground is an integral part of the community and acts as a green buffer zone. It must remain so in perpetuity.

MAITLAND COMMUNITY CABINET MEETING

Ms ROBYN PARKER (Maitland—Minister for the Environment, and Minister for Heritage) [5.01 p.m.]: It is with great pride that I inform the House of the wonderful start to the year we are having in

Maitland. Two weeks ago I hosted the Premier and our ministerial colleagues for the first Community Cabinet in 2014. This event was great news for Maitland and the Hunter region. The Community Cabinet is an opportunity for people to raise with the Premier and Ministers matters that are important to them and the local community. The Maitland Town Hall was abuzz with activity on Monday 10 February as local residents and community groups made the most of their opportunity. In fact, it was standing room only. The lunchtime community forum was one of the biggest our Government has seen. The auditorium was packed with people representing many communities from Maitland, across the Hunter and beyond. The audience represented all walks of life.

I thank the Premier and my ministerial colleagues for making the community forum a very successful event for all involved. Maitland also allowed the Liberal-Nationals Government to showcase initiatives in the region that are making a difference, especially those in my electorate. For example, the Hunter Infrastructure and Investment Fund has already delivered for Maitland. A \$2 million upgrade of the mental health unit at Maitland Hospital has been completed. This unit has helped to improve facilities for our mental health patients, their families and carers and the dedicated staff. A further \$45 million was committed for safety and traffic flow improvements at Maitland's two roundabouts on the New England Highway. Work has commenced on this project and parts of it are very close to completion. Good progress has been made on construction of the new slip lanes at the railway station and the Maitland Hospital roundabouts, and there is the eastbound overpass to come. The Maitland Town Hall, where I hosted the Community Cabinet, last year received a \$2 million grant to renovate the main auditorium of the heritage-listed building for our regional theatre, making it suitable for contemporary entertainment and performances.

At the time of the visit by the Cabinet, the total investment from the Hunter Infrastructure and Investment Fund for Maitland was over the \$50 million mark, with the Premier and the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure announcing a \$5.6 million grant for Maitland City Council to upgrade Maitland No. 1 Sportsground. The council will contribute \$3 million towards the \$8.6 million project, which involves demolition of the outdated grandstand for a new structure. It has been Maitland's No. 1 sportsground in name only; it has been quite an embarrassment. I am delighted to be part of a government that has delivered money for this important upgrade, which will result in the sportsground being used for regional sports competitions and not just as the Maitland Pickers Rugby League team's home ground. It has been used for events such as Relay For Life and Carols by Candlelight, but I foresee a greater number of events being held there.

I also am pleased to report that the Community Cabinet focused on health, education, law and order. The Minister for Health, Jillian Skinner, unveiled the delivery of two new resuscitation cots for Maitland Hospital to provide specialised care for newborns. The Minister for Education, Adrian Piccoli, made his second visit in less than nine months to Rutherford Technology High School to provide an update to the principal, Michael Whiting, his staff and students on planning for the school's redevelopment, which is worth more than \$15 million. The project, which was announced in the last budget and is due for completion in 2016, will replace demountable classrooms with permanent classrooms and provide new spaces for teaching the performing arts and for staff. Maitland Tutorial Centre, which caters for students with behavioural and emotional disorders, will be relocated to the school and will be accommodated in a purpose-built unit.

As the Minister for Heritage, I was pleased to join the Attorney General, Greg Smith, on an inspection of the \$1.1 million renovations at Maitland Court House. This beautiful 1896 building has been improved both in looks and functional capacity, with improvements to disability access and fire safety, replacement of the roof with slate tiles, repairs to the clock in the historic clock tower, and landscaping works to be commenced. I know that many people in Maitland will be pleased with this work on an iconic building in Maitland. The Community Cabinet provided Maitland with the snapshot of what is happening in Maitland under the O'Farrell Government and what is to come. It was a refreshing experience. I am still receiving congratulatory emails on providing accessibility to Cabinet. The former Government also held Community Cabinet meetings because they are a great way for our communities to participate in democracy. We are very lucky in this State and country to be able to participate in such a way. I am delighted that a Community Cabinet meeting was held in Maitland. I also am delighted with the progress the Government is making in relation to the new Lower Hunter hospital, which will be located at Metford. The site has been chosen and a public meeting will be held shortly to enable people to be heard on their healthcare needs and their vision for the new hospital.

ALBION PARK RAIL BYPASS

Mr GARETH WARD (Kiama) [5.06 p.m.]: I am pleased to provide the House with an update on the Albion Park Rail Bypass project. I was very pleased that the New South Wales Government provided \$1 million

in the 2013-14 State budget to progress investigations and planning for the future extension of the M1 Princes Motorway between Yallah to Oak Flats, which will provide a bypass at Albion Park Rail. The Roads and Maritime Services review of the reserve bypass corridor has confirmed it remains a suitable location for the Albion Park Rail Bypass. The review involved identifying and analysing issues along the route; ensuring that key physical and engineering features of the route corridor can meet the design standards; analysing traffic and transport performance to better understand traffic volumes and management; traffic forecasts; and assessing the road corridor in terms of environmental flooding, community and social issues.

A bypass at Albion Park Rail will be consistent with the New South Wales Long Term Transport Master Plan. In the early 1990s the then Fahey Government and the then Roads and Traffic Authority undertook a study that identified a preferred route for the bypass. To reserve land for this bypass route, a road corridor was included in the Wollongong and Shellharbour local environment plans. This road corridor protects the route from development and reserves land for this important road. Detailed planning will now commence and will include concept design and investigation of potential interchanges and locations for the design. The drop-in sessions, which I have requested the Roads and Maritime Services to conduct, will provide informal opportunities for the community to meet the members of the project team, to ask questions and to provide feedback on this project. Community consultation will be the key. Like all major infrastructure projects, it is important to engage community members so that they can provide feedback on local conditions and issues.

The core information sessions at Centenary Hall on Tongara Road at Albion Park will be held this Saturday on 1 March from 10.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m., from 5.00 p.m. to 8.00 p.m. on Monday 3 March, from 1.00 p.m. to 4.00 p.m. on Saturday 8 March, and on Monday 10 March from 5.00 p.m. to 8.00 p.m. I encourage community members to attend the sessions to ensure that they are fully informed about this very important and long overdue project. Unfortunately, Labor failed to progress this project to this stage during its 16 years in government. Since becoming the member for Kiama I have advocated for this project on behalf of local residents who are keen to build momentum and work towards a positive result. Indeed, local Labor members have suggested that traffic congestion started on 26 March 2011, but clearly that is not the case.

The M1 Princes Motorway and the Princes Highway is the only continuous transport corridor linking Sydney and the Illawarra region with the Shoalhaven and the South Coast. The road serves as a commuter route, a local route for residents, a major tourist route and an important freight route. Key issues affecting the M1 Princes Motorway and the Princes Highway between Yallah and Oak Flats include heavy traffic, particularly in the morning and afternoon peak periods and in peak holiday periods. Traffic numbers and delays are increasing. As to development, since 1996 the Illawarra population has grown substantially. Within the next 30 to 50 years development is planned at Calderwood, West Dapto, Tallimba and Tallawarra. All of those factors will impact on traffic conditions. The developments will add up to 30,000 new homes, which will contribute to increased traffic volumes along the existing route.

Flooding causes the full closure of the Princes Highway and the Illawarra Highway for an average of half a day and 4.5 days a year respectively. In relation to inconsistent driving conditions, motorists experience a high-speed environment north of Yallah and south of Oak Flats. Lower speeds are experienced between those two suburbs. The change of conditions creates frustration and reduces traffic efficiency. The bypass at Berry is expected to be completed by 2018, leaving Albion Park Rail as the only town between Heathcote and Bomaderry with traffic lights on the Princes Highway. The A1 Princes Highway between Yallah and Oak Flats is experiencing a high and increasing number of crashes. The frequency of crashes is expected to worsen as traffic on the highway increases in future years.

I take this opportunity to thank the Minister for Roads and Ports, Duncan Gay, for listening to the concerns I have raised on behalf of my local community. They have genuine concerns about progressing this project, and I will continue to fight and advocate for this project regardless of who is in government at a State or Federal level. In a meeting with the Minister today I again raised many of the issues I have outlined in the House, and I thank him for hearing my concerns. As I have mentioned, the New South Wales Government has allocated funds for several projects associated with progressing this project.

The recent review of the reserve bypass corridor included: analysing the traffic and transport performance of the road corridor to better understand traffic volumes and movement in this area; traffic modelling to forecast the usage of the bypass, given the reserve bypass corridor is three kilometres longer than the existing route; and consideration of traffic volumes, travel times, traction for traffic and economic performance. A bypass of Albion Park Rail would divert a substantial portion of through traffic onto the bypass,

allowing the existing A1 Princes Highway to mainly cater for local traffic. This would reduce travel times for through and local traffic in both directions, reduce driver frustration and improve the reliability of journey times. I thank the House for listening to my concerns. [*Time expired.*]

MARRICKVILLE ELECTORATE SCHOOL STUDENT ACHIEVEMENTS

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT (Marrickville) [5.11 p.m.]: I speak once again about the wonderful efforts and achievements of children and young people in the Marrickville electorate, which were showcased by the many school presentations that occurred at the end of last year or, in some cases, the beginning of 2014. I attended many end-of-year school awards ceremonies. Time does not permit me to talk about all of them but I will particularly mention some of the schools and their achievements. I congratulate Ms Ruth Bradfield Ling and her dedicated team of teachers and staff at Marrickville West Public School. The school has gone from strength to strength, which was very much on show at the 2013 presentation day. The day was well attended by proud parents and many community members. In addition to the recognition of student achievement through the awards, guests were entertained by a wonderful rendition of "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer" and "Roar".

Just down the road, Ferncourt Public School also had a very impressive annual presentation of awards, with a great turnout of parents and friends. Parents and guests were entertained by a very enthusiastic school band and school choir. Congratulations to Ms Ruth Turnell and her team of teachers and staff is warranted. I also congratulate Mathew Wang as dux of Marrickville West Public School and Stella Aroney as dux of Ferncourt Public School. It was also pleasing to see the recognition of citizenship at both schools, with the Citizenship Award going to Mia Ardianto at Marrickville West Public School and Maisha Sayed and Abbey Walker sharing the Principals Award. Sophia EI Mohamed received the Citizenship Award at Ferncourt Public School.

The new student leaders were presented with their badges. These roles are important and for many students this is their first taste of democracy in action. Hopefully they will be encouraged to maintain an active interest and involvement in this area throughout their lives. I also congratulate Marrickville High School Principal Ms Arety Dassaklis and her team on their presentation day. Ms Dassaklis is a relatively new principal to the area but is already making her mark. In addition to the recognition of dux of each year and the many awards of achievement, there were four awards sponsored by universities. These important associations expose Marrickville High school students to the possibility of tertiary study and raise their aspirations.

These awards included the University of Western Sydney most outstanding year 11 student, which was presented to Melisa Kuru. The University of New South Wales academic achievement award went to Thai Phuong Thao Le; the University of Sydney year 10 academic excellence award went to Manik Mahajan; and the Sydney University Compass award went to Michael Kirby Barrett. Congratulations to all those students. I also must make mention of wonderful performance of "Skinny Love" by Ms Katrina Wong.

I also attended the graduation of the 2013 Project ARC participants and Youth Connections students at Rosemount Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services. The young people involved at Rosemount Good Shepherd have faced many obstacles in their lives and yet all seven Project ARC students participated in every activity through the program, four students completed subjects towards their Higher School Certificate and nine students gained a record of school attainment. I congratulate Kirsty Rose, the coordinator of the program. Rosemount Good Shepherd is making a real difference in the lives of young people who have disconnected from school. Rosemount Good Shepherd understands the importance of education to improving job opportunities and life outcomes for young people. The graduation ceremony was well attended by the students' families, staff and community members. Two of the graduates, Taylor Hickey and Kamarah Terry, were the emcees for the event. They were excellent hosts and made sure the ceremony ran smoothly and on time.

The final event I mention today is the annual speech day for Fort Street High School, a selective high school in my electorate. The event was held on the 21 February this year at Sydney Town Hall. This ceremony was special for the usual reasons of recognising the achievements of the students, which were very impressive, but also because it marked the final day of Deputy Principal Ms Christine Kemp, who has worked in public education for more than 38 years, five of those at Fort Street. That is an extraordinary contribution. Principal Ms Roslynne Moxham made special mention of this in her annual principal's address, which was, as always, inspiring. There were a number of very beautiful performances from the symphony orchestra, the chamber choir, the stage band and the wind ensemble.

I congratulate all the students involved in these performances and all the award recipients, including Marta Krzanowski, dux of Fort Street High School and recipient of the Premiers Award for all-round

excellence; Kimberly Yi Xian Yoon, recipient of the Ada Partridge Prize for second in the Higher School Certificate; and Harry White, recipient of the Fanny Cohen Prize for third in the Higher School Certificate. The Fort Street annual speech day also heard a wonderful address by Ella Colley, a Fortian from 2007. As always, attending these award ceremonies provides a reaffirmation of the intelligence, creativity and resilience of the young people of Marrickville.

REGIONAL AIR SERVICES

Mr ADAM MARSHALL (Northern Tablelands) [5.16 p.m.]: I raise the issue of regional air services throughout the State. I have referred to this issue before in the House and I am on record as a critic of QantasLink and the services it has been providing to the Northern Tablelands, particularly the Armidale-to-Sydney route. I have referred to the need for more competition in regional air services and the need for people in my part of the world, the Northern Tablelands and the New England north-west, to have more options. Competition is the only way to get the existing carrier, QantasLink, to pull up its socks, sharpen its pencil and deliver the services for which the people of our area are paying a hefty price. I am glad to report to the House that yesterday Regional Express airlines made a positive announcement that from Friday 28 March it will offer 36 weekly flights between Armidale and Sydney, bringing an annual 60,000 extra seats to the route.

Dr Geoff Lee: How many?

Mr ADAM MARSHALL: Sixty thousand extra seats, which is great news for the people of the Northern Tablelands and everyone in the region. As we know, competition is great for consumers and will keep both carriers on their toes. It will ensure that the people of our area have more flights to choose from at a more competitive fair pricing scheme when they choose to fly. As we know, Regional Express is Australia's largest independent regional airline, operating a fleet of more than 40 Saab 340 aircraft on some 1,300 weekly flights to 35 destinations throughout New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia and Queensland. On behalf of all the people in Armidale and the Northern Tablelands I give Rex a very warm welcome to the region and to let it know full well that we will support it.

However, this good news belies the difficulties that are confronting aviation in this country in general and regional aviation in particular. Today we heard news that Qantas has notched up its biggest first-half loss since being floated in 1995 and will post a pre-tax loss of between \$250 million and \$300 million, in a period where typically Australian airlines do quite well. Today Qantas also announced the cutting of thousands of jobs, which is very sad news for its employees. Likewise, Regional Express has reported a 60 per cent fall in its first-half profit, down to \$3.6 million. Compared to 2012, passenger numbers fell 5.1 per cent to just under 550,000. Rex has announced that it will not pay interim dividends.

While the people of Northern Tablelands can rejoice in the fact that we have a second carrier in the region—an extra 60,000 seats—we must remember that times are tough for regional aviation. We saw the collapse of Brindabella Airlines, which operated flights out of Moree and Narrabri, and that was very sad. This good news needs to be tempered with the fact that, unless we in regional communities value the service we have and support the carriers to increase the amount of travellers that use both airlines, it may be short-lived. We must ensure that we sustain that competition into the long term. I encourage people throughout the New England and the State's north-west, particularly the Northern Tablelands, to take advantage of this competition and cheaper air fares and fly more. Regional air services are critical to the development of country communities: they are essential for business, medical services and tourism.

Many communities in my area and in other members' electorates throughout the State rely on air services to bring in specialist medical services to attend their hospitals. I finish on this note: A public debate is taking place about a second Sydney airport at Badgerys Creek. There is no doubt that Sydney needs a second airport, but we must ensure that regional air services have continued access to Sydney (Kingsford Smith) Airport and do not get pushed out to Western Sydney. Regional services must have continued access to the main airport and their slots should be grandfathered or ring fenced. This is essential for regional communities, and we will not accept anything less.

PARRAMATTA NORTH PUBLIC SCHOOL

Dr GEOFF LEE (Parramatta) [5.21 p.m.]: I support the great work of Parramatta North Public School, which proudly upholds its tradition of quality teaching in a caring environment. It is a wonderful school with excellent teaching and learning programs supported by professional and caring teachers. The building of staff

capacity with a focus on enhanced outcomes in literacy and numeracy is a high priority, as are the school's successful programs such as its creative arts program led by the coordinator, Ms Louise Pye. It is very much a collaborative effort by the committed and highly dedicated staff. In 2013 the school proudly showcased its school choir, two dance groups and a drumming group at the Riverside Theatre during Celebrating the Arts week. The exquisite costumes were designed and tailored by finance manager Ms Debbie Jones and Ms Pye. Ms Kate Young, assistant principal, and Mr Greg Leeson, band coordinator, worked tirelessly on the implementation of a band program and the formation of the school's concert band. Students in years 3 to 6 can now learn an instrument, participate in band camps and tutorials and develop expertise in the area of music.

The school recognises the importance of fitness and sport and the attributes of sportsmanship and good citizenship that active student participation brings. Its successful Personal Development, Health and Physical Education Program is led by Lee Roser and supported by Ian Wheatley, assistant principal, along with the entire teaching staff. School teams were successful in summer and winter seasons. The senior cricket and junior soccer teams were victorious, while several students represented the school at zone and district carnivals. Parramatta North Public School has demonstrated strong academic success in the International Competitions and Assessments for Schools university competitions. I congratulate Jayden Ambichi on his distinction in writing; Chandni Jayaraman on a distinction in writing; Rosanna Xu on a high distinction in mathematics and English and distinction in computer skills; Sakshi Joshi on a high distinction in English and distinction in mathematics; Rishi Wig on a distinction in spelling; Vishnu Yannam on a distinction in spelling; and Khushi Patel on a high distinction in English. I recognise Sakshi Joshi, Rosanna Xu, Jessica Islam, Khushi Patel and Chloe McMillan, who were all successful in achieving a place in a gifted and talented class—a regional initiative involving students attending this class one day a week for a term.

The student representative council, led by Mrs Rohana Hollier-Smith and Mrs Carole Eltakchi, has brilliantly coordinated and organised successful discos and fundraising events throughout the year. The Play Leaders Program, coordinated by Mrs Caroline Postlethwaite, has provided younger students a wonderful opportunity to connect with older students. The school has state-of-the-art information and communications technology [ICT] facilities. The school recognises Mrs Rosemary Pizzuti for her coordination role and the highly skilled English as a Second Language teachers for their contribution to the outstanding progress made by English as a Second Language students, as well as Mrs Shahla Malek, who expertly delivers an excellent Farsi community language program three days a week.

The parents and citizens committee has made a great contribution and in 2013 worked tirelessly to hold many fundraising events: mothers' and fathers' days, special canteen food days, raffles, walkathons, calendar art projects and additional events. The new water refill station for students is the result of a fantastic fundraising effort. The school recognises the outstanding contributions made by the committee members: Ms Selda Ozdemir, president; Ms Angela Massoud, secretary; Mrs Cathy Bailey and Ms Chrhrys Richards, co-vice presidents; and Mrs Lyndee Merritt, treasurer. I acknowledge the executive team members, Mrs Kym Murdoch, Ms Kate Young and Mr Ian Wheatley, as well as all staff members. They are true professionals who provide the wonderful students with every opportunity to become successful twenty-first century learners and responsible citizens of the future.

INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING PROPOSAL

Mr JOHN SIDOTI (Drummoyne) [5.26 p.m.]: One of my constituents, Mr Ian Spring, a retired economist and business manager, has set out to encourage Federal borrowing to solve our infrastructure problems. In a submission to the Productivity Commission inquiry into infrastructure, Ian Spring suggested an ongoing program of Federal borrowing to give a fast-tracked 20-year fix to our transport infrastructure problems. The proposal is that the Federal Government borrow 0.6 per cent of gross domestic product [GDP] annually—\$10 billion in the first year—and use half of this for free contributions to private transport infrastructure projects. This would result in ongoing new expenditure in road and rail of \$15 billion per year nationally and \$5 billion per annum in New South Wales.

I have reviewed the submission and feel it has considerable merit and deserves serious consideration by the Productivity Commission. Adoption of this proposal would enable transformative changes to my electorate, to the whole of Western Sydney and to the nation as a whole. In fact, the submission includes the western suburbs of Sydney as an example of how this program could help one particular region. It shows how the program could fund the new transport infrastructure needed in Western Sydney over the next 20 years. In this section it draws attention to the fact that the population of Western Sydney will grow by more than one million people by 2034 and suggests the following new works as being essential to cope with that enormous growth: the

North West Rail Link; a cross-Sydney Harbour rail tunnel; the Westconnex motorway; the Parramatta to Epping rail link; a Parramatta-centred Western Sydney light rail network; an upgrade to Western Sydney metropolitan road links; the widening or duplication of the M7; the M1, M2 and M4 links; and a new Parramatta to Sydney express train link.

A rough estimate of the total cost of these works is \$68 billion in 2014 dollars. The submission also says that with sources of transport infrastructure funding relied on up to now drying up, for various reasons, only Federal borrowing and co-financing with the private sector could get the jobs done. This program gives the best of both worlds: cheap public capital leading to lower-priced tolls and tickets, and the skills and drive of private enterprise to get the build job done efficiently. The whole community would benefit. Traffic would improve and growing transport chaos would be avoided. Extra taxes generated by the increase in gross domestic product due to the program would strengthen Federal and State budgets.

Gross domestic product would rise by 1.3 per cent, and 45 per cent of the borrowing would come back to the Federal budget within a year or two in income taxation paid by those doing the building work. State governments, of course, would benefit from an increase in GST. Tens of thousands of new jobs would be created—a powerful benefit to the western suburbs of Sydney. To those concerned about adding to Federal debt, the borrowing is for long-term, income-earning capital improvements, and these benefits would grow over time. Also, against the backdrop of gross domestic product growing over 20 years, the significance of the debt would be small, only 8 per cent of gross domestic product. That is a tiny price to pay for a first-class national transport system.

As the submission points out, the Sydney Harbour Bridge, built with borrowed money, cost \$8 million. The weight of debt shrinks and efficiencies leading to lower costs could give an ongoing stream of extra taxation revenue to support debt-servicing costs and eventually offset the debt. Greater availability of funds would enable appropriately generous treatment of property owners affected, both directly and indirectly, by new works. I believe Mr Spring's initiative is timely and its adoption would give us a very welcome solution to the growing congestion and other transport problems in Western Sydney. His website *borrowandbuild.com.au* gives details. Borrowing by the income-taxing level of government is the traditional conservative way to fund long-term infrastructure. Ian Spring's borrow-and-build proposal should be fully examined and reported on by the Productivity Commission in its report, which is expected in March.

TRIBUTE TO MR LES DOLLIN

Mr BART BASSETT (Londonderry) [5.30 p.m.]: This Sunday 2 March 2014 is the annual Clean Up Australia Day. Now in its twenty-fourth year, since 1990 Australians have devoted more than 24 million hours to the environment through Clean up Australia Day and collected over 200,000 tonnes of rubbish. Last year more than 550,300 volunteers across 7,341 sites removed an estimated 16,150 tonnes of rubbish across the nation. Today I pay tribute to another volunteer, Les Dollin, from the Hawkesbury local government area. Les is an unsung hero who works day in, day out without pay and without fanfare to keep the Hawkesbury and Australia beautiful. Just like Sydney Harbour, the Hawkesbury has some of the most spectacular scenery which is a rich tapestry of the natural and built environments.

Les is officially retired but that is not a reason to slow down or take it easy. He spends many hours mowing lawns, picking up rubbish, cleaning scrub and noxious weeds, and replanting native plants and shrubs. Les gets involved for the good of the community. Les is an active member of Kurrajong-Comleroy Historical Society, which provides much valuable information about one of the oldest European settlements in Australia and preserves the memory and history of Comleroy Road. He also conducts research into Australian native bees. Les had been an electrician at Clyde Wagon Works for 10 years and at Chullora Railway Workshops for 20 years and has compiled a collection of stories and photographs of these fascinating workshops during their heyday of steam, blacksmiths, coppersmiths, steam fitters and many other trades that have now disappeared. He also maintains the Australian Fowler crawler register, which lists 350 antique Fowler crawlers being restored by tractor enthusiasts around the nation.

But Les is probably best known as the Comleroy Road Mower Man since 2007. That road runs between the two State electorates of Londonderry and Hawkesbury. Les outlines his involvement on his website, explaining that as he travelled along the road one day he noticed it becoming more and more overgrown to the point where his niece, Julia, was having trouble riding her horse along the roadside. Walkers were unable to walk safely along the road and the undergrowth was also making Comleroy Road ineffective as a fire break for residents. Les began spending about five hours a day cleaning up the verges of the road and the grass. Some local residents helped him by cleaning up the verges near their homes and keeping them maintained. In 2007

Les spent six months clearing weeds from an overgrown park on Comleroy Road near Peel Parade and Kurrajong Rural Fire Brigade helped to burn all the debris. The local community and Hawkesbury City Council helped him by planting native trees in the park.

Les' volunteer work is no mean feat. He has beautified and maintained an eight-kilometre stretch of road along Comleroy Road and Bells Line of Road between North Richmond and Kurrajong through the Adopt-a-Road Program for about seven years. Les' civic pride is hardly a surprise when one considers that three generations of Dollins have lived in the area. His parents, Norm "Jack" Dollin and Gloria Dollin, together with his grandparents Norman and Mary Dollin carved a pioneering farming property out of the bush. They raised ducks for the local guesthouses and later established an orchard. Norman Dollin was in the Australian Light Horse and fought at Gallipoli. Communities are created, strengthened and improved through the efforts of people such as Les Dollin. But someone has to pay and help. As a retired gentleman, there was no way Les could afford a new heavy-duty motor. After hearing that Les' old mower was struggling, resident Tony Noonan kicked off the fundraising campaign for a new lawnmower for Les with a \$50 donation and urged others to support the effort through a letter to the editor in the *Hawkesbury Gazette*, which also supported the cause by promoting the campaign.

The Rotary Club of Kurrajong-North Richmond took over the coordination of fundraising activities in October and arranged for the purchase of a new lawnmower. Fundraising efforts for the new lawnmower have involved donations large and small from individuals and local businesses. I was delighted to make Les' job easier by securing \$2,500 in State government funding, and I thank the Premier for that generous donation. The Redbank North Richmond development project contributed \$2,500, Kurmond BP service station collected more than \$1,000 in customer donations over the counter, while Kurrajong Cellars collected more than \$300 and Kurrajong Newsagency collected about \$200. Montes Men's Hair Stylist at Kurmond raised more than \$100, while Macka's Haircuts at North Richmond raised more than \$200. One North Richmond family chipped in \$1,000 and Hawkesbury Dental gave \$1,500, while Mountain Palace at North Richmond donated \$200 and raised about \$300 more from customers. These donations, large and small, meant that more than \$10,000 was raised in just five months. Another generous community member donated a mulcher and Les also will receive a whipper snipper to assist in his work. I was thrilled when last Tuesday the Kurrajong North Richmond Rotary Club handed over the cheque and the mower to Les for his great work.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS (Hawkesbury—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.35 p.m.]: I commend the member for Londonderry for raising these great initiatives that keep the Hawkesbury area cleaner and for making particular note of Les Dollin, who is a constituent of mine. Les is an icon. He belongs to several organisations, and indeed one could not find a more community-minded person. He is broadly respected across the area and I see him at many different functions, notably the Comleroy Road Public School presentation, which he attends every year as a special guest. Les highlights a problem that is common across this State. Disgusting rubbish is turfed out of car windows onto our roads and into our beautiful areas. It is a disgrace. We should not have to rely on wonderful people like Les Dollin to pick up that rubbish, but I am very thankful that he does.

FAIRFIELD HIGH SCHOOL *OUR FACES, OUR STORIES* PROJECT

Mr GUY ZANGARI (Fairfield) [5.36 p.m.]: Fairfield High School has recently published its sixth edition of *Our Faces, Our Stories*, which is a collaborative project where students from Fairfield High School are given the opportunity to tell the story of their migration to Australia. In *Our Faces, Our Stories* students who originate from all over the globe and come from different walks of life share their tales with us. Learning the goals, ambitions and hardships faced by those students and their families to get where they are today is truly inspirational. As part of the book, students were tasked with creating an expressive piece of art that would also represent their story. All the artworks presented by the students were reflective of their personal beliefs, struggles and aspirations for their future in this great country. Not that long ago a number of the students lived in countries where freedom of speech was not valued. In fact, free speech was looked down upon; it was taboo. Free speech is a great compliment to Australia and to our society as we know it, but it is something that many of us take for granted. Our great nation allows the students to express their feelings, thoughts, goals and experiences through both speech and their artworks.

The school celebrated the launch of *Our Faces, Our Stories* with a barbecue at Fairfield Par, which was attended by the teachers, parents and students. It was an extremely successful morning, with all participants getting into the spirit of sharing. It was important for us all to listen to their experiences, and of course there is nothing more uniquely Australian than sitting around having a chat with mates and enjoying a barbecue. For the first time *Our Faces, Our Stories* was published completely in-house by the school, which is no small task. This

was a great achievement by all the departments involved and testament to the ongoing support of the individuals who are the driving force behind the project. Special commendation should go to the teachers who took on the role of mentoring the students throughout the year and for going that extra mile to ensure students received the support they required. The great backbone of our society is the stories and experience that people bring with them to our shores.

I was personally taken aback by the level of engagement from all the contributors to the book. It was nice to see that despite the hardships articulated by the students in the book they were still able to smile and be very proud of where they came from. They expressed how equally proud they were of their adopted country, Australia, and their adopted city, Fairfield. I am in awe of Fairfield High School's commitment to harmony in our community. It was amazing to see that through all of the events that took place from the start of production to yet another wonderful publication of their book so many unique stories, perspectives and insights were shared among a diverse multicultural group. It is events such as these that make our local community a great, vibrant and unique society in which to live.

In concluding this private member's statement, I take my hat off to the principal of Fairfield High School, Mr Bob Mulas. Mr Bob Mulas is at the forefront of creating harmony throughout our community. He champions the cause of diversity in our community and is to be congratulated on the wonderful work he does with students, teachers and the wider Fairfield community, including local churches and the wonderful local area command. I take my hat off to Mr Bob Mulas and to the wonderful students of Fairfield High School.

CRONULLA ELECTORATE GOVERNMENT GRANTS

Mr MARK SPEAKMAN (Cronulla—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.41 p.m.]: I inform the House about recent New South Wales government grants in the Cronulla electorate. In 2013 North Cronulla Surf Life Saving Club once again achieved the main goal of the surf life saving movement, namely, no lives lost. It was recently awarded a \$70,000 grant under the New South Wales Government's Surf Club Facility Grant Program. North Cronulla Surf Life Saving Club will receive \$70,000 for refurbishments to its club, which includes refurbishment of the Harry Brown Ballroom and kitchen and toilets. The Surf Club Facility Grant Program is worth \$2 million per annum and assists with funding both major and minor projects at surf life saving clubs across New South Wales. Modern facilities make surf lifesaving activities more accessible, which, in turn, encourages participation and improves beachgoer safety.

Eight other community groups in the Cronulla electorate recently shared \$200,000 in funding under the New South Wales Community Building Partnership scheme. The program offers improved community infrastructure across the State; encourages local community participation through social, recreational and environmental activities; boosts local construction jobs and businesses; and greatly benefits our hardworking community organisations. The first successful applicant was Saint Andrews Anglican Church, Cronulla, which will receive \$14,900 for the construction of a new door and disability access ramp. The second recipient was Caringbah North Public School Parents and Citizens Association—my old school—which will receive \$20,000 for the construction of a stage and recreation area at the school. The stage will be used for hosting winter and evening events and the recreational space will be used for various purposes, including an extension of the lunch area and school and community events.

The third recipient of funding under the Community Building Partnership scheme was Cronulla High School Parents and Citizens Association. It will receive \$24,800 for an upgrade to the performing arts building. This will benefit various community groups who use the performing arts studio. The fourth recipient was Cronulla South Public School Parents and Citizens Association. It will receive \$30,000 to install a new play surface at the school. Currently, a significant portion of play space is often unavailable for use due to a natural turf area that is difficult to maintain. Installation of artificial turf will ensure that the area is fully utilised by the school and community-based childcare services.

The fifth recipient is the Shire Woodworking Club at Lilly Pilly. It will receive \$4,950 for the creation of a paved safe entry and frontage for the clubhouse. This will assist the elderly and disabled and provide better community exposure. The sixth recipient is the Southern Districts Rugby Club at Sylvania Waters. It will receive \$25,000 for the upgrade of car park facilities at the club which will benefit supporters but also the many sporting groups that frequent the area and use the car park. The seventh recipient is Saint Aloysius Catholic Church, Cronulla. It will receive \$7,350 for the construction of new pathways into the church community hall. That will benefit several community groups that use the hall for their activities. The eighth recipient under the Community Building Partnership scheme is Wanda Surf Life Saving Club, another club that last year achieved

the goal of no lives lost. It was awarded \$73,000 for renovations to its clubhouse. I congratulate the successful applicants and I commend them for all the great work they do for the Cronulla community. I look forward to visiting the completed projects.

BANKSTOWN CITIZEN OF THE YEAR HARRY ALLIE

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK (Bankstown) [5.45 p.m.]: This evening I take the opportunity to commend one of the quiet achievers of the Bankstown community, Mr Harry Allie, who was named on Australia Day as Bankstown's Citizen of the Year. Uncle Harry, as he is affectionately known by everyone, is the first Indigenous resident to receive the award for his tireless work for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, particularly in the areas of employment and education. His life motto is one we could all take counsel from: "There's always someone more deserving than me." Uncle Harry is not one to seek the spotlight, but his work for the community deserves to be put up in lights. Now 72, Uncle Harry is a long-time resident of Chester Hill, and a descendent of the Kujjula people of Charters Towers, in Far North Queensland. As a young man, Harry was inspired to join the Royal Australian Air Force by his uncles and an aunt who served in the forces in World War II. He enlisted in 1966 at Townsville and served for 23 years in units throughout Australia, the United States and Malaysia.

His last posting was at Bankstown, where he chose to settle and dedicate his life to working not just for Indigenous people but also for the wider community. His association with the Armed Forces continues to this day and 18 months ago he was appointed as an Elder of the Air Force to advise it on cultural diversity and support young Indigenous people should they seek a career in the Royal Australian Air Force. In my time as Bankstown mayor, I had the great pleasure of working closely with Uncle Harry when he was chairman of the Bankstown Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee, where he was instrumental in developing Bankstown's Reconciliation Action Plan to give the Indigenous community a voice.

I recall the emotion of Kevin Rudd's apology in Parliament to the Stolen Generations on 13 February 2008. Uncle Harry had organised a get-together that morning and I could see the apology meant a lot to him and to the broader Indigenous community in Bankstown. It was a vital part of the healing process for a lot of Elders who may not have been taken from their families but who witnessed what was happening around them and still live with those ghosts. During his 34 years in the Bankstown area, Uncle Harry has held many prominent roles at local, State and national levels. Uncle Harry was awarded one of five prestigious Elders awards by the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council for his life-long contribution to Indigenous education in Australia. The commendation recognised his role as an elder on campus at the University of Western Sydney and on its Indigenous Employment and Engagement Advisory Board. Uncle Harry was also appointed as an Indigenous Education Ambassador for the Federal Department of Education.

Listing his present community positions makes for an impressive portfolio. Uncle Harry is a committee member of Communities for Children for the Smith Family and a member of the Ain't No Excuse Project for the St Vincent de Paul Society of New South Wales. He is an ambassador for the Youth Awareness Resource Network, a board member for the Bankstown General Practitioner's Division, president of the management committee of the Bankstown Community Resource Group, chairman of the NSW Co-ordinating Committee for the Ceremony Honouring Indigenous Veterans, a member of the Department of Human Services Bankstown Local Advisory Group Committee and a member of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee to Bankstown City Council.

Uncle Harry also works with the Coloured Diggers Projects for Redfern's Anzac Day Ceremony, is a member of the NSW Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Veterans Services Association and is a representative on the Gandangara Local Aboriginal Land Council. Uncle Harry has worked closely with the South Western Sydney Local Health District on the Closing the Gap initiative. Harry Allie's decision to stay in Bankstown, despite his roots being firmly entrenched in the far north, has as much to do with what the community brought to Uncle Harry as what he has brought to the community. He talks of the closeness of the people in Bankstown and of the rich multicultural diversity. As he says, "This place is not about sitting on the sidelines; we all work together for everyone." I take the opportunity to congratulate Uncle Harry and I look forward to seeing more of his achievements in the future.

TRIBUTE TO JUNE POLAND

TRIBUTE TO MICHAEL ROLFE

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON (Vaucluse—Minister for Sport and Recreation) [5.49 p.m.]: In the latter half of 2013 two well-respected members of my local community, June Poland and Michael Rolfe, passed away.

It is fitting that their generous and consistent contribution to the fabric of my community is recognised in this House. June Georgina Poland passed away on 20 November 2013, aged 78. She was the wife of Peter Poland, mother of three children, David, James, Suzanne, and grandmother of nine. She was born in Sydney. She studied at Ascham School and later at the Sydney Metropolitan Business School. In June 1976, she joined the National Trust and was elected as a trust councillor in 1982. During the 1980s she was involved in many bicentennial projects and was a founding member of the Woollahra Bicentennial Community Committee. In 1985, June Poland was also one of the founding members of the Woollahra History and Heritage Society.

It was in that capacity that I came to know her well. Both she and Peter, her husband, were and are respected and staunch advocates and tireless workers for the preservation of Strickland House in my electorate, which is a large historical estate in Vacluse. They were and are the lifeblood of the society, which aims to encourage the study and preservation of the history of Woollahra and surrounding areas. June also rallied Woollahra Municipal Council to name an unnamed reserve in Rose Bay the Bungaree Reserve after Bungaree, one of the best-known Aboriginals in the early days of the colony. He died in 1830 and was buried in the vicinity beside one of his wives. June had many talents, which included writing. She produced a booklet about the landing of Governor Phillip at Camp Cove and another called *Carrar/Strickland House: the finest site on the foreshores of Sydney Harbour*, which sold more than 1,500 copies. She has educated and informed the local community about historic sites over many years. In 1995 her broad contribution was formally recognised by the community when she was named Woollahra Citizen of the Year, and in 2005 she received a NSW Government Heritage Volunteer Award. Vale June Poland.

Michael Rolfe passed away in October 2013. Husband of Hilda Rolfe, Michael was a devoted and passionate resident of Watsons Bay in my electorate. He was the longstanding president of the Vacluse Progress Association and a strong advocate for the Vacluse and Watsons Bay area, especially in planning, design and heritage matters. As a professional town planner and architect, Michael generously shared his expertise in planning and development with those around him. He combined his professional knowledge and enthusiasm for the local area by working for and on behalf of the residents of Watsons Bay. Michael was also founding member of the Woollahra History and Heritage Society and served as treasurer for many years. He was actively involved in Woollahra Municipal Council committees for many years. He was chair and secretary of the Sydney Harbour and Foreshores Committee in 1984 and a member of the Total Environment Centre in 1986. His contribution extended to being a member of the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Heritage Council of NSW, the Department of Public Works and Services, and the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust.

In Michael's quest to share the work of the Woollahra History and Heritage Society with the community, he co-authored the society's quarterly newsletter with the late June Poland. Michael was recognised for his lifetime of broad contribution to many causes. This recognition included the Papal Gold Medal, the Benemerenti; the NSW Government Heritage Volunteer Award in 2008; and the Woollahra Citizen of the Year Award in 1998 for his contribution to local planning issues as part of his role as president of the Vacluse Progress Association. I pay tribute to June Poland and to Michael Rolfe who have been longstanding, tireless workers in my local community. I extend my sincerest condolences to their families. Vale two great citizens of the local community in my electorate of Vacluse.

TRIBUTE TO MRS JEAN PEARE, OAM

Mr KEVIN CONOLLY (Riverstone) [5.53 p.m.]: I bring to the attention of the House the sad passing of an iconic figure in the Riverstone electorate, Mrs Jean Peare, OAM, of Mulgrave. Jean passed away last week at the age of 82. Her life will be celebrated tomorrow at a funeral service at St Matthew's Catholic Church in Windsor. Jean married Bill, her husband of 59 years, in 1955 in Leichhardt. At that time she was an officer of the NSW Police Force, a career choice that seems fitting for a person who locals knew as one who always served her community. She often took the lead and was never frightened of doing the hard work. Jean and Bill moved to the Hawkesbury and together raised their seven children on a farm at Mulgrave. Jean's involvement in community organisations can be traced back 50 years when she joined the Hawkesbury City Netball Association, with which she had a long involvement. She was a life member and patron of the association and held many roles on the executive, including as president for 27 years.

Jean served as official functions convenor at the 1991 Netball World Championships and was a delegate to the Netball NSW Council for 29 years. She was a member of the Hawkesbury Sports Council from its inception. That unique local organisation ensures that sporting facilities within the district are managed in the most effective manner for the benefit of all user groups. Jean's common-sense approach contributed heavily to the positive reputation the sports council has earned. Her commitment to sport in the district was recognised at

many levels. In 1978 she received the Anne Clark Service Award from Netball NSW. In 1983 Jean was recognised by her local community as Hawkesbury Council's Sportsperson of the Year. On 8 June 1998 Jean Peare was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for service to netball and to the Hawkesbury district. In 2000 Jean received the Australian Sports Medal. In 2012 she was the recipient of the Waratah Service Award for distinguished service to Netball NSW.

Jean's community involvement included spending many hours serving on a succession of council committees, including the Hawkesbury Civic and Citizenship Committee. Her in-depth knowledge of the local community and its people guaranteed that she was able to provide great insight when committees were deliberating on the deserving recipients of community awards. She gave tremendous service to the Hawkesbury Sister City Association after becoming a member in 1984 and she was its president for 19 years. The association of today hardly resembles that of its humble beginnings. Jean's commitment to the Hawkesbury Sister City Association has enriched the life experiences of so many people in our community and in Hawkesbury's sister cities overseas. Her dedication to this program and her hard work provided opportunities for many of our young residents to widen their horizons and better understand different cultures. The extensive training that the association provides to students before they embark on these trips equips them with skills they can utilise throughout their lives.

Jean assisted in carefully and patiently nurturing the friendships between Temple City in the United States of America and Kyotamba in Japan with the city of Hawkesbury. Jean also contributed to the welfare of her community by answering phones for Helpline, which is a vital but challenging form of service. Jean was also a committed member of St Matthew's Catholic Church, Windsor, while she raised her growing family. In more recent times she served for a number of years on the parish council, a role which I shared with her for a time. As a member of the parish, she gave her time to teach special religious education classes in local State schools. In the 1990s she helped to establish the Monday Club at St Matthew's Church, which organised social gatherings and outings for the parish elderly on a weekly basis. She was the energy behind the club for many years, and its work continues today as part of her legacy.

Jean Peare was one of those optimistic and energetic community builders who bring out the best in those around them. I believe this involvement and generosity was a source of happiness for her as she saw others benefit from her efforts. Her service to the community demonstrates the value of volunteering and the positive impact that one individual can have on a whole community. She will be fondly remembered by so many for the positive person she was. I recognise Jean Peare, OAM, for her great contribution as a volunteer. I express my condolences to her husband, Bill, and to all members of her extended family.

ST IVES LIONS CLUB YOUTH OF THE YEAR QUEST

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA (Davidson) [5.58 p.m.]: On Monday evening I attended the St Ives Lions Club 2014 Youth of the Year Quest and awards function at Terrey Hills. As occurred last year, the evening was an opportunity to listen to talented young people from my local community. Each of the candidates delivered a speech on a subject of their choice and responded to two difficult impromptu questions. They had previously undergone a 30-minute interview with three judges. Lions clubs have a membership of 1.3 million people in more than 200 countries, making it the largest and most active service organisation worldwide. Since the first Australian Lions Club was established in Lismore, New South Wales, in 1947 more than 1,400 clubs have been established across Australia, comprising more than 30,000 active members, including members of the St Ives Lions Club. The club's motto is "We serve", and it does.

I was welcomed to the club's Celebration of Youth by the club president, Frank Anello, and the organiser and chair of the Youth of the Year Quest, Maureen Owen. Another Lions Club member who plays a central role is Michael Ferns, while fellow members to whom I spoke on the night included Dennis, Roy, Anne, Joe, Linda and Michael. The Youth of the Year Quest aims to encourage, foster and develop leadership in conjunction with other citizenship qualities in our youth. In doing so, it helps to prepare them to take an active and constructive role in the community. Last Monday's activities included the public-speaking component of the quest and six year 12 students competed at an extremely high standard. It is inspirational to know that my electorate has youths of such quality who will continue to contribute to our community.

Each student spoke on a subject of his or her choice and did so eloquently. Five of the six competitors were senior students from schools within the electorate of Davidson. Shiryn Hagh from Brigidine College spoke about the power of words; Claudia Harper from Killara High School spoke about medicine—beneficent or maleficent; Daisy Hines from Loreto Normanhurst spoke about sex trafficking in Cambodia; Patrick Howard

from St Ives High School spoke about the importance of carers in Australia; Linda Zhang from Roseville College, the winner of the public-speaking component of the evening, spoke about the unspoken side of the internet; and, last but not least, Samuel Mart from Masada College, who won the overall competition and who is the local Youth of the Year, spoke about the face of indifference.

I was pleased to sit at the same table as Samuel's delightful parents and his science teacher. I wish him all the best in the zone final next month. I know that several local winners over the past four years have progressed through the various stages to win the national award. As I said, I wish Samuel well in the Lions Club competition and I congratulate all those involved. I also note the wonderful work that the Parliamentary Lions Club does in promoting similar activities and raising funds for worthwhile community causes.

Private members' statements concluded.

**The House adjourned, pursuant to standing and sessional orders, at 6.03 p.m. until
Tuesday 4 March 2014 at 12 noon.**
