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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Thursday 6 March 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.

PARLIAMENTARY AUDIO AND BROADCAST SYSTEMS

The SPEAKER: Order! As a result of severe thunderstorms last night there has been disruption to a number of services on the parliamentary network. Information Technology Services are working to restore services as quickly as possible. As a precaution, Hansard staff have set up a back-up system and will be reporting from the floor of the Chamber this morning. There may be some delay in publishing papers from today's sitting, including *Hansard*. Questions lodged today can still be accessed via the parliamentary intranet in the usual way.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of Motions

General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) given.

COAL SEAM GAS PROHIBITION (SYDNEY WATER CATCHMENT SPECIAL AREAS) BILL 2013

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 7 October 2013.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS (Lane Cove—Minister for Resources and Energy, and Special Minister of State) [10.04 a.m.]: The Coal Seam Gas Prohibition (Sydney Water Catchment Special Areas) Bill 2013 is not only completely unnecessary but also hypocritical and not based on any sound understanding of the issues involved. There are several reasons for this which I will outline to the House. First, in 2012 the Government commissioned the review and development of scientific information to underpin future regulatory development for coal seam gas. Commissioning this review was the reasonable and responsible approach of a government seeking to develop a sound evidence base for regulation of an industry. To this end the Government requested the Chief Scientist and Engineer, Professor Mary O'Kane, to review coal seam gas regulated activities in New South Wales.

One of the review's terms of reference was to identify and assess any gaps in the understanding and management of risk from coal seam gas activities. The review is considering these activities in relation to human health, the environment and water catchments. The Chief Scientist released her initial report on the review of coal seam gas activities in New South Wales in July 2013 and in that report she made some interesting observations. She noted that from a technical and scientific perspective many challenges and risks associated with coal seam gas are not dissimilar to those in other energy and resource production, and in water extraction and treatment. She further observed, "Some challenges ... can be effectively managed through high standards of engineering and rigorous monitoring and supervision of operations."

The initial report discussed the cumulative effects of resource activities in water catchments, including the Sydney catchment area, and noted that better information was required. The report also said that long-term and cumulative environmental impacts are less obvious and require a commitment to significant ongoing research. However, there is no call in the initial report of the Chief Scientist for coal seam gas operations to be prohibited, even in water catchments. Further, the report states that the risks associated with such operations can be managed through effective regulation.

Mr Barry Collier: How ridiculous.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: I will come to that remark in a moment. The member for Miranda will regret that. There was a call for further research in the second stage of the review. The Government is in firm agreement with that approach. Prohibiting coal seam gas activities in the special areas without a scientific basis does not make sense, so in November last year the Government placed a hold on any coal seam gas exploration or production activities in the special areas of the catchment. At the same time we also commissioned the Chief Scientist to undertake further work in addition to the review. This further work is an assessment of the cumulative impact of all the activities that impact ground and surface water in the special areas of the Sydney catchment.

The hold on the activities is a sensible, reasonable action that allows us to await the outcome of the Chief Scientist's cumulative impact assessment. Then, and only then, if action is needed will it be taken, but it will be evidence-based action not knee-jerk, short-sighted populism. It is very clear that because of these steps there is no justification for a legislated permanent prohibition at this time. There is another strong reason why the bill is unnecessary. The New South Wales Government has developed a robust and comprehensive regulatory framework for coal seam gas activities that is rightly regarded as the most stringent in the Commonwealth. This framework allows for independent, risk-based decision-making in relation to approving coal seam gas activities. It also provides for the greatest rigour in imposing conditions on approved coal seam gas activities in monitoring the industry and in ensuring compliance with all requirements.

The Government has made extensive and significant changes in developing a stringent regulatory framework for coal seam gas activities and it will go forward on the basis of sound, scientifically acceptable evidence and information. It is not surprising that Labor failed to do this. When Labor was busy blanketing New South Wales with petroleum exploration licences, none of these protections were in place. Did Labor have any residential exclusions zones for coal seam gas activities? No. Were critical industry clusters protected? No. Was there a hold on coal seam gas activities in the Sydney water catchment areas? No. Was the Chief Scientist advising the Government on these issues? No.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister will be heard in silence.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: I ask the House to take note of the fact that in October 2008 the New South Wales Labor Government granted a petroleum exploration licence over the whole of Sydney, from Kurnell to Gosford and all the way across to Eastern Creek

Mr Tim Owen: They'll explain that.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: As the member for Newcastle said, I look forward to the member for Keira and members opposite explaining how and why that occurred. Labor nearly enabled coal seam gas drilling in St Peters in suburban Sydney without any knowledge of the science and its impacts. When Labor put that pall over all of metropolitan Sydney, did it have an aquifer interference policy at the time or a well integrity code? No. Did Labor have a ban on the use of harmful benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene and xylene chemicals and even have an office of coal seam gas to regulate these activities? No. Following the failures of members opposite and the rank hypocrisy and sanctimonious bleating we are likely to hear this morning, I am proud to say that New South Wales is now leading the world in its comprehensive regulatory approach to ensuring that gas is a safe and sustainable industry in New South Wales.

Members opposite will attack the industry. We are working with communities to ensure that this goes forward. We know the Opposition's position on the coal industry. Labor has a secret plan to shut down the industry. That is well known and that is something to which members opposite might allude during their contributions. I am sure that all Government members would be interested to hear what they have to say. Government members are not the only people who are interested in knowing about Labor's plan to shut down coalmining in New South Wales; families, workers and union members are keen to find out about the secret plan.

The rationale for the Opposition's proposal is as shallow and simplistic as usual. It is pure populist politics of the worst kind. The Opposition's position does not recognise the strength of the current regulatory framework because it never intended to put in a regulatory framework in the first place or the protections this Government has introduced. Labor's position is based on no scientific understanding of the issues and does not allow for any way to move forward. The Government is taking a proactive approach to the issue. We have a strong track record of real reform and effective regulation. We act on evidence and science. We stand by our record. For these reasons, the Government opposes the bill.

Mr BARRY COLLIER (Miranda) [10.16 a.m.]: I speak in debate on the Coal Seam Gas Prohibition (Sydney Water Catchment Special Areas) Bill 2013 not just as the member for Miranda but as the shadow Minister for Water. The object of the bill is to cancel petroleum titles relating to coal seam gas and to prohibit the grant or renewal of such titles in relation to the special area of the Sydney Catchment Authority. There are a number of truths in this world which are self-evident. Here is one in three simple words: water is life. So precious, so critical, so essential to our present and future wellbeing are our drinking water supplies that we cannot afford to waste a single drop. Just as people must come before profits, so too water must come before coal seam gas and any other form of mining that impinges upon or threatens our precious water supplies.

The thrust of this bill is so simple as to be a no-brainer: to permanently ban coal seam gas exploration or mining in the water catchment areas of Sydney and the Illawarra. If enacted, the bill will cancel existing licences and leases relating to the exploration, assessment and production of coal seam gas in Sydney water catchment special areas. It also will prohibit the grant or renewal of new licences. Section 44 (1) and (2) of the Sydney Water Catchment Management Act 1998 enables the Minister to declare an area of land to be a "special area" for the purpose of "protecting the quality of stored waters, whether intended for use for drinking or other purposes" and/or "maintaining the ecological integrity" of such an area of land.

The Act and the regulations identified five special areas, five catchments managed and protected by the Sydney Catchment Authority—Warragamba, Woronora, Upper Nepean, Blue Mountains and the Shoalhaven. Taken together these catchments cover less than 2 per cent of New South Wales but supply clean drinking water to around five million people—60 per cent of the State's population. So precious are these water catchment special areas that, under clause 22 of the regulations, a person is liable to a \$22,000 fine for walking in any one of them, camping, lighting a fire, swimming or fishing in the water in any of these special areas. One cannot do any of those things in a water catchment special area but one can explore for coal seam gas, drill a coal seam gas well and extract coal seam gas in these special areas. All that is needed is a licence from the New South Wales Government. Apart from anything else, this is a legislative absurdity. What of coal seam gas itself?

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Miranda will be heard in silence. The member for Keira will come to order.

Mr BARRY COLLIER: What of coal seam gas? Coal seam gas is an unsustainable fossil fuel, made up almost entirely of methane—a potent greenhouse gas—which has not been proven to be safe for human health or the environment. Coal seam gas is extracted by drilling vertically through soil, rock strata and aquifers to reach the coal seam. The potential for permanent damage to the aquifer and groundwater supplies is very real. Hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, is used to stimulate the flow of coal seam gas by injecting water, sand and toxic chemicals, including the known carcinogen benzene.

Water produced during the fracking process is salty and contains toxic chemicals and heavy metals and according the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation is not fit for human consumption. Where does this waste water go? The answer is: into our rivers, creeks, aquifers and water supplies. We simply cannot put the Sydney and Illawarra water supplies at risk by allowing coal seam gas extraction in these special catchment areas.

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

Mr BARRY COLLIER: Mark Bethwaite, chair of the Sydney Catchment Authority, stated:

Given the real and potential risks to special areas and Sydney's water supply, the Sydney Catchment Authority's strong position is that coal seam gas activities should be excluded from these special areas.

The Premier is also on record prior to the March 2011 State election as stating:

The next Liberal-National Government will ensure that mining cannot occur in water catchment area...no ifs, no buts, a guarantee.

What we are asking the Premier and his Government to do, three years on, is to honour that promise and give us the guarantee. That is all. It is easy, it costs nothing but a simple aye from the other side of the House. The Government does not have a mortgage on ideas and it is really very petty for the Government to oppose this bill simply because it comes from this side of the House. Opposing this bill is just as absurd as allowing coal seam gas operations in these special catchment areas in the first place, whether actual or potential.

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind members that interjections are disorderly at all times.

Mr BARRY COLLIER: Today is one of those moments on which the Premier will be judged. The Premier has the opportunity to put the health and wellbeing of the people of Sydney and the Illawarra beyond the petty party politics that the Government is displaying today. To their credit, the member for Kiama and the member for Heathcote are on the record as opposing coal seam gas exploration and mining in water catchment areas.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Keira will cease interjecting and distracting the member for Miranda.

Mr BARRY COLLIER: Putting coal seam gas mining in special catchment areas on hold is a complete and utter cop-out by the Government. It is the coward's way of buying time without making any commitment to the future. The people who live in the Sydney and the Illawarra catchment areas, and whose lives depend on safe reliable water supplies, want certainty. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

The words "on hold" are a temporary term; it is not legislated. The word "hold" is a term used by a former energy Minister who is now the subject of an Independent Commission Against Corruption inquiry. Recently the new Minister made the following statement, "Coal seam gas is a key solution to our energy problems in New South Wales and crucial for our economic viability", which is plain rubbish and the Minister knows it.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Mr BARRY COLLIER: The Minister was better in his Fair Trading portfolio than he is as Minister for Resources and Energy.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister for Resources and Energy will come to order.

Mr BARRY COLLIER: The Minister is now pushing to fast-track coal seam gas exploration with the support of the Deputy Premier. We cannot trust the mob opposite. The people of New South Wales want certainty. The Minister must say today to the people of New South Wales that the Government will prohibit coal seam gas exploration and extraction in special areas of the catchment. To do otherwise is almost insane—it is crazy. We do not need to wait for the science; we know the science and our drinking water supplies cannot be placed at risk. I hope that the Premier is listening to this debate.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will come to order. They will have an opportunity to contribute to the debate.

Mr BARRY COLLIER: Despite the problems with the internet I hope that the Premier is listening to this debate.

The SPEAKER: Order! I am sure the Premier is listening to the debate.

Mr BARRY COLLIER: If the Government really wants New South Wales to be first it must put the people of New South Wales first. It must guarantee that there will be no coal seam gas mining in special water catchment areas. If the Government is placing the people of New South Wales first it must honour its commitment to them and support this bill. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT (Baulkham Hills) [10.27 a.m.]: The Coal Seam Gas Prohibition (Sydney Water Catchment Special Areas) Bill 2013 should be responded to by saying only two words, "Too late." This bill is too late because Labor is in opposition. It is too late because the people of New South Wales made a judgement call in March 2011 and denied Labor the right to introduce legislation in this Chamber. It is too late because Eddie Obeid has sullied the name of every Opposition member. Labor has no right to lecture Government members or the people of New South Wales concerning what is right and what is wrong when it comes to public policy. It is too late because Labor completely destroyed the energy industry in this State by ripping profits out of electricity generators and not putting a cent back into the industry for over 16 years. Members opposite cannot point to this side of the Chamber and blame this Government for problems created by the former Government.

The cost of electricity generation and energy in this State is so high that families in my electorate have to miss meals because they cannot afford to heat their houses. Pensioners are relying on food coupons. The Opposition must accept responsibility; it created this problem and introduced the legislation. I note that the Leader of the Opposition does not have the courage to be present in the Chamber. The member for Blacktown was denied the opportunity to be Leader of the Opposition until Eddie Obeid stood up and delivered him the numbers. The Leader of the Opposition introduced this bill in an effort to clean his hands of the stench left behind by Eddie Obeid. I compare this bill to the North Sydney Bears. Do members remember the North Sydney Bears? They used to get up at the beginning of the season and bluster and tell everybody how it was going to be their season and how wonderful it would be. By round two—

Mr Barry Collier: Point of order: This has nothing to do with the North Sydney Bears.

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

Mr Barry Collier: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129, relevance.

The SPEAKER: Order! The debate is wideranging. There is no point of order.

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT: The North Sydney Bears were failures and were removed from first grade just as those opposite are failures and have been removed from first grade. The contributions of Labor members to debate on this bill will ensure that working class conservative people will vote Liberal at the next election. We have 12 months until the next election. When this bill is rejected by this Chamber it should be sent out with how-to-vote cards to all Opposition electorates to demonstrate Labor's policy. The Labor Party is introducing a bill that will increase the cost of heating one's home and place a tighter squeeze on one's family budget. The introduction of this bill is an attempt by the Opposition to make the community forget about Eddie Obeid. Those opposite cannot escape the fact that they sat beside Eddie Obeid, took the money and accepted his judgement—they have to cop it. Members opposite have to sit there and cop it. If they want to play with the big boys and dish up a fight up they will have to cop it.

This bill is too simplistic and I am surprised that it has been introduced. I cannot understand for the life of me why any member of the Labor Party would want to go anywhere near this type of debate. I have been hanging around politicians for 25 years and my grandfather was a shop steward in the electrical union, so I thought I understood the Labor Party. I thought it stood up for honesty and decency and working people. However, this legislation and the 16 years of corruption and inept government that went along with it is proof positive that Labor members have learnt absolutely nothing.

Our side of the Chamber has members such as the member for Wollondilly, who have a real understanding of energy policy. The member for Wollondilly understands why we need to keep our water clean. He understands the importance of maintaining natural resources to continue our pristine way of life in New South Wales. He is the type of bloke whom I would take advice from; not the Leader of the Opposition, who will staple a picture of Eddie Obeid to every how-to-vote card that he hands out next March. This bill ignores the enormous amount of work that this Government and its Minister has done to develop the most stringent and effective regulations for coal seam gas activities in Australia. We now have in place a very strong set of safeguards for this industry.

Nothing in this legislation highlights the fact that members opposite dished out coal seam gas licences willy-nilly to whoever went into Eddie Obeid's office. I notice that the Opposition member who spoke on this bill did not say a word about Eddie Obeid or the donations that the Labor Party received in return for coal seam gas licences. Despite that, he had the audacity to lecture Government members about the morality of our policy and legislation. Labor members have no morality. They forfeited the right to talk about morality in this House. That is why the Labor Opposition has only 20 members.

The Government's high standards and safeguards send a clear message that a kneejerk, blanket, permanent prohibition is not the way to go when dealing with coal seam gas in the Sydney water catchment area. There must be an evidence-based approach. The definition of "evidence" in the Evidence Act does not mention Eddie Obeid. Evidence means that things are able to be tested and proved to be true. This legislation does not incorporate an evidence-based approach. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

The hold on coal seam gas activities that the Government has announced will remain in place until the completion of a study by the New South Wales Chief Scientist and Engineer. That study was commissioned by

this Government. Labor members did not understand the need to involve scientists when they were handing out Eddie Obeid's licences. The study is in addition to the Chief Scientist and Engineer's ongoing statewide coal seam gas review.

Mr Barry Collier: You shut the Cronulla Fisheries.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Barilaro): Order! The member will be heard in silence.

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT: I must respond to the interjection from the member for Miranda. If the member wants to complain about us closing down government resources and offices he should refresh his memory about what happened in the 12 years that he was in this Chamber as a Government member. There were more closures under Labor's administration than we could ever dream of. That the member for Miranda is trying to complain about the closure of the Cronulla Fisheries is proof positive that Labor members have very short memories. The hold that we have placed on statewide coal seam gas activities shows that the O'Farrell Government continues to listen to the community and is building on the strong regulatory framework that it has put in place. That is what the community demands and expects. This piece of public policy is too vital for Opposition members to play silly games and try to introduce half-baked demands for restrictions. The strong regulatory framework for coal seam gas that we have put in place applies throughout New South Wales, including the special areas in the Sydney water catchment area. The Leader of the Opposition probably missed that when he drafted this bill.

The sound regulatory framework we have in place is a key means of ensuring that environmental protection is the most important consideration in approving coal seam gas activities. "Environmental protection" is the most important phrase in this legislation. Again, there is no reference to Eddie Obeid. During the time that members opposite were in government we got a coal seam gas mine whenever Eddie Obeid said we would. Under our administration, we will get a coal seam gas mine when the Environment Protection Authority and independent advocates tell us we can have one. That is the difference. Members opposite listened to Eddie Obeid; we listen to independent advice. Our framework is second to none and we offer no apology for the fact that Eddie Obeid has no place in our approval process.

A particular strength of our framework is that it enables independent decision-makers to take a risk-based approach to approving coal seam gas projects. This approach is evident in the work of the independent Planning Assessment Commission and the Office of Coal Seam Gas, which provide close scrutiny of coal seam gas proposals. The role of these entities enables the Government to prevent any coal seam gas exploration or production in environmentally sensitive or inappropriate areas, which are decided on a case-by-case basis. Once again, the O'Farrell Government is introducing independent decision-makers who are at arms-length. They are not on level 10 where the Labor Party upper House members sit; they are independent assessors at arms-length. The case-by-case approach allows flexibility and allows the merits of each application to be considered before a decision is made.

The Planning Assessment Commission and the Office of Coal Seam Gas do not act in isolation. They must talk to one another. The fundamental notions behind the coal seam gas management that the Government is introducing are flexibility, independence, openness, transparency and the fact that the Planning Assessment Commission will not work in isolation. It will take advice. Those people who are investing in coal seam gas—those who are dedicated to reducing the price of gas for the pensioners who had to stock up on blankets and deny themselves food under the Labor Government—will know that the supply of coal seam gas will be administered using a fair and equitable approach. Additional safeguards are now in place to provide independent, sound controls of coal seam gas activities. The Sydney Catchment Area Authority plays a key role in the decision-making process for coal seam gas activities in special areas.

Mr Barry Collier: And they're against it.

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT: No, we are not against it. The member for Miranda, or should I say the member for the Rural Fire Service since he is only here because his mates in the fire brigade union stood up—

Mr Barry Collier: Point of order: They might have to come to your house if it's burning down. What a disgrace.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Barilaro): Order! What is the member's point of order?

Mr Barry Collier: My point of order is that I said that the Sydney Catchment Authority was against it.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Barilaro): Order! I remind the member for Baulkham Hills not to stray from the leave of the bill.

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT: The truth hurts, and the member for Miranda is in a lot of pain. Information provided by project proponents for the catchment authority's consideration must be detailed, scientifically robust and holistic, and it must address cumulative impacts. That has been this Government's approach from the start. Critically, the Department of Planning and Infrastructure, the Planning Assessment Commission and the Office of Coal Seam Gas will have regard to the advice provided by the authority as part of their decision-making process. Coal seam gas titleholders are also required to protect the environment under their environmental protection licence issued by the independent Environment Protection Authority. The licences have legally enforceable conditions that address the prevention of pollution and safeguard the environment. They cover air, water and noise. These safeguards have been implemented. Members will also be aware that almost a year ago the Government made the Environment Protection Authority the lead regulator of environmental and health matters for coal seam gas exploration.

For members of the Labor Party to tell the Government that the Environment Protection Authority is not up to the job is laughable. If any of them had had a job in the private sector—which none of them have—they would know that the Environment Protection Authority is a tough cop on the beat. The authority knows how to do that work and how to regulate to protect the environment. I have kids who will inherit the environment and I have the utmost confidence in the authority. By having the Environment Protection Authority in these roles, the Government is making sure that the coal seam gas industry performs to the highest standards of environmental protection and management.

Mr JAMIE PARKER (Balmain) [10.40 a.m.]: I speak on behalf of The Greens on the Coal Seam Gas Prohibition (Sydney Water Catchment Special Areas) Bill 2013. As many members know, The Greens have long been campaigning to protect our water catchments, farmlands and sensitive environmental areas. We welcome the introduction of this water catchment bill. I agree with many members of the Government who have highlighted the Labor Party's changing position—I think that is the most diplomatic way to put it. However, I acknowledge that there has been a change since the Labor Government lost office. Under that Government we had the most disgraceful approach to issuing coal seam gas licences. It was unencumbered by environmental considerations and acknowledged that it was open slather for coal seam gas exploration without the protections that this Government has introduced. While the Government has taken some steps, there is still a long way to go to protect farming land, agricultural land and drinking water catchments, and to ensure that our energy future is secured, not by conventional gas extraction but by renewable energy, while acknowledging the concerns about coal seam gas, which this bill starts to do.

The Greens spokesperson on mining, the Hon. Jeremy Buckingham, MLC, introduced the Responsible Mining Bill 2012 to protect our water catchments, communities, sensitive environmental areas and farmlands from invasive mining. I support the Opposition's bill because it reflects many elements of good policy. It is a first step to right past wrongs in a move towards achieving a more responsible mining framework. While The Greens will support this bill, I will move amendments to include protections for mining and water catchments across the State. As many know, longwall coalmining is having a significant impact on Sydney's water catchment, and gold and antimony mines on the mid-North Coast and the South Coast pose a risk to precious river systems in the Macleay, Clarence and Moruya catchments.

The Greens believe that the protection of our water catchments is a priority, no matter where people live—whether it be in Sydney, which is the focus of this bill, or in rural and regional New South Wales. Water catchments should be no-go zones for destructive coal and coal seam gas mining. This Government has completely failed to protect water catchments as the Premier promised it would before the election. Much has been said in this House during question time about the Premier's no-ifs, no-buts guarantee. I will refresh members' memories on this issue. Before the last State election, the Premier made a promise to ban coal seam gas and mining developments in our water catchments. He said:

The next Liberal/National Government will ensure that mining cannot occur ... in any water catchment area, and will ensure that mining leases and mining exploration permits reflect that common sense; no ifs, no buts, a guarantee.

That was misleading. Any fair-minded person would say that the then future Premier, who said his Government would ensure that mining could not occur in water catchment areas, misled the people of New South Wales.

Why? Because the Government has introduced a system that allows the Planning Assessment Commission and others to make that determination. The Premier could never make that commitment honestly, unless he personally interfered in the process, which would be improper. In The Greens' view, the Premier should make a commitment as far as he can to honour the guarantee that he gave. The Government should make water catchments strategic land in the strategic regional land-use plans and include water catchments as part of the two-kilometre coal seam gas exclusion zone set out in the State environmental planning policy. It is good enough to exclude mining within two kilometres of residential areas, but it is not good enough to support people in rural and regional areas who fall outside that zone.

The Greens call on the Government and the Opposition to cancel mining and coal seam gas licences in New South Wales drinking water catchments and to end coalmining in drinking water catchments. Coal seam gas extraction produces massive volumes of contaminated water which is high in salt and which can contain toxic compounds and heavy metals. Although BTEX is banned from being used in fracking fluids, these compounds—benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene and xylene—often exist naturally in coal seams, so they end up accumulating in what is called "produced water". Coal seam gas also requires industrialisation of the landscape for roads, well pads, pipelines, compressor stations and wastewater storage ponds—all of which require land clearing—that pose a heightened risk of water contamination and lower water quality.

I remind the House that it was Ross Dunn from the Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association who told a public meeting in Sydney in August 2011 that good management could minimise the risks of water contamination, but could never eliminate those risks. I also note that the CSIRO said that coal seam gas mining poses a risk to surface and groundwater and can result in aquifer drawdown, which industry environmental impact statements have already admitted could be as much as 150 metres. It makes no sense that a person can be fined up to \$44,000 for unlawfully entering a special area, yet a coal seam gas company can undertake industrial operations in such areas with the sanction of the State. That is the reason that, although I support this bill, I will seek to ensure that it goes further. It is important to remember that coalmining in water catchments is a major threat to water quality. This bill is a wasted opportunity to protect Sydney's water catchment. If it does not extend to coalmining, it does not solve the problem. Without talking about coal and only talking about coal seam gas, we are dealing only with the issues that this bill legitimately raises while pushing other issues to one side.

Longwall mining is listed as a key threatening process in schedule 3 to the Threatened Species Conservation Act of New South Wales. We know that longwall coalmining has a significant impact and there are four coalmines which undermine Sydney's water catchment special area and which will drain about three billion litres a year from our water supply. That is enough to fill 1,200 Olympic-size pools or for about 43 million 10minute showers. This will have a significant impact on our water catchment. If Labor members were serious about protecting our water catchments they would include longwall coalmining in this bill. The damage being done to the metropolitan special areas of Sydney's drinking water catchment by intensive longwall coalmining is jeopardising Sydney's water security. As I said, I will move amendments to ensure that we stop coalmining threatening our water supply.

It is important to acknowledge that the Sydney Catchment Authority has made some very powerful statements on this issue. The authority's submissions to the Government's resource significant mining State environmental planning policies said Sydney's drinking water catchments should be exempt from the changes and called for a ban on longwall mining near major lakes and reservoirs. We have heard the Sydney Catchment Authority view on this issue. It also wants coal seam gas activity banned from designated special areas. Its submission said that damage to infrastructure, watercourses and swamps from longwall mining had already occurred in the Upper Canal, which is the only route for water to be transferred to Sydney from the upper Nepean dams. We must address the very significant impact of coal seam gas activity and longwall coalmining.

It is also useful to look at the Sydney Catchment Authority's literature review of the impact of coal seam gas mining on water resources. It identifies numerous impacts of coal seam gas mining on catchment health, including soil erosion from clearing, contamination from spills, groundwater contamination due to improper borehole design, air pollution from flaring and subsidence due to settlement of the dewatered coal seam gas formations. It is important to understand that the Sydney Catchment Authority believes that this is significant and serious and needs to be taken into account. We know that underground coalmining dramatically alters geology, hydrology, surface topography, surface water quality and the ecological integrity of land. To date about 24 per cent of the special areas have already been undermined by longwall coalmining. I also note that the Sydney Catchment Authority expects that percentage to increase to 91 per cent by 2030. That is a stunning figure and this bill fails to address it. The amendments I will move seek to address that issue.

I conclude my contribution by thanking the Protect Sydney's Water coalition, which was formed to fight for this bill. The coalition brought together groups from the Illawarra, Sydney, the Southern Highlands and the Blue Mountains. Those groups are concerned about the impacts of coalmining and the possibility of industrial coal seam gas extraction occurring in the drinking water catchment. It brings together groups that have long been campaigning on this issue, including River SOS, the Nature Conservation Council, Stop CSG Illawarra, Stop CSG Sydney, the Total Environment Centre, the Lock the Gate Alliance and the Colong Foundation for Wilderness. It is a credit to those people that the Government has been pushed as far as it has and it is a credit to them that the Labor Party has changed its position. Hopefully, the Labor Party will maintain that position if it ever gets back into government. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr JAI ROWELL (Wollondilly) [10.50 a.m.]: Members opposite cannot be serious in introducing the Coal Seam Gas Prohibition (Sydney Water Catchment Special Areas) Bill 2013. Nobody trusts them; everyone knows exactly what they did, and they certainly know what they did in Wollondilly. I remind members opposite of the recent announcement by the O'Farrell Government that coal seam gas operations are on hold, effective immediately, in special catchment lands. That means that coal seam gas mining, exploration and extraction cannot occur in the sensitive water catchment lands zoned as "special or protected lands". The Wollondilly community and I have been working to achieve that result for a very long time. The residents of Sydney and surrounding suburbs will be grateful for that result because it will protect their drinking water until the release of the Chief Scientist's report.

Wollondilly stores more than 80 per cent of Sydney's drinking water and has dams such as Cawdor, Nepean, Warragamba and Avon. This moratorium is a sensible move by the Government because it places activity on hold while a scientific study is conducted by the Chief Scientist and Engineer, Professor Mary O'Kane. It is my firm belief that government should take a consultative approach to policy making and ensure that robust and independent research is at the heart of decision-making. I also believe that during such a policy-making process a large dose of common sense should be applied to ensure that the risks do not outweigh the benefits. That is why I am pleased with the O'Farrell Government's policy of placing operations on hold until the study can be conducted.

It is not acceptable to grant licences in sensitive areas, as the former Government did, and then simply cross one's fingers. Whilst I am confident that the findings of the study undertaken by Professor O'Kane will rule out any future coal seam gas operations in water catchment areas, I believe in science rather than speculation. I also believe that even a minor risk to Sydney's drinking water supply is unacceptable. That is why I will give Professor O'Kane the opportunity to present her findings, which I will study intently. That is what good governance is all about. Good governance involves assessing the risks and benefits, consulting with stakeholders and listening to the concerns of the community when formulating a policy position. Good governance does not involve issuing licences like lollypops, as members opposite did year after year.

To have an effective mechanism for the policy process, and one that provides for further scientific evidence, the Government should introduce a moratorium under the Petroleum (Onshore) Act 1991 on any approved activities in the Sydney Catchment Authority special areas pending the outcome of the investigation. The moratorium should apply to all activities under the Petroleum (Onshore) Act under an additional licence condition for those licences that cover the catchment. The Government has also requested the Chief Scientist to undertake a specific investigation into the impacts of coal seam gas exploration and mining activities on water quality and quantity in the special areas of the Sydney water catchment, having regard to other key activities in the wider catchment. The Government supports the principle of restricting activities in the Sydney Catchment Authority special areas until it has an evidence-based understanding of the impacts of activities on water quality and quantity.

I have spoken on this issue many times in this place and before my election to this place, and my position is clear. I take this opportunity once again to acknowledge the consistent hard work of local campaigners in my electorate, namely, but not limited to, Julie Shepherd, Caroline Graham, David Hunt and Peter Martin. I also commend the work of Will D'Arcy, Brett Cottee and Greg Seisun. I acknowledge the work of Rivers SOS, the Southern Highlands Coal Action Group and Stop CSG Sydney. The Government has not shied away from this issue. It has undertaken significant reform to strengthen processes dealing with coal seam gas activities to ensure this State has the best system in the nation. More needs to be done, and that is why the Government is waiting for the Chief Scientist's report before implementing any new response.

I have spoken on the record previously about supporting Wollondilly's water catchment areas and I will continue to do so. We must also examine where coal seam gas operations can occur—where it is safe for the

environment and where it does not interfere with our water catchment areas, such as Wollondilly—to ensure that this State continues to have reliable gas supplies. The member for Baulkham Hills spoke of his constituents' concerns about people not being able to afford energy. I will put on the record a number of petroleum exploration licences that have been issued or renewed so that members know when they were issued; they were issued not by the current Government but by the Labor Government.

The AGL Upstream Investments petroleum exploration licence No. 2 was renewed by the then Minister for Natural Resources, Ian Macdonald, on 29 May 2008. Petroleum exploration licence No. 442 was first granted on 27 February 2002 by the then Minister for Mineral Resources, Eddie Obeid. Petroleum exploration licence No. 444 was granted in 2003 by the then Minister for Mineral Resources, Kerry Hickey. Petroleum exploration licence No. 454 was granted on 28 March 2007 by Ian Macdonald. Members opposite have steered clear of those names in the past couple of weeks. These are all licences issued by every member opposite who was a member of the Labor Government.

The Labor Government also granted a number of other licences. Members opposite would have this House believe that all of these licences they are now complaining about were granted by the Coalition Government. That is certainly not the case. This Government is getting on with the job of reform. I remind the House about the Apex licence, which members opposite have been crying foul about since the 2011 election. It was their Minister and the members of their Government who approved that exploration licence. No-one in the community knew anything about it.

Mr Ryan Park: It was dumb.

Mr JAI ROWELL: I acknowledge the interjection from the member for Keira that it was a dumb decision, and he certainly was not a member of that Government. The first that anyone in the Wollondilly, the Oakdale, The Oaks and Mount Hunter communities knew anything about any exploration in that area was when the trucks came in with their drilling equipment to start digging holes in the ground. No-one was given the opportunity to object or to find out more about a matter that went to the very heart of those communities. The Labor Government was responsible for that and everyone in those communities will remember for evermore why it did that.

Members on this side of the House will not be lectured by members opposite. Our community does not trust the Labor Party to deal with this. The Labor Government issued the licences and members opposite are pretending today that they care. They cannot be trusted. I am confident that our Government is listening and working hard. As the Minister said earlier, the Government has already introduced the toughest coal seam gas regime in Australia. I eagerly await the Chief Scientist's report. I commend the Government for its hard work and take this opportunity to thank the members for Heathcote, Kiama, Camden and Campbelltown and the Federal member for Macarthur, Russell Matheson, for joining me in ensuring that our communities have a voice in this Parliament. If anyone on the other side of the House represented their community like members on this side of the House do, this State would be a better place.

Mr RON HOENIG (Heffron) [10.58 a.m.]: I support the Coal Seam Gas Prohibition (Sydney Water Catchment Special Areas) Bill 2013. The bill is evidence based and, if enacted, will play an important role in the years ahead as New South Wales faces one of its greatest economic crises—that is, gas supplies. I will expand on that in a moment. The Minister for Energy, in response to this bill, told the House that the Government has a legislative framework, that it is the toughest in Australia and that it is designed to enable mining of coal seam gas while protecting the environment—or words to that effect. The fact is that the legislative framework the Government enacted was a political response, not a scientifically based response. It was a political response to overwhelming community concern throughout the State.

Mr Mark Coure: We listen to our communities.

Mr RON HOENIG: You got dragged screaming into it. Your former energy Minister was saying that you cannot leave coal seam gas in the ground. That was his response to overwhelming concern. It was a political response, not a scientifically based response. Consequently, on coal seam gas, the State finds itself trying to deal with a fundamental policy failure that commenced under the former Government. We are the first to concede that the way the Labor Government dealt with coal seam gas issues was wrong, and it should not have been supported.

Mr Mark Coure: Thanks for that. That is going to be on my quote sheet.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Barilaro): Order! Members will come to order. The member for Oatley will come to order.

Mr RON HOENIG: That was the verdict of the people in March 2011, when they threw the Labor Party out of office. What was the Labor Party's response? What was one of the first things the Leader of the Opposition did? He came into this House and said that we were wrong; he said there shall be no more coal seam gas mining in this State until it is safe, not only for the public water supply but also for prime agricultural land and the environment of this State. He conceded that, and rightly so. I have not seen the former Minister for Energy stand in this House, when the Premier overruled him, and say, "I was wrong when I said you cannot leave coal seam gas in the ground." This is a very difficult and very serious issue. What will happen in this State, in a very short period, is that gas prices will quadruple. There is a reason for that, and it is not that New South Wales is running out of gas, as the vested interests claim.

What will happen with the eastern gas market—in New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and South Australia—is that the Gladstone liquid export facility will come on line and New South Wales residents will be competing with the rest of the world on gas prices. Currently, we are the fourth-largest gas-exporting country in the world. In about three or four years Australia has gone from the sixth- to the fourth-largest exporter of gas. At present, 20 per cent of this gas is exported. That figure is projected to be more than 30 per cent, virtually immediately upon the Gladstone facility coming on line. There will be a crisis, because when gas prices go up that will impact upon not only the industries and manufacturers that are dependent upon the supply of gas but also the electricity generators who use gas for the generation of electricity. That will affect the entire New South Wales economy, because people all the way down to pensioners will be paying huge gas bills.

Mr Mark Coure: Thanks to your governments.

Mr RON HOENIG: It has nothing to do with that. Prices will be determined by the eastern gas market. The vested interests of the gas and coalmining industries will demand the release of coal seam gas in an effort to reduce prices. What the member said is probably coming from the Department of Energy. One of the problems is that Australia has about 8 per cent of world gas supplies, so no amount of coal seam gas extraction from the entire eastern seaboard will have an impact on world prices. Our people will be paying world prices. I can predict the response that will then come from the government of the day, because when people start screaming about the gas and electricity prices they are paying, that government will respond with a knee-jerk reaction—just as governments do in response to the popular press—and say, "The solution is to allow more coal seam gas mining." Then there will be no constraint and no environmental considerations.

The purpose of this bill is to ensure that, when those pressures come, the water supplies in the Sydney catchment are protected come what may. If anyone thinks the current planning system of this State or the Planning Assessment Commission somehow will be able to protect the environment of New South Wales, they are kidding themselves. The commission may well have refused some coal seam gas mining, but I can tell the House that the Planning Assessment Commission has approved 94 per cent of all applications it has received. It even approved the Eastlakes Shopping Centre development. I have told the Minister that I suspect there has been quite dishonest conduct in the processing of the application—not involving the current Government. But even then the Planning Assessment Commission ticks off development applications. So if members opposite think the commission is going to protect the community, the farmlands, water supplies and the aquifers from coal seam gas miners, they are kidding themselves.

I want to talk about the Opposition's position and about planning being evidence based. To this day, the Chief Scientist of New South Wales cannot tick off coal seam gas mining. Last year we had a briefing from the Chief Scientist about her work. Ultimately, the Chief Scientist said this about coal seam gas:

For a dry continent such as Australia more knowledge will be necessary. Further research is required to build our understanding of hydraulic connectivity between groundwater bodies and also between shallow aquifers and connected surface water bodies. Further research is also required on cumulative impacts on groundwater and connected surface water where there are numerous wells and plays and where there are other industries also drawing on the water, such as agriculture, or changing the geological structures, such as long-wall mining.

That is the view of the Chief Scientist. You can have whatever regulatory regime you like, political or otherwise, but it will be no solution. One solution is being offered by the Opposition. The Government might cynically suggest that it is somehow designed to play to people's prejudices, to get a political advantage or to create a wedge. I put to the House that it is actually a process to know what is coming in the next few years, in order to provide some measure of protection. I will make some comment about the Sydney catchment special

areas. They were established for the purpose of excluding industrial and development activity in the vicinity of potable water sources to prevent the contamination of the water supply, particularly by micro-organisms. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

Section 22 of the Sydney Water Catchment Management Regulation 2013 provides that a person must not enter, fish, swim, camp or light a fire in any schedule 1 special areas. The maximum penalty for breaching that regulation is \$22,000 in the case of an individual and \$44,000 in the case of a corporation. So you cannot go fishing, swimming or camping and you cannot light a billy, but you can engage in coal seam gas mining. That is how ridiculous is the position that we are currently in. The Sydney Catchment Authority is responsible for the management of the Sydney catchment. The Nepean and metropolitan special areas are both schedule 1 special areas, while the Warragamba Dam is surrounded by a schedule 1 special area close to the water.

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

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Barilaro): Order! It being before 11.30 a.m., General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) will now be proceeded with.

HUNTER SPECIALIST PARAMEDIC UNITS

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend) [11.10 a.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) Notes that the Hunter region, with a population over 500,000, has two six-person intensive care paramedic teams compared with the Central Coast region, which has three teams for a population of 300,000.
- (2) Notes that the Health Services Union is concerned that both regions are understaffed in specialist intensive care paramedics.
- (3) Calls on the Minister for Health to address this disparity and to form more specialist paramedic units to service the Hunter by December 2013.

The residents of the Hunter are once again being short-changed. Two six-man intensive care specialist paramedic units service the Hunter region, which is home to half a million people, while there are three stationed on the Central Coast, which is home to 300,000. A former intensive care paramedic, Stephen Hogeveen, has been quoted in the *Newcastle Herald* as saying that coverage is inadequate and he warned that Hunter residents may be disadvantaged in an emergency. Considering the growth in the region over the past 30 years, it is conceivable that the number of intensive care paramedic units in the Hunter has remained stagnant since 1981. Clearly this issue must be addressed—lives depend on it. The two intensive care paramedic teams in the Hunter are stationed at Cardiff and Hamilton, and the stand-alone intensive care paramedics are located at other stations.

The six-man teams at Cardiff and Hamilton allow for two paramedics to be on duty for each shift. The Rutherford Thornton area and the western side of Lake Macquarie have been identified as needing six-man units, though there has been no move towards providing them. Peter Rumball, President of the Health Services Union Hunter sub-branch, has said that ideally there should be a significant increase in the overall number of teams servicing both the Hunter and the Central Coast—at least four in both regions and a fifth in the Hunter. That there have been only two for more than three decades now is troubling. "It's all about the politics", Mr Rumball said, "not patients". I fear that he may be right. Such an expansion might not be economically feasible immediately but until it can be enacted properly former intensive care paramedic Mr Hogeveen has said that a thoughtful, considered redistribution of existing staff would mean more equitable coverage. He is in a position to know. He served as a station manager and sat as a director on the Central Coast Health Board.

However, this issue speaks to a broader problem. There is not just a lack of specialist intensive care teams but a lack of paramedics in the Hunter. It is not all doom and gloom though, and credit must go where it is due. The Government has made some promising moves to address concerns about the lack of paramedics in the greater Hunter region. Last year it announced that four new paramedics would be stationed at Gloucester, Merriwa, Murrurundi and Stroud after years of lobbying by the Health Services Union and community groups. This is excellent news for those communities but it goes only part way to redressing the underlying problem that there are simply not enough paramedics in the Hunter to meet the needs of the region adequately. "We're still looking at places like Belmont and other stations there that need more staff to be able to adequately support the community", Health Services Union State secretary Gerard Hayes was quoted as saying to the ABC.

The rapid growth of many Hunter communities will only exacerbate the problem in years to come. Mr Rumball also highlighted the failure of the NSW Ambulance Service to adequately roster shifts in Hunter stations, including Birmingham Gardens, Cessnock, Nelson Bay and Belmont. "Basically on a weekly basis since August 10, they have failed to increase the numbers of staff [to] two crews", he was quoted as saying by the *Port Stephens Examiner*. He continued, "They've failed to fill rostered lines to increase roster levels for those four stations". This assumes that paramedics are a finite resource; I reject this notion. I argue instead that the fundamental problem remains a shortage of paramedics. The solution of better rostering serves only as a stopgap measure: moving around existing resources instead of introducing new ones. We need more paramedics to go around. A NSW Ambulance Service spokesman was quick to point out in the same article that quoted Mr Rumball that paramedics respond to calls from throughout the region, regardless of which station they are assigned to.

In an emergency such as those that paramedics across the State respond to every day, every second counts. Paramedics will rush to every call they receive, regardless of how far away they are when the call comes in. These are people with passion and commitment who work tirelessly to save lives—and thank heavens for that. However, this problem will only get worse in the coming years. With a projected population growth of 160,000 in the lower Hunter alone over the next 20 years, the number of paramedics, including the number of specialist intensive care units, must increase commensurately. The people of the Hunter deserve adequate emergency services; they should not, as Mr Hogeveen characterised it, be treated as second-class citizens.

Mr TIM OWEN (Newcastle) [11.16 a.m.]: Government members regularly respond to motions moved by the member for Wallsend that are mostly factually incorrect. The allocation of intensive care paramedic crews throughout the Central Coast and Hunter is in accordance with demand and geographical boundaries. We checked with the department and advise that there are no six-person intensive care paramedic units in the Central Coast and Hunter regions, or anywhere else throughout New South Wales. This is yet another motion that is factually incorrect and obviously driven by a union—probably the Health Services Union, which has covered itself in great glory of late!

Currently 40 intensive care paramedics are rostered at seven stations throughout the Central Coast. Additionally, other intensive care paramedics operate as managers with response capacity. Those seven stations are located at Bateau Bay, Doyalson, Ettalong, Hawkesbury River, Point Clare, Terrigal and Toukley. Currently 43 intensive care paramedics are located at 12 of the 24 stations throughout the inner and outer Hunter. Those locations are Cardiff, Cessnock, Hamilton, Kurri Kurri, Nelson Bay, Rutherford, Tanilba Bay, Toronto, Gloucester, Merriwa, Murrurundi and Tea Gardens. Currently two stations are situated in the Hunter region—as mentioned by the member for Wallsend—at Hamilton and Cardiff. They have dedicated intensive care paramedic crews staffed by a total of 23 intensive care paramedics, with two intensive care paramedics on each vehicle.

Historically, those dedicated intensive care paramedic crews have responded to road and helicopter emergencies as part of their normal duties. But this Government has changed that arrangement due to the former Government being asked for years by the Westpac Rescue Helicopter Service to give it dedicated doctors and paramedics—which it never got but which we have now delivered. This Government has dedicated crews additional to the paramedics who are allocated to the Hunter region. The reform plan this Government has initiated will see that introduced in 1½ weeks. The current reliance on operational road intensive care paramedics to respond on helicopter missions will cease, resulting in enhanced response capability of road intensive care paramedics. As I have mentioned, everything this Government does is based on fact, not fiction; it is about demand and geographical boundaries. Working with facts is how a responsible Government should deliver capability; it is not about just listening to a union and asking for more of this and that.

Our paramedics are enhancing their clinical skills to also provide enhanced cardiac care: 12-lead electrocardiograph, pre-hospital thrombolysis and stroke treatments. This affords all patients the opportunity to receive high-quality clinical care and treatment, both on the road and in the air. On occasion intensive care paramedics are required to respond and provide treatment to patients with non-life-threatening medical conditions. As the member for Wallsend said, this is unavoidable due to workload or as a result of being the available paramedic closest to the patient. On a weekly basis we speak to generally inane motions from the member for Wallsend, and yet again her motion today is factually incorrect. The Government is taking every action that is necessary. Service delivery is based on demand and geographical areas, and I think that is where we should leave the matter.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields) [11.20 a.m.]: I support the motion moved by the member for Wallsend and pay tribute to the paramedics as one who has regularly attended at the side of the road

many motor vehicle accidents. The skills of intensive care unit paramedics are truly extraordinary: They save lives every day during most shifts. It is not just about trauma; modern cardiac care is having angioplasty at a major centre, and to do that one needs to correctly diagnose somebody with chest pain using a 12-lead electrocardiograph. Intensive care paramedics not only do that but do it brilliantly—and with heart attacks time is muscle. The fact that rates of surviving a heart attack with intact myocardium are so good is due largely to the incredible skills of intensive care paramedics. As the member for Wallsend stated, intensive care paramedics sometimes respond to other emergencies when they are the closest available crew, and that is appropriate. They are paid to be at work and, from my experience, they are extremely willing to do so.

However, as the member for Newcastle said, we need to deal with facts not fiction. The facts are that in both Hunter 1 and Hunter 2—those regions covering the Hunter area—the median ambulance response time is close to the longest in the State. In 2011-12 the response time for Hunter 2 was 12.73 minutes, while in Hunter 1 it was 11.92 minutes. This is well above the State average. I was waiting for members opposite to say that the situation is better now than under the former Labor Government; I suspect that claim is to come. Since 2006-07 the median ambulance response time statewide has increased by 10.4 per cent, from 9.6 to 10.6 minutes. This year the 50th centile response time is up to 11.13 minutes. So ambulance response times across the State continue to increase and those in the Hunter are already close to the longest in New South Wales.

The number of ambulance clinicians is fairly stable, at about 3,916 in 2013-14—which is up very little from 2012-13. Many more people want to become paramedics than are able to find a job. There are 267 ambulance stations across the State and large numbers of university graduates with various degrees and people who wish to enter the system without a degree but who have relevant skills. It is a matter of training enough paramedics to replace those who leave because intensive care unit paramedics require significant skills achieved over many years and it is difficult to replace them at short notice. We need to train as many intensive care unit paramedics as there are people willing to undertake training. The best place to train them is on the job, and the best way to do that is to increase the number of paramedics in the Hunter and bring the 50th centile rates down to the State average.

In December 2012 the Ambulance Service released a significant reform plan concentrating on trying to get less urgent calls out of the ambulance system. That does not solve the problem of intensive care paramedics. The only way to respond to major trauma or illness such as heart attack or stroke is with the appropriate paramedic response—a primary responder—and for the paramedic to provide treatment using his or her unbelievably well-developed skills. I have been with paramedics on many occasions in my life, and they are the most impressive clinicians one could meet. I support the motion.

Mr GARRY EDWARDS (Swansea) [11.24 a.m.]: The motion moved by member for Wallsend about paramedic team staffing in the Hunter and Central Coast regions is based on an absolute falsehood. The member for Wallsend incorrectly stated that the Hunter region has two six-person intensive care paramedic teams and that the Central Coast region also has two such teams. These are the raw facts regarding our paramedic teams. As the member for Newcastle rightly pointed out, there are no six-person intensive care paramedic units on the Central Coast, in the Hunter or indeed anywhere else in New South Wales. There are currently 40 intensive care paramedics rostered at seven stations throughout the Central Coast, including at a station in Doyalson in my electorate.

The allocation of staff is in accordance with demand and geographical boundaries. In the Hunter 43 intensive care paramedics are located at 12 stations throughout the region, including at stations in Hamilton and Cardiff. The staff include 23 intensive care paramedics, with two intensive care paramedics on each vehicle. These dedicated intensive care paramedic crews respond to road and helicopter emergencies as part of their normal duties. There are no organisational plans to increase the number of dedicated intensive care paramedic stations in the Hunter-New England sector. Further reforms to streamline intensive care paramedic allocation for both helicopter and vehicle operations are currently being rolled out following the launch of the independent review of helicopter operations and intensive stakeholder consultation reform plan for the NSW Aeromedical (Rotary Wing) Retrieval Services in New South Wales in July 2013. This reform plan will see the introduction of a dedicated doctor-paramedic or doctor-nurse crew who are all certified aeromedical for all helicopters within New South Wales, and will improve the capability of the health emergency and aeromedical services unit, with six intensive care paramedics being trained.

Presently, the requirement is to provide two intensive care paramedics on helicopter emergency responses. The rollout of the reform plan has commenced in Newcastle, with the transition to the new crew model progressing this month. It will enable permanent crews for all helicopter bases to be available 24 hours a

day, seven days a week. The current reliance on operational road intensive care paramedics to respond on helicopter missions will cease, resulting in enhanced response capability of road intensive care paramedics. I conclude as I began: This motion is based on a falsehood. There are no six-person intensive care paramedic teams in the Hunter, the Central Coast or indeed anywhere else in New South Wales.

Mr RON HOENIG (Heffron) [11.28 a.m.]: I support the motion. I inform the House of my experience with paramedics over a number of years, and their treatment of my family members has endeared them to me. They do an outstanding job and make a substantial contribution to our health service. They are not only qualified health professionals but also dedicated and caring. Having had that type of experience gives one great insight. Many people understand what emergency service personnel do because of their life experiences or their knowledge of human affairs. Theoretically people know there are ambulance and paramedic services and they are aware of what they do, but when they are touched by those professionals and see them working with members of their family they have a greater appreciation of them. I take this opportunity to pay my respects and to indicate that I support and admire those professionals who do so much for the community in times of crisis. They are a special group of people.

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend) [11.31 a.m.], in reply: I thank the members representing the electorates of Newcastle, Macquarie Fields, Swansea and Heffron for their contribution to debate on this important motion. I pose this question on behalf of the community: Which Sydney bureaucrat wrote Government members' speeches? I am sorry it is inconvenient for the member for Newcastle to have to deal with representations on behalf of the people of the Hunter and the Hunter community. Heaven help any workers who knock on the door of the member for Newcastle because they will get short shrift. The member for Macquarie Fields made a wonderful contribution to debate on this motion. The member informed the House that since 2006-07 ambulance response times have continued to increase—even more so in the Hunter. According to members of the Government workers in the health sector are lying about that statistic.

It is sad that this important issue has been distilled by members of the Government to a point where they are telling health workers in the Hunter community that their concerns are inane and worthless. In his contribution to the debate the member for Swansea explained to paramedics in the Hunter that they have it good. I encourage the member for Swansea to talk to the workers instead of reading a speech written by a Sydney-based ministerial adviser. It will be something new for the Liberal Government. I apologise to paramedics throughout New South Wales for the comment by the member for Newcastle that this motion is inane. Is it inane that workers are striving for better conditions in order to respond more quickly in the Hunter? I apologise on behalf of the Government. The Opposition cares about workers and their needs.

Mr Andrew Gee: It should be above politics.

Ms SONIA HORNER: It is not inane and it should not be above politics. The Government should deal immediately with the shortage of paramedics and increased response times in the Hunter. I urge all members to support the motion. It is important to the workers and to the people in New South Wales who need a quick response from an ambulance officer or a paramedic.

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

Motion agreed to.

OPERATION OPERATING ROOM LTD

Mr ADAM MARSHALL (Northern Tablelands) [11.34 a.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) Congratulates the hardworking members of the Inverell community organisation Operation Operating Room Ltd.
- (2) Notes that Operation Operating Room, since its inception six years ago, has contributed \$101,230 to Inverell District Hospital for important supplementary equipment, improvements and preventative health events.
- (3) Pays tribute to Operation Operating Room President, Deputy Mayor Di Baker of Inverell Shire Council, and fellow committee members, past and present, for their commitment to improving health care and health facilities in Inverell.

I congratulate and offer my sincere thanks to the volunteer group Operation Operating Room and its tireless fundraising efforts to support Inverell hospital and health care in the Inverell community. The Operation

Operating Room group does a fabulous job raising money for equipment, preventative health programs and advocating on behalf of the hospital and residents in the community. The group was established in 2006 in response to a letter from a visiting specialist, Dr Reid. At the time Dr Reid suggested additional equipment that would benefit the operating theatre and the Inverell Chamber of Commerce answered the call by providing \$1,000 to establish Operation Operating Room Ltd. Since 2006 the organisation has raised \$110,000 for patient comforts and equipment at the hospital, including an infant resuscitator which has a more efficient heater and allows oxygen to be blended with the air for infant resuscitation. In the past 12 months alone the group has funded nearly \$30,000 worth of equipment, including a gynaecological chair, an ice machine for patients in the medical ward and a set of scales for the infant resuscitator. Most recently Operation Operating Room, together with the hardworking members of the hospital auxiliary, donated two cardiac monitors worth \$7,000 each.

Ms Katrina Hodgkinson: How terrific is that?

Mr ADAM MARSHALL: It is terrific, Minister. The monitors replace the outdated models and provide improved diagnostic and investigative capabilities for the hospital. They are used on patients that are acutely unwell, have cardiac symptoms, respiratory conditions, or related medical conditions, to provide a continuous electronic trace of the heart. The Operation Operating Room group works very closely with the hospital management team to establish what additional equipment would benefit patients and then works incredibly hard to deliver on those needs as quickly as possible. The group meets bi-monthly and organises at least one significant fundraising event each year. It also collects donations from local community organisations such as Rotary and Lions.

The hospital and the Inverell community as a whole are incredibly fortunate to have the support of groups such as Operation Operating Room that are committed to improving the care that patients receive in the hospital as well as the local health district. As the member for Northern Tablelands I am incredibly thankful and grateful for their efforts. It would be remiss of me not to pay special tribute to the Operation Operating Room president, Di Baker, who has spearheaded that organisation for a number of years. Di Baker is passionate about health care in the community and all aspects of the community in her role as deputy mayor of Inverell Shire Council. From my perspective Ms Baker always answers the call when required and is a very passionate person about her community. It is a pleasure to work alongside her. I want to mention current and past directors and members of Operation Operating Room: Debbie Kachel, Pam Weste, Jo Williams, Tim O'Connell, Kerry Hall, Cynthia Archer, Dave Mudaliar, Sabine Bombeke, Leanne Michael and John Goldsmith. They have all been incredibly committed to enhancing health care and health facilities in Inverell—a very big thank you. Inverell would not be in the position it is without their assistance.

I had the pleasure of attending the Operation Operating Room annual general meeting last year. I can report to the House that all those members I mentioned are the most kind, sincere and generous people I have met. They are filled with community spirit, passion and a strong commitment to health care and assisting others in the community. I cannot speak highly enough of the community's gratitude to them and mine as well. The Operation Operating Room team is a remarkable group of community members who willingly give much of their time throughout the year. Their efforts are greatly appreciated by me and by the entire community. It is important for this Parliament to recognise the efforts of that organisation and to pay tribute to it. I commend the motion to the House.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields) [11.40 a.m.]: I support the commendable motion moved by the member for Northern Tablelands. More members should move motions similar to this to ensure that groups like Operation Operating Room Ltd and people like Di Baker receive the attention they deserve from Parliament for their tireless work. It is an extraordinary achievement to raise more than \$100,000 in a town the size of Inverell. This group is playing in first division when it comes to raising funds in the local community.

As a board member of the Kids of Macarthur Health Foundation I know that it is not just the money that groups such as Operation Operating Room Ltd raise that is vital. The support they provide for the health community is also vital. Healthcare work is extremely difficult. When doctors and nurses use equipment that the local community has paid for it provides them with enormous emotional support—and lifesaving support—during times of crisis. These groups give more than just money; they also give the hospital truly amazing moral support. Their support is vital because for the first time enough doctors, nurses and allied health staff are graduating to be able to fill vacant positions in towns such as Inverell, which has been the major problem in rural New South Wales for the past 50 years. University of Western Sydney graduates are in their third year of post-graduate study, but they are now about to enter specialist or general practitioner training. I hope and expect that many of those graduates will train in Inverell and return to rural practice there.

The medical practices in Inverell are of incredibly high standard and have been for many years. Nearly 30 years ago I was a transport registrar at the old Children's Hospital. Whenever I received a call from Inverell I knew that the child would have had the highest quality care available. I knew that part of the reason was that country people looked after their own and that the nursing staff and doctors were incredibly compassionate towards their local community members. It is because of that loyalty that groups such as Operation Operating Room Ltd have responded with such extraordinary support.

Armidale now has a rural medical school, which is vital for training future doctors for Inverell. It is important that the Government give Armidale Hospital the \$40 million it needs to train staff, many of whom will one day work in Inverell. Inverell healthcare workers need to be able to care for their community. With proper facilities they will be able to care for 74 per cent of their local residents, but they also need the support that will be provided by rebuilding Armidale Hospital. The challenge for the Government is to ensure that the young doctors, nurses and allied health therapists can be trained to the appropriate level required to work in towns such as Inverell. In rural and regional hospitals a wide variety of skills are needed and those skills are not always able to be taught in major teaching hospitals.

The future of Inverell hospital was debated in this Chamber last year. The hospital is now near the end of its useful life. The cost to reconstruct it would be of the order of tens of millions of dollars. A similar type of hospital at Narrabri cost \$40 million to construct in 2012 and was opened by this Government. As I said last year, Inverell could be designed as a new district general hospital with 50 beds. To add to the heartfelt words of the member opposite, a commitment of that amount of money by any level of government would be most welcome by the people of Inverell.

Mr ANDREW GEE (Orange) [11.45 a.m.]: I support the important motion moved by the member for Northern Tablelands. At the end of last year a petition of more than 10,000 signatures calling for the upgrade of Ulan Road was presented in this Parliament. The member for Northern Tablelands supported that motion that ultimately helped to yield \$9.5 million for that road upgrade. It is therefore with great pleasure that I today reciprocate that support by lending weight to the motion moved by the member for Northern Tablelands and commending the hardworking members of the Inverell community organisation Operation Operating Room Ltd.

The member for Northern Tablelands is justly proud of these tireless volunteers for raising much-needed money for the Inverell District Hospital. The member has mentioned chair Di Baker, who has led the team ably. I know the member is very proud of the great community workers he named in his address. They typify the spirit of regional New South Wales. We are a little more isolated and so people have to give a little more time and effort to keep our community organisations going.

Operation Operating Room Ltd member Jo Williams grew up in Inverell and has raised her four daughters there. As a mother she is very aware of the need for proper health services in her area. Sabine Bombeke is another member of the group. She was born in Belgium and is married to former Australian cycling champion Scott Sunderland. Sabine moved to Inverell with her family in 2010 and is a great community worker. Another member, Pam Weste, has lived in Inverell for 19 years. In 1991 she left Sydney with her two young children and made the tree change, like so many regional New South Wales residents have done. Timothy O'Connell is a director of Operation Operating Room Ltd. He is also a parent of young children and knows the value that the organisation brings to Inverell hospital. Today we pay tribute to all those volunteers and to the many others who have supported the work of Operation Operating Room Ltd either through volunteering or giving money. The group's achievements are the result of a community effort by the whole of Inverell.

Community organisations help out in our hospitals across New South Wales. In my electorate I have worked closely with the Orange Hospital Auxiliary, which has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for our hospital. Its members include Tracy Wilkinson, Flo Corbyn, Pat Devenish, Robin Sloan and Doreen Thurtell to name just a few. Doreen insists that I work a shift with the hospital auxiliary volunteers every year. I have performed with varying degrees of success. I confess that last time I spilt the coffee beans all over the counter. I thank them for their forbearance and their patience.

The Wayfinders are another group of fantastic volunteers. They guide people from all over western New South Wales around the hospital when they come for treatment. Page 4 of this week's edition of the august *Orange City Life* features a photo of Wayfinders Susan Sander, my old friend from the Orange Lion's Club Errol McCann and Pat Devenish from the hospital auxiliary standing proudly outside Orange Health Service. I congratulate Operation Operating Room Ltd on its fine work and achievements.

Mr ADAM MARSHALL (Northern Tablelands) [11.49 a.m.], in reply: I thank members for considering this important motion. I thank the member for Macquarie Fields, the shadow Minister for Health, for his support for the motion and his apt words celebrating the work of Operation Operating Room Ltd. His comments are true that this organisation's impact on the Inverell community and the hospital goes far beyond the funds it raises. The organisation also makes an important contribution through the support and morale boost its volunteers offer the skilled hospital staff who work incredibly hard and are ably led by Amanda Morris. The support of Operation Operating Room Ltd goes beyond the equipment it funds for the patients; the staff also appreciate having the support of the community and the organisation.

The member for Macquarie Fields also spoke about the fact that while Inverell hospital caters for the needs of the community there is no doubt that it needs some infrastructure upgrades. As the local member, I will continue to work hard on behalf of my community to see that the hospital receives whatever upgrades are needed. The Inverell community knows that, but I state again that I will work as hard as I can to ensure that occurs. I also thank my colleague the member for Orange, who understands hospitals in regional communities and the need to support hospital auxiliaries and local organisations such as Operation Operating Room Ltd. Mr Acting-Speaker Fraser, I know this is true also in Coffs Harbour, although Coffs Harbour is on the coast and inland areas have unique issues. The member for Orange also acknowledged organisations in his area. Every member of this House has hospital auxiliaries and organisations like Operation Operating Room Ltd working in their communities to give emotional support to staff and to raise important finances for equipment to make those people staying in their local hospitals a bit more comfortable.

I thank the member for Orange and the member for Macquarie Fields for their support for this motion. They have given resounding acknowledgement of Operation Operating Room Ltd. Operation Operating Room Ltd should have that support because it does great work. I look forward to attending its next meeting. This House and the community take off their hats to Operation Operating Room for supporting our hospital. I look forward to Operation Operating Room Ltd receiving continued support.

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

Motion agreed to.

FREE SHUTTLE BUS SERVICES

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK (Bankstown) [11.52 a.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) Condemns the Government for cancelling the free shuttle bus services in Bankstown, Blacktown, Cabramatta, Campbelltown, Liverpool, Newcastle and Penrith.
- (2) Condemns the Government for altering the frequency of the Gosford shuttle bus and adjusting it as a paid service.
- (3) Condemns the Government for altering the Kogarah shuttle bus route and adjusting it as a paid service.
- (4) Notes that residents in the communities of Bankstown, Blacktown, Cabramatta, Campbelltown, Liverpool, Newcastle, Penrith, Gosford and Kogarah, including the elderly and frail, are being deprived of a free service in their community.
- (5) Calls on the Government to reinstate free shuttle bus services across New South Wales.

I condemn the decision of the O'Farrell Government to cancel the free shuttle bus services in Bankstown, Blacktown, Cabramatta, Campbelltown, Liverpool, Newcastle and Penrith. The free shuttle bus services were fought for and championed by local community members who saw a gap in the provision of public transport. The local shuttle bus services were introduced by the former Labor Government to provide a free, accessible and convenient service for members of the local community. They were relied upon particularly by the elderly and the frail who do not have the capacity to walk long distances. In fact, the free shuttle buses were frequently used by a broad spectrum of the community, including mothers and fathers with prams, schoolchildren, those with an illness, mobility issues or disability, as well as shoppers and those simply wishing to use public transport. The shuttle buses provided a transport link between key commuter destinations—including transport hubs and shopping centres—within the respective metropolitan centres in which they operated. The buses were air-conditioned and had entry points low to the floor. They were a useful and practical means of public transport that delivered significant benefits for local residents, local businesses and the local community.

The New South Wales Government made the sad decision to cut those services based on an argument that funds used to run the services would be better directed elsewhere. Let us put this into perspective. Operating

the free shuttle bus services cost the New South Wales Government only \$7 million a year which was a small amount to pay but it offered many tens of thousands of commuters a free and accessible means of public transport. In contrast, this Minister would rather spend that \$7 million on other things. In April last year the Minister for Transport was happy to pay more than \$1 million in consultancy fees alone for the redesign of the Sydney Trains logo—a complete waste of money. A mere two months after cancelling the free shuttle bus services, the Minister was happy to spend more than \$17 million of taxpayers' money on the rebranding of Sydney Trains. This included \$7.3 million on new train station staff uniforms, \$4.5 million on new signage for just three CityRail stations and a handful of ferry wharves.

This Government does not have the right priorities. Why would a government spend that amount of money on rebranding trains when it could spend \$7 million a year to provide free and accessible public transport services for metropolitan centres? In my electorate of Bankstown, the shuttle bus service connected the Bankstown Bus Interchange to the Bankstown central shopping centre, to government services buildings, to shops on Meredith Street and Brandon Avenue, and to the Bankstown RSL and Bankstown sports clubs. I know many members of the local community who used the shuttle bus service several times a week. My office received numerous letters and phone calls demanding that the service be reinstated. In Blacktown, the shuttle bus service provided a crucial link between the Blacktown Transport Interchange, Westpoint Blacktown, Blacktown Workers Club, Blacktown TAFE and Blacktown Hospital.

The member for Cabramatta, who is in the Chamber, knows how important the local shuttle bus was for his community. The cancelled Cabramatta bus connected the precincts of Canley Vale and Canley Heights to the government service buildings and shops within the Cabramatta central business district. The Cabramatta community was highly dependent on the local shuttle bus due to the lack of free parking in the Cabramatta area. Once again they have no option other than to resort to paid parking. The Campbelltown shuttle service stopped at significant locations such as Macarthur Square, Macarthur Station and Campbelltown Hospital. In Liverpool, the shuttle serviced Liverpool Station and Bus Interchange, Liverpool Hospital, Westfield Liverpool, Liverpool Library and Liverpool Post Office. Patrons of these shuttle services could move quickly around their central business district precincts to carry out their daily activities.

In Newcastle, the shuttle bus connected Newcastle station with Scott Street, Hunter Street, the cafe precinct, Newcastle TAFE, Marketown Shopping Centre and King Street. In Penrith, the shuttle bus linked Henry Street and High Street, as well as Centro Penrith, Penrith Station and Westfield Shoppingtown. In fact, the member for Penrith was delighted when he made an announcement on 23 September 2011 that the route of the Penrith shuttle would be changed. He said, "This is a big win for Penrith." He came out with all guns blazing and soon after the Minister announced that the Penrith shuttle bus service would be cancelled. We have not heard too much from the member for Penrith about that, but I expect he made it clear that his community benefitted greatly from having the service.

All 12 shuttle busses were a big win for their communities. They were not merely a crucial means of public transportation but also helped to relieve cost-of-living pressures on those who have to budget for every dollar. Cuts to these shuttle bus services limit mobility for many in the community, especially those on fixed incomes or pensions. I condemn the New South Wales Government for cancelling the free shuttle bus services and I call on Barry O'Farrell and his Minister to reinstate free shuttle bus services across New South Wales.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS (Hawkesbury—Parliamentary Secretary) [11.59 a.m.]: I indicate at the outset that the Government will oppose what is nothing less than a shambolic motion that is wasting the time of members and New South Wales taxpayers. It is unbelievable that members of the former Labor Government, who are now in opposition, dared to move a motion that has anything to do with public transport after their woeful record. After 16 years of slashing services, underproviding services and making promise after promise to build rail lines, members opposite dare to raise their heads in opposition to take a swipe at this Government. The former Government slashed 1,500 weekly bus services in 2006 alone. The shuttle buses were nothing more than an election stunt by the former Government, which introduced them in the dying days of its last term—desperate to hold onto marginal seats. Not only did the Labor Government not win those seats; the fraud of its members was exposed when they said their Government was investing in public transport. There was no planning to enable these services to continue to operate following the State election—surprise, surprise.

A responsible government—which the O'Farrell Government is—ensures that decisions made about any infrastructure investment are supported by accountable and transparent processes. That means that projects will be not only announced but also delivered. That is a nice change from what happened under our predecessors. The Labor Government committed no funding to the shuttle services beyond the first 12 months.

After that—which, incidentally, coincided with the New South Wales election—the funding ended, and so did the shuttle services. It was nothing more than a sham and typical of the irresponsible, inept and completely incompetent economic mismanagement of the Labor Government.

Who introduced these services? It was none other than the current Leader of the Opposition when he was the Minister for Transport. Just two months out from the last State election he announced free shuttle buses for Campbelltown, Gosford and Liverpool, but no funding was allocated to provide those services after the State election. Just one month out from the election, along came the free shuttle buses for Newcastle and—members can guess—Blacktown, the electorate of the current Leader of the Opposition. It was a blatant attempt to shore up support in the electorate that Sussex Street had promised him—an electorate that was a Labor stronghold until the current Leader of the Opposition was parachuted in. As might have been expected, the voters of Blacktown vehemently protested and delivered an 18 per cent swing against the Leader of the Opposition. We are delighted that Blacktown now is a very marginal electorate and, given the performance of the Leader of the Opposition, we can guarantee that will be so at the next election.

Transport for NSW monitored the performance of the shuttle buses, which is what a responsible government does—it monitors performance and ensures that it is delivering people's requirements. We found out later that the introduction of shuttle buses by the former Government was nothing more than an election stunt. We looked at how many people were using the services. Liverpool had a staggering 0.6 people boarding per kilometre, which meant that a bus had to travel two kilometres before it picked up a person. Penrith had 0.7 people boarding per kilometre and Newcastle had 1.3 people boarding per kilometre, which meant that if a bus travelled five kilometres it would not even have three people boarding it. It was a deplorable situation: empty buses were costing \$7 million a year. It is another example of the economic mismanagement of our predecessors in the Australian Labor Party. These shuttle buses were sapping funding from otherwise essential services such as health, education and community services.

There is so much to do in transport that we cannot afford to waste millions of dollars a year on ghost services, as our predecessors did. These buses need to be used where demand is greatest. I am proud to say that transport staff in the north-west and Western Sydney—enormous growth areas—have been very happy about the extra bus services. The O'Farrell Government, with the help of our great Minister for Transport, has added more than 4,000 new weekly bus services since coming to office. That is 240,000 extra seats on buses across the State—five times the number of seats in a full Sydney Cricket Ground. The new timetable introduced 1,700 extra bus services a week—1,200 of which are in Western Sydney, and particularly in the areas of my electorate that were transport starved prior to the 2011 State election.

On 28 January we announced a further 580 weekly bus services, which have begun serving north-west Sydney, including 150 services between Rouse Hill and Parramatta on the T-way; 105 extra services on the new route linking Castle Hill and Chatswood; and 100 extra weekly services between Rouse Hill, Kellyville, Norwest and Parramatta. I know I am bragging, but when 250,000 residents were moved into the area by the former Government with a complete lack of planning, and when those people have no public transport, it warms the cockles of my heart to know that we now have a responsible government and a responsible Minister who are more than happy to say to them, "You live there; you have been deprived and disadvantaged, but this Government will give you the services you deserve." This motion is an absolute sham and this Government will oppose it for all the obvious reasons I have stated.

Mr NICK LALICH (Cabramatta) [12.05 p.m.]: I join my colleague the member for Bankstown in condemning the O'Farrell Government for cancelling free shuttle bus services in disadvantaged areas across New South Wales—areas with very high unemployment and large numbers of people surviving on low incomes, including Bankstown, Campbelltown, Liverpool, Newcastle, Penrith and my electorate of Cabramatta. These free bus services meant a lot to people who have to budget every dollar to pay for rent, medical expenses and household bills and to put food on the table. So much for Barry O'Farrell's statement before the last election that he would reduce the cost of living pressures on people with low incomes in the western areas. The Minister for Western Sydney is not doing much for Western Sydney.

This Government has again demonstrated just how out of touch it is with families battling to make ends meet. In total, the Government has axed 12 free shuttle bus services, which cost just \$7 million to operate—money well spent on services that enabled isolated, marginalised and disadvantaged people and families to stay connected to their communities. In my electorate of Cabramatta the free 88 shuttle bus service was hard won and was championed by the local community. The elderly and less mobile people in the area were particularly

dependent on the service and were left bitterly disappointed when the Government cancelled it. I know that because many constituents have come up to me to express their anger and disappointment and I have received numerous letters from people demanding that the free bus service be reinstated.

At the time the Cabramatta 88 bus service was cancelled more than 20,000 passengers were using the service every month. The buses were running out of Cabramatta three-quarters full, but the Minister stated that only 4.5 people per kilometre were using the service and that there had to be about nine people per kilometre to make the service worthwhile. I do not know how the Minister came up with those figures when the buses were running three-quarters full. The member for Hawkesbury should know how these services are run because he and his family operated a bus service. There are seven million stories in the life of the member for Hawkesbury and today we have heard just one of them. We know the member for Hawkesbury has done a lot of things in his life, and I congratulate him.

When I stood at bus stops to ask residents about the service, the feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Many times when I saw the buses pass by in Cabramatta there was standing room only on them. In addition, the service was taking cars off our heavily congested roads and freeing up parking spaces in Cabramatta, which are in very short supply. I join my colleague the member for Bankstown in calling on the O'Farrell Government to reinstate free shuttle bus services to disadvantaged communities in New South Wales, including in Cabramatta.

Mr MARK COURE (Oatley) [12.09 p.m.]: What a ridiculous motion moved by members opposite—those who, for nearly 20 years, subjected this State to transport failures.

Mr Nick Lalich: We were in government for 16 years.

Mr MARK COURE: Twenty years sounds better than 16 years. We all remember that for nearly 20 years the guilty party, those opposite, re-announced plans for New South Wales that were never delivered. The member for Cabramatta was a member of the former Government, and he would remember the announcement, the re-announcement and the cancellation of the Sydney metro project. How much did the former Government waste? It was \$500 million. Then there was the rail extension to the eastern suburbs, which was to be completed in 2002. It was never delivered. The Parramatta rail link was never delivered. The Hornsby to Newcastle high-speed rail link was never completed, never delivered. The North West Rail Link was never completed, never delivered. The South West Rail Link was never completed, never delivered. The Sutherland to Wollongong fast rail link was never completed, never delivered.

Now we are debating free shuttle bus services. Just like every one of its plans, this was another Labor Government failure. Who would implement a \$7 million program for a free shuttle bus that no-one would use? That shows how ridiculous is this motion moved by the member for Bankstown. What is amazing is that the then Minister for Transport is now the Leader of the Opposition. He rushed the introduction of these free shuttle buses in four weeks before the last State election in a desperate attempt to garner a few votes in places like Bankstown, Liverpool, Campbelltown, Penrith and Kogarah. In true Labor style, there was no logic and no planning. The shuttle bus service triplicates existing routes, particularly in Kogarah. The Kogarah route was implemented by the Labor Government as a free shuttle service. How many people used it? It was used by no-one in Kogarah. In fact, it went around one block. Since then this Government has extended the service to Calvary Hospital—something the four members opposite and the Labor Government could not do.

Mr Ron Hoenig: I was not even here.

Mr MARK COURE: The member for Cabramatta was a member of the Labor Party at the time. Members opposite realised how ridiculous these shuttle services were. Amazingly, 12 months after the former Government introduced the Kogarah free shuttle bus service, the current member for Kogarah called it useless.

Mr Richard Amery: I think she was referring to you, actually.

Mr MARK COURE: No, no. When it was implemented she said it was a great free shuttle bus service, but 12 months later she called it useless. It shows that when it comes to transport the Labor Party has no idea.

Mr RICHARD AMERY (Mount Druitt) [12.12 p.m.]: I support the motion moved by the member for Bankstown condemning the Government's closure of shuttle bus services at the various locations mentioned in

the motion. I particularly support the fifth point, which calls on the Government to reinstate shuttle bus services across New South Wales. That call is made because, as anybody knows who travels around any capital city, not only here in Australia but also overseas, free shuttle bus services are extremely popular, and they are well used, particularly by the disadvantaged in our communities.

I acknowledge the Mount Druitt Commuters Improvement Group, which is known to the member for Hawkesbury and which runs a very good web page on transport issues. John Svoboda, the organiser of that group, has been calling for a free shuttle bus service for the Mount Druitt area to complement the service which was operating in Blacktown but which has been abolished by this Government. John received the support last year of the Mount Druitt Chamber of Commerce. Reg Murray wrote to John's group, saying that the chamber strongly supported the implementation of a shuttle bus service in the region. What chance would Mount Druitt now have of getting a shuttle bus service when all such services have been abolished by this Government? As the member of Hawkesbury honestly said, this Government has other spending priorities. It would cost just \$7 million to retain these services. That \$7 million, in the context of a Transport budget, is chicken feed; but it would be justified expenditure, given the benefits that those services provide.

I think it was the member for Hawkesbury who said that we cannot afford to waste millions of dollars on these bus services. However, as was highlighted in the same debate by the member for Bankstown, we can afford to spend double that amount on things such as signage, new logos, badges and consultancy fees in the Transport portfolio. Not wasting that money on those expenditures would allow us to have shuttle bus services in all the locations mentioned in the motion. Of course, if all the consultancy fees and the signage and badges money spent prettying up the image were saved in the Transport portfolio, we would be able to have these free shuttle bus services.

Mr Mark Coure: You wasted about \$500 million.

Mr RICHARD AMERY: The member for Oatley interjects again. I hope I stay in this place long enough to see him grow up. I jest, because no-one would expect to stay here that long. It is important that this motion be carried because these services need to be provided. The Community Transport Group in Blacktown provides an excellent service to Mount Druitt. I ask members to imagine the situation confronting that group. It is an organisation under stress; it must provide transport assistance to the needy who want to go shopping, to medical centres and hospitals, and so on. Of course, it does not provide transport to people who work in sheltered workshops and such places. The group is limited in the services it can provide because of its budget.

Can members imagine the assistance that that sort of organisation could provide if it had a local free shuttle bus service? Such a service would take the pressure off community transport and assist those less needy in our community to get around, to get out of their houses, to get to shopping centres, to get to medical centres, and so on. But what do we get? We must listen to the member for Oatley bragging about what the Government is doing. The member for Hawkesbury talked about all the people the former Government moved to the north-west sector without providing any services. In the next breath he talked about the new bus services his electorate is getting as part of the new T-way—a Labor Government project. I support the motion.

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK (Bankstown) [12.16 p.m.], in reply: I thank the member for Mount Druitt for his contribution. He has done a fine job today outlining the concerns of his community about the cancellation of the shuttle bus service. I also acknowledge the member for Cabramatta, who had a shuttle bus route very similar to that at Bankstown. I know that his community also has suffered greatly from the cancellation of the Cabramatta shuttle bus. However, it was sad to hear the type of logic that was advanced today by the members for Hawkesbury and Oatley. According to their logic, we would not have any public transport in regional or rural New South Wales; nor would we have any services connecting us to regional cities and towns. According to their logic, the Government would be cutting services to Canberra and everywhere else.

We know that governments must sometimes provide a service that is not economic, but it is provided for the greater public good. We often do that at a cost. We lose money all the time in public transport; that is the whole point of public transport—it is subsidised by the taxpayer. It is a cost, and it is a burden. We are all aware of that. Most of the services provided by government come at a cost, but we provide them because we know it is necessary for needy communities. Undoubtedly, among those are the communities that I have mentioned—such as Bankstown, Blacktown, Mount Druitt, Cabramatta and Campbelltown. It is sad that we did not hear today from the member for Campbelltown or the member for Penrith.

It seems it was easy for the member for Penrith to jump up and down, along with the Hon. Gladys Berejiklian, in front of the local Penrith press and to say that they had a big win when they changed the shuttle bus route. But where were they when that shuttle bus was cancelled? Where was the member for Penrith or a Minister with a Western Sydney portfolio when that shuttle bus was cancelled? I could probably tell the House where the Minister for Transport was: busy with her mate Jack Simos at Conrad Capital paying \$1 million for consultancy fees that nobody in this Parliament can justify. Nobody can justify the payment of \$10,000 and up to \$25,000 per month for 15 hours work that was kept under government guidelines to prevent a tender being called for Transport for NSW.

Mr Andrew Constance: Point of order: The member for Bankstown is well and truly outside the leave of the motion. Given the track record of the member for Bankstown with transport, particularly taxis, she should not lecture the Minister for Transport. I ask that the member be brought back to the leave of the motion. I know that the contribution of the member for Bankstown is entirely and utterly irrelevant.

The ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Andrew Fraser): Order! The speaking time of the member for Bankstown has expired.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 20

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

Noes, 61

Mr Anderson	Mr Gee	Mr Patterson
Mr Aplin	Mr George	Mr Perrottet
Mr Ayres	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	Ms Hodgkinson	Mr Smith
Mr Brookes	Mr Holstein	Mr Souris
Mr Conolly	Mr Humphries	Mr Spence
Mr Constance	Mr Issa	Mr Stokes
Mr Cornwell	Dr Lee	Mr Toole
Mr Coure	Mr Maguire	Mr Ward
Mrs Davies	Mr Marshall	Mr Webber
Mr Dominello	Mr Notley-Smith	Mr R. C. Williams
Mr Doyle	Mr O'Dea	Mrs Williams
Mr Edwards	Mr O'Farrell	
Mr Elliott	Mr Owen	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Evans	Mr Page	Mr Rowell
Mr Flowers	Ms Parker	Mr J. D. Williams

Question resolved in the negative.

Motion negatived.

ARMIDALE UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE

Mr ADAM MARSHALL (Northern Tablelands) [12.31 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) Acknowledges the Armidale branch of the University of the Third Age (U3A), President Shirley Cook, Secretary Doug Crocker, Vice President Des Latham, office volunteers Alison Affleck and Margaret Burke and committee members for their tireless efforts to improve their premises and services for more than 60 members in Armidale.
- (2) Pays tribute to the U3A movement across New South Wales for its commitment to lifelong learning, providing low-cost educational opportunities and recreation activities for older people in our communities, keeping them active and involved in society.

The University of the Third Age [U3A], similar to the Men's Shed movement across this State, is a great organisation. As the motion states, U3A groups keep our seniors active and involved in the community, pursuing their passion for lifelong learning and allowing them to pass on their skills and experience to other members of the community. Before I talk specifically about the Armidale U3A branch, I will give some general information to the House about the U3A movement. The University of the Third Age—or U3A as it is more commonly known—is an international organisation that embodies the principles of lifelong education and the pursuit of knowledge in an atmosphere of mutual learning and teaching. Each branch or local U3A in a community is a learning community, organised by and for people who can be best described as active in retirement—the so-called third age of their lives, hence the name "University of the Third Age".

The term "university" is used in the original mediaeval sense, not one we see in modern times. It is an association or community of teachers and scholars. Within the Armidale branch, like in so many U3As across the State, retired academics and teachers who still have a passion for education and for passing on their knowledge are heavily involved. Members are united in the pursuit of knowledge. The "third age" refers to the life period of active retirement, which follows the first age of childhood and formal education, while the second age of working life precedes the fourth age of dependence, which comes a little later. In Australia the movement kicked off in 1984 in Victoria and then spread. Now the organisation has a total national membership of more than 40,000, which is quite significant.

The Armidale branch is very strong and Shirley Cook, Doug Crocker, Des Latham, Alison Affleck, Margaret Burke and committee members do considerable work running this highly organised and very active organisation. Its strong membership includes more than 80 active volunteers, who spend an enormous amount of time delivering the many projects and courses each semester. In the first semester this year the Armidale branch is offering 60 courses, events and activities—a plethora of activities and learning opportunities for people in the Armidale community. There is certainly something for everyone, from aquarobics to bushwalking, birdwatching to German conversation, cryptic crosswords to croquet, mahjong to New England history and folklore, table tennis to tai chi, yoga to seniors computer club—and the list goes on.

U3A Armidale has worked incredibly hard over a number of years to raise funds to create a permanent home for the group and has a wonderful facility in Barney Street, Armidale. People visiting the facility on any day of the week will usually find a couple of the volunteers with a paintbrush or hammer doing maintenance repairs or handiwork to the beautiful old home that has been converted to allow them to deliver most of the courses and lectures. Recently I had the great pleasure of attending the premises to listen to a lecture about New England history and folklore delivered by a few managers of Saumarez Homestead, which is a National Trust home on the outskirts of Armidale. As the local member, it was fantastic to learn a little more of the history, and it demonstrates that we never stop learning. Despite people being in the third age of their life they still have a keen interest in and passion for learning and a strong desire to be involved in their community. The U3A certainly provides that vehicle.

I was pleased also to launch recently the Northern Tablelands Seniors Week awards. It is timely to speak about U3A, given that Seniors Week will be celebrated this month. It was great that Doug, Des, Alison and Shirley were present to launch the Northern Tablelands Seniors Week awards, and I can report to the House that nominations are flowing in thick and fast. I was happy to present U3A with a cheque for just over \$11,000 from the Community Building Partnership Fund so that members can repaint the exterior of their premises and erect new signage. The U3A movement is outstanding and the Armidale branch is fantastic. In May our branch will host the national conference of U3A. I hope that the Minister for Ageing, the Hon. John Ajaka, will be available to open the conference in Armidale. This passionate group is working hard to organise

the conference. It is appropriate that the House dedicate time to discuss the importance of U3As in all our communities, and I pay particular tribute to the wonderful members of the Armidale branch. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr CLAYTON BARR (Cessnock) [12.37 p.m.]: I support the motion and applaud the member for Northern Tablelands for giving the House the opportunity to talk about the University of the Third Age. The electorate of Cessnock has three centres that offer University of the Third Age services to the community. As members will know, regional communities are often made up of small villages and towns that are some distance apart. University of the Third Age services are offered at the retirement village at Cessnock, the senior citizens hall and library at Kurri Kurri, and at the Sugar Valley Neighbourhood Centre at West Wallsend. The University of the Third Age responds to the fact that people are now living much longer and, even though their careers may be over, many remain healthy and wish to participate in activities and offer their services to their communities. However, the University of the Third Age might be in jeopardy if the Federal Treasurer has his way as he intends to make us work until we are nearly dead.

Having said that, the University of the Third Age is testament to the fact that our elderly are doing extremely well in that they continue to learn, prosper and support each other. In my electorate the most popular services of the University of the Third Age are not so much about recreation but more about education services, particularly courses on computers and the internet. I get quite chuffed to receive emails from some of the more senior members of the community that I have the great privilege of serving knowing that they have learnt how to do such things through the University of the Third Age. Approximately 50 per cent of the population of the Cessnock electorate are not connected to the internet, either by choice or because they are unable to access services. It is something that I, as the local member, am mindful of constantly. If some information is available only online we immediately cut out half the population from receiving it.

Before I conclude my brief contribution, I am happy to lend my support and acknowledge Shirley, Doug, Des, Alison and Margaret for their contribution to the Armidale community through the University of the Third Age—good on you. I commend the regional members who want their community to do the best it can.

Mr ANDREW GEE (Orange) [12.41 p.m.]: I join the member for Northern Tablelands in congratulating the University of the Third Age, in particular the Armidale branch, on the great work it does. I pay tribute to President Shirley Cook, Secretary Doug Crocker, Vice President Des Latham, office volunteers Alison Affleck and Margaret Burke and the committee members. The member for Northern Tablelands is a supporter of the University of the Third Age and it is fitting that he moved this motion today to pay tribute to important community work.

The second part of the member's motion pays tribute to the University of the Third Age movement across New South Wales and its commitment to lifelong learning. In support of the member for Northern Tablelands in introducing this motion I pay tribute to the Orange University of the Third Age. Orange University of the Third Age is one of 62 University of the Third Age organisations in New South Wales. The hardworking University of the Third Age committee in the city of Orange is very active. The committee consists of President and Course Coordinator Cecily Butcher, Vice President Lesley Rodgers, Secretary Jenny Solling, Treasurer Mary McArdle, Committee members Gillian Baxter, Faith Williams and Ray Norman, Social Committee members Ron Mills and Tony Richards, Publicity Officer Jean Penrose, and Course Coordinator Bev Holland. Cecily Butcher also publishes Newslink to keep members informed.

The University of the Third Age in Orange offers a wide range of activities including the Monday forums, armchair travel courses, greeting card making, exploring pencil drawing, croquet—a strong sport in Orange, with a croquet field on Clinton Street—and French à la gare. Never let it be said that Orange is not cosmopolitan; as the member for Northern Tablelands said, it is the Rome of the west. There are courses in water colours for fun, music appreciation, art appreciation, geology, beginners cryptic crossword—something Mr Acting-Speaker may find interesting—lively discussion groups, decoding cryptic crosswords, creative writing, and the list goes on. The Orange University of the Third Age recently had its sign-up day and the most popular course was ukulele playing. Knowing the musical talents of the member for Tamworth, perhaps we can press gang him into conducting courses in that area. The University of the Third Age not only conducts courses but also organises activities such as the April coach trip to Parkes.

Mr Adam Marshall: Mighty Parkes.

Mr ANDREW GEE: An excellent region of New South Wales. A theatre party featuring the musical *Chicago* and an anniversary dinner have been organised as well as Friday morning teas and activities to

encourage members to get out and exercise. Our tribute to the University of the Third Age today should be above and beyond partisan politics so it was disappointing that the member for Cessnock took a cheap shot or a snipe at the Federal Treasurer. Government members will not debate that issue; we want to pay tribute to all the volunteers who work so hard for the University of the Third Age across New South Wales, and particularly in regional New South Wales. They are an important part of the fabric of our regional communities, which would be poorer without them. I commend the member for Northern Tablelands for his great work and his support for the University of the Third Age.

Mr ADAM MARSHALL (Northern Tablelands) [12.45 p.m.], in reply: I thank members for debating this motion and for recognising the importance of the University of the Third Age not only to the community of Armidale and the Northern Tablelands or the electorates of Orange and Cessnock but also to all communities across New South Wales. As the member for Orange informed the House, there are 62 University of the Third Age organisations throughout the State, with more than 40,000 members. It is an important organisation and, as the member for Orange also said, our communities would be poorer for their absence.

The University of the Third Age assists our senior citizens to stay active, socially connected and able to pursue their passion for learning while instilling that passion in others in the community. It is important that all members support University of the Third Age organisations in their electorates because they do terrific work in the community. I thank the member for Cessnock for his contribution to the debate and support for the motion. He correctly identified that for regional communities access to computers and the internet is in demand. I was reading and researching the social media forum Facebook and discovered that, interestingly, the largest growing demographic of Facebook users are people in their retirement years—their third age in life. It is not young people who are gravitating to Facebook in their hundreds and thousands; it is seniors.

Through the University of the Third Age movement, its computer labs, tutelage and education people who want to learn how to use computers and access social media have that option. It is an important way to stay in touch with grandchildren or great grandchildren around the world. It is the only way I can communicate with my grandparents, not because I am travelling but because they are globetrotting and the only way I can keep in touch is through social media. It is an important medium and through the University of the Third Age seniors and retirees can attain the skills to utilise it.

I conclude by restating my appreciation of and congratulations on the work of the University of the Third Age Armidale branch. I acknowledge the fantastic work of Shirley Cook, Doug Crocker, Des Latham, Alison Affleck, Margaret Burke and the host of committee and other members. They work hard to offer a plethora of courses and interesting activities and events that are well subscribed. I have seen the number of people who attend the courses and it is terrific that people, as they approach retirement age, have a passion to be involved in the community and want to act that out as a group. Well done to the University of the Third Age Armidale and to all the University of the Third Age organisations across the State. Their work is particularly important in regional communities. I congratulate them all and acknowledge them publicly.

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

Motion agreed to.

SHELL COVE RAILWAY STATION

Mr GARETH WARD (Kiama) [12.49 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) Notes that work has now commenced on a \$39 million railway station in Shellharbour City.
- (2) Congratulates the Minister for Transport on her personal support of this project.
- (3) Notes the Illawarra has been a significant beneficiary from the Transport Access Program.
- (4) Condemns the former Government—

I refer to those opposite—

for promising this station in 2001 and failing to deliver improved public transport to the Illawarra and South Coast.

What is in a name? I am pleased my friend the member for Shellharbour has taken time out of her busy schedule to be with us in the Chamber to discuss an important transport program that everyone in Shellharbour is united

to deliver. But there seems to be some contention as to who is delivering and who did not. In 2001 an announcement was made about Shell Cove station. Who was in government in 2001? It might have been members opposite. In 2002, 2003, 2004—

Ms Anna Watson: Get on with your history lesson.

Mr GARETH WARD: I know the member for Shellharbour does not like history. Those who do not understand history are doomed to repeat it, and I am sure she will continue to do so.

Ms Anna Watson: It was planned for in 2001.

Mr GARETH WARD: She has started already. All the way from 2001 until 2011 we saw no action and no delivery. The New South Wales Labor Party is the little red engine that couldn't.

Ms Anna Watson: Oak Flats railway station, upgrades to Dapto, upgrades to Albion Park.

Mr GARETH WARD: The old red rattler on the opposition bench opposite is rattling away. We know that the substance and the facts are on our side on this issue. I passionately believe in delivering better public transport, and that is what the Government is doing. At Shellharbour construction is underway of a station that will deliver better transport access for the Shellharbour community. That was not done by members opposite; it was started by this Government and I actively lobbied for it. There has been some dispute about the name of the station. As opposed to members opposite, including my friend the member for Shellharbour, I am not too fussed about what the station is called. I am fussed about delivering. They are about talk; we are about real action.

We need only look across the Illawarra to see that the Government is getting on with the job of delivering better transport access and fixing the mess left by Labor. To make trains run on time when members opposite were in government they slowed down the amount of time it took a train to travel between stations. They spent \$70 million on the Bondi turnaround without delivering a single extra service. We have delivered an extra 125 express services. We have also added quiet carriages on the line. I must acknowledge that I cannot ride in them, but they are great for people who enjoy them. We have deployed additional police officers to travel on the South Coast line. I am sure we all agree that is an important measure to drive down instances of crime and misconduct. The Illawarra is getting its fair share of transport access funding, which I am sure the member for Shellharbour welcomes.

Ms Anna Watson: Where's your transport plan? You have not even been given that yet.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Lee Evans): Order! The member for Kiama has the call.

Mr GARETH WARD: I must respond to that interjection about the transport plan. Members opposite made plan after plan but not one of them was delivered on. The former Labor Government promised 12 rail lines and none of them were delivered. That is Labor's record in government. It was derailed by bad administration. It came off the rails because those opposite could not deliver. In contrast, Albion Park and Gerringong stations have now been upgraded. I note that the Labor candidate for Kiama has condemned the Kiama car park upgrade. He said, "What about this paddock that is meant to be a car park?" He obviously does not know that the car park has been constructed. Unlike the Labor candidate for Kiama, I am proud of the investments in the Kiama electorate. I will not condemn them; I will stand up for them in this place because the Labor candidate will not. He will just be another shiny bum in the Labor caucus. I am getting on with making sure the Government delivers for my community. We have upgraded stations at Albion Park, Gerringong and Kiama. We have delivered those important projects.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Lee Evans): Order!

Mr GARETH WARD: I am just following the example of the member for Oatley, Mr Acting-Speaker. I am sorry if the Minister at the table is offended by my enthusiasm for my electorate but Ministers like him will continue to hear it because my electorate wants them to hear it.

Mr Andrew Constance: Point of order: I ask you to direct the member for Kiama to calm down because his shouting is hurting Hansard's hearing. As I am only a metre away from him, it is also hurting mine.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Lee Evans): Order! I uphold the point of order.

Mr GARETH WARD: I am not sure you asked for a standing order, Mr Acting-Speaker, but that is okay. We are talking about important projects. No matter what it is called, Shell Cove or Shellharbour or Flinders station will make a huge difference to the travelling public. At the moment Dunmore station is much harder to use because the highway upgrade has made it difficult to turn into the station. Moving the station closer to the population will provide greater access, which is what the \$770 million Transport Access Program is all about. In addition to the transport upgrades I have mentioned at Gerringong and Albion Park, a 230-space car park has been constructed at Oak Flats.

Ms Anna Watson: Who built Oak Flats station? I think it was Labor.

Mr GARETH WARD: I am pleased the member for Shellharbour has interjected. Labor built a police station next to a train station but did not provide any car parking.

Ms Anna Watson: You just said we built nothing and then you said we built the railway station and the police station. Did we build something or did we not?

Mr GARETH WARD: I am talking about transport. Police are not transport unless you are catching the blue light taxi. Perhaps members opposite can tell me more about that.

Ms Anna Watson: Stick to the script, Gareth.

Mr GARETH WARD: Gino did not write my notes. You can stick to your script.

Ms Anna Watson: Leave Gino out of this.

Mr GARETH WARD: Gladly. We saw no delivery from those opposite on Oak Flats. This Government is now delivering 230 car parking spaces. Similarly, upgrades have been made to the stations at Kiama, Gerringong and Albion Park. As somebody who catches trains frequently, I am passionate about this motion and about transport.

Ms ANNA WATSON (Shellharbour) [12.55 p.m.]: Somebody needs to advise the member for Kiama that the Oscars are over and Cate Blanchett won. You have missed out there, Gareth, so you can calm down. I will respond briefly to the motion moved by my friend the member for Kiama. Despite the self-congratulations contained in the motion, members should be acquainted with the facts relating to the new station. First, the Geographical Names Board of New South Wales has made clear that it cannot be called "Shell Cove station". In an embarrassment to that free-range chicken opposite, the board knocked over his arrogant attempt to rename the station "Shell Cove".

Mr Gareth Ward: I would rather be a free-range chicken than a headless chook.

Ms ANNA WATSON: He is the Illawarra's own free-range chicken; everybody knows that. In December the Minister for Finance and Services told me in answer to a question on this subject:

The proposed name 'Shell Cove Station' does not meet the Geographical Names Board of New South Wales' guidelines as the railway station is located outside the suburb of Shell Cove.

Again, this is pure arrogance. The answer continued:

The Board has invited Transport for NSW to submit a revised proposal.

The Illawarra's little Roman Caesar opposite has been put in his place and he does not like it. Secondly, the Labor Party made the commitment to build the new station. The member for Kiama, who was the then Liberal candidate, had to be dragged kicking and screaming to support the new station. He was forced to match my commitment to build the station only weeks before the last election.

Mr Mark Coure: Not screaming; squealing.

Ms ANNA WATSON: That is right: He was squealing. I thank the member for Oatley. I was pleased that the member for Kiama was forced to match my commitment because it meant the new station would be

built regardless of which party won government. Finally, we should put paid to the rubbish that the station was promised in 2001. The facts are that the then Government planned for the new station to be built as the population of Flinders increased. I hope the member for Kiama is listening because that is an important point. Is the member for Kiama seriously suggesting that transport infrastructure should be built regardless of the capacity for its use? If he is making that stupid argument I am sure the Treasurer will be most interested in giving him a talking to later about infrastructure economics. The member for Kiama should go and have a little chat to his friend Magic Mike. The former Labor Government had a very good record of delivering rail infrastructure in the Illawarra region. It electrified the railway and built the new station at Oak Flats. I am pleased that the new station is under construction. The only matter remaining to be determined is the station name.

Mr John Williams: Bring down Noreen.

Ms ANNA WATSON: She does not need my help. I have called on the Government to stop being arrogant and to consult fully with the Shellharbour community about the naming of the station. I repeat my call today: I challenge the Government to publicly release the proposal for the name of the station so that genuine consultation may be had.

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

LEGISLATION REVIEW COMMITTEE

Report: Legislation Review Digest No. 50/55

Debate resumed from 27 February 2014.

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK (Bankstown) [1.00 p.m.]: In speaking in debate on the Legislation Review Digest No. 50 of the Fifty-fifth Parliament I acknowledge my fellow committee members: the member for Myall Lakes, the member for Parramatta, the member for Rockdale, the member for Swansea and our colleagues in the other place—Mr David Shoebridge, the Hon. Shaoquett Moselmane and the Hon. Dr Peter Phelps. I also take the opportunity to thank the hardworking staff of the committee for preparing the first digest of 2014. Last week the committee considered eight bills, including the Bail (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2013. The bill will amend the Bail Act to clarify that a bail authority can decide who is an acceptable person to provide security for the grant of bail. This will be similar to the function of a bail authority to determine who is an acceptable person to give a character acknowledgement. The bill also will widen regulation-making powers conferred by the Bail Act. The New South Wales Opposition is not opposed to this bill which, according to the Attorney General, will come into effect in May 2014.

The committee also considered the Crimes and Other Legislation Amendment (Assault and Intoxication) Bill 2014 and the Liquor Amendment Bill 2014. Labor has taken a strong stance against alcohol-fuelled violence, and has campaigned repeatedly for the New South Wales Government to take firm action. In November last year the New South Wales Opposition released the comprehensive Drink Smart, Home Safe policy to address the issue of alcohol-related violence. Key features of the policy include an 18-month trial of 1.00 a.m. lockouts, 3.00 a.m. last drinks and tougher restrictions on high alcohol content drinks after 10.00 p.m. We also looked at reducing alcohol-related harm in New South Wales and introducing risk-based licensing, conducting operations on bottle shops to prevent the sale of alcohol to minors and collecting data on alcohol sales by suburb to properly understand the true impact of alcohol-related harm in New South Wales.

The Government made no provision to increase police numbers and resources on the frontline. In my speech to the House, I highlighted that the objective should be to prevent any punches from being thrown in the first place, and a visible presence of police officers is a common-sense way of achieving that. The committee also examined the Mining Amendment (ICAC Operations Jasper and Acacia) Bill 2014. This bill when enacted upon assent will amend the Mining Act 1992 to cancel the following three exploration licences: licence No. 7270 at Doyles Creek; licence No. 7405 at Glendon Brook; and licence No. 7406 at Mount Penny. This bill is the culmination of investigations and proceedings by the Independent Commission Against Corruption, known as Operation Jasper and Operation Acacia, taken in relation to the grant of the aforementioned exploration licences.

The bill will therefore aim to place New South Wales in the position it would have been had the tainted mining licences not been granted, through the amendment of the Mining Act to ensure that the tainted processes

have no continuing or future impact with respect to the relevant mining licences. The bill also aims to ensure that no person, whether or not implicated in any wrongdoing, may derive any further direct or indirect financial benefit from the cancelled mining licences. With respect to a potential denial of due process, the committee made the following comment:

The Committee notes that the recommendations and findings of ICAC which form the basis for cancelling the exploration licences in respect of Doyles Creek, Mount Penny and Glendon Brook are subject to legal challenge and further threatened legal challenge. Cancelling the licences prior to the outcome of the legal proceedings may be premature. Nonetheless, having regard to the information that came to light as a result of ICAC investigations, the Parliament is entitled to form its own view about whether the licences should be cancelled. For this reason, the Committee makes no further comment.

I commend this digest to the House.

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. 51/55

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

Dr GEOFF LEE (Parramatta) [1.04 p.m.]: Mr Acting-Speaker Evans, it is a great pleasure to see you in the chair again as you are such a hardworking member. It also is a pleasure for me to participate in the take-note debate on Legislation Review Digest No. 51/55 of the Legislation Review Committee which was tabled on 4 March 2014. The committee considers any bill 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 on 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.

It is a pleasure to be the deputy chair of the Legislation Review Committee. I have stepped into big shoes in that our chair, the member for Myall Lakes, does such a sterling and efficient job. I acknowledge him in the Chamber because he works very hard in leading the committee to produce the digest every sitting week. On behalf of the committee, I thank the member for Myall Lakes for his efforts in chairing the meetings. I also commend the staff. Recently there has been a change to the timing of the tabling of digests at 1.30 p.m. on the first sitting day of the week. This has put significant pressure on staff to produce the report within a couple of hours of the committee meeting. Some credit must go to Jason, but also to the whole team for their dedication to the review process. In the process, all committee member comments are taken into account and the discussion is captured before the digest is produced.

I also commend members of this hardworking committee. We meet each sitting week to review multiple bills and regulations. Committee members are the member for Myall Lakes, the member for Rockdale, the member for Swansea, the member for Bankstown, Mr David Shoebridge, the Hon. Shaoquett Moselmane and the Hon. Dr Peter Phelps. We are a collegiate team and we do all our work behind the scenes. We read notes before we meet and we make comments. We work through issues in a positive and constructive way. The chair navigates this difficult process to reach a consensus view. When there is no consensus we put it to the vote, which is a fair and just way to get the right outcome. I notice that the member for Bankstown is nodding vigorously in agreement and I thank her for her support for the committee. Quite often she mentions the meeting times and how wonderful it is that she can attend. I am sure that everyone will rush to read the new digest because it is full of valuable information and it is a fantastic and insightful read. I commend the digest to the House.

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK (Bankstown) [1.09 p.m.]: I also make a contribution to debate on Legislation Review Digest No. 51/55. I acknowledge the sterling speech of the member for Parramatta and the contributions of the member for Myall Lakes, the member for Rockdale, the member for Swansea and our colleagues in the other place: Mr David Shoebridge, the Hon. Shaoquett Moselmane and the Hon. Dr Peter Phelps. As always, I commend the staff for preparing the digest, in this case in the second straight sitting week of 2014. The committee considered three bills this week including the Crimes Amendment (Intoxication) Bill 2014. The New South Wales Opposition has been steering the ship in relation to alcohol law reform. No doubt the Drink Smart, Home Safe policy that we launched in November is the reason why the Government reacted in haste in January.

Ms Robyn Parker: Point of order: Having been a former member of the Legislation Review Committee and sitting in the House every sitting week during these debates I know that it is incumbent upon members to speak to the terms of reference and not on substantive matters that are subject to the committee's work. As the member has said, it is a bipartisan committee and we have heard how collegiately its members work together, but this is not an opportunity to score points on what Opposition policy may or may not be; it is not relevant to this committee.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Lee Evans): Order! I draw the member for Bankstown back to the leave of the committee report.

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK: I am not sure why that is a sore point, but it is a pretty important bill and it has been subject to great debate since January when it was brought into Parliament to begin the process of law reform in New South Wales. It would be remiss of me not to comment on how and why we are debating these pieces of legislation and why this legislation is of relevance to the committee. Part of the process of the Legislation Review Committee is to thoroughly examine legislation. It has done so and I am delighted to speak on the outcome of that review. Fortunately, there was consensus within the committee in relation to the Crimes Amendment (Intoxication) Bill. Two other bills were considered by the committee: the Mining and Petroleum Legislation Amendment Bill 2014 and the Criminal Assets Recovery Amendment Bill 2014, which will be an Act to recover the proceeds of crime in the event that they were derived by a person who was not the direct perpetrator of criminal activity. The committee made the following comment:

... under this bill, the changes to the definition of proceeds of criminal activity is to take place with retrospective effect. Nonetheless, the Committee notes that this provision is designed to tighten what may be an existing loophole, and does not consider the amendments unreasonable in the circumstances.

I commend the digest to the House. [*Time expired.*]

Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD (Myall Lakes) [1.13 p.m.]: The member for Bankstown does not seem to understand the role of the Legislation Review Committee. She talked about something being a sore point. Usually I lead the debate on reports of the Legislation Review Committee and I do not have an opportunity to respond to some of the outrageous things that the member for Bankstown says. The Legislation Review Committee is a bipartisan committee where political pointscoring is not part of the committee's process and is not part of the take-note debate. Government or Opposition policy is irrelevant in this debate. The committee's role is not to look at policy; it is, among other things, to look at whether the legislation trespasses unduly on personal rights and liberties or whether it makes rights, liberties or obligations unduly dependent upon insufficiently defined administrative powers. Those functions are set out in sections 8A and 9 of the Legislation Review Act.

Members of the committee have to be bipartisan and they should not pointscore. We can all be partisan and we could all prepare partisan reports, but we do not do that. We go into the committee and we are bipartisan. We do not come into the House to score political points in these debates; we come into this Chamber to report on the functions of the committee and to report on the bills and regulations that we have considered. We do not look at the policy behind the bills and their merits; we look at whether or not they trespass on people's rights. That is an important role of this committee because without this committee no-one would look at whether or not people's rights have been violated or trespassed upon. If the member for Bankstown has issues with bills she should raise those issues at the committee meetings. If she wants to be political and partisan, we should look at her record over the past three years when it comes to committee meetings.

Ms Sonia Hornery: Point of order: This is not relevant to the committee report.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Lee Evans): Order! I draw the member for Myall Lakes back to the leave of the committee report.

Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD: To be part of this bipartisan committee members turn up to the meetings and put their case to the committee. Unfortunately, the member for Bankstown has missed that opportunity too often over the past three years. The committee has changed the meeting time to fit in with her schedule. If she wants to make political comments she could do so during the meetings, but I would ask her not to do so because the committee is supposed to be bipartisan. If she wants bipartisan, unbiased reporting—as has happened for the past three years—the member for Bankstown should be part of the committee and honour the important role that the committee plays in this House. I commend the report to the House.

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

Report noted.

[*Acting-Speaker (Mr Lee Evans) left the chair at 1.18 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.*]

ASSENT TO BILLS

Assent to the following bill reported:

Police Amendment (Police Promotions) Bill 2013

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**Notices of Motions**

Government Business Notices of Motions (for Bills) given.

QUESTION TIME

[Question time commenced at 2.18 p.m.]

BADGERYS CREEK AIRPORT

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON: My question is directed to the Premier. The Premier told the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce last week, in relation to Badgerys Creek:

It's clear that it's going to be built; there's going to be an airport there.

Why does the Premier refuse to publicly state his position on an airport at Badgerys Creek, and will he stand up to Tony Abbott and demand a curfew?

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: For the benefit of the gallery, the laughter is because a month ago the Leader of the Opposition tried to pretend that he and Anthony Albanese, the Federal shadow Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, were on the same page when it came to a Badgerys Creek airport. There was a big story about the two of them supporting a Badgerys Creek airport. There was only one minor problem, and that it was one that should have been identified by the Leader of the Opposition because prior to the Federal election the man who ultimately rose—as only you can in the Labor Party, where failure causes you to fall upwards—to the position of Deputy Prime Minister—

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Labor has always defied gravity; people fail upwards in the Labor Party—and Albo did that precisely.

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Anthony Albanese before the last Federal election—

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: —and I have not heard him renege on it since the last election—was out there saying it had to be a 24-hour airport. Yet the Leader of the Opposition says it will have a curfew. That has put him at odds with his Federal colleague. My position remains clear. I expressed it here this week—

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: I expressed it here in response to a question from the Leader of the Opposition last Tuesday—a question I thought might have received wider coverage by the media, but it was missed by the 3¢ a day media that we all fund. Or is it \$3 a day? Whatever it is, it is not enough. The fact is, as I have said previously—

Ms Linda Burney: The fact is I've got no idea what you are talking about.

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Everybody knows the Deputy Leader of the Opposition has no idea. She does not have to interject and say that; that is taken for granted every time she comes into this Chamber and opens her mouth. My position remains that the determination of an airport is, and always has been, a decision for the Federal Government. But as I said Tuesday week ago, we have the first Prime Minister in 40 years who went to an election stating that he was determined to make a decision about Sydney's second airport in his first year in office.

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: As I said last Tuesday, we have the first Prime Minister who is giving every sign of being prepared to work with the State Government to deliver the infrastructure—

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: —to make a second Sydney airport work. That stands in stark contrast to the Leader of the Opposition in this place.

Dr Andrew McDonald: Madam Speaker—

The SPEAKER: Order! Does the member for Macquarie Fields rise on a point of order?

Dr Andrew McDonald: Yes, I must.

The SPEAKER: Order! You do not have to.

Dr Andrew McDonald: Yes, I do.

The SPEAKER: Order! Most of the time the member's points of order are annoying.

Dr Andrew McDonald: Only some of the time, Madam Speaker.

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

Dr Andrew McDonald: My point of order is under Standing Order 129. The question was about—

The SPEAKER: Order! I know what the question was about. Does the member's point of order relate to relevance?

Dr Andrew McDonald: Relevance.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Premier is being relevant to the question asked. The member for Macquarie Fields will resume his seat. The Premier has the call.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Do not be surprised that before I sign up to deals I do my homework. Do not be surprised that before I commit to a North West Rail Link I make sure that taxpayer dollars are going to be spent wisely. Never again will there be a government led by the member for Toongabbie, but never again will half a billion dollars be wasted on an election stunt called the Rozelle metro—not a single centimetre of track built and \$500 million wasted. We will do our homework. We will ensure that the State's taxpayers get the best possible deal from any Federal Government, as we demonstrated with Gonski and the National Disability Insurance Scheme, and as we will demonstrate should the Federal Government decide to go down the path of a second Sydney airport. That is what responsible government is all about. It is not about the headlines or election campaigns when promises are made, such as a North West Rail Link or an upgrade to the Princes Highway, but never delivered.

Mr John Robertson: Point of order: It is under Standing Order 129, relevance. We are not talking about election campaigns; we are talking about whether the Premier has a position on a curfew. We could talk about election promises such as no Wallarah 2.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition is debating the point. He will resume his seat. There is no point of order.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: It is not like headlines for an election campaign. This Government will deliver the South West Rail Link, running under budget and ahead of schedule. I can go across the board—under this Government thought is given, and homework is done, to get the best possible deal for the State. Ultimately, that is the way that infrastructure is delivered faster and more cost-effectively across this State.

ALCOHOL- AND DRUG-RELATED VIOLENCE

Mr ROB STOKES: My question is addressed to the Premier. How is the Government being assisted in efforts to drive cultural change on the scourge of drug- and alcohol-fuelled violence?

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: No part of this city or State has been devoid of alcohol- and drug-fuelled violence. Regrettably, from time to time they are matters that are evident on the peninsula and the northern beaches. It is an issue that all local members on the northern beaches, like other members in this House, are keen to address. We know the community has had a gutful of the behaviour that we have seen play out on our streets every weekend, behaviour which we know can too often have tragic outcomes. The Government took a number of commitments to the last election and we have gone on deliver those, whether it is about additional police and powers or, indeed, the changes to licensing regarding three-strikes rules.

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: This year we announced licensing measures that came into effect last weekend, including 1.30 a.m. lockouts and 3.00 a.m. cease service of alcohol across the Sydney central business district and Kings Cross, with the plans of management to come into effect towards the end of April. We are sending the strongest possible message through the introduction of mandatory minimum sentences that the sort of behaviour we have seen, whether in the city or across the State, will not be tolerated in the future. We are committed to a major public education campaign to drive the cultural change in our community that says drunken and drug-induced violence will not be tolerated.

Since the Government announced its package in January it has been inundated with offers of support from organisations wanting to get on board. I thank television and radio stations that are running the Danny Green one punch can ruin lives advertisements as part of their community service obligation whilst this Government's campaign is getting up to speed. I thank Danny Green for his efforts and the radio and television networks for running the advertisements. Danny Green's advertisement has been seen and heard widely since it was aired.

Ms Noreen Hay: No thanks to you, Barry.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: I think the member for Wollongong ought to be quiet during a question on this subject given her record with the former member for Kiama.

Ms Noreen Hay: I think you are a disgrace. I think you are a disgraceful Premier.

Mr John Robertson: Point of order: If the Premier wants to trawl history, we will talk about the member for Coffs Harbour and his behaviour in this Chamber.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. There is no point of order.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: I am now provoked.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: A police Minister in his underwear cavorting with the member for Wollongong is not exactly something we want to think about when we are talking about the misuse of alcohol.

Ms Noreen Hay: You are a disgrace.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: It was an absolute disgrace. I thank the Taxi Council for today agreeing to come to the party and to ensure that the Danny Green one punch can ruin lives advertisements will be seen on the back of taxicabs in this city. That will put the message front and centre, particularly in the entertainment spots late at night. Taxi drivers are at the frontline every Friday and Saturday night, and they see firsthand the consequences of violence. Too often they find themselves on the receiving end of alcohol-fuelled violence across this city.

I am delighted to say that as a result of that initiative by the Taxi Council—in particular, its media partner—other advertising companies such as J. C. Decaux, Val Morgan and oOh! Media have also donated advertising space. That means the Danny Green advertisement will be seen on CityLight panels in and around Kings Cross, on screens in pubs and clubs, and at petrol bowzers. We are receiving great assistance from across the community to bring about cultural change to ensure people take personal responsibility. Sadly, no such support is forthcoming from the Australian Labor Party.

The Leader of the Opposition was happy to grandstand in January, but when it comes to the crunch he has again been rolled by the Left wing of his own party and decided to side with the thugs against the community and police. I have been advised that the Victorian laws being praised by Labor have never successfully been applied and have never put anyone behind bars. [*Extension of time granted.*]

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Our measures are tougher and reflect the community outrage against the violence that has been going on in public places across this State and the inadequacy of the sentences being handed down. The Leader of the Opposition has reached back to Bob Carr's playbook. Those who sat through 16 years of Labor government, but particularly 10 years of government under Bob Carr, remember what he did on every occasion. He would talk tough; he would increase the maximum penalties—and guess what? That is how today we end up with the average sentence for manslaughter in New South Wales being less than four years. Bob Carr introduced a 20 year maximum penalty, but what is being handed out? It is less than four years.

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: The Opposition is channelling Bob Carr but knows that the proposals it is putting forward will not deliver justice or the demands of the community for tough action that sees people involved in drug- and alcohol-fuelled serious violent attacks go to jail.

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

WALLARAH 2 COAL PROJECT AND MR NICK DI GIROLAMO

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: My question is directed to the Premier. Given reports today that the former resources Minister, who is now before the Independent Commission Against Corruption, attended a private dinner at the home of Nick Di Girolamo with a director of Korea Resources Corporation, does the Premier still have confidence in the conduct of his former resources Minister?

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: These are issues that are before the Independent Commission Against Corruption by all accounts. I do not know anything beyond the press releases issued by the Independent Commission Against Corruption. If there are issues there, I have absolute confidence that the Independent Commission Against Corruption will get to the bottom of them. Why do I have confidence? Because we are the Government that increased the budget of the Independent Commission Against Corruption to record levels and gave the commission additional powers to do the job it is empowered to do across the State. Of course, we are the parties that introduced the Independent Commission Against Corruption to this State in 1989.

I make the point again that when it comes to the Wallarah 2 project—like every other major project across the State, including mines and other issues—it will be decided on its economic, social and environmental merits by an arms-length process, away from government, by the independent Planning Assessment Commission. It will proceed or not proceed on a decision by the Planning Assessment Commission.

Mr Michael Daley: Point of order: My point of order is relevance under Standing Order 129. I did not ask the Premier about his confidence in the Independent Commission Against Corruption. I asked him about his confidence in the member for Terrigal.

The SPEAKER: Order! I caution the member for Maroubra against including in his question speculation from a media source, which generally is not admissible in a question or as the basis of a question. I direct the member for Maroubra to the standing orders. There is no point of order.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: I say directly to the member for Maroubra: If you have evidence to the contrary, present it to the Independent Commission Against Corruption.

REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr TROY GRANT: My question is addressed to the Deputy Premier, Minister for Trade and Investment, and Minister for Regional Infrastructure and Services, and Leader of The Nationals.

Mr Ryan Park: One big happy family.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Keira will be a happy family in a minute—out the door, by himself.

Mr TROY GRANT: I ask the Deputy Premier—someone who provides real leadership: How is the Government funding infrastructure in regional New South Wales?

Mr Clayton Barr: Point of order: Questions are not allowed to contain irony.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order.

Mr ANDREW STONER: The question was not ironic, but the member for Cessnock is moronic.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will come to order. The Deputy Premier has the call. This is an important subject.

Mr ANDREW STONER: The member for Keira has been drinking too much red cordial at lunchtime. He is getting excited. I am excited—a bit like Big Kev—because this Government is getting on with the job of rebuilding New South Wales, including regional New South Wales.

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

Mr ANDREW STONER: They are getting very excited again—maybe it was more than red cordial for some of them. I know that Madam Speaker is aware some 37 per cent of the State's population lives and works in our regions. Accordingly, the Government is getting on with the job of delivering the infrastructure that regional New South Wales needs. Members opposite just do not want to hear the success stories.

The SPEAKER: Order! Last week I warned Opposition members about not paying attention during answers about regional New South Wales. That is very disappointing because many members are interested in regional New South Wales.

Mr ANDREW STONER: It is very telling and it is why The Nationals now represent 93 per cent of the land area of New South Wales. Labor was never interested in regional New South Wales and it neglected the infrastructure we now have to build.

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

[Interruption]

Mr ANDREW STONER: We may get really angry with the member for Cessnock if he keeps interjecting. Last week I told the House about the \$48 million upgrade to the Bells Line of Road and the new \$40 million Water Security for Regions program, both funded primarily from our Restart NSW Fund. The Bells Line of Road upgrade will improve safety on this vital road connection over the Great Dividing Range, while Water Security for Regions will provide funding for infrastructure projects such as \$2 million to connect the bore to Forbes town water supply system in the Dubbo electorate, \$5.3 million for the Nimmitabel Lake Wallace project in the Monaro electorate and \$10 million for pipeline and water storage works to secure Cobar's water supply in the Barwon electorate.

Other regional infrastructure projects funded from Restart NSW include the continuing upgrades of the Pacific Highway and Princes Highway, the Resources for Regions program, which is bringing \$160 million of much-needed infrastructure funding for mining-affected communities, and Bridges for the Bush, which is rebuilding bridges across country New South Wales to provide for high productivity road transport. These are important investments in regional infrastructure and are good for the economy of our regional communities. They were items that were neglected for 16 long years under Labor.

In contrast, the Government's capital fund, the Restart NSW Fund, which is drawn from budget windfall tax revenues—proceeds from the utilisation of assets such as the long-term lease of the desalination plant and Waratah bonds—is helping to fund the catch-up that this Government has had to undertake to address the backlog left by Labor. In relation to the quantum available through Waratah bonds, it is worth noting that the Government worked closely with the Commonwealth Government to develop the significant investor visa. This visa requires a minimum investment of \$1.5 million into Waratah bonds as a requirement for nomination by New South Wales. The Premier and I have promoted New South Wales as the destination of choice for significant investor visa applicants on all our trade missions, including to China, India and South-east Asia. I am delighted to inform the House that as a result of our promotion of this significant investor visa the Government has secured investments of \$155 million in Waratah Bonds from those approved to date by the Commonwealth. To this point we have nominated 308 applicants for the significant investor visa. [*Extension of time granted.*]

The significant investor visas are a clever way of leveraging investment from high value migration into New South Wales straight into much-needed infrastructure that forms part of a backlog of works left undone by Labor. So far the Government has nominated 308 applicants for the significant investor visa and if all are granted a visa by the Commonwealth the New South Wales Government will see at least \$462 million invested in Waratah Bonds and that will then be invested in infrastructure. The figure may be higher. So far approximately 40 per cent of the successful applicants have chosen to invest the entire minimum investment required by the Commonwealth of \$5 million in Waratah Bonds, rather than the 30 per cent requirement by New South Wales of \$1.5 million.

I advise the House that the Government has also streamlined two key migration significant visa pathways: The business talent permanent subclass 132 visa and the investor retirement subclass 405 temporary visa. This will attract overseas entrepreneurs and investors to the State to generate more jobs and investment in our economy. The changes also encourage increased business and investor migration into regional New South Wales. Our international engagement and State migration strategies are paying dividends in New South Wales infrastructure and the broader economy, including in regional New South Wales.

LOBBYIST MR NICK DI GIROLAMO

Mr PAUL LYNCH: I direct my question to the Premier. Will the Premier inform the House of how many functions, dinners, football games or other events he has attended with Liberal fundraiser and lobbyist Nick Di Girolamo, who is currently being investigated by the Independent Commission Against Corruption?

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: That information was released last year to the Labor Party under a Government Information (Public Access) Act application. I make the point that it does not matter on how many occasions I have seen Mr Di Girolamo at a football match—the Tigers do not win—because the decision about the Wallarah 2 mine will be made by the independent Planning Assessment Commission. A photograph that was taken at the Italian Chamber of Commerce is repeatedly published. Of course I met Mr Di Girolamo at the Italian Chamber of Commerce when he was the president.

I well remember a photograph being taken of me, Mr Di Girolamo and the Italian mayor of Ipswich, Paul Pisasale. That function was being held to raise money for the Queensland flood appeal. Whether I see Mr Di Girolamo at a function or a football match does not change a thing. It is not surprising that a man who was on the board of the West Tigers and a Premier who is a West Tigers supporter would attend the same football match. From the moment that this Government came into office—

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: As I have stated repeatedly in this Chamber, the issue of Wallarah 2 is a matter for the independent Planning Assessment Commission to determine. The Government is committed to not repeating the Eddie Obeid and Ian McDonald practices of the former Government.

Mr Ryan Park: Point of order: My point of order relates to relevance under Standing Order 129. The question asked by the member for Liverpool related to how many times the Premier had met Nick Di Girolamo at various functions.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Premier is being relevant to the question asked. There is no point of order.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: I was looking for the list. This is material that was released to the Labor Party a year ago. The answer is 10 events as Premier including West Tigers football matches, Italian Chamber of Commerce functions and the drop-by to the Minister's office I referred to last week.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will come to order.

HOSPITAL WAITING TIMES

Ms MELANIE GIBBONS: I address my question to the Minister for Health and Minister for Medical Research. Will the Minister inform the House what the Government is doing to treat more patients and reduce waiting times in our emergency rooms?

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: I thank the member for Menai for her great interest in health. The member is a familiar figure at Liverpool Hospital. The constituents of Menai have never had such an attentive member looking out for them. There has been a dramatic improvement across the hospital system and in particular through our whole-of-hospital program. There have been dramatic improvements in emergency departments. At Liverpool Hospital in January 2013, 43.8 per cent of patients were seen and went through the emergency department within four hours. By December 2013, after our wonderful clinicians had worked together, that figure had risen to 67.3 per cent—a 23.5 per cent improvement, which is testament to the doctors and nurses in the emergency department and throughout the hospital. Ministry of Health staff members have worked with hospital staff to improve patient outcomes.

Across the board there has been a massive increase in the health budget. It was increased by 5.2 per cent last year, amounting to nearly \$18 billion. There has been no reduction in the health budget at all: it is a record health budget. In 2013 there were 1.74 million inpatient admissions, which is 54,000 more than the previous year. To place those figures in context, 1.74 million patients is more than the population of South Australia. That is how many people have been admitted to hospitals in New South Wales. There were 314,000 surgeries performed last year, which is 4,000 more than the previous year, and 2.6 million people attended emergency departments, which is an increase of 77,000 on the figures for previous years. That outcome is due to the wonderful work of clinicians.

There have been 4,100 extra nurses, or 2,800 full-time equivalent positions, and 1,400 extra doctors employed since the 2011 election. I am thrilled that this year an additional 960 interns commenced their internships. The New South Wales Government has invested more than \$105 million in that program. There have been fantastic improvements across the board for patients. It is all about the best interests of the patients. I congratulate the doctors. There is additional information about some of the hospitals that have seen dramatic improvements. I know that members in regional areas will be very interested in information concerning regional hospitals. In January 2013 at John Hunter Hospital 50.5 per cent of patients were seen in four hours. That figure has risen to 66.4 per cent. At Wollongong Hospital 54 per cent of patients were seen in four hours and that figure has risen to 67.5 per cent. At Wagga Wagga Hospital the number of patients seen in four hours has risen from 67.5 per cent to 68 per cent. The member for Wagga Wagga has moved from his position in the Chamber. Westmead Hospital is the stand out with 44 per cent of patients—

Mr Ryan Park: There he is.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: I know exactly where he is and where he will be staying. In January 2013 at Westmead Hospital 44 per cent of patients were seen within four hours and by December 2013 that figure had risen to 74 per cent. Last week I was thrilled to visit that hospital with the member for Parramatta and the member for Granville to highlight its achievements and to thank the medical staff for their efforts. Last week I also visited Royal Prince Alfred Hospital where I noted that the figures have increased from 54 per cent to 71 per cent in that same comparison period. There has been a reduction in the average length of stay in hospitals across the board since the Coalition came to office. This Government has ended wastage and increased the number of people undergoing elective surgery. New South Wales leads the country in treating elective surgery patients on time.

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

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: I am grateful to the doctors, nurses and others who work in the health system because it is through their efforts utilising the devolution policy that they have improved treatment for patients. That policy devolves control from a central point—and the former Parliamentary Secretary for Health telling them what to do—to the hospitals and to health workers. That policy has improved morale. I congratulate all those in the health system on their achievements.

ITALIAN MINISTERIAL CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE AND MR NICK DI GIROLAMO

Mr GUY ZANGARI: My question is directed to the Minister for Citizenship and Communities.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will come to order. I cannot hear the member for Fairfield.

Mr GUY ZANGARI: Given that the Minister appointed Nick Di Girolamo, who is currently facing serious corruption allegations at the Independent Commission Against Corruption, to his Italian Ministerial Consultative Committee, will the Minister confirm that Mr Di Girolamo is still a member of his committee and will he release full details of all appointments to these multicultural consultative committees?

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the Leader of the Opposition to order for the third time. I call the Leader of the House to order for the first time. I call the member for Kiama to order for the first time.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I thank the member for his question. As he knows, ministerial consultative committees were established to do what the Labor Government did not do.

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

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Ministerial consultative committees were established to engage with the multicultural community throughout the term of government. The Labor Party manual says to throw money at multicultural communities at election time and to use them as political pawns to get votes.

Mr Barry Collier: Just answer the question.

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

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Calm down, member for Miranda. That is why the ministerial consultative committees were established. They are groups of volunteers who work in the community with government to make sure that outcomes are delivered for communities.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the Macquarie Fields to order for the second time. An Opposition member asked the question; Opposition members should listen to the answer.

Mr Guy Zangari: Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129, relevance.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister is being relevant to the question asked. The member for Fairfield will resume his seat. That was another spurious point of order.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: The member for Fairfield asked a question relating to a ministerial consultative committee. He should let me tell him a little bit about it, because I know he is interested. He asked similar questions in the budget estimates committee hearings.

Mr Guy Zangari: And you never answered them.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I gave you the answer.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Fairfield will cease interjecting. The Minister will be heard in silence.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I will give him the answer again if he will listen. For example, the hardworking member for Coogee is chair of the Russian Ministerial Consultative Committee. For 10 to 12 years whilst Labor was in power in this State the Russian community asked the then Minister for Education to include in the curriculum a course for Russian-speaking students. Guess what? They knocked on the door for 10 years and could not get the Labor Government to do anything. However, the hardworking chair of the Russian Ministerial Consultative Committee spoke to the Minister for Education and managed to deliver that outcome for the Russian community. Another great example of these committees is the Lebanese Ministerial Consultative Committee, which is chaired by the hardworking member for Granville.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister does not need the assistance of the member for Granville.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: That committee suggested that a youth parliament be held for the young Lebanese-Australian community in New South Wales. The member for Granville organised a that parliament, which was so successful that we decided to incorporate it—

Mr Guy Zangari: Point of order: My point of order is relevance under Standing Order 129.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister continues to be relevant to the question asked. There is no point of order. The member for Fairfield will resume his seat.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: These ministerial consultative committees have been so successful that the former failed Federal Government decided to try to adopt them. However, it only issued a media release; to my knowledge it did not even organise a meeting and the idea then went into the ether.

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

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Yesterday we set up another ministerial consultative committee for the Thai community.

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

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I congratulate the Korean Ministerial Consultative Committee.

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

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: The Korean committee is chaired in part by the member for Strathfield.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease arguing across the Chamber. I call the member for Maroubra to order for the third time.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: The committee raised concerns in relation to human trafficking. As a result of raising those concerns and the committee's hard work, the Community Relations Commission conducted an investigation into human trafficking in New South Wales. That report has now been published and the Government will respond in due course. There are many more things I could talk about, all of which would not have happened if we had not had continual dialogue with communities throughout our term in government. There is a big distinction between how we treat communities and how the Labor Party treated them as political pawns. [*Extension of time granted.*]

Mr Barry O'Farrell: It is so secret it is on the internet.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: As has been interjected, members opposite can look on the internet and see photos of it. It is so secret that there is a photo of him and the ministerial consultative committee. The reality is that Nick Di Girolamo was a prominent member of the Italian Chamber of Commerce. As a prominent member of that community of course he was going to be invited to join the committee. Lots of prominent people in their respective communities are members of this committee system. I leave it up to the chairs to determine whether they wish to release the members' names. These people are volunteering; they are not public servants. If I asked the member for Fairfield, for example, to release the names of his Labor Party branch members, would he release them? No. Members opposite should calm down. There is a doctor on the Opposition benches. He should administer some sedatives.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Fairfield will come to order

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Are members opposite interested in this answer?

Dr Andrew McDonald: Very. Keep going.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I said during the estimates hearings and I will say again—

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

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: As I said in the estimates hearings and I repeat now: Chairs are appointed to each of these ministerial consultative committees and the members are volunteers. If the member for Fairfield wants to ask the chairs of the committees to request their members to release their names, he is free to do so. I do not think he has asked that question. He is so interested that he has not even asked them.

HAWKESBURY-NEPEAN VALLEY FLOOD MANAGEMENT REVIEW

Mr BART BASSETT: My question is directed to the Minister for Primary Industries and Minister for Small Business. What is the status of the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley Flood Management Review?

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON: I thank the member for Londonderry for his question and his interest in this very important matter. The scoping study, known as stage 1 of the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley Flood Management Review, is now complete. This vital review follows the work completed by Infrastructure NSW in 2012 proposing a range of specific infrastructure investments and reforms over a 20-year period. The Hawkesbury-Nepean is one of the most heavily developed and at-risk flood plains in Australia, a risk that was ignored for 16 years by members opposite—the entire term of the Labor Government. Not only was this risk ignored, but the Labor Government turned its back on the risk facing Western Sydney communities when much of the work had already been done.

Under the Fahey-Armstrong Liberal-Nationals Government, an environmental impact statement was developed that looked at all the possible options. That statement reached the conclusion that raising the Warragamba Dam wall by 23 metres would reduce losses due to flooding in the valley. The election of the Carr Labor Government in 1995 saw a change in priorities and a determination that saving flora was more important than saving human lives and that protecting the environmental values of Lake Burragorang was more important than protecting people in the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley.

Government members: Shame!

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON: Shame, indeed. This is not an issue that no-one has known about for the past 20 years, but we do know that members opposite chose to do nothing about it. Acknowledging the problem and taking steps to find a long-term solution is indicative of the Liberal/Nationals Government philosophy. To ignore the problem and hope it will go away is a mark of weakness that is a permanent stain on the Labor Government's record.

Stage 1 of the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley Flood Management Review evaluated existing flood management and found that flood mitigation, management and evacuation plans were inadequate. The report clearly outlines the consequences of inadequate flood management in the Hawkesbury-Nepean. In the case of a one-in-100-year flood the report found that 23,000 people would have to be evacuated—people who were ignored by the Labor Government. Whilst the prolonged flooding in late 2011 and early 2012 raised levels of community awareness of flood and the role that dams play in flood mitigation, the report found that nine out of 10 people have no flood evacuation plan and only eight out of 10 would evacuate if asked to do so.

A key outcome of stage 1 of the review is the development of flood mitigation options for the Government's consideration. The reality is that there is no simple or single solution to flood-risk management in the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley. Flood-risk management is not only about raising or changing Warragamba Dam or upgrading evacuation roads; it must also include community information about flood risks and how to be better prepared. The area covered by the review included the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley floodplain from Warragamba Dam to Brooklyn Bridge. This covers the two most populated floodplains in the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment—namely, the Penrith floodplain and the Richmond-Windsor floodplain, in the rapidly growing Western Sydney region.

Options for raising the Warragamba Dam wall by either 23 or 15 metres were considered. These two options provided significant reductions in flood risk on both the Penrith and the Richmond-Windsor floodplains. Raising the dam wall would not eliminate risks, but it would delay the flood peak, allowing for a considered and calm approach to evacuation. The review also found that it is critical that the NSW State Emergency Service has the capacity to plan for, respond to and manage the full range of floods in the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley.

As stage 1 of the review is now complete, the Government has established a multiagency task force to lead and coordinate the next vital stage. Stage 2 of the review will deliver a detailed cost-benefit analysis of the most practical and cost-effective flood mitigation options for the Government to consider. Infrastructure

requires significant investigations and takes a long time to complete. That is why it is so important for the community to be as well prepared as possible for any significant flood events. I look forward to reporting back on the task force's findings in the future and further addressing this vital issue that has been neglected for far too long. I thank members representing Western Sydney electorates who have continued to bring this issue to the Government's attention. I thank the members for Londonderry, Hawkesbury, Smithfield, Penrith and Riverstone. *[Time expired.]*

LIGHT RAIL EXTENSION

Mr JAMIE PARKER: My question is directed to the Minister for Transport. Given that more than 10,000 people have signed my petition calling for an extension of the light rail along Parramatta Road and to Balmain, will the Government commit to expanding the light rail network, which reduces traffic and benefits commuters, the environment and the business community?

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: I thank the member for Balmain for his question and his continued interest in public transport. I know it is not always easy being green, but the member for Balmain has been very supportive and constructive in relation to the Government's agenda to expand light rail. It is apparent that the member for Balmain's predecessor would never have been asked this question, because for 16 years the Labor Government was unable to build any public transport projects. I understand that she is trying to make a comeback, but her Government did not care about light rail.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is too much noise in the Chamber.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: When it came to the Balmain electorate, the Labor Government cared only about wasting \$500 million on the failed Rozelle metro project. That was a mistake which cost taxpayers dearly. That is one of the key reasons that this member for Balmain was successful in his bid for the seat.

Ms Carmel Tebbutt: Who are you, his campaign manager?

The SPEAKER: Order! I blame the member for Marrickville for the noise in the Chamber.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: We know they are very touchy about the seat of Balmain. That is the loudest interjection I have heard the member for Marrickville make in all her years in Parliament. She is very sensitive. While Labor members, including the Leader of the Opposition and former Minister for Transport, have no clear position on light rail, everybody else in Sydney does. I am constantly hearing that people cannot wait for light rail to be delivered. While zero light rail projects were started by members opposite, I am pleased to say that under this Government we have three world-class light rail projects under construction. We have a project in the inner west that will shortly open to the public. It runs from the central business district to the south-west. There is also a project in Newcastle, and I know the member for Newcastle is very excited about that. While the Labor Government drew many lines on maps, it delivered very little. It came up with nine different transport plans, but was unable to do what this Government has done in just under three years.

I am very pleased to inform the member for Balmain that, as set out in the NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan—the Government's vision for transport over the next 20 years—Parramatta Road has been identified as a strategic transport corridor for further investigation. While at this stage the Government is not agnostic about that corridor—in other words, it is keeping its options open with regard to what mode is the best long-term option to serve the corridor—light rail will certainly be considered. As the member for Balmain knows, it is a crucial corridor that needs an integrated solution. The master plan also identifies the Western Sydney light rail network as a potential future initiative. We are watching very closely Parramatta City Council's progress on this front.

The Government's focus remains on transport infrastructure, delivering these projects and making sure they are completed. Pending the outcome of current vehicle testing, customers will be boarding the new light rail vehicles at nine stops in the inner west in the near future. The central business district and south-east light rail project is also progressing rapidly and all the feedback from the environmental impact statement is being finalised with geotechnical investigations being undertaken. We have shortlisted three consortia to tender for the public-private partnership. All this is very exciting.

It is very exciting. The Newcastle light rail project is part of the Government's plan to revitalise Newcastle, to encourage development and to improve urban amenity. I am very pleased that recently this

Government began consultations with the Newcastle community about what they would like to see in relation to light rail. While the Labor Government was incapable of delivering public transport projects, this Government is getting on with the job. We will do what is in the best interests of the people of this State. We know that members opposite are very sensitive about this topic because where they failed we are delivering.

ELECTRICITY PRICES

Mr ANDREW ROHAN: My question is addressed to the Minister for Resources and Energy and Special Minister of State. Will the Minister update the House on how the Government is assisting families and businesses, and other related matters?

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: Related matters? Opposition members should sit down, buckle up—emergency exits are to your left and to your right. I thank the member for Smithfield for his question and for his considerable enthusiasm and support for families and businesses in his electorate. The O'Farrell-Stoner Government is delivering on its election commitment to put downward pressure on the cost of living following 16 years of Labor's reign of terror over the New South Wales community. The Liberals and Nationals went to the 2011 election with a promise to deliver \$400 million in savings from reforming the electricity distribution networks.

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

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: This reminds me of what the Leader of the Opposition said when we made this commitment. The Treasurer might remember what he said.

Mr Mike Baird: He said it couldn't be done.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: He said it could not be done. It gives me great pleasure once again to inform the House that this Government is delivering \$4.3 billion in savings to the people of New South Wales—not \$400 million in savings, but \$4.3 billion. These savings have been achieved through restructuring the networks intelligently and prudently to achieve efficiency gains for the people of this great State. The O'Farrell-Stoner Government is a reformist government and I am proud to be a member of it. The Government is working hard to rein in power prices for the families and businesses of New South Wales after a decade of Labor's double-digit price increases.

What do the Leader of the Opposition and other members opposite know about reducing prices? They know nothing. We on this side of the House know all about reducing prices and we know how important it is to New South Wales households and businesses. The Leader of the Opposition and members opposite know plenty about increasing prices. Let me, unfortunately, remind the House again that under the Labor Government electricity prices increased by more than 60 per cent over five years. What a disgrace.

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

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: When the Leader of the Opposition was Minister for Energy he oversaw price rises of 22 per cent per annum. Of course, those were still happy times for the Leader of the Opposition. Whilst families in New South Wales suffered under his electricity price rises the Leader of the Opposition was busy working his way to the top job with his Labor mates. I am sure he reminisces a lot about these, which I found in the bin this morning: "My happy snaps by John Robertson". They were the good times.

Mr Ron Hoenig: Point of order: Madam Speaker, the Minister is using a prop and I ask you to direct him to remove it.

The SPEAKER: Order! I uphold the point of order. The Minister must not use props.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: It is like playing chess with a pigeon: Members opposite come in here, knock the pieces over, crap on the board and then fly back to their flock claiming victory. I am not the only one who remembers the true impact when members opposite were in power and they oversaw electricity prices. I have letters from Paul Keating and many others, which I will deal with at another time.

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

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: Under this Government electricity price trending has gone down and it continues to do so. Some people think that this is the Leader of the Opposition's popularity, but in fact it is the movement of electricity prices.

The SPEAKER: Order! I warn the Minister against using props.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: Electricity prices continue to fall, and what a great thing that is. However, I must give some credit to the wrecker opposite. When he was devastating families and businesses across the State with outrageous double-digit electricity price increases there was one industry members know prospered. It was the candle industry; it did very well out of the former Minister for Energy.

Dr Andrew McDonald: Point of order: Madam Speaker, I ask you to direct the Minister to cease using props.

The SPEAKER: Order! I uphold the point of order.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: The candle industry did very well. [*Extension of time granted.*]

However, it did not do as well as The Greens' traditional solution to manufacturing—basket weaving. This Government has a proud record of assisting families and businesses in New South Wales. We proudly stand by that record, which stands in stark contrast to the record of members opposite. Under this Government not only are electricity prices down but business confidence is up and more than 91,000 jobs have been created. Under the leadership of the Premier we are making New South Wales number one again. Under this reformist government life is and will continue to be easier for families and businesses in New South Wales.

Question time concluded at 3.17 p.m.

PETITIONS

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

Western Sydney Palliative Care Services

Petition requesting increased funding, staffing and infrastructure for palliative care services in Western Sydney, received from **Mr Richard Amery**.

Mount Druitt Hospital Cardiac Unit

Petition opposing the closure of the Mount Druitt Hospital cardiac unit and calling on the Government to reverse its decision and to retain the unit, received from **Mr Richard Amery**.

Sydney Electorate Public High School

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

Independent Investigation of Police Actions

Petition requesting the establishment of an independent and transparent complaints body with investigatory powers over police stations, 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**.

Companion Animals on Public Transport

Petition requesting that companion animals be allowed to travel on all public transport, received from **Mr Alex Greenwich**.

Rooty Hill Railway Station Access

Petition requesting the installation of elevators at Rooty Hill railway station, received from **Mr Richard Amery**.

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**.

COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**Membership****Motion by Mr BRAD HAZZARD agreed to:**

That:

- (1) Mark Joseph Coure be appointed to the Committee on Children and Young People in place of Mr Andrew Stuart Cornwell, discharged.
- (2) A message be sent informing the Legislative Council.

CRIMES AMENDMENT (INTOXICATION) BILL 2014**Second Reading****Debate resumed from 5 March 2014.**

Mr JAMIE PARKER (Balmain) [3.19 p.m.]: I appreciate the opportunity to make this contribution to debate on the Crimes Amendment (Intoxication) Bill 2014, and I will keep it relatively brief. As members know, The Greens oppose mandatory sentencing. In our view, removing the judicial discretion to mould the punishment to the individual circumstances of the defendant and the crime will inevitably produce unjust outcomes. Without correspondence between the crime and the penalty, mandatory sentencing inherently leads to unfair outcomes. Mandatory sentencing is used by governments throughout the world to appear to be tough on crime without doing anything significant to address the causes or effects of crime in our communities.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! There is too much audible conversation in the Chamber.

Mr JAMIE PARKER: Like so many governments, I fear that this Government has jumped on this bandwagon. The bill shows that the announcements on 21 January were in fact very hasty. Thankfully, advocacy by the civil liberties and legal communities and those sensible, thinking people within the Coalition have led to

the Government seeing some sense in abandoning the more preposterous aspects of the proposal—notably the proposed mandatory sentence of two years imprisonment for assault occasioning actual bodily harm and for assault police. On closer examination, almost everybody recognised that those penalties were grossly disproportionate to the offences involved, and The Greens welcome the Government's recognising that fact. It is a positive development. Though some minor original offences are not included in this bill as having mandatory sentences, the inclusion of reckless wounding could see long sentences imposed, at great cost, for relatively minor injuries. In *R v Hooper* [2004] NSWCCA 10, it was found that:

A "wounding" is any injury involving a breaking or cutting of the interior layer of the skin and could be quite minor.

The Government has not presented evidence that suggests sentencing for those offences is currently insufficient, or that imposing mandatory sentencing will do anything to address rates of offending in the community. The issues that have been raised and that led to this move are important. They are very concerning and it is important that steps are taken. But it is unclear why a mandatory sentence should only apply in situations where the offence was committed by an intoxicated person in a public place, as if private assaults or assaults by sober people are any less dangerous or culpable. That is particularly so when it comes to matters of domestic violence, which I have raised before in this House.

Proposed new section 8A inserts a definition of intoxication that provides that a person is intoxicated if they are noticeably affected as a result of the consumption of drugs or alcohol. This creates an enormous discretion for police to determine that, in their opinion, a person is intoxicated. I note that the Labor Party has foreshadowed that it will move amendments in the other place to limit mandatory sentencing to being presumptive, rather than mandatory. Of course, it is The Greens' view that the current arrangements are superior to both the Labor amendments and the Government's legislation; but those are in fact better than what is being proposed under this mandatory sentencing legislation. I conclude by reiterating that these mandatory minimum sentences are unjust. Their application is problematic. The existing arrangements, while in some situations are a problem, can be appealed and other steps can be taken to deal with these matters.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai—Premier, and Minister for Western Sydney) [3.24 p.m.], in reply: I thank members for their comments in debate on the Crimes Amendment (Intoxication) Bill 2014. In January this year the Government announced a comprehensive package of measures to further address the scourge of drug- and alcohol-fuelled violence on our streets. Whether that be in Kings Cross or across the central business district, the measures we have announced will address the same issue anywhere in New South Wales. The measures build on action already taken by the Government, including—to name a couple—the 505 extra police officers on the beat since we came to office; the change in police powers to expand move-on powers and the introduction of intoxicated and disorderly offences; and, of course, the new three-strikes liquor licensing disciplinary scheme, which allows for the cancellation of licences of venues that continue to flout the licensing rules.

In January the Parliament passed measures to provide for the introduction in the central business district entertainment precinct of 1.30 a.m. lockouts, 3.00 a.m. last drinks and, throughout the State, 10.00 p.m. bottle shop closures; and last week saw the commencement of those measures. I inform members, particularly the member for Sydney, that they went much better than anyone anticipated, given that we had 30,000 additional tourists from overseas and interstate in Sydney over the weekend viewing the Mardi Gras parade. Those measures were accompanied by the introduction of one-punch assault laws, which include a mandatory minimum sentence of eight years and a maximum of 25 years imprisonment if the offender is intoxicated by alcohol or drugs.

The bill before the House represents the next stage of measures that the Government flagged to address serious drug- and alcohol-fuelled violence on our streets. The bill creates additional aggravated personal violence offences, with higher maximum penalties, when intoxicated in public, and the most serious of those offences require the court to impose a mandatory minimum sentence. The Government agrees that mandatory minimum sentences should apply to acts of serious violence. That is why this bill only attaches a mandatory minimum sentence to offences that cause grievous bodily harm or wounding to another person. Grievous bodily harm is defined in the Crimes Act to include any permanent or serious disfiguring of the person. Wounding involves a breaking of the skin and commonly arises from knife attacks or glassings. These, by any measure, are serious offences.

Nevertheless, members opposite have flagged their intention to move amendments in the other place to have a mandatory sentence for one offence only—a new offence called "gross violence". Although I have not

yet seen the Opposition's amendment, I remind the House of what I said earlier. The Victorian laws, so applauded by the Leader of the Opposition, have yet to result in a single person being convicted or sent to jail. The Victorian laws also provide an option that enables judges not to impose mandatory minimum sentences even where guilt has been established. I think both those measures fly in the face of the community determination for government to take tough measures—tough measures of a type that we announced; tough measures that cover not only licensing changes but also penalty changes and the public education program that we think will ultimately lead to a change in culture.

What Labor is doing is, regrettably, as Bob Carr did on too many occasions, talking tough, pretending it is in favour of introducing tough legislation but knowing that that legislation will fail. The only consequence of that is that people who engage in serious drug- and alcohol-fuelled attacks and assaults will not suffer the consequences they should. We are determined to ensure that they do. I say to the crossbenchers in the upper House that they should look before they leap. They should be very careful about getting into bed with the Labor Party on this issue, because I have no doubt what the community reaction will be when people discover that Labor is trying to pretend that a house of cards is a tough measure. The Victorian legislation has not yet put a single person in jail. Regrettably, the Victorian legislation allows judges to continue to do what too many have done, which is not impose sentences that are in line with community expectations. I commend the bill to the House.

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

Division called for and Standing Order 181 applied.

Noes, 3

Mr Greenwich
Mr J. Parker
Mr Piper

Question declared resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Motion by Mr Barry O'Farrell agreed to:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Bill read a third time and transmitted to the Legislative Council with a message seeking its concurrence in the bill.

PAYROLL TAX REBATE SCHEME (JOBS ACTION PLAN) AMENDMENT (FRESH START SUPPORT) BILL 2014

Bill introduced on motion by Mr Mike Baird, read a first time and printed.

Second Reading

Mr MIKE BAIRD (Manly—Treasurer, and Minister for Industrial Relations) [3.33 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Payroll Tax Rebate Scheme (Jobs Action Plan) Amendment (Fresh Start Support) Bill 2014 builds on the Government's election commitment under the Jobs Action Plan to create jobs in New South Wales and to

rebuild the New South Wales economy. The bill proposes an amendment to the Payroll Tax Rebate Scheme (Jobs Action Plan) Act 2011. Because the Jobs Action Plan Fresh Start Support builds on the current scheme, all the current requirements of the scheme continue. The original Jobs Action Plan Payroll Tax Rebate Scheme recognised the key role of business in boosting employment, and offered a strong incentive for businesses to hire additional staff. The Jobs Action Plan has obviously been instrumental in helping to support the creation of more than 91,000 jobs in New South Wales since the Government came to office. Data to the end of January 2014 shows that approximately 41,100 applications have been received to date.

The Fresh Start Support scheme proposed in this bill will provide an additional \$1,000 payroll tax rebate to employers when they hire a worker made redundant after 1 January 2014 from a list of designated employers. As under the current scheme, the hire must be for a new job and result in an increase in the new employer's full-time equivalent numbers. In the case of part-time employees, the amount of the rebate will be pro-rated based on the number of hours worked compared with the standard hours of the particular employer's full-time employees, consistent with the current legislative provisions in the Jobs Action Plan legislation. The \$1,000 additional payroll tax rebate under the Fresh Start Support scheme will be paid on the first anniversary of the employment of the employee. This additional \$1,000 means the rebate increases to a possible maximum of \$6,000 for employees formally employed by designated employers. This will mean eligible employers will receive a \$3,000 rebate of payroll tax on the first anniversary of employment of the relevant employee, being \$2,000 under the existing scheme and an additional \$1,000 under Fresh Start Support, and \$3,000 on the second anniversary.

Key issues the Government will consider in determining whether an employee should be listed as a designated employer are whether the scale of retrenchments from the employer will cause significant disruption to an industry or region, or whether the employer operates in a specialised field with employees who have limited opportunities for re-employment in that or another field. A numerical test of 100 or more employees made redundant from a business in a metropolitan area during a 12-month period or 50 or more employees made redundant from a business in a non-metropolitan area during a 12-month period will automatically be taken to have satisfied the designated employer criteria. The Government may still list designated employers who do not meet the numerical test but those redundancies will have a material impact in their local area.

Metropolitan areas include local government areas in the Sydney Statistical Division, including Gosford and Wyong, plus the local government areas of Newcastle and Wollongong. The non-metropolitan area consists of the rest of New South Wales. Those definitions are again consistent with the legislative provisions in the existing scheme. To be eligible for the payroll tax rebate the employer must employ a worker who has been made redundant between 1 January 2014 and 30 June 2015 from a designated employer. The services of those made redundant must have been performed in New South Wales. The new scheme is currently scheduled to close to new applicants from 30 June 2015, consistent with the current existing scheme. However, the Government will reconsider this as circumstances develop.

For employees and employers to benefit from the scheme it will be necessary for the former employer to be listed as a designated employer. This is to ensure that those most in need of assistance during major structural adjustments in their respective industry or businesses are supported. We ask that businesses undergoing significant redundancy episodes notify the Government so they can be listed as a designated employer and their former employees can benefit from this support. The bill does not allow these designated employers to be eligible for a scheme, noting that these businesses should not benefit from hiring additional staff when they have recently made significant redundancies. The designated employer would, however, remain able to claim a payroll tax rebate if they meet the criteria.

A regulation will be tabled shortly that outlines guidelines for defining a designated employer and the definition of a redundancy. These guidelines can be varied with the approval of the Government. The guidelines specify that once a business is listed as a designated employer, it will remain so until the scheme closes. This bill recognises the difficult economic environment that many businesses are operating in both domestically and globally—obviously some businesses are caught in global circumstances—and encourages employers to hire employees made redundant through no fault of their own. This bill demonstrates that the Government remains committed to making New South Wales the first place to do business and at every opportunity encourages employers to expand their operations, which is the genesis of this bill. The Government wants to provide an incentive to existing businesses through this rebate scheme to create a new job. I commend the bill to the House.

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

**CRIMES AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (ASSAULT AND INTOXICATION)
BILL 2014**

LIQUOR AMENDMENT BILL 2014

Take-note Debate

Debate resumed from 5 March 2014.

Mr CRAIG BAUMANN (Port Stephens—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.39 p.m.]: I continue my contribution from yesterday. The community was justifiably outraged that a convicted man could be granted bail after serving just over six months for a crime he admitted to. Ironically, this scandal was taking place at the same time the family was being handed the keys to a new, specially built house for Tom. My staff wanted to build him a house in which he could live comfortably with his mother, Shirley, with plenty of room for his daughters when they visited. A block of land was purchased and everyone chipped in. Suppliers gave their products without charge and subcontractors provided their labour voluntarily. This truly was a labour of love. Tom was finally able to move out of the aged care facility he had been in since being released from hospital.

In February 2012 the Court of Criminal Appeal upheld Lawton's appeal in light of the new definition of "recklessness" and returned the case to the District Court. In May that year Lawton pleaded guilty to the less serious charge of assault occasioning actual bodily harm. In September 2012 Lawton was sentenced to imprisonment for two years and three months with a non-parole period of 14 months, which means of course that he has now been released. No-one can really appreciate how Tom Biviano's life has changed. The good-looking, energetic, charismatic 43-year-old that night lost his multimillion-dollar business and life as he knew it. The effect on his family has been enormous. These words from his mother, Shirley Young, as told to the *Daily Telegraph* earlier this year, give us some insight. She stated:

Caring for our son full-time is not easy but I wouldn't have it any other way. The cost is enormous to care for someone left like this.

He was awarded \$50,000 in victim's compensation so we bought a bus to get him around.

His outings have to be short because he needs regular bed rest.

The new wheelchair cost \$37,000, then there is the hospital bed in his room, a ceiling lifter, a shower chair—it goes on and on.

I get \$114 a fortnight from the government as a carer—that's it.

Tom's body has a lot of damage—there's little or no movement from the chest down, so he needs assistance with everything from toileting to dressing and showering.

He requires the aid of two staff twice a day, seven days a week.

I don't get much sleep these days because Tom needs turning and needs his feet massaged for circulation during the night.

His life is so far from who he was four years ago.

The son I knew died the day he was hit. Now we are left to do what we can.

I just want people to think about this—when you go to hit someone, think first about how this could change a person's life forever.

All Tom wants is to have his life back. He will never get the chance to walk again or have a relationship.

This was not his choice, it was taken away by this one punch. People who do this need to be held more accountable for what they've done.

They should be made to do something regularly in terms of caring for their victim—either contribute time or money towards their care for the rest of their lives.

We can't accept that the 14 months jail Tom's attacker got is adequate for ruining his life, plus the lives of his daughters and ours as well.

We need to change the law and get tough on these thugs.

Give them a sentence deserving of the crime—not a slap on the wrist.

It is evident that thugs are going into the city for a reason. Fuelled up on alcohol and possibly drugs, they are looking for trouble. We have a generation radically different from when I was a young man going out on the

town and we need to acknowledge that society has changed in ways that allow this culture of alcohol and drugs to grow unchecked. The laws need to be changed and the judiciary needs to be more in tune with community expectations. I am committed to helping our community start the conversation about personal responsibility. We need to talk to our sons, our brothers and our mates about their alcohol use and behaviour. But here in the House we can support these new laws and make a difference. I commend the bills to the House.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS (Murray-Darling) [3.43 p.m.]: I support the Crimes and Other Legislation Amendment (Assault and Intoxication) Bill 2014 and cognate bill, which have been introduced primarily to address alcohol, drugs and violence. I grew up in a mining town where hardworking miners spent many hours underground and at the end of their shift they would enjoy a few drinks at the local hotel. Occasionally there would be fights in the hotel but they did not result in people being maimed, killed or having their lives destroyed through some stupid act of violence. As a government, we are responsible for the welfare of the citizens of New South Wales. When the lives of people are threatened and the violence can no longer be tolerated, it is the responsibility of government to take appropriate action. Although the Government's action will never be the silver bullet and has been criticised by members opposite, it is a step in the right direction. Indeed, the Premier has stated that if it is necessary for the screws to be tightened they will be.

Anyone opposed to the consumption of alcohol would certainly laugh at the stupid behaviour of some people when intoxicated. Unfortunately, young people are often the innocent victims of violent attacks. As a result some have died or been permanently maimed and the perpetrators appear to receive soft sentences. That is unacceptable to both the community and the Government, so the Government has responded accordingly. There can be no excuse for bullies and thugs walking our streets and perpetrating violent acts on their fellow citizens. The most recent death was occasioned by a thug who had been a bully all his life and who saw an opportunity to king-hit someone younger. Evidence shows that this gentleman had a history of violence and assault. Some of the worst decisions are made when people are under the influence of alcohol or drugs. However, at some point people must accept the consequences of their actions, particularly if those actions destroy the life of a human being.

I have waited seven years for the member for Tweed to speak some words of wisdom and yesterday he did so. He said that this legislation is about the victim, and that is correct. After seven years something has got through to the member for Tweed—perhaps it was a bolt of lightning—but he acknowledged that the legislation is about the victim. The Government has no sympathy for thugs and perpetrators, who can now go to jail for the maximum time possible; they deserve what they get. The Government's sympathy lies with the victims of these assaults. This legislation is a step towards saying to the thugs that the Government has had enough and, despite the judicial system, it will ensure that any sentence is fair and equates to the violence inflicted.

When I was growing up the pubs used to close at 10 o'clock. People went to the hotel, had a few drinks on Saturday night and at 9.30 it was time to go to the dance—and that was it. I do not understand why the younger generation sits around at home, consumes a bulk amount of alcohol before leaving home and arrives at the hotel inebriated. Young people do not need to do that and it should not be allowed to happen. The member for Macquarie Fields informed the House that at present a State transport bus features an advertisement promoting preloading. This atrocious and unacceptable caper of drinking vast quantities of alcohol believing it to be trendy must be stopped. This bill is a step in the right direction but many more steps need to be taken. Parliament must look at the way that alcohol is promoted and how it influences young people into believing that alcohol is providing them with a lifestyle benefit. The remorse felt by anyone with a hangover is enough of an indication that alcohol provides no lifestyle benefit.

Mr Geoff Provest: You have experience with that.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS: The member for Tweed, who just entered the Chamber, favoured me with a bolt of brilliance. I have previously praised the member but now that he is in the Chamber I can further praise his achievements. The member for Tweed highlighted the fact that I had drunk my share of alcohol, done all those things that young people do and made some bad decisions when I was under the influence of alcohol. If I had my time again I would moderate my intake somewhat and achieve more in life. For anyone in that phase of life there is no doubt that socialising is a big part of their lives and having a few drinks is taken for granted as part of that socialising. But as time progresses people realise that they can participate even though they have drunk only a moderate amount of alcohol. The bills introduced by this Government will benefit the people of this State.

Mr Geoff Provest: Are you related to Walt Secord?

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! I warn the member for Tweed that such language will not be tolerated in the Chamber.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS: Only time will reveal whether this legislation results in a reduction in violence.

Mr Geoff Provest: Good on you, Walt.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! The member for Tweed will come to order.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS: Feel free to remove him from the Chamber, Mr Deputy-Speaker. These bills are about public nuisance but the Government has not legislated for the behaviour of the member for Tweed. However, such legislation could be introduced. I look forward to seeing what these bills will achieve. [*Time expired.*]

Mr ANDREW ROHAN (Smithfield) [3.53 p.m.]: I am pleased to speak in debate on the Crimes and Other Legislation Amendment (Assault and Intoxication) Bill 2014 and the Liquor Amendment Bill 2014. I strongly support the Premier's introduction of these bills as a measure to make the streets safer and to reassure the community. The fact is that every citizen is entitled to walk the streets at any time of the day or night in safety. That is a natural and basic right of every individual in our society. There is an expectation that quality time with friends will not be a risky endeavour.

Recently a number of serious and violent alcohol- and drug-fuelled assaults in the Sydney central business district shocked the community. While some of these assaults took place in the Sydney central business district they are not confined to the city alone. The New South Wales Government has listened to the community outcry and taken action to address and prevent further deaths as a result of alcohol- and drug-fuelled violence. These assaults are perpetrated by a few irresponsible individuals who have no respect for others or for the law.

The Government has acted swiftly and appropriately with the introduction of a suite of tough measures that will tackle irresponsible behaviour in the Sydney central business district. They include: mandatory sentences for one-punch assaults and serious alcohol- and drug-fuelled violence offences; drug and alcohol testing for suspected offenders; an extended central business district precinct; 1.30 a.m. lockouts and 3.00 a.m. last drinks; free transport; 10.00 p.m. closing times for bottle shops and liquor stores; and increased fines and tougher penalties for the supply and possession of steroids. The sentence has to match the crime.

I have listened to the constituents of Smithfield and urged the Government to address their concerns. The third highest population of young people in New South Wales lives within the Fairfield local government area, which includes the Smithfield electorate, and many travel into the city to have a good time with their friends. This new legislation will provide them with some security and safety measures and at the same time it sends a strong message to young people to behave responsibly in public spaces and to respect others that are out socialising.

This unacceptable and violent behaviour is not confined to Kings Cross, Darlinghurst and Oxford Street because most of the visitors to the Sydney central business district travel from other suburbs. I am sure that many travel from Western Sydney, including the Smithfield electorate. As a parent, whenever my children go out on the weekend with their friends to have a good time I cannot sleep until they arrive home safely. It does not matter what time that might be. I thank God that so far they have been safe. It is every parent's nightmare that their children will go out with friends and mates to have a good time and instead something will go wrong.

The bill will not tackle all the problems associated with alcohol-fuelled violence, but it is a good start and as time passes the Government will build on this legislation to make it stronger. This legislation will send a message that alcohol- and drug-fuelled violence will not be tolerated on our streets. I commend the Premier for taking this courageous step towards making our streets safer. It will reassure parents there is a form of safety net to protect their children's lives by deterring unacceptable antisocial behaviour. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO (Ryde—Minister for Citizenship and Communities, and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs) [3.59 p.m.], in reply: I commend the motion to the House.

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

Motion agreed to.

TRAVEL AGENTS REPEAL BILL 2013**Second Reading****Debate resumed from 14 November 2013.**

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK (Bankstown) [3.59 p.m.]: I lead for the Opposition in debate on the Travel Agents Repeal Bill 2013. The object of the bill is to repeal the Travel Agents Act 1986 and to deal with transitional and savings matters with regard to the closure of the Travel Compensation Fund. The present regulatory framework was implemented in 1986 when the State and Territory jurisdictions agreed to implement a State Act to regulate the travel agent industry and to establish the Travel Compensation Fund.

Consumer habits have changed considerably in recent years and technological advancements have allowed widespread, mainstream access to online travel services. However, under the present framework consumers can only access the Travel Compensation Fund if their travel agent operates within the framework of the legislation. Online travel agents and agents who operate from a foreign jurisdiction are excluded from the scope of the current framework. As such, the travel industry has recognised the limitations of the existing legislative framework and the need for reform of the industry.

In 2011 the former Federal Labor Government and the former Minister for Consumer Affairs, the Hon. David Bradbury, initiated the development of the Travel Industry Transition Plan. State and Territory Ministers subsequently convened at the Council of Australian Governments Consumer Affairs Forum on 7 December 2012 and approved by majority the Travel Industry Transition Plan. The Travel Industry Transition Plan has five recommendations. They are: to repeal the existing travel agents legislation; to increase general reliance on general consumer protection legislation, corporations laws, industry specific remedies and oversight mechanisms; to wind up the Travel Compensation Fund; to align with national tourism policy; and to encourage voluntary industry accreditation and/or industry specific dispute resolution mechanisms.

Research has supported reform in the travel agent industry. Studies have shown that approximately two-thirds of travel and travel-related expenditure is not accrued within the scope of the existing framework. This has resulted in consumers not being compensated for losses stemming from travel agents as defined by the meaning of the current Act. Consumers are increasingly transacting electronically with businesses that fall outside the scope of the Travel Compensation Fund jurisdiction and increasingly left vulnerable to loss. The transition plan states:

The reality of the travel industry, like other retail industries affected by competition and the vagaries of the global economy, is that unprotected consumer losses have occurred and will continue to occur due to inconsistent coverage by existing regulation.

A key element of the transition plan has been the implementation of the Travel Compensation Fund Substitution Trust Deed. This process commenced on 17 June 2013. The deed has been modified to contain provisions which enable the ministerial council to direct singular grants from the fund to support industry-based accreditation. The deed also contains provisions to help the industry adjust to regulation under the Australian Consumer Law. The removal of the prudential supervision of travel agents occurred on 1 July 2013. As it currently stands, all State and Territory jurisdictions have indicated that they will withdraw from the previous national scheme that commenced in 1986 by 30 June 2014.

This bill will commence on 1 July this year. The bill also will have the effect of adding further provisions to the end of schedule 5 of the Fair Trading Act 1987 that will: provide that no compensation will be payable by the State in connection with the repeal of the Travel Agents Act 1986; preserve the Travel Compensation Fund until it is closed; be repealed on proclamation when the Travel Compensation Fund is closed, which is expected to be between 1 July 2015 and 31 December 2015; retain certain existing review and appeal rights for consumers and travel agents; and maintain the disqualification period of a person who was disqualified to direct, manage or conduct a business as a travel agent under the current Act for the period of that disqualification or until this repeal bill is enacted.

Travel agents across all States and Territories will now be required to comply with existing consumer obligations under the Australian Consumer Law. This bill is part of the process that will ensure that all States and Territories will be consistent with the Council of Australian Governments Legislative Governance Forum on Consumer Affairs national legislative framework. The Labor Opposition does not oppose this bill and is supportive of New South Wales participating in the national Travel Industry Transition Plan to ensure that consumers are properly protected by relevant legislation. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr MARK SPEAKMAN (Cronulla—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.05 p.m.]: I support the Travel Agents Repeal Bill 2013, which provides for the repeal of the Travel Agents Act 1986 and the Travel Agents Regulation 2011. By introducing this legislation the Government shows its commitment to doing everything it can to reduce red tape for small business whilst ensuring that consumers are adequately protected. If enacted, the legislative amendments contained in the bill will bring to an end a legislative scheme that was established by a number of jurisdictions entering into a Participation Agreement for the Co-operative Scheme for the Uniform Regulation of Travel Agents in 1986. By adopting this agreement the participating jurisdictions, which included New South Wales, agreed to regulate the industry through licensing schemes. The Act also regulated the industry through a requirement to contribute to a compensation scheme named the Travel Compensation Fund.

It is clear that this scheme was designed for an era when travel agents controlled access to and information about travel. At the time the scheme was implemented, consumers were reliant on travel agents to make arrangements, and cash prepayments were common. Credit cards were not commonplace. Bankcard was the first card widely available and during the 1980s banks educated consumers about this form of virtual money. Bankcard was phased out in 2006 because other credit cards replaced it. The cooperative scheme has protected consumers' cash prepayments in the event that the agent becomes insolvent before passing the prepayment to the supplier but purchasing patterns have changed and this is an increasingly diminishing form of commerce. Today consumers can deal directly with suppliers and access information through the internet without intermediary assistance.

The abolition of the travel agents legislation brings to a culmination the wide public and stakeholder consultation necessary to make these wide-ranging reforms to the industry. The Council of Australian Governments Legislative and Governance Forum on Consumer Affairs has approved the Travel Industry Transition Plan, which will operate in conjunction with the removal of the legislation by 30 June 2014. The first reform commenced from 1 July 2013 and removed the requirement for agencies to lodge annual financial returns to the Travel Compensation Fund. Voluntary industry accreditation will commence in mid-2014 and the Travel Compensation Fund will close by mid-2015.

The transition plan makes arrangements to dedicate a portion of its remaining funds to a range of purposes, including stakeholder communication and education and a one-off grant for consumer research and advocacy purposes. A one-off grant also will be made to support the development of the voluntary accreditation scheme by a national working party of government, industry and consumer representatives. In implementing the plan governments and agencies have agreed to work closely with industry to ensure there is appropriate disclosure of risk in travel-related transactions. Industry and consumers can see the wide-ranging benefits that this package of contemporary reforms will bring to the modern issues they now face in the provision of travel services. Throughout the wide-ranging consultation that was needed to bring this legislation to fruition industry and consumers have indicated that they support this reform package.

As I said earlier, the repeal of this legislation will leave us with adequate consumer protection but it will remove expensive red tape. It has been estimated that the financial burden on Australian travel agencies predominantly attributable to the Travel Compensation Fund requirements is between \$19.57 million and \$25.3 million each year. That cost directly affects the ability of local travel agencies to expand and to employ more staff, particularly those in rural and regional New South Wales. Because the regulatory burden applies only to Australian-based businesses, their offshore-based competitors selling in the same market have been placed at a considerable advantage as they can offer lower prices and drive local operators from the marketplace. This legislation will level the playing field. There will be adequate consumer protection after the repeal of this legislation and there will be the removal of unnecessary red tape. For those reasons, I support the bill.

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT (Baulkham Hills) [4.11 p.m.]: It is with pleasure that I support the Travel Agents Repeal Bill 2013. I congratulate the outgoing Minister for Fair Trading, the Hon. Anthony Roberts, and the incoming Minister for Fair Trading, the Hon. Stuart Ayers, on their commitment to small business and the decline of regulation and licensing requirements in this State. The bill repeals the Travel Agents Act 1986 and aims to reduce the bureaucratic burden on business and costs for consumers, and provide for a smarter and more efficient regulatory system. The removal of this bureaucracy will place Australian travel agents on an equal footing with offshore competitors, for which the Australian Federation of Travel Agents and their chief executive officer, Mr Jayson Westbury, have advocated for some time. Small business will no longer be weighed down by the cost of funding this bureaucracy which does not benefit consumers one bit.

The current licensing system to become a registered travel agent is a throwback to a former Labor Government and is a bureaucratic nightmare. Businesses are required to provide to the licensing body in-depth

and comprehensive financial records for each year. It is estimated that this costs travel agents between \$19.57 million and \$25.3 million a year. This bill will reduce the cost of booking airline tickets as the licensing system has forced prices to increase or has created additional overheads which reduced the ability of businesses to employ more staff and expand. It is quite appropriate that at a time of challenges facing Qantas, our largest airline and the national carrier, the O'Farrell Government is implementing this legislation to reduce the cost of doing business with travel agents.

These are costs which overseas competitors do not face. With a number of tickets being bought on the internet, this will be welcome relief for the industry. The bill will remove these costs and place Australian travel agents on a level playing field for the first time. The current system has cost more to administer than it has returned to customers and the lower fees will mean that bookings via a trusted travel agent will be cheaper for consumers. The current Travel Compensation Fund, developed in the 1980s, is becoming increasingly outdated and provides little protection for consumers. It is appropriate that the Minister who introduced this bill has entered the Chamber.

Mr Anthony Roberts: What a great fellow Jayson Westbury is.

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT: The Minister acknowledges the chief executive officer of the Australian Federation of Travel Agents. He is a tireless worker for the tourism industry in Australia. The Travel Compensation Fund was developed to protect cash or cheque prepayment to travel agents, but provided compensation only if the travel agent became insolvent prior to passing the payment to suppliers such as hotels, airlines and rail and cruise operators. If a supplier became insolvent and was unable to deliver a service as a result of insolvency or other means, the consumer was not protected. This system is time-bound to another era. Travel agents are able to make payments directly to travel providers, and consumers can pay travel providers directly using electronic funds transfer and credit cards, so the type of cash and cheque prepayment the Travel Agents Act is protecting is increasingly rare, making the Act increasingly redundant.

By using credit cards, consumers are able to access additional protection through the chargeback mechanism, whereby the consumer's financial institution is able to debit a merchant's account for any loss as a result of a payment error or the transaction being disputed, often as a result of the service failing to be delivered. Therefore, there are private sector alternatives that are providing more thorough protection against the failure of delivery by travel suppliers. Since the existing scheme does not cover loss caused by suppliers such as airlines, hotels and cruise operators, consumers have always been advised to obtain travel insurance for these services—and they should continue to do so, especially in the event of serious issues not covered by chargeback. Consumers will still receive strong protection through the Australian Consumer Law, which provides guarantees for services, prohibits misleading and deceptive representation, and provides price transparency. I encourage consumers, who have been misled by an unscrupulous travel agent, to use the services of NSW Fair Trading to address issues such as those listed. Consumers will still have many avenues to find a reputable travel agent once the Travel Agents Act has been repealed, including membership of an industry association or group such as the International Air Transport Association.

The Australian Federation of Travel Agents accreditation scheme will commence this year. Companies wishing to participate must opt in to comply with a voluntary code of conduct, which sets standards for good practice in dealing with and managing relationships with existing and potential customers. Participants will be required to commit to complying with Australian Competition Law in their business practices. Business will be required to be fit and proper entities, which requires them to act in an honest and fair manner. Participants will accept adequate public liability and professional indemnity insurance. Finally, participants in the accreditation scheme will be required to offer sufficient staff education and training, with a focus on professional development and at least 20 per cent of staff holding at least a certificate III or equivalent in travel. This new industry accreditation scheme will enable consumers to identify a reputable travel agent. It is important in ensuring that consumers are well protected when they travel. The bill will lead to lower costs and a smarter, more efficient regulatory system for both business and consumers. I commend the bill to the House.

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

MUSWELLBROOK DISTRICT HOSPITAL

Discussion on Petition Signed by 10,000 or More Persons

Mr GEORGE SOURIS (Upper Hunter—Minister for Tourism, Major Events, Hospitality and Racing, Minister for the Arts, and Minister for the Hunter) [4.15 p.m.]: I presented this petition to the Table Office on

14 November. I welcome visitors to the gallery who have travelled from Muswellbrook, in particular the Machine Group representatives: Granville Taylor, who is enjoying his birthday; Yvonne Taylor; Tony Neate; Jenny Hinschen; and Jane Dyson. I thank them for their interest in an issue that is vital to the residents of Muswellbrook shire. I have been in contact with the residents who lodged this petition, and they believe that the time has come for the New South Wales Government to invest in new hospital infrastructure for Muswellbrook to maintain the health of the population and to ensure the continued contribution of high levels of revenue to the State economy. Such an investment by the State would recognise and support the billions of dollars invested in the shire by mining companies, in particular, and the considerable investment in human capital by the region's employed workforce. They have expressed to me the view that Muswellbrook has world-class coalmines but a third-world hospital. I thank Granville Taylor for providing me with these debating points so I can properly represent the petition.

The petitioners are of the belief that there are significant issues with asbestos contamination on site. This impacts on general maintenance ability and prevents significant refurbishment being carried out anywhere in the building. Infrastructure is dated and needs to comply with Australian standards. The air-conditioning plant is old and needs to be upgraded. The system is so affected by interior wall asbestos that vents have been sealed and areas cannot be reached for maintenance. The site development plan has proposed the sale of the western third of the existing site, where buildings cannot be constructed for integration into the main hospital. The residents believe that even if a complete refurbishment of the hospital were carried out in the period to 2028, the new facility would still suffer from the shortcomings of a difficult site with a steep slope and no further scope for expansion. The committee advises that the current Muswellbrook showground has been rezoned for retail purposes and that the show committee has demonstrated its support for a move to a new site. There has been no commitment at this time to commence any redevelopment of the site. The showground is a site of approximately 13 hectares adjoining Brennan Park, which has already been rezoned for an aged care community and is under consideration by the Calvary group for its new development.

The petitioners have told me that this site is particularly attractive for the location of a new hospital as it has direct access to the New England Highway and that within walking distance there are motels, a shopping centre and fast-food outlets. They believe that such an integrated development would help meet the goal in New South Wales 2021—Health, which is to restore confidence in the public health system by rebuilding hospitals and health infrastructure, re-engaging clinicians, and giving communities and healthcare providers a strong and direct voice in improved local patient care. The old hospital site could be used to provide a training ground for remediation of other asbestos-affected buildings, under the guidance of an organisation such as TAFE NSW or the University of Newcastle. On completion, a significant refurbished building in Muswellbrook would be available to house a suitable business operation or government department, which would provide economic diversification for the town.

The importance of the Muswellbrook contribution to the State's economy is amply demonstrated by the net funds generated to the NSW Treasury of close to \$240 million in 2012. There are also two major power stations in the shire—Bayswater and Liddell—which together generate approximately 40 per cent of New South Wales' electricity needs. Against this background must be considered the \$80 million it would cost to build a new hospital in Muswellbrook. That is equivalent to about four months of the net revenue generated by Muswellbrook, and the petitioners believe that this would be a reasonable investment in such an important region. However, the current economic climate is such that accessing a lump sum of \$80 million is extremely difficult. A new hospital would clearly be an asset to our region, but in the absence of such funding we need to examine other options.

The Muswellbrook Health Service Site Development Plan, developed by the Hunter New England Local Health District, provides a strategic assessment that has identified priorities and made recommendations for the future planning of any facility upgrades or new works on the Muswellbrook health campus. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

The master plan considers a number of different options for redevelopment. One is a staged approach that would allow Hunter New England Health to take full advantage of any progressive funding opportunities that may arise. The committee suggests that with limited funding available this may be the best option for the region. A \$6.5 million emergency department redevelopment is underway and is the first phase of the overall redevelopment of Muswellbrook Health Service. The New South Wales Government has already allocated \$4 million to the project from the Restart New South Wales Resources for Regions funding program. BHP Billiton is partnering with Hunter New England Health to deliver this project and has generously contributed \$2.5 million from BHP Billiton Sustainable Communities, a charity established by the company as part of its community investment program.

The new, state-of-the-art emergency department will greatly expand the space available to treat people needing emergency care and will provide the community of Muswellbrook and surrounding areas with access to a modern emergency department and the latest technology in health care. The redevelopment will deliver additional beds and more clinical treatment spaces for patients, improved areas and facilities for visitors and staff, and new ambulance bays. I am also pleased to hear that the Hunter New England Local Health District has submitted an expression of interest in the latest round of the Resources for Regions program. The submission has reached the short list for funding of \$20 million for part one of a \$35 million redevelopment. When that is complete the subsequent tranche of Resources to Regions funds may be available for part two.

Senior representatives from Hunter New England Health met on 16 October with representatives of Muswellbrook Aged Care and Hospital in a New Environment, the community group that has sponsored the petition. This included the group chairman, Mr Granville Taylor, and the secretary, Ms Jenny Hinschen. I hope that this group continues to be involved in the planning and development of the hospital renovations and will decide that it is appropriate to form either a consultative committee to work with the Government on this issue or a reference group. I thank the petitioners for their interest in this important subject and will continue to work on their behalf for better hospital facilities for Muswellbrook.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields) [4.24 p.m.]: The saga of the Muswellbrook Hospital redevelopment is one where a good idea to move the aged care off site and put the emergency department on the ground floor has been dogged by bureaucratic delays and bad timing. Dr Mark Rikard-Bell, who with his wife Del has worked in Muswellbrook for 31 years without seeing an upgrade, says it better than I can in a letter he sent me on 4 March 2014. He wrote:

Dear Andrew,

Muswellbrook community was motivated to petition for a new district hospital, with the support of the Medical Staff Council, due to the loss of the fight to save Muswellbrook's Nursing home, which was located in the area now taken up with the new emergency department construction.

These Nursing home patients are currently occupying acute patient beds, with no construction of a new nursing home planned, and no nursing home facilities in Muswellbrook.

NSW Health Department has not contributed any money to Muswellbrook Hospital, with the emergency department building from \$2.5 million donated by BHP Billiton and \$4 million from the "Restart NSW-Resources for Regions".

Funding of the new emergency department will not assist with general patient care if the patients ongoing care is in the inadequate wards.

I was on the planning committee for the emergency department and rejected the plans submitted, requesting funding for \$6 million for a "stand alone" emergency department.

The nursing home would have been retained, caring for these elderly residents appropriately.

A second stage development of the hospital above the emergency department could then have proceeded.

The current hospital is 60 years old and not up to modern standard. The general ward area is antiquated with paediatric and adult patients mixing with acute illness. In addition nursing home patients, some suffering from dementia creates additional concerns and risks.

Designated area for paediatric care is essential with modern medical care.

There are only 2 single rooms available in the whole hospital.

Air conditioning keeps breaking down, water comes through the roof when it rains and there are significant electrical wiring problems.

Theatre and sterilisation areas are in urgent need of upgrading.

Staffing is difficult due to the absence of modern facilities, including the latest technology in health care. There are serious concerns about the ability to staff the new emergency department with both Doctors and nursing staff.

Separation of the emergency department and the high dependency unit with the current level of staffing compromises patients care and safety.

There are currently major issues with recruiting Doctors, and nursing staff, including midwives who find working in such conditions unacceptable, and the Doctors particularly express concern about patient safety and care being compromised.

There are future plans for a new Hunter region hospital—but it will be located over 100kms away from Muswellbrook.

Muswellbrook has the potential to be a centre of teaching excellence. Currently there are Registrars and Medical Students attending the hospital who we have difficulty retaining longterm due to the current state of the facilities and working conditions.

Yours faithfully,

Mark Rikard-Bell - Chairman Medical Staff Council, VMO Muswellbrook Hospital
Delma Mullins - VMO Muswellbrook Hospital

Muswellbrook Aged Care and Hospital In a New Environment was formed in May 2013 to lobby for an improvement in hospital and aged care facilities in Muswellbrook. I note that many of its members are present in the gallery today and I welcome them. I have also received representations from the mayor of Muswellbrook, who I note is also in the gallery. The mayor's representations set out a litany of poor community health statistics.

For example, a 2010 epidemiological assessment by NSW Health of the incidence of cardiovascular and respiratory diseases in Muswellbrook showed that between 2007 and 2009, Muswellbrook residents aged 0-35 years had higher rates of asthma and overall respiratory illness than elsewhere in the Hunter or Sydney, whilst Muswellbrook and Singleton ranked highest in New South Wales for rates of cardiovascular disease for hospital separations. The Muswellbrook local government area also had the region's highest number of preventable premature deaths. Like Dr Rikard-Bell, the mayor has long been opposed to the premature dislocation of aged care residents and has made representations to me that the upgrade of the hospital should not have come at the expense of residents in aged care. An orderly and dignified process would have ensured that the planned new aged care facility was constructed before renovations commenced at the hospital.

I understand the mayor has been inundated with stories of resulting hardship from residents and those who care for and support them since that decision to relocate residents was made. The mayor has also repeatedly said that whilst the upgrade of the hospital is unambiguously a priority, it should, in the main, be funded from the State's Health budget. The asbestos in the building is an additional problem; it is causing issues such as the ward patients not being able to watch television whilst in hospital because asbestos is wrapped around the wiring in the ceiling. I congratulate all who have been involved in the collection of this petition and I hope that it will be a major contributor to the future development of a new Muswellbrook hospital.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER (North Shore—Minister for Health, and Minister for Medical Research) [4.29 p.m.]: I am pleased to speak in the discussion on the Muswellbrook District Hospital petition. I inform those in the gallery that the NSW Government is committed to improving health services for the people in Muswellbrook and across the entire Hunter Valley. The shadow Minister for Health read a letter from the chair of the Medical Staff Council stating that there had been no investment in the hospital for 16 years. The shadow Minister was the Parliamentary Secretary in the former Labor Government, which did not invest any money in upgrading hospitals. The O'Farrell Government is investing millions of dollars across the State delivering hospital upgrades that have been promised for many years. The Government inherited a terrible backlog and this year \$1.2 billion will be provided over, hopefully, its first four-year term from a \$4.7 billion budget. We are building the hospital system based on current priorities.

It is not true to say that no government funding has been provided to upgrade the Muswellbrook District Hospital emergency department. The \$6.5 million upgrade is part of the overall redevelopment of Muswellbrook hospital. As has been stated, \$2.5 million came from the BHP Billiton Sustainable Communities charity and the balance from the State Government's Hunter Fund. The Government made this proud commitment to upgrade that emergency department. Further development of the hospital is being considered in a submission to Resources for Regions as part of the Hunter Fund. The Muswellbrook District Hospital upgrade was fairly difficult because the ground floor aged care services occupied the logical space for emergency department access. The aged care beds had to be relocated and I am told that construction soon will start on a residential aged-care facility in Muswellbrook—planning is well underway.

I mention also for the benefit of the member for Cessnock the great deal of money committed to upgrade other facilities in the Hunter region, including a \$2 million upgrade of Cessnock District Hospital emergency department which was completed in January and which will provide expanded and improved services for the people of Cessnock; upgraded facilities in a recent \$350 million refurbishment of the emergency department at Scott Memorial Hospital in Scone; a \$2.5 million upgrade to Singleton District Hospital emergency department, completed last October; and the announcement of the site for the \$20 million first tranche of the new Hunter Valley hospital in Maitland. Much work is being done by this Government. I give a commitment to the people of Muswellbrook that their hospital will not be forgotten.

Discussion concluded.

TAMWORTH RESCUE HELICOPTER SERVICE

Discussion on Petition Signed by 10,000 or More Persons

Mr KEVIN ANDERSON (Tamworth) [4.32 p.m.]: I proudly bring to the attention of the House a petition signed by more than 10,000 people in the New England north-west area calling for a review of strategies for the future of Aeromedical (Rotary Wing) Retrieval Services in New South Wales and for the reinstatement of winching operations by crews and aircraft from the Tamworth base of the Westpac Rescue Helicopter Service. I acknowledge and thank the Deputy Mayor of Tamworth Regional Council, Russel Webb, for his efforts in organising the petition. As part of an Aeromedical (Rotary Wing) Retrieval Services review, a recommendation was made to cease winching operations for safety reasons at the Tamworth base of the Westpac Rescue Helicopter Service. Winching operations ceased on 22 July 2013. The decision caused a groundswell of anger from communities in the New England north-west region, who believed they were losing a valuable service—indeed, they were.

Many who have supported the Westpac Rescue Helicopter Service through volunteering or donating their hard-earned money over many years felt their local helicopter was losing a vital service. The community has a real sense of owning this service and no-one wants to see it diminished in any way, shape or form. My role as local member is to fight for the community's beliefs, and it believes that the helicopter's winching capabilities should be retained, and so do I. NSW Ambulance made the decision and advised the Minister for Health that winching should cease due to safety concerns. We acknowledge that advice respectfully. I would not compromise the safety of any rescue operation. However, since the decision was made on behalf of the community I have tried many times to reason with NSW Ambulance and also to propose many options suggested by numerous organisations, including the Namoi Regional Organisation of Councils, the Christian Women's Association, the Manilla Rescue Squad and others.

In the 12 months prior to the announcement only four winching operations were undertaken, three of which were low acuity. Given the small number of operations, suggestions were made about increasing training for crew to respond to safety concerns. The advice from the management of the Westpac Rescue Helicopter Service stated:

Winching was introduced from the Tamworth base immediately after it was established in 2001. Indeed part of the basis of establishment of a base in the New England and North West was to help reduce time to patient.

You will appreciate that even with the relatively lower numbers of winching operations there has never been an incident in the 13 years. This is because the Service has created the highest standards of training and equipment for its professional staff.

We raised the point:

Many organisations undertake high risk training for emergencies that they may never attend, however that does not prevent them from undertaking that very important lifesaving training and maintaining a highly skilled local workforce.

The Namoi Regional Organisation of Councils wrote:

It has been stated in the Reform Plan training will be better utilised with crews that are required to perform winching operations more regularly. This position ignores the fact that aircrews need regular winching training as they can be stationed at any of the locations. Member Councils do not believe that concentrating the majority of the trained crews within 220 kms and leaving the rest of the State with two locations of trained crews can be justified.

In the view of Namoi Councils' members, having regard to the significant increase in response times, discontinuance of winching capabilities and operations at the Tamworth Helicopter Base is clearly not in the public interest and a retrograde move.

However, despite our best efforts the decision has been made and we need to respect it and move on. Good news has arrived on the back of the reform. The Minister for Health will highlight the significant investment planned for the Tamworth base in 2015. I acknowledge the presence of the Minister in the Chamber and thank her for responding to this important petition. Tamworth is a growing community with planned future major workforce development and the community reserves the right to revisit this issue should circumstances change. As the Minister has said previously, the decision may be reviewed if demand for the service changes. I suspect that it will. I thank the thousands of people who took the time to sign the petition and for their ongoing support. I pay tribute to crews and staff of the Westpac Rescue Helicopter Service and thank them for their dedication and commitment to our community. I am proud to represent the good people of the Tamworth electorate.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields) [4.37 p.m.]: The job of a Minister for Health is difficult with 100,000 passionate health workers and six million patients. Each of those health workers gets out

of bed every morning to provide patient safety. As a teacher of acute resuscitation I can tell the House that teaching it is one thing, but there is no substitute for putting that teaching into practice. No-one can be taught a procedure but use it rarely and be as safe as someone who uses that same procedure frequently. Some years ago a medical colleague of mine was winched down to a critical patient on a rope that was too short. When he reached the end of the rope he fell 20 metres, sustaining a significant back injury that kept him off work for some time, and consequently was unable to help the patient. The Ambulance Service of NSW has since changed its work practices dramatically to ensure occupational health and safety for its staff, and patient safety. Winching is an extremely high-risk and potentially exceptionally dangerous procedure that should be undertaken frequently. Winching should not be done by many people occasionally; it should be done by a few people often.

In July 2013 the Reform Plan for Aeromedical (Rotary Wing) Retrieval Services recommended that winching in Tamworth should stop immediately. With only four retrievals in 2012, I am absolutely convinced that this was the right thing to do. There is no way, with four winching episodes in 12 months, that anybody can guarantee patient safety equivalent to that of a team that does it all the time. This decision was vindicated the following month, in August 2013, when a 68-year-old man died in Victoria while being winched to a helicopter. He was, by media report, a large man. He was being winched into an Ambulance Victoria helicopter when he fell to the ground. He died from multiple injuries—injuries much more severe than the injuries that led to him being winched. I urge all members to read the Australian Transport Safety Bureau report, which gives graphic details of the risks involved in winching.

Winches in helicopter ambulances are extremely heavy. In many areas of the State, such as Orange and in areas of higher altitude such as New England, the winches may affect the aerodynamics of helicopters, making take-off and landing more dangerous. It may require a larger or more expensive helicopter to service a population if a winch is part of the equipment. The letter from the Minister to the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly is completely correct. I would like to know why it took a 10,000 signature petition to elicit this response, which was appropriate. A simple letter to the Minister and an explanation from the Minister and the member for Tamworth, along with the correct answer, would have achieved the same outcome. The member for Tamworth now has a 10,000-signature petition and a 10,000-person database, which I am sure he will not use at the next election—

Mr Gareth Ward: I hope he does.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: I note the interjection of the member, "I hope he does." That would be an inappropriate use of a petition, which has been signed in good faith by the people of Tamworth.

Mr Kevin Anderson: Point of order: This petition was generated by the people of the Tamworth community and the New England north-west by the deputy mayor of Tamworth Regional Council, Russell Webb. I take it that the member for Macquarie Fields is implying that the petition was generated by my office. I ask him to withdraw that remark.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Melanie Gibbons): Order! Does the member for Macquarie Fields withdraw the remark?

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: I did not indicate it was generated from the member's office. I asked the member to ensure that he did not use it, or the names on it, prior to the 2015 election, which I am sure he will not because he is clearly upset. He has assured me that he will not use any of these names; that in fact he will destroy the database and not use it all prior to the 2015 election. I am very pleased he is doing that.

Mr Kevin Anderson: Point of order: That is a Labor tactic. We on this side of the House do not do that.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Melanie Gibbons): Order! There is no point of order.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: The Minister for Health has made the correct decision—to protect patient safety. This was always the correct decision. It could have been explained correctly in July. I am pleased that the correct decision has been made and that the patients of Tamworth are being protected.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER (North Shore—Minister for Health, and Minister for Medical Research) [4.42 p.m.]: As was said by our learned colleague on this side, the member for Macquarie Fields started off

reasonably well, but then went pear-shaped halfway through his speech. I thank the member for Tamworth for lodging this petition on behalf of his constituents. I acknowledge the right of every member of this Chamber to lodge such petitions on behalf of their constituents. I commend the member for Tamworth for raising their concerns. I have actually met many of the petitioners and the councils, and I have written to the member. He is rightly raising concerns, and this is an appropriate place to have those concerns addressed.

The cessation of winching at Tamworth will not mean an end to winching in the Tamworth region. The recommendation was based on the fact that winching is high risk, and that operators need to do a number of winches to maintain their skills. Even the training is high risk. The reality is that in the previous year there were only four winches. In three of those the patients did not actually need winching because their injuries were not terribly serious. There are examples of absolutely tragic outcomes for both patients and paramedics through the very difficult process of winching. I repeat, there will not be an end to winching at Tamworth; the winching just will not be done from the Tamworth base. The reform plan supports concentrating on high-risk winching at Lismore, Newcastle, Sydney, Wollongong and Canberra. If there is a need for a winch outside those places, then the appropriate helicopter and team will be dispatched.

The Government's reform plan for aeromedical retrieval services is available on the NSW Health website. For the first time, there will be a doctor and paramedic or doctor and nurse on every flight. Patients will receive better and faster emergency care with bases operating 24/7, including at Newcastle, Tamworth, Orange, Wollongong, Canberra and Lismore. The Government has committed to employing 11.5 new full time equivalent retrieval doctors and 18 new full-time equivalent paramedics. This includes five more paramedics and two more full-time equivalent retrieval doctors for Tamworth. This will be funded by a \$151.2 million commitment from the New South Wales Government, including an additional \$39.1 million in new funding over the next three years.

I am very proud to say that, for the first time ever, non-government organisations and commercial helicopter operators will be able to tender on a level playing field for government-funded helicopter contracts. The reform plan guarantees that the helicopter retrieval network can meet the growing demand for retrieval missions in New South Wales, which is expected to increase by 23 per cent by 2022. I commend the member for Tamworth for representing his constituents in this important matter.

Discussion concluded.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Melanie Gibbons): Order! Discussion on petitions signed by more than 10,000 persons having concluded, the House will deal with community recognition statements.

COMMUNITY RECOGNITION STATEMENTS

DR CHRISTOPHER BEGG, RURAL MEDICAL SERVICE AWARDS

DR PETER ALLEN, RURAL MEDICAL SERVICE AWARDS

Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD (Myall Lakes) [4.45 p.m.]: I inform the House that prominent local doctor Dr Christopher Begg from Forster has been awarded Rural Medical Service awards for his services to medicine. Dr Begg has practised at the Wallis Street Medical Centre for the past 38 years. Dr Begg was presented his award at the New South Wales Rural Doctors Network presentation dinner and was noted for his invaluable commitment and contribution to rural New South Wales. I inform the House also that prominent local doctor Dr Peter Allen from Forster, has been awarded Rural Medical Service awards for his services to medicine. Dr Allen began his medical career in Forster in 1978 and has worked at Total Health Care for the past 35 years. Dr Allen was presented his award at the New South Wales Rural Doctors Network presentation dinner and was noted for his invaluable commitment and contribution to rural New South Wales.

STEFAN PUPOVAC, CABRAMATTA SPORTS ACHIEVER OF THE YEAR

Mr NICK LALICH (Cabramatta) [4.46 p.m.]: One of Cabramatta's rising young sport stars, Stefan Pupovac, was recently recognised at the local Australia Day Community Awards and Citizenship Ceremony. At the event on 23 January, this multi-talented athlete was awarded Sports Achiever of the Year. Stefan plays basketball as part of the Oblic Club. He is vice-captain of an open boys basketball team, mentors young students in sporting programs and coaches younger students at Cabramatta West Public School and Cabramatta High

School. He has held four captaincies at school, including the Bill Turner Cup soccer team, the open boys soccer team, the under-15 boys basketball and under-15 boys Australian Football League team. I thank Stefan for his contribution to our community and congratulate him on his award. He is definitely a name to watch in the future.

DRUMMOND PARK PRESCHOOL

Mr ADAM MARSHALL (Northern Tablelands) [4.47 p.m.]: I recognise Armidale's Drummond Park Preschool for achieving the highest rating possible from the New South Wales Department of Education and Communities, exceeding the national quality standard. Under the new guidelines, all preschools and childcare centres are assessed against stringent criteria across seven key areas of early childhood education and are rated on their performance. Having had the pleasure of visiting Drummond Park Preschool, I can attest to the community nature of the school and its warm and friendly environment, which caters for each child's unique abilities. These are the key ingredients of its huge success. I congratulate Drummond Park management committee president Jacqueline Toakley, vice-president Amanda Hess, committee member Jodie Wriggall, director Joanne McDermott and all the staff on this achievement. It is a thoroughly well-earned reward for their commitment and unstinting efforts on behalf of the children.

LIVERPOOL MANDAEAN COMMUNITY

Mr PAUL LYNCH (Liverpool) [4.48 p.m.]: I rise to recognise the Mandaean community in Sydney and particularly in Liverpool. I especially want to recognise an event organised by the Sabian Mandaean Association in Australia and the Mandaean Synod on 29 January this year at the Mandi, the Mandaean Community Centre in Pirie Street, Liverpool. This event was a funeral oration and commemoration of the tragic and horrible death of Rami Jabar Al Swide in Iraq. Rami was born in 1993 and recently died in atrocious circumstances in a sectarian killing as the victim and a member of a religious minority. There are fewer than 75,000 Mandaeans throughout the world, with only an estimated 5,000 left in Iraq, making deaths such as this even more horrific than they would normally be. The event featured many members of the Mandaean community, religious leaders, the president of the association, Adam Farhan, and other office bearers of the Sabian Mandaean Association. The Iraqi Ambassador to Australia also was present. Every death is tragic, but a death in horrific circumstances directly because the victim is a member of a small, persecuted religious minority is particularly reprehensible.

TRIBUTE TO ROGER PHILLIP NETHERCOTE

Mr CRAIG BAUMANN (Port Stephens—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.49 p.m.]: I regretfully advise the House of the passing of Roger Phillip Nethercote. Roger was a 1970 alumnus of Trinity Grammar School and dedicated his professional life to local government. He spent 12 years at Blue Mountains City Council as a town planner, overseeing village revitalisation at Leura, Wentworth Falls, Katoomba and Blackheath. In 1990 Roger joined Penrith City Council and spent 23 years as the council's People and Places group manager, overseeing children's services, community and cultural development and environmental health and development. Roger leaves behind his wife, Jenny, and children, Kristy and Andrew. I offer the sincere condolences of the Parliament. Roger's funeral will be held tomorrow at Leura Memorial Gardens. A request is made in the funeral notice that in lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the Blue Mountains City Council Mayoral Bushfire Relief Fund. Roger is supporting his community even in death. Roger Nethercote—Ned to his mates—rest in peace.

FAIRFIELD HOSPITAL TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY

Mr GUY ZANGARI (Fairfield) [4.50 p.m.]: On Friday 29 November 2013 I attended the twenty-fifth anniversary ball of Fairfield Hospital at Club Marconi. I congratulate all the staff members who received special acknowledgements or a staff recognition award on the evening. I thank the staff for their ongoing dedication and contributions to the hospital. I commend Fairfield Hospital for 25 years of outstanding service and for providing a high level of care and assistance to our local community. Congratulations to Fairfield Hospital on hosting a successful event.

NOWRA BOWLING AND RECREATION CLUB

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK (South Coast—The Speaker) [4.51 p.m.]: I congratulate Nowra Bowling and Recreation Club on celebrating its 100th anniversary. Although the club has physically transformed over the

past 100 years, it has remained an institution within the local community, continually hosting sporting and community organisations. The history of Nowra Bowling and Recreation Club is fascinating. Its original members were restricted to businessmen or male community leaders. However, over the past 100 years the club has modernised and continued to grow, with more than 3,000 local members from all backgrounds. I congratulate the club's board, including President Mike Mitchell, and its management staff, in particular, Secretary-Manager Stuart Christison, on their continued service to the Nowra community. I congratulate Alex and Annie, operators of the Rinks Restaurant, for their continued friendly service. I wish all staff and members of Nowra Bowling and Recreation Club all the best on their 100th anniversary celebrations.

THE BIG ISSUE STREET FOOTBALL FESTIVAL

Mr ALEX GREENWICH (Sydney) [4.52 p.m.]: I acknowledge the annual The Big Issue Street Football Festival, which saw Sydney City Local Area Command police engaging with community members and other government agencies through the playing of soccer matches. Sydney City Local Area Commander Mark Walton and Crime Manager John Maricic made the festival possible by organising, as well as competing in, the round robin competition. This initiative is an example of positive policing to build relationships with people in the community who are disadvantaged or at risk, especially people who are homeless. Crime Manager John Maricic continues to work towards building and consolidating strong relationships with the community, especially with the large numbers of Chinese, greater Asian and homeless people in the Sydney city area. Police from the Sydney City Local Area Command regularly play soccer against the Sydney Community Street soccer team, as well as the Chinese Community soccer team which comprises homeless people from different backgrounds. I commend the Sydney City Local Area Command for its proactive engagement with the community.

TRIBUTE TO CORAL ANNE BORG

Mr JAI ROWELL (Wollondilly) [4.53 p.m.]: I recognise the life of Coral Anne Borg, who was born in 1946 and passed away last week. Coral is the late wife of Councillor Fred Borg of Campbelltown City Council. She first met Fred in 1985 and they were married in 1993. Coral was a dedicated mother and will be remembered as a lovely, honest and simple woman who was committed to the three Fs: her family, faith and Fred. Coral's funeral took place today at Our Lady Help of Christians Catholic Church, Rosemeadow, in my electorate of Wollondilly. Although I could not attend her funeral, my thoughts were with her and her family. I have known Coral since the age of 17 and have fond memories of her looking out for me in my first year of university. Throughout my time knowing Coral, I was her colleague, later her boss and, most importantly, her friend. I will always treasure our friendship. I pass on my condolences to Fred and her family. Coral will be sadly missed. She truly was one of our local saints. God bless Coral.

PLUMPTON HIGH SCHOOL PRESENTATION DAY

Mr RICHARD AMERY (Mount Druitt) [4.54 p.m.]: Presentation Day for Plumpton High School was held on 4 December last year. I was pleased to be invited to take part in the presentation of awards to many students who had achieved much over the previous year. In addition to the students being recognised, I was pleased that the school, with relieving Principal Peter Ezzy officiating, recognised the following staff for 10 years of service: Natasha Atai, Marjay Bagus, Karen Burden, Jasmine Narayan, Karlene Rex, Tony Sadsad, Cheryl Simmons, Larry Southall, Hayley Tanti and Jillian Tomlinson. I congratulate those staff members. Their collective service to Plumpton High School amounts to more than 100 years.

REVEREND DR SARAH MACNEIL, BISHOP OF GRAFTON ANGLICAN DIOCESE

Mr CHRISTOPHER GULAPTIS (Clarence) [4.55 p.m.]: I offer my congratulations to the Right Reverend Dr Sarah Macneil on her consecration and installation as the eleventh bishop of Grafton, thus becoming the first female bishop to take charge of a diocese in the Anglican Church of Australia. More than 500 people attended the cathedral in Grafton to witness the historic occasion. Dr Macneil worked as a diplomat in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade before being ordained as a deacon in 1993 and a priest in 1994. I wish Bishop Sarah Macneil every success as she ministers to the diocese of Grafton.

SYDNEY MARKETS LIMITED

Mr JOHN SIDOTI (Drummoyne) [4.56 p.m.]: I inform the House that on 17 February 2014, Sydney Markets Limited received an award in the category of Best Renewable Resources: Recycling at the World

Corporate Social Responsibility Congress held in Mumbai, India. It is wonderful news that Sydney Markets Limited was selected as the category winner from more than 2,500 international submissions. This world award recognises Sydney Markets Limited for innovation and commitment to sustainable business practices by reducing our environmental footprint through waste management, recycling, water and energy savings. The award is the latest in a series of accolades to this company for its sustainability and environmental initiatives. It is a fitting precursor to the official opening of its new solar panel carport structure, which is due to open in early April. I congratulate Bradley Latham and all of the staff at Sydney Markets Limited.

MARIE CLEMENTS, MEDAL OF THE ORDER OF AUSTRALIA

Mr MARK SPEAKMAN (Cronulla—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.57 p.m.]: I congratulate Marie Clements of Caringbah on being awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia in the Australia Day Honours List. She was recognised for her service to the community, particularly through a range of health and disability support organisations. Mrs Clements, aged 85, has volunteered at Sutherland Hospital's healthy food stall for 17 years. Most of her work has focused on young disabled people, which was inspired by her daughter who died 2½ years ago. Mrs Clements was a founding member of the Parent to Parent Association, which undertakes activities such as taking adults with disabilities on holidays. She has taught tennis to people with disabilities, with a couple of the players having competed in the Special Olympics. She has volunteered with the Margaret House Respite Care Services and Sylvanvale Foundation. I congratulate Marie Clements.

MAITLAND LIONS CLUB YOUTH OF THE YEAR FINALISTS ZAC BAYLIS AND THOMAS ETHERIDGE

Ms ROBYN PARKER (Maitland—Minister for the Environment, and Minister for Heritage) [4.58 p.m.]: I congratulate Zac Baylis and Thomas Etheridge on being joint winners of the Lions Club of Maitland 2013-14 Quest zone final. Zac is a year 11 student at Maitland Grossmann High School. Thomas is captain of Maitland High School and a member of the Hinton-Bowthorne Brigade of the Rural Fire Service. I thank the Lions Club of Maitland for providing the six finalists in the zone final this year and for giving them the opportunity to develop qualities such as leadership, good citizenship and skills in public speaking. I wish Zac and Thomas all the best when they contest the regional finals of the Lions Youth of the Year Quest. I have been involved with Lions Youth of the Year for some time and the Lions Club of Maitland does an extraordinary job. I note that Bob Gee, father of the member for Orange, was President of the Lions Club of Maitland last year.

SPRING HILL UNITING CHURCH SESQUICENTENARY

Mr ANDREW GEE (Orange) [4.59 p.m.]: I thank the Minister for the Environment for that mention. I draw the attention of the House to the Spring Hill Uniting Church, which recently celebrated its sesquicentenary—150 years. Last Sunday I was lucky enough to attend a church service and luncheon at Spring Hill to celebrate the milestone. The service was led by Reverend Noreen Towers, ably assisted by Reverend John Scott. The soloist for the day was Neville Smith, who was in great voice. Mrs Betty Reed gave the Bible reading. I commend the efforts of the organising committee, which included Kerrie Nicholls, Alex Rezko, Elsie Lambert, Betty Oborn and Kathryn Ainsworth. The event, which drew people from near and far, included Hazel Caldwell who grew up in Spring Hill. She travelled all the way from Broken Hill with her daughter and son-in-law especially for the celebration. They sat in the pew behind me. Mrs Caldwell fondly remembered travelling from Huntley to Spring Hill as a young girl to help her mother clean the church. Upon seeing that the communion tablecloth is embroidered with "October 1919", Mrs Heni Bobeldyk acknowledged that she was born in 1918. Congratulations to the Spring Hill Uniting Church. It is a church built to last.

KIAMA ELECTORATE CITIZEN OF THE YEAR AWARDS

Mr GARETH WARD (Kiama) [5.00 p.m.]: On Thursday 16 January 2014 I was pleased to join Mayor Brian Petschler at Kiama Municipal Council's Australia Day Awards Ceremony at the Kiama Pavilion. I congratulate Warren Turner of Minnamurra, who was named Kiama's Citizen of the Year, on his role working non-stop as a volunteer with the local State Emergency Service assisting residents affected by a mini tornado. The self-employed software writer put his own business on hold for a significant period to assist those who had lost their properties or had them seriously damaged. I also congratulate recognised surfer and Gerroa-born Sally Fitzgibbons, who was named Kiama's Young Citizen of the Year for her commitment to public campaigns. Sally is an Ambassador for the NSW Police Force's Play Safe, Stay Safe anti binge drinking campaign, the Run Wollongong children's ward charity and Kiama Tourism.

ALBURY ELECTORATE CITIZEN OF THE YEAR AWARDS

Mr GREG APLIN (Albury) [5.01 p.m.]: I extend my congratulations to Tonia Timmermans on being named Albury City Citizen of the Year for her tireless fundraising efforts and community service involvement with the Carer Accommodation Centre, which is now known as Hilltop; the Regional Art Gallery; the Murray Conservatorium and so many other groups. Alf Armstrong was recognised as Albury City Volunteer of the Year for his sustained fundraising efforts over the past 10 years for the Carers Accommodation Centre and many Rotary projects. The Young Citizen of the Year is Breanne Shaw, who is an ambassador for children diagnosed with cancer and is a significant fundraiser for cancer causes. Breanne was diagnosed with bone cancer at 14 and is now in remission. Congratulations also go to David Longley, the Howlong Citizen of the Year, for his long list of achievements on behalf of many sporting and community groups in town. He is truly a town champion.

The Howlong and District Young Citizen of the Year is Rorey McNamara, a year 6 student at Howlong Public School, who is a junior member of the Howlong Fire Brigade and a keen school and football club umpire. I also extend congratulations to Peter Wright, the Corowa and District Citizen of the Year, for his 34-year involvement with the Corowa Rescue Squad and for his passion for helping people. I also recognise Jan Doyle as the Mulwala Citizen of the Year for her extensive community volunteering and for being such an integral part of the Mulwala community.

WESTERN SYDNEY ACADEMY OF SPORT AWARDS PRESENTATION

Mr ANDREW ROHAN (Smithfield) [5.02 p.m.]: On 23 November 2013 I was honoured to attend the Western Sydney Academy of Sport's ninth Annual Athlete Dinner and Awards Night at the Panthers Club in Penrith. It was a night that recognised and awarded the achievements of the academy's best male and female athletes. As well as giving awards for Athlete of the Year for each of its programs, the academy announced the recipients of the prestigious Woolworths Athlete Scholarships. I congratulate all award recipients on their wonderful talent and passion for their sport. It is truly a gift to see young people promoting a healthy lifestyle through sport. I thank academy Chief Executive Officer Martin Bullock for inviting me to this charming event. I especially thank the Hon. Gabrielle Upton for attending and assisting with the presentation of awards. It was a spectacular night to celebrate the achievements and talents of young aspiring sportspeople in Western Sydney.

ANN DOUGHAN, COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD

Mr BART BASSETT (Londonderry) [5.03 p.m.]: It was my pleasure recently to present Ann Doughan from Grose Vale with a New South Wales Government Community Service Award for her tireless work for people suffering from cancer and their carers. Ann is Hawkesbury Cancer Support Group convenor, Hawkesbury Cancer Support Network chair, since 2011 a Hawkesbury Relay For Life committee member in charge of survivors and carers, Penrith Hub, a Cancer Council NSW palliative care volunteer and managing director/owner of Patio Land. Since the death of her husband, Peter, in 2005 from mesothelioma, Ann has rallied around cancer causes. She founded the Hawkesbury Cancer Support Group in 2011 with a group of other local cancer advocates. The group provides services as a fellow-traveller and carer, transporting members to treatment, talking through personal concerns as carers and advocating for better funding for palliative care in New South Wales. Ann's nomination emphasises the invaluable role of carers in the community. She is a brave woman and she deserves our congratulations.

MICHELLE BYRNE, MINISTER'S AWARD FOR WOMEN IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT (Baulkham Hills) [5.04 p.m.]: I congratulate the Mayor of The Hills Shire, Dr Michelle Byrne, on winning the Metropolitan Council category of the Minister's Award for Women in Local Government yesterday. Michelle, who is a good friend of mine and my community, is the youngest mayor to serve on The Hills Shire Council and only the third female to hold that office in more than 100 years. It is always pleasing to see strong female role models from many different fields. I encourage young women and men in my electorate to be inspired by Michelle's achievements. I believe it is important to promote and develop women.

LANDCARE

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA (Davidson) [5.05 p.m.]: Originating in Victoria in 1985, Landcare groups subsequently formed around Australia, including in New South Wales, and in more than 20 countries around the world. Landcare has a grassroots community model and is non-partisan in nature. It encourages integrated

management of environmental assets and a more sustainable approach to private land management. A wide range of volunteers are united by a shared desire to together create positive change in their communities, with their impact benefiting us all. At a local level, the Garigal Landcare Group has worked on private, Crown and other public land, including land adjacent to the Belrose tip, where a 10 hectare site should be formally announced later this year as being added to the Garigal National Park. I acknowledge the contributions made by those passionate individuals who make up the Landcare movement, particularly the Garigal Landcare Group.

In mid-January I was pleased to attend a local Landcare event at Oxford Falls. The ongoing commitment of this group over more than 10 years, ably led by President Conny Harris, is gratefully acknowledged. We are fortunate to have much natural beauty at Oxford Falls and the surrounding area, and it is important to maintain stewardship of this for future generations. On behalf of my community I express deep appreciation for what these volunteers do in our natural environment through Landcare.

FAIRFIELD VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR PETER MOORE

Mr NICK LALICH (Cabramatta) [5.06 p.m.]: I congratulate and recognise Canley Vale resident, Peter Moore, who was named Volunteer of the Year at the recent Fairfield City Council's Australia Day Awards. Peter has been involved in the Fairfield Liverpool Cricket Association for many years. He has been the association's volunteer secretary, president, senior records officer and treasurer. He is also very busy volunteering with the Fairfield Liverpool Lions Cricket Club junior cricket program. Also taking up a lot of his time is coaching the under 15s Weblin Shield Team. Volunteers like Peter are the backbone of our communities. Their work and dedication make our neighbourhoods friendlier, happier and healthier places to live. I thank Peter and every other volunteer in New South Wales for their contributions to our communities.

Community recognition statements concluded.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

LIVERPOOL ELECTORATE ROADS

Mr PAUL LYNCH (Liverpool) [5.07 p.m.]: I draw to the attention of the House the concerns of my constituent Milenka Latincic. Ms Latincic is a resident of a comparatively new area within my electorate called Middleton Grange. She is concerned about her area, the lack of action by Liverpool council and in particular the state of Flynn Avenue in Middleton Grange. She has written to me about her concerns. In part, she said:

Part of the road, between Broadbent Avenue and Ulm Street would have to be the worst road in Sydney. The road is riddled with potholes, uneven surfaces, parts of the road are too narrow and there is even a hump whereby a low car could very easily be caught. I have contacted Liverpool council and after about 3 weeks they patched up the potholes and nothing more. The road is still dangerous and unpleasant to drive on due to the aforementioned factors.

I spoke to Ms Latincic last Monday. She told me how dangerous it was driving on the road that very morning as she made her way to work in the Liverpool central business district. Deep potholes were filled with water, the road was only one car's width and she had to stop as vehicles passed her in the opposite direction. She also told me of her daughter's difficulties. She stated:

About 6 weeks ago my 19-year-old daughter lost partial control of her car, she was driving towards Cowpasture Road, there was a car coming from the opposite direction and she had to swerve slightly to the left to make way for the oncoming car. At the point where the road is at its narrowest she lost control because the side of the road is not tar but rubble and dirt. Her car is 2 years old and has done only 30,000 kims. We have been advised by our mechanic that all 4 tyres need replacing. Also whenever possible and safe my family and I drive on the opposite side of the road to avoid the hump that is present on the right side of the road when coming from Cowpasture Road. Also when it rains part of the road is extremely flooded thereby making it impossible to drive through the puddle but instead have to bypass it by driving on the opposite side of the road. Being residents who pay council rates I expect me and my family to be safe at all times and not have to fear each time we use that road; also being local residents we know the road and take precautions but to the unsuspecting driver it is a fatal accident waiting to happen.

This situation really is quite concerning. Liverpool council in my view should be doing better. The lack of regard for the road seems to be symptomatic of council disregarding Middleton Grange. Ms Latincic also states:

Flynn Avenue is the main entrance into Middleton Grange from Cowpasture Road. I would therefore expect it to be kept immaculate and worthy of a main street but it couldn't be further from that.

We sold our house in Fairfield Heights to move to Middleton Grange believing that it would be a beautiful new suburb with new homes and immaculate kept streets. We were bitterly disappointed as there is nothing beautiful about Middleton Grange in the

state it is in now. The area is unkept and neglected compared to Cecil Hills and Elizabeth Hills, especially as you come into Flynn Avenue from Cowpasture Road due to overgrown grass on council land (footpath). The road surface of Flynn Avenue is horrific and dangerous and the stream on Flynn Avenue is polluted with construction material. Even the street name is confusing and misleading, when looking from Cowpasture Road it shows Qantas Boulevard when in fact it is Flynn Avenue. I live in Bryant Avenue. Council originally erected an incorrect street sign showing Bryant Avenue. That sign was there for many months until council removed it to make way for a correct street sign. After many months we are still waiting for a street sign.

Ms Latincic also noted the disparity in the way that different suburbs are treated. She said:

My thoughts and thoughts of other residents is that focus and resources are being driven into the two suburbs mentioned above, Cecil Hills and Elizabeth Hills. These two suburbs are immaculate in every sense, it is a pleasure to visit and walk in these two suburbs especially around the lakes, unlike Middleton Grange lake which is overgrown with grass etc. All new suburbs within New South Wales are well thought out and well kept, unlike ours whereby we don't even have a proper road let alone immaculate gardens and cleanliness. I am extremely disheartened and embarrassed when visitors come from local and afar. All I can say is shame, shame, shame Liverpool council.

I have had the opportunity to inspect the areas referred to by Ms Latincic. Unfortunately, her description of the road surface is all too accurate. I ask that Liverpool council direct some attention to this issue to allay the concerns of my constituent. Ms Latincic wants a fair go for herself and for the many other residents in her area. I find it hard to understand council's neglect of this area when it recently resolved to spend \$7 million to build one road in the Warwick Farm horse precinct, which will damage Rosedale Oval on which first grade cricket matches are played and large amounts of money have been spent. Perhaps the council should fix existing roads before it starts building a new road at a cost of \$7 million.

PREMIER'S AWARD FOR WOMAN OF THE YEAR FINALIST TURIA PITT

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK (South Coast—The Speaker) [5.12 p.m.]: Today I recognise and sincerely congratulate Turia Pitt, who is a truly inspirational young woman in my electorate of South Coast, on being named as one of the four finalists in the Premier's Award for Woman of the Year in the 2014 NSW Women of the Year Awards. The NSW Women of the Year Awards recognise the achievements of wonderful women across our State who make a real difference in their local community. This year the judging panel assessed a record number of nominations of women who have made, and who continue to make, a significant contribution across the State. Turia Pitt is one such young woman.

Turia is an inspirational burns survivor and motivational speaker, who began her career as one of Australia's few female mining engineers. Interestingly, when she attended her first undergraduate lecture a fellow student told Turia that she was "in the wrong class"—the assumption being that women do not study mining engineering. Challenging assumptions and prevailing against the odds was to become a theme in Turia's life. Not only did she carve out a successful engineering career in the traditionally male-dominated mining industry, but she survived and refused to be limited by injuries she sustained in the catastrophic Kimberley fires of 2011 that almost took her life.

Turia graduated from the University of New South Wales with a double degree, with honours, in Mining Engineering and Science. She earned a scholarship with Rio Tinto and in January 2011 secured her dream job at the prestigious Argyle Diamond Mine. Turia soon managed challenging multimillion-dollar engineering projects and became involved in an impressive range of philanthropic and community programs. She volunteered with the St John Ambulance team and Argyle Diamond Mine emergency response team; taught English to students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; cycled in Cambodia for ChildFund, raising funds to build two schools; and worked on a housing project in Mongolia with Habitat for Humanity.

In 2011, tragically, Turia was one of four marathon runners trapped in a remote gorge in the Kimberley region when bushfires swept through the area. She suffered deep burns to more than 60 per cent of her body. Fighting back from a two-month coma and recovering from more than 100 operations, including the removal of the fingers and thumb on her right hand and dozens of skin grafts, Turia has "accepted and moved on". She has relearned basic life skills, including eating and walking. She has reclaimed her independence and declared that the fire that turned her life upside down will not define her future, which includes community engagement on issues she is passionate about. Turia is now completing a Master of Mining Engineering.

Promoting organ and tissue donation and supporting people with burn injuries is important to Turia. While continuing various treatment programs to help her recovery, this year Turia will participate in the Variety Cycle from Sydney to Uluru. She will also walk a section of the Great Wall of China to raise money for Interplast—a non-profit organisation that provides free reconstructive surgery for people in developing countries. Demonstrating the strength of character and courage for which she has become renowned, Turia's

program for 2014 includes returning to the Kimberley region to compete in the 20 kilometre Lake Argyle Swim. Her resilience inspires all who meet her. She has also become a popular guest speaker. With the release of her book, entitled *Everything to Live For: The Inspirational Story of Turia Pitt*, she shares her story of survival and achievement through adversity with businesses leaders, community groups and schools.

The response she receives from audiences—and I have been in those audiences—and the comments on her website are testament to the fact that Turia's message of perseverance resonates with women worldwide. Turia motivates others to make a positive change in their lives. Her "Never, never, never give up" motto is a strong and powerful message. That motto not only looks great on Turia's now signature running shirt but also is an anthem for women everywhere who are striving to close the gender gap. I knew Turia as a student when I taught at Ulladulla High School and I am sincerely proud of all that she has achieved. She is an outstanding South Coast local who is admired and loved. Turia is a beautiful young woman.

Tomorrow the winners of the 2014 Women of the Year Awards, which include the A. H. Beard's Community Hero and Harvey Norman's Young Woman of the Year categories, will be announced by the Premier at a special reception. She is one of four finalists and I wish her the best of luck. But even if Turia does not win, she is still a winner to the people of the South Coast and to those across this country who are aware of her achievements. If anyone wants to read the story of a truly inspiration young woman they should purchase a copy of *Everything to Live For: The Inspirational Story of Turia Pitt*.

GRENFELL KART CLUB

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck—Minister for Primary Industries, and Minister for Small Business) [5.17 p.m.]: Today I congratulate the Grenfell Kart Club on its success in winning the right to host the 2014 New South Wales State Open Sprint Kart Championships. The championships will be held in Grenfell from Thursday 2 October to Sunday 6 October—the October long weekend—at the Bogolong Raceway, which is located at the intersection of the Mid Western Highway and Henry Lawson Way. The Grenfell Kart Club is the smallest club associated with Karting New South Wales, the governing body for go-karting in New South Wales. This will be a unique opportunity for Grenfell. In past years the championships have been held mainly in coastal areas. Only the much larger regional centres of Tamworth and Wagga Wagga have hosted events to the west of the Great Dividing Range since the 1990s.

The Grenfell Kart Club is extremely active. In April 2012 I was pleased to be able to help it obtain a grant of \$25,000 from the Community Building Partnership program to construct a new clubroom, race secretary office and storeroom. The New South Wales State Open Sprint Kart Championships is a national event in which participants from across Australia compete. In last year's event, which was held at Marrangaroo near Lithgow, 36 per cent of all competitors came from interstate. The event attracts the elite of the sport of go-karting and, based on previous attendances, Grenfell can expect to host about 430 competitors and officials and more than 2,000 other visitors. Indeed, the population of Grenfell of less than 2,000 is expected to double this coming October long weekend.

This massive event will bring significant benefits to a region that does not have the economic advantages available to other areas situated closer to the coast, and the local community has thrown its strong support behind it. Several community meetings have been held and the club has received all kinds of offers of support, including home billeting, food catering, volunteer staff for events, working bee participants and offers to hold other local events as additional attractions. Strong backing has also been received from the mayor and local council, numerous local business owners, the golf and bowls clubs, and community service clubs such as Rotary and Lions.

It is not widely recognised that go-karting is the nursery for most other motorsports in Australia and internationally. More than 95 per cent of all Australian V8 Supercar drivers started their careers racing go-karts and the percentage is even higher for Bathurst and Formula One drivers. Some of the young drivers competing at the elite level at Grenfell this year will be Bathurst and Formula One winners in years to come. To participate in go-karting at this level requires more than being a skilled driver. Many of the competitors are affiliated with teams and coaches to get the support and expert knowledge needed to compete at this elite level. This builds on the experience of competitors, coaches and officials, further strengthening future opportunities in the wider motorsports community.

However, a small club requires significant assistance to run such a large event, by way of both officials and funding. Earlier this year Grenfell Kart Club applied to Sport and Recreation for a funding grant under its

Participation and Facility Program to help provide additional amenities to support the influx of people coming to the championships. In the four-day period available for this event a massive amount of work must be done: competitors must be registered, pits allocated, tyres chosen and scrutineering undertaken. The demand from competitors is such that all the races are significantly oversubscribed, which means that participants will have to compete in several lead-up heats to ensure that only the most worthy are able to compete in the finals.

The second and third days of the event will be dedicated to race practice, qualifying laps and racing heats, with the finals and trophy presentations taking place on day four. It will require a large number of officials from New South Wales and interstate to run a race meeting of this calibre and complexity. Indeed, more than 30 officials will be required, including clerks of the course; stewards; marshals for the pits, tyres, grid, flag and starter areas; scrutineers; and race timers. The Office of Communities, Sport and Recreation operates an events program to support events conducted in regional and rural areas. Earlier this year I identified to the club that this would be an appropriate program to assist with the operation of the event and the club has recently submitted an application.

I commend the club's application to the independent assessment panel and urge the panel to give favourable consideration to what will be an exciting event that provides a focal point for community building and engagement. I highlight to the House the fantastic work of the Grenfell Kart Club committee, ably and capably led by club president Craig Sargent from Young. I have had considerable contact with Craig on numerous occasions and have always been most impressed by the energy and enthusiasm he brings to his representations on behalf of various businesses and community groups, in particular, Grenfell Kart Club. I congratulate the Grenfell community on its fantastic community spirit, which I am sure will result in a most outstanding New South Wales State Open Sprint Kart Championships this October long weekend.

MENAI ELECTORATE MULTICULTURALISM FORUM

Ms MELANIE GIBBONS (Menai) [5.22 p.m.]: Today I share with the House a recent visit to my electorate from the Minister for Citizenship and Communities, and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Hon. Victor Dominello. As many of my colleagues would be aware, the western side of my electorate is a cultural melting pot of new migrants and people who long ago decided to call Australia home. As a result, there are many diverse multicultural communities existing within one local government area and I am invited to attend events and celebrations regularly from people from all corners of the globe. I can only imagine the huge changes and challenges that are involved in moving to another country, particularly where one might not know the language.

For many it means leaving behind family, friends and a society one may have known from birth and re-establishing in a foreign country, without too many connections to assist. Thankfully, there are community organisations such as Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre, a thriving hub that offers support and advocacy to various migrant groups in and around the Liverpool local government area. At the helm of Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre is Kammalle Dabbousey, who manages to coordinate all these diverse groups and help foster a productive and effective multicultural community. Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre was the perfect place to take Minister Dominello, particularly considering his portfolio responsibilities and interests.

In a very short time, thanks to the assistance of Liverpool Deputy Mayor Mazhar Hadid, we were able to organise a multicultural forum for close to 20 different cultural groups and give them the chance to raise with the Minister issues facing their communities. We were lucky to have representatives from the Mandaean-Australian Community Cultural Club, the Sabeian Mandaean Association, the Moroccan Association of New South Wales, the Melkite Association, the Islamic Association of Ali, the Samoan community in Liverpool, the Greek Orthodox community, Friends of Fiji, Nzuko Umunna, the Nigerian community, Bantaal Pular, the Fullah community in Sierra Leone, the Afghan community, the Iranian community, the Ethiopian community, the Kurdish Association, the Sudanese community, the South American community and the Assyrian Australian Association. In addition, two youth representatives, who were recent migrants to the Liverpool area, spoke about the challenges they face as young people coming to a new country. Each group had the chance to raise a few key issues with the Minister and similarities came to light.

One of the key issues raised was the importance of looking out for ageing members of these communities. Some have been here for decades, others for not so long, but as they no longer work they become increasingly isolated. Many groups were keen to establish mentoring programs between the young and old to help the younger generations carry on the language and cultural traditions and, at the same time, help older members of the community stay connected to society and other community links. The shared fear was that

members of the younger generation, largely brought up in Australia, were losing their cultural identities that had made their parents and grandparents so proud. As a result, the gap between young and old appeared to be widening and advice was sought on what could be done to help bridge that gap.

Another issue raised at the forum was the difficulty in having professional skills and experience recognised in Australia. Many people spoke of their eagerness to contribute to the Australian workforce and to bring their education and skills from their home country, but they faced hurdles in having those skills recognised once they arrived in Australia. Other issues were the language barriers and the need for greater English language skills support, in schools and beyond, to ensure that new migrants are given the best chance to join the workforce and communicate with their peers. At the conclusion of the forum, the Minister briefly addressed the main concerns raised and promised to prepare more detailed responses for the groups attending. He encouraged the groups to continue meeting as a whole to discuss ways for all groups to receive assistance or find ways to share resources such as community spaces instead of seeking space for one group alone.

The Minister said that by combining their resources and strengths they would be able to achieve much more for the local community and help to promote the beauty of a multicultural society. All in all, the visit was a great success and the Minister was well received by the community members, who enjoyed the rare chance to speak directly to the Minister. It was a great opportunity. I thank Kammalle and the Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre for hosting this visit and for putting the Minister and me in touch with so many different groups in the one place. I look forward to attending the next forum to see where we can go from here. On another note, I pass on my thanks and best wishes to my electorate officer, Natalie Peterson, who is leaving tomorrow to go on maternity leave. I wish her all the best for her family's future.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Gareth Ward): Order! I join the member for Menai in wishing Natalie Peterson all the very best for her maternity leave and what I am sure will be a fantastic journey for her and her new baby.

ST JOHN THE BAPTIST SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

Ms NOREEN HAY (Wollongong) [5.27 p.m.]: I inform my colleagues of my recent attendance at the St John the Baptist Serbian Orthodox Church fundraiser, which was held at the Bella Portafino Function Centre. The church is located in Kenny Street in my electorate of Wollongong and has a rapidly growing congregation. The church, under the guidance of Reverend Branko Bosancic, offers services every Sunday and on feast days. It also operates a community outreach program and youth group. The Serbian Orthodox parish in Wollongong was first established in 1967. The construction of the church was completed in 1973, which would have made last year its fortieth anniversary, and the church was officially dedicated in 1976. The church's Sunday school dates back to 1968.

In more recent times Reverend Bosancic has made the building available to local community groups and hosts activities such as aged day care, language and dancing lessons, and support meetings. The Serbian Orthodox Church is certainly developing a reputation for being not only Serbian or a religious haven but also a community partner in times of need. The purpose of the fundraiser was to help raise money for much-needed repairs to the church, including replacement of roof tiles, gutters, ceilings, old electrical installation and special church lights, floor tiles, doors and painting. Due to the dedication and outstanding organisational skills of the church committee, the event was a great success. I make special mention of Judith Matic, who is a tireless worker for the church and the Serbian community and a lovely person to boot. Entertainment was provided by the talented and famous Sydney Marsala Serbian Band, which had the crowd on its feet and dancing the night away.

The event was well attended, with everyone offering support to the church. This included my dear friends Vesna Stajic and Milovan Kolar. The church aims to raise \$150,000 to address maintenance issues and I have every confidence it will achieve this goal. I have always been a strong supporter of the Serbian community and have always been welcomed with open arms. I look forward to continuing this strong relationship into the future and to attending many more auspicious events at the St John the Baptist Serbian Orthodox Church. I congratulate the Serbian community and church committee on its magnificent job in organising such a great night. As I have said many times in this House, my electorate comprises many multicultural communities, all of which have strong ties with their traditions and an appreciation of their cultural differences. These are all shared within the electorate of Wollongong and for that we are all eternally grateful.

Not everybody is lucky enough to experience firsthand the warmth and generosity of spirit of the various multicultural communities in my electorate. It is absolutely second to none. That was my experience at

the Serbian Orthodox community function in my electorate just recently. I acknowledge that the Lord Mayor of Wollongong and the Federal member for Throsby, Stephen Jones, were also in attendance. To experience the kind of warmth I am talking about you really have to be at one of these functions where the community comes together. These functions give us but a small sample of the services these organisations deliver out there in the community. I am very proud to be associated with the Serbian Orthodox church group. As I said, Judith Matic is a tireless worker and a great champion for her community. In closing, I place on record my best wishes to Mr Joe Andrade, Personal Assistant to the Speaker, and the member for Burrinjuck, Katrina Hodgkinson, for their birthdays on Monday.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Gareth Ward): Order! I join the member for Wollongong in acknowledging the outstanding contribution of the Illawarra Serbian community, particularly those in the Wollongong electorate, to the region.

COFFS HARBOUR SHOWGROUND

Mr ANDREW FRASER (Coffs Harbour—The Assistant-Speaker) [5.32 p.m.]: This evening I raise, as I did last week, the issue of the Coffs Harbour Showground. I forgot to mention some very important information, which is most unlike me, which I believe needs to go on the record in this House. The Department of Lands and North Coast Holiday Parks particularly need to listen to this. I agreed that the area currently occupied by the caravan park attached to the showground could be handed over to be managed by North Coast Holiday Parks. The department gazetted an area, and I had no problem with the gazetted area. But since then, the area gazetted in the *Government Gazette* has been fenced. When I say "fenced", I am talking about the kind of security fence that we see at schools these days. It is seven-foot tall and basically impenetrable to anyone who tries to climb it. That is the type of fence that has been put up—and it does not have a gate in it.

Anyone with a modicum of common sense involved in running the caravan park concerned, the Harbour City Caravan Park, would understand that any traffic headed northbound normally accesses the caravan park by turning right into the showground and coming through the back gate of the caravan park. The erection of this fence without a gate means that anyone travelling north will not utilise that caravan park. As a result, I suggest the park's income will decrease by at least 40 per cent if not 50 per cent, and the park especially will not be used by those who generally stay for one, two or three nights. When travellers leave the park after morning check-out, they need to be able to turn north. Now they cannot turn north from the main access of the caravan park; they have to travel some way south, go around the block and then head north again. Therefore, the caravan park located half a mile up the road or thereabouts will gain the business that the showground caravan park used to have. This is a very short-sighted decision.

Another issue that is a real problem is that the area fenced off has the only three-phase power on the showground site. This is the area that the show people and anyone else requiring three-phase power utilise during the show. It now will be impossible for that area to be accessed by users of the showground. I agreed that that area could be used by North Coast Caravan Parks but I never agreed that it could be fenced. It is absolutely pathetic. It needs to be remembered in this whole debacle—and that is what it is—that the caravan park was originally set up to provide income for the show society. As I raised last week in the House, the Department of Lands and North Coast Caravan Parks have backed away from the promise of this income to the showground.

I also have found out on inspecting the fence that it has not been erected around the area as gazetted. The then administrator, Pat Gibson, who has since resigned, agreed that the boundary could be shifted. In order to fix that problem, the Department of Lands has re-gazetted the area, without even running it by the Minister's office. That is absolutely pathetic. I want the fence pulled down. If it is not pulled down before the 100th show in May, I have suggested to the Department of Lands and staff at the Deputy Premier's office that I could remove it. I have a tractor and an angle grinder at home. I am deadset serious. The show society cannot operate a show or a major festival of any kind without that area and without access to three-phase power. This is not just a matter of providing the society with money to establish three-phase power in another area, it is a matter of returning that area as useable space for the showground.

As I said when I started my speech, the caravan park was set up in the first place to provide an income for the show society, and that is what should be happening. I do not want a quango taking it over, putting the money into its own coffers, and spending 57 per cent of it in administration fees, with the rest going back to State coffers. Mr Steven Rowe and Mr Steven Edwards are coming from Sydney to attend a meeting on 14 March. I will make sure that I am at that meeting, and I will send them a copy of this speech in *Hansard* prior

to that meeting. I hope that common sense prevails and the fence comes down so that the Coffs Harbour Show Society and other users of the Coffs Harbour Showground recreational reserve are able to use this magnificent facility into the future.

STATE BUSHFIRES

Mr JAI ROWELL (Wollondilly) [5.37 p.m.]: On 17 October last year my electorate of Wollondilly—along with many others across New South Wales, including the Southern Highlands, the Blue Mountains and the Great Lakes—was stricken with more than 100 separate bushfires. I have spoken on this matter in the Chamber before and I once again put on record my utter admiration and respect for the volunteers of the NSW Rural Fire Service. In the aftermath of the 17 October bushfires, my office received an overwhelming outpouring of gratitude for our local Rural Fire Service heroes from a community that had so narrowly avoided a catastrophic tragedy like the one we witnessed in the Blue Mountains. I ask that we all spare a thought for those in New South Wales who were not so fortunate.

In response to this community outpouring, my office, along with the Lions Club of Tahmoor, put into action a plan to assist our local Rural Fire Service brigades to purchase new and upgraded firefighting equipment. This plan came to fruition with an event called Brigade Aid, which we organised. Brigade Aid was held at Bargo Sportsground on 30 November 2013. The day began with a car, motorbike and truck show supported by carnival rides and demonstrations of emergency services vehicles throughout the day, and continued into the evening with two concerts filled with both local and internationally acclaimed talent. The motor show was organised by Cheree Derks and Damien Bishop. The range of machinery brought to Bargo Sportsground for the day was breathtaking. Anyone who loves muscle machinery was there and every cent of the entry fees was donated to the fundraising cause. Sponsors included Harry's Cafe de Wheels, Sy's Harley Davidson, JJ's Performance, Custom Chrome, Westend Performance, CHL Logistics and Stillwell Trucks.

Dale Burridge, one of the original stars of *The Phantom of the Opera* and proud Tahmoor resident, directed, produced and performed in the feature concert alongside his internationally acclaimed Danielle Everett, a fellow *The Phantom of the Opera* co-star and Oakdale local. With Dale's connections, we were blessed to welcome other star performers to Wollondilly, including Martin Crewes from The Man from Snowy River Arena Spectacular and Jessica Lingotti and Toni Bird, both leading Sydney vocalists. Young talent, including Sarah Prestwidge and Jordan Maher, performed alongside country music stars Christie Lamb, one of my favourite performers, Jonathon English and Jemma Beech. Other local performers included Merri Winter, Cameron Lawler and his band, the Yanderra Primary School Choir and the Rural Fire Service Pipe Band. Dale was instrumental in securing the help of David Thomas, owner of Crystal Productions, which is a renowned production company that provided more than \$20,000 worth of lighting and sound equipment for the event.

Entertainment throughout the day was provided by Applejax Line Dancing and the Bloc Bargo. These Wollondilly dancers were simply spectacular. Carnival rides were generously provided by Gary O'Neill of O'Neill Shows and kept kids of all ages, and even some of my staff, amused all day. Gary O'Neill was also able to provide the performers with the stage free of charge, which made their performances just that bit more outstanding. Various Lions Clubs from across Wollondilly and the Southern Highlands were on the front line providing food and beverages to thousands of individuals. Bargo Sports Club donated all drinks sales to Brigade Aid and Luke Richardson fattened us up on Dutch pancakes. Food supplies came from Nixons Produce, Country Valley, with an assortment of other providers. Captain Pat of C91.3FM graciously donated his time to be the master of ceremonies for the event. I appreciate him donating his valuable time to such an amazing day of fundraising. A big thank you goes to the Wests Tigers, in particular Paul Sironen, for arranging young guns Blake Austin and Tim Simona and National Rugby League 2013 try scorer of the year, David Nosoaluman, to attend at such short notice.

So many people and organisations opened their hearts and offered their services for the day. Community Links' Cherrie Willingham and Fiona King and helpers did the face painting until the supplies of eager children—and once again staff—ran out. Tracey Franke supplied her petting zoo and ESP Security generously donated two security guards to watch over the collected donations and the performers. Kennards Hire, Highlands Tyremaster, Action Hire Mittagong, Camden Hire and Tahmoor Signs donated required facilities. John Nixon Jr provided a weekend away as one of the raffle prizes. Mark Felsch of Wollondilly Shire Council was instrumental in ensuring the day was as well prepared as it could be. Special thanks go to both Wollondilly Shire Council and Wingecarribee Shire Council, with their respective mayors, Benn Banasik and Juliet Arkwright, for their efforts in supporting the day and securing their generous donations.

The larger sponsors of the day included Mittagong RSL, donating \$10,000; Campbelltown Catholic Club, donating \$5,000; Bradcorp, donating \$5,000; Glencore, donating \$8,000; C91.3FM, donating \$2,000; Wollondilly Council, donating \$2,500; Wingecarribee Shire Council, donating \$1,000 plus much of the day's equipment; and last but certainly not least Bargo Petroleum, donating \$1,000. Funds from the day have been tallied at more than \$70,000. I would like to pass on my heartfelt thanks to the community for supporting this event. I thank my staff who helped on the day: Brooke Hilton, who put so many hours of effort into the event, Jeff and Janet Gray, Lou Arnato, Cheree Derks, Tim Bishop, the Lions Club at Tahmoor, Michael Shaw, Maddie Gray, Scott Purcival, Kathryn Steinweiss, David Gavin, Ryan Arnold and my beautiful wife. They all gave up their time and our community turned up in the thousands.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Gareth Ward): Order! I commend the member for Wollondilly for his tireless advocacy on behalf of his local volunteers.

WILLIAM COX AND GEORGE EVANS COMMEMORATIVE PLAQUES

Mr BART BASSETT (Londonderry) [5.42 p.m.]: On Saturday 30 November I had the pleasure of attending the unveiling of new plaques to commemorate colonial road builders William Cox and George Evans. I was proud to see the results of a project for which I had advocated and achieved \$2,500 from the New South Wales Government on behalf of my electorate. It was great to see descendants of Cox and Evans, Hawkesbury councillors, including Jill Reardon and Mayor Kim Ford, and Hawkesbury Historical Society representatives at the unveiling, including John Miller, a local historian and passionate advocate of Lachlan Macquarie's legacy, as well as Neville Dehn, a descendant of William Cox. After years of service to the Hawkesbury community, the member for Hawkesbury and I can speak of events such as this. We have worked so hard in the Hawkesbury for so long that we know all the community groups and will continue to advocate on their behalf.

Held at Ham Common, Richmond, as part of the Blue Mountains Crossings Bicentenary 2013 to 2015, the plaques recognise the valuable contribution of Cox and Evans to the Hawkesbury and their efforts to survey and organise the construction of the road across the Blue Mountains. Their efforts after the first recognised European crossing of the Blue Mountains in May 1813 by Blaxland, Lawson and Wentworth led to the construction of a road from Emu Plains across the Blue Mountains to Bathurst, now known as the Great Western Highway. In 1813 Evans, a surveyor, artist and determined explorer, was responsible for finding a passage into the interior of New South Wales over the Blue Mountains. His navigational expedition laid the footprint over which Cox would then build the road.

Standing there in Ham Common opposite the Royal Australian Air Force [RAAF] Base Richmond, I was reminded of the efficiency and vision of a man I have long held in high regard, Governor Lachlan Macquarie. He was my sort of leader, a man who saw what needed to be done and did whatever it took to get it done. The building of a road across the previously impenetrable Blue Mountains and onto the fertile plains of what we now know as the Central West is just one example of that. Macquarie saw a need. The growing colony was at the point of starvation and new pasture lands were needed desperately to provide food for the people. He came up with a solution and issued a proclamation: he was sending 30 convicts, eight guards, bullocks and equipment to build a road across the Great Dividing Range. The team hacked through 163 kilometres of brutal, wild terrain to construct the road between July 1814 and January 1815. Just over six months later it was done.

There were no environmental impact statements, no community consultation, no archaeological digs, no calls for papers, no endless inquiries, no protests, and no Government Information (Public Access) Act requests; just action at the instigation of a strong leader. It was an incredible achievement for its day. Unbelievably, it would probably be impossible today despite our advanced technology and population. How can that be? Two hundred years after that outstanding road-building feat over the Blue Mountains, Macquarie's name is invoked by The Greens in the name of protecting his legacy. This ragtag contingent of miscreants, whose sole purpose is to disrupt any form of progress, selfishly deny their communities and families the benefits of advancement in the name of one of the most progressive forefathers of this nation.

Macquarie himself would expect those who followed him to continue his tradition of progress and betterment, not to stagnate in indecision. He knew that communities grow, evolve and flourish under strong decisive leadership and that economies prosper with modern infrastructure and services, programs and protocols. Macquarie also knew that those who achieve greatness do so by surrounding themselves with community-minded progressives—people such as Cox and Evans—who share their vision and pitch in to do whatever it takes to get the job done. To follow in the footsteps of Lachlan Macquarie and achieve greatness we

must do what he did and surround ourselves with those who embrace progress. He would have been appalled at The Greens' preference to retain the status quo and block any attempt to update crumbling and inadequate infrastructure.

A new \$28 million project at North Richmond proposes a bridge over the Grose River using a designated road corridor created for this purpose more than 130 years ago. Let us hope the professional activists see sense and do not delay this much-needed traffic relief at North Richmond, as they have done at Windsor. There is still a group of people camped out at Windsor Bridge, in a public place, in the name of protest. A group that has looked for every avenue since the Coalition came to government to derail a project that the three local members—Ray Williams, the member for Hawkesbury; Kevin Connolly, the member for Riverstone; and I—said we would commit to before the election, supported by the Government and the roads Minister. Yet after extensive investigation and studies the group still feels that it is representing the community when we know it represents a very small minority. Hear, hear to Lachlan Macquarie, the great developer.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Gareth Ward): Order! I thank the member from Londonderry for his private member's statement and acknowledge his strong representation of his local community over many years.

ROCKDALE MUSICAL SOCIETY

Mr JOHN FLOWERS (Rockdale) [5.47 p.m.]: I speak this evening about the Rockdale Musical Society. Musical theatre is a form of theatrical performance that combines spoken dialogue, acting and dance. The story and emotional content of a musical—humour, pathos, love, anger—are communicated through the words. Music, movement and technical aspects of the entertainment form an integrated whole. A large number of people are interested in performing on stage, but what encourages ordinary people to perform special roles? By day, performers can work in ordinary jobs but by night and on weekends they shine on the stage as amateur performers who devote every spare moment to living their dreams. Away from the bright lights of actual performances, however, the behind-the-scenes commitment required from many of those amateur thespians is enormous. Not only do they have to learn their lines, rehearse and perform but also they are often called upon to help build sets, make costumes, collect tickets and even sell choc tops during the interval.

Most performers will tell us that amateur theatre is as much a lifestyle as a hobby. The purpose of my introduction is to draw attention to my electorate of Rockdale. The Rockdale Musical Society is one of Australia's oldest musical societies, having been established in 1939 following a meeting by local residents of Rockdale hosted at the Rockdale Town Hall. Finances were limited prior to the establishment of the musical society. However, within a short period the high standard of performances such as *Sunny* in October 1939 became known and attendances increased substantially. The public immediately hailed the show and the musical society as a huge success and monetary worries were a thing of the past.

This overwhelming acceptance of the quality of performances was acknowledged by the local and surrounding communities. From humble and enthusiastic beginnings, Rockdale Musical Society has grown to become one of the most respected names in local amateur theatre. Two shows are presented at Rockdale Town Hall each year, one in March and one in September. Well-known examples include *Jekyll and Hyde*, *Cats*, *The Wedding Singer*, *Miss Saigon* and *Hairspray*. A forthcoming special performance is planned to be held at the recently reopened Rockdale Town Hall. It is the popular and much-loved *Sound of Music*, with a full cast of young performers to appear on stage as the von Trapp children.

The director, Cathy Boyle, said that she was thrilled with the incredible standard of the children appearing in this performance and remarked that the children "have already become like one big family—a family that likes to sing a lot". The cast can look forward to audience singalong participation, in keeping with the popularity of this musical. Performances for this special event will be held on Fridays and Saturdays from 20 February to 16 March. The Rockdale Musical Society, with David Wood as president, prides itself on ensuring that the theatre experience of all its patrons is exceptional and truly entertaining. For those who have an active interest in musicals and theatre, the Rockdale Musical Society is always on the lookout for performers, production teams, and backstage, front-of-house, costuming and properties experts. I wish the society all the best in its future productions.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Gareth Ward): Order! I thank the member for Rockdale for his private member's statement and for his continual advocacy of the arts in his electorate.

ILLAWARRA REGIONAL TRANSPORT PLAN

Ms ANNA WATSON (Shellharbour) [5.52 p.m.]: I take the opportunity to raise the fact that the Illawarra region still does not have an Illawarra regional transport plan after three years of this Government. The Government promised the Illawarra community and the many stakeholders that took part in consultations on the NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan that an Illawarra regional transport plan would be released at the end of last year. Throughout 2013 I submitted questions in writing to the Minister for Transport on the delivery of the plan, so it came as a surprise that as last year's last days and hours ticked over there was still no sign of the Illawarra regional transport master plan. It is very disappointing.

I have received many inquiries about this plan but still have heard nothing from the Government. In the dying days of last year, the Minister released five regional transport plans for New South Wales but no regional plan for the Illawarra, which, Mr Acting-Speaker Ward, should be of concern to you. I criticised the Government then for the delay in the release of the plan and I do so again today. The Minister told the *Illawarra Mercury* that the plan's release had been delayed because of a new project at West Dapto that needed to be included in it. That project is very important to the people of West Dapto. Once completed, it will link Fowlers Road to Fairwater Drive, creating an alternative road link to the major thoroughfare along Bong Bong Road. Mr Acting-Speaker, I know that you know this road very well and the problems that have occurred as a result of your Government not addressing this issue.

The former State and Federal Labor governments provided significant funding to Wollongong City Council to build a new road network across West Dapto to help alleviate congestion and provide flood-free access. The former State Labor Government gave the council \$26 million in an interest-free loan, and the former Federal Labor Government provided an additional \$15 million. Labor's record on roads in West Dapto is good. The Minister for Transport failed to mention that the road project is in the very early planning stages. The question we need to ask is: Precisely what will be included in the plan? It will be a simple dot point saying that the road will be built. The plan's release is being delayed so that the Minister's bureaucrats can put a dot point on a piece of paper. That is not good enough. In the meantime, we still have no regional transport plan for the Illawarra. We have been waiting 12 months for the release of the plan.

I believe that when the Illawarra regional transport plan is finally released, after delays that have never been explained, the Illawarra community will be very disappointed. Mr Acting-Speaker, I am sure that you will feel that disappointment. I think that this Government wants all of us in the Illawarra to forget that it promised to deliver an Illawarra regional transport plan. I call on the Minister to release the plan. Stop the unexplained delays and the feeble excuses. It is time for this Government to deliver what it promised for the Illawarra: a master plan for regional transport. We have been waiting for 12 months. Now is the time to deliver. I challenge the Government to deliver this plan as soon as possible. People in the Illawarra have been waiting long enough. Now is the time for the Minister to act. The Minister has not done what she promised. Now is the time for her to deliver.

OUR LADY OF MERCY COLLEGE PARRAMATTA

Dr GEOFF LEE (Parramatta) [5.56 p.m.]: In 1888 Sister Mary Clare Dunphy wrote, when asked to undertake the office of superior of a newly proposed Parramatta community, "Will go if sent." Nine pioneering Sisters of Mercy left their homeland of Callan, Ireland, for Parramatta, the end of the Earth, never to return. They took a boat called *Cuzco*, travelling with the Australian cricket team, which had just lost the Ashes series in England. The sisters came to Australia to establish a new school for the poor, especially for girls. That school, known as Our Lady of Mercy College Parramatta celebrates its 125th anniversary this year, having started with just seven girls in 1889.

The passion of the sisters who founded the college was twofold. They had a passion for nurturing the Catholic faith and for the works of mercy: to visit the sick and the imprisoned, and to give drink to the thirsty. They had a strong commitment to the education of young women. This year we give thanks that generations of teachers have kept alive the flame of their passion and that Our Lady of Mercy College has developed into an outstanding Catholic institution that continues to educate young women in the mercy tradition. The founder of the Sisters of Mercy, Catherine McAuley, knew the importance of educating women if poverty and ignorance were to be overcome. She instructed her followers:

... no work of charity can be more productive of good to society, or more conducive to the happiness of others, than the careful instruction of women ...

In recognising 125 years of Our Lady of Mercy College education, Sister Catherine Ryan, Congregation Leader of the Sisters of Mercy, Parramatta, said:

Over the past 125 years the College has fulfilled this role: there are thousands of ex students who have been "carefully instructed" and carried the fruits of a mercy education into society, into their professional and family lives. The students of today are afire with the causes of mercy and justice, such as the group of students who have just returned from building houses in Cambodia.

This year sees the commissioning of the college's ninth principal, Mr Stephen Walsh, who is committed to continuing the legacy of Catherine McAuley at Our Lady of Mercy College. Mr Walsh has acknowledged the outstanding leadership of the eight women before him. He is committed to continuing to build relationships in our community that are founded on mercy and compassion. Stephen Walsh continues the work of Principal Kitty Guerin, who oversaw a large building program and the development of the college master plan, and promoted a focus on the integration of technology and learning through the one-to-one notebook program.

Recent college highlights include attendance by the Prime Minister, Governor-General Bryce and Governor Bashir at one event in 2012. Excellence in education is a focus at Our Lady of Mercy College, as evidenced by the achievement of three students from 2013 of Australian tertiary admission ranks [ATARs] of above 99. Miss Mary Guirgis received the highest ranking of 99.75. Many events have been organised to celebrate the 125th anniversary. They include a women's forum celebrating International Women's Day on Saturday 8 March; two celebratory concerts at the Riverside Theatre on 5 and 6 June, organised by college music director Mr Paul Witney; and the Mercy Day mass in September, celebrated by Bishop Anthony Fisher.

As we give thanks for 125 years of mercy education I congratulate all those who make the college what it is today. I thank the college board, which is led by Ms Kerry Walshaw and entrusted with the governance of the college and the stewardship of the mercy heritage. I also thank the leadership team led by new principal Stephen Walsh, and the staff, student body, parents and alumni. It is the wish of the Sisters of Mercy that Our Lady of Mercy College Parramatta walks with faith into its future and continues to provide excellent education to young women. May it be proud of its long history, firm in its Catholic tradition and afire with passion for mercy and justice. I commend our Lady of Mercy College Parramatta and its creed, "Our name is mercy, our spirit is compassion."

CENTRAL COAST MEALS ON WHEELS

Mr CHRIS HOLSTEIN (Gosford) [6.00 p.m.]: Shortly prior to Christmas last year I had the honour and pleasure of attending the Central Coast Meals on Wheels facility in Woy Woy. The reason for my visit was to inspect improvements that had been made as a result of funding from the Community Building Partnership program. That program now of course benefits from recurrent funding under the O'Farrell-Stoner Government. Central Coast Meals on Wheels is a non-profit organisation providing home-delivered meals, community restaurants and food-based programs on the Central Coast. Services are provided to people who are frail aged and younger people with disabilities and their carers. Meals are delivered to their door by friendly local volunteers.

I have seen the menu from which people can pre-order and I can say it is both extensive and diverse. The menu is contained within a 14-page booklet and it is very impressive. I am not one to shy away from a good meal but, unfortunately, I am not eligible to order from it. The ladies have put forward an outstanding menu but valued even more highly than the food is the human contact that clients have with the volunteers when they deliver their meals. Sometimes the volunteer delivering the meal stops and has a chat. In some cases they may be the only person the lonely client has seen all day. The Meals on Wheels operation is managed by paid staff and overseen by a community-based volunteer board of directors. About 650 volunteers and 14 paid staff deliver about 2,000 meals every week.

Central Coast Meals on Wheels Chief Executive Officer Robyn Howes is well known to me through her work with Gosford City Council. Pocket rocket Colleen Sharpe looked after us at Woy Woy on the day of my visit. Gail Ransley of the volunteer board was in attendance. She was accompanied by Margaret Johnson, Pam Finch, Elaine Halliday, Mary Clarke and Faye Maitland who were all delightfully friendly and a credit to the organisation they represent. They are the unsung heroes who always wear a smile on their face and carry goodness in their heart as they move amongst our community. I record my admiration for the volunteering spirit that has prompted so many to volunteer at Meals on Wheels. Without them there would simply be no service. I congratulate and thank them for the fine work they do in our community.

CHARLESTOWN ELECTORATE COMMUNITY AWARDS

Mr ANDREW CORNWELL (Charlestown) [6.03 p.m.]: I bring to the attention of the House some notable citizens in my electorate. The first person is Bianca Judd, who was recently named Lake Macquarie Young Citizen of the Year for her extensive charity work. Bianca began by raising money for international projects and has now established her own charity, the Field of Dreams. Working in partnership, she has been able to send vital care packages overseas to deliver medical supplies, books, food, toys and clothing to the needy in the Philippines. On 19 October last year Bianca's attention turned to home and she started taking donations for the Springwood fire victims. A mere nine days later a convoy of three trucks delivered more than 32 tonnes of essentials to the Winmalee Rural Fire Service. Now Bianca is organising the Pinstripe and Pearl benefit ball, which will be held in the Hunter next month, to raise money to purchase a disaster relief mobile command centre. At just 30 years of age, Bianca is an inspiration. I commend her for her hard work.

The second person is Jack Antcliff, who was recently named Lake Macquarie Young Citizen of the Year in the under 18 category. Last December I had the pleasure of meeting Jack when he approached me regarding a dive-in theatre event at Charlestown pool. I was pleased to lend my support to that event which saw more than 200 people come together in a fun and safe environment. Despite his young age, Jack is a strong contributor to the local community and an integral member of the Lake Macquarie Youth Advisory Council. In this role he is a driving force behind involving young people in the decision-making process. Jack completed a short film that showcases the talents of local youth and was subsequently used as a promotional tool for the youth council. Jack is also a member of the Whitebridge High School Student Representative Council, has established an online newspaper called the *Kahibah Times* and is a volunteer lifesaver. Jack is a wonderful example for our community and I congratulate him.

The third person is Mrs Pamela Richardson, who has been announced as the Charlestown Local Woman of the Year. Pam has been the principal of Kahibah Public School since 1997 and in that time she has woven her magic through the lives of the student body, the teaching staff and the community. The year 2013 marked her fiftieth year in teaching. At more than 65 years of age she continues to teach simply because she loves it. Her nurturing approach has led to the entire school embracing Choice Theory, which is a philosophy based on equality, valuing others, listening, thoughtful conversation, gentle guidance and the power of strong, meaningful relationships. Pam also runs a Peaceful Parenting program and Choice Theory workshops in other schools. Pam is liaising with a local group to create a new school hall that will be purpose built to accommodate growth in the school as well as the growing needs of the community. She has a deep commitment to sport and has been an integral part of the Newcastle Hockey Association for more than 45 years. She is also a lifelong member of the Hunter School Sports Association. Pam is a deeply respected, widely liked and admired member of the Charlestown electorate. Her deep commitment to education has benefited generations of children and their families.

The final person I bring to the attention of the House is Donald Spence, who, sadly, passed away this week. Don was named Lake Macquarie Volunteer of the Year in January 2014 and I had the honour of presenting him with a New South Wales Community Service Award several weeks ago. They were just two small tributes to an amazing man who dedicated his life to the Windale community. Thirty-five years ago Don was involved at the grassroots level of the development of community requirements and social infrastructure for what was then a new public housing estate in Windale. He had just moved to the area but Don soon became a key local advocate as he pursued the community's need for police and fire services, a public swimming pool, a Police Citizens Youth Club [PCYC], health services and a preschool.

Not content with helping to establish the new fire station, he joined up as a retained firefighter. He retired in 2011 after 40 years of service during which he moved through the ranks to become captain. Meanwhile, Donald continued to play a leading role in the community as president of the Windale Community Group. He arranged meetings with residents, council, agencies and other groups to improve facilities. Don's work has touched countless lives. Though we now suffer his loss, the facilities and programs he helped create will be a lasting tribute to his work into the future.

A couple of weeks ago I had the great fortune of visiting Don and his wife. Don was in the end stages of cancer and had been unwell for some time but he was still immensely positive and upbeat. In conversation Don said his greatest disappointments were that he was not going to be able to continue the work he had done in the community and that his wonderful family life would be curtailed by that terrible disease. It was a very touching half hour that I spent with Don and I will never forget it. Don has left an enormous legacy not only in his suburb of Windale but also throughout the community of Charlestown. I commend him for his work and thank him for everything he has done.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Gareth Ward): Order! I thank the member for Charlestown for his statement and congratulate him on his recent election to Deputy Government Whip.

BRONTE RSL SITE REDEVELOPMENT

Mr BRUCE NOTLEY-SMITH (Coogee) [6.08 p.m.]: I will update the House on the proposal to redevelop the Bronte RSL site at Macpherson Street, Bronte. I have spoken twice before in this place about this ongoing saga because it is very important to residents in my electorate and particularly those in Bronte who will be most affected. To provide some history, the financially struggling Bronte RSL entered into an agreement with Winston Langley Burlington to redevelop the site. The developer's proposal for high-rise apartments and a large Harris Farm supermarket is a gross overdevelopment of the site. The local community rallied against the outrageous proposal, which would completely destroy the amenity and character of the existing Bronte neighbourhood. The community is fully backed by Waverley Council, which voted unanimously against the proposal. In July last year the Joint Regional Planning Panel also rejected the proposal on the grounds that its size and bulk was excessive and that it was ultimately not in the best interests of the local community. I agree with these sentiments wholeheartedly.

Whilst it is clear that the Bronte RSL site is in need of redevelopment, the proposal put forth by Winston Langley Burlington is far in excess of what the community and the council want or need. One would think those reasons would be enough to put to rest any further discussion on this proposal, given that local communities are best equipped to decide such matters for themselves. Recently, the Planning Assessment Commission [PAC], decided to permit yet another assessment of Winston Langley Burlington's proposal. After this decision, the local community feel as though they and their council have been completely ignored. They do not feel that the Planning Assessment Commission has taken into account unanimous local opinion that the proposal is completely unacceptable. The proposal will exceed current council guidelines by 7.5 metres on the front of the building and is double the height restriction in the middle of the building.

The presence of a supermarket would mean delivery trucks would cause serious traffic issues in a currently quiet residential area and create a dangerous situation for schoolchildren from Clovelly Public School, who will have to share the road with those trucks. The only encouraging aspect of the Planning Assessment Commission's determination is that it states that the proposal lacks any merit. This means that Winston Langley Burlington will need to submit an entirely new proposal. However, for long-suffering residents of Bronte that is not of much comfort because it still does not accept their clear rejection of the proposal. At the forefront of the local community campaign is Stephen Lightfoot, who founded the action group Save Bronte. Stephen has been an excellent voice for local residents throughout this process. I thank and commend him for the important work he is doing on behalf of the entire Bronte community.

Last October I led a delegation of representatives from the Save Bronte campaign and from Waverley Council to meet with the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure. I felt it was important that local residents were given the opportunity to voice their valid concerns directly to the Minister, especially given the way in which this particular redevelopment will change the shape of their neighbourhood. Most residents of Bronte accept that the current Bronte RSL site is well overdue for some form of redevelopment. It is an old building that is in desperate need of renewal. All that residents are asking for is a redevelopment that is in keeping with the existing character of Bronte. They want a reasonable outcome for their local area and to date Winston Langley Burlington's proposals are completely unreasonable. The monstrous proposal is about nothing more than maximising profits at the expense of my constituents.

I fully support the efforts of Stephen Lightfoot and the Save Bronte campaign. I will join with the Waverley Council and Bronte residents in taking whatever steps are necessary to ensure that they get a reasonable outcome for their local area—meaning a redevelopment proposal that compliments, rather than destroys, the unique character of Bronte.

AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR LEADERSHIP FOR WOMEN

KIAMA NSW WOMEN OF THE YEAR FINALISTS

Mr GARETH WARD (Kiama) [6.12 p.m.]: On Wednesday 5 March 2014 I was fortunate to attend an event here at Parliament House for International Women's Day. The event was hosted by me and Dr Diann Rodgers-Healey of the Australian Centre for Leadership for Women [ACLW] who is a resident of the Kiama electorate. The event was attended by the Minister for Family and Community Services, and Minister for Women, the Hon. Pru Goward; the Minister for Citizenship and Communities, and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Hon. Victor Dominello; and Madam Speaker. As I remarked on the evening, I am very grateful that you could attend, Madam Speaker. This Parliament was formed in 1824 and universal suffrage was won in

1901. It was not until 1916 that women were able to stand for election to Parliament. In 1925 the glass ceiling was finally broken by Millicent Preston-Stanley but it was not until 2011 that you, Madam Speaker, took your rightful place in the Speaker's chair—and a fine job you are doing, not just because you are a woman but because you are the best person for the job.

The SPEAKER: The cheque is in the mail.

Mr GARETH WARD: After my mother, I most admire you. On the evening of the event, we also were very fortunate to have a Kiama High School student, Ben Fryer, who provided musical entertainment for the evening. He did a wonderful job of entertaining us. Diann founded the Australian Centre for Leadership for Women in August 2000 to assist leaders and emerging leaders and to achieve systemic change for the leadership of women. Since its inception 13 years ago the Australian Centre for Leadership for Women has established its own distinctive identity by researching and publishing on pertinent issues that concern women; contributed to national policy reform for women's equality; developed the capacity of leaders and emerging leaders through leadership programs; and recognised and rewarded women and men who advocate for women.

The Australian Centre for Leadership for Women is a virtual centre with a strong national base of women and organisations that are interested in women's leadership. Its vision is consolidated in its five strategic platforms: to transform, empower, recognise, globalise and give back. Although the Australian Centre for Leadership for Women's long list of achievements can be seen in its virtual presence at www.leadershipforwomen.com.au, I will highlight some of its notable achievements in one of its strategic platforms: to transform contexts for systemic change.

The Australian Centre for Leadership for Women has participated in national reviews, including a review of the Workplace Gender Equality Act and the Equal Employment Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act and agency. Research projects have been conducted and published on areas associated with Australian political leadership and the media, women getting onto boards, women's global activism, and women's leadership in education and the corporate sector. National campaigns to raise awareness have incorporated expert panels analysing government policy, the concerns of disadvantage in the community, and the impact of climate change.

Diann runs the Australian Centre for Leadership for Women and is single-handedly steering its vision and enabling outcomes by drawing in teams of community and industry leaders to work on common goals to assist women, address barriers and raise awareness. Through research, forums, mentoring and coaching, Diann values a relationship with the Australian Centre for Leadership for Women's members to consolidate how to move forward to address inequity. In 2014 Diann will be working with Aboriginal women leaders who have been offered the Australian Centre for Leadership for Women's Advanced Leadership Scholarship Program. However, the Australian Centre for Leadership for Women's flagship is its national awards program, which was established in 2006. Beginning in 2006 with its Leadership Achievement Award and in 2010 with the Advancement of Women in the Workplace Award, the centre's Sustaining Women's Empowerment in Communities and Organisations [SWECO] Award culminates its intent to recognise sustainable leadership initiatives by women and men that advance women in communities and workplaces.

The electorate of Kiama is also very fortunate to be the home of two of the finalists in the 2014 New South Wales Woman of the Year Awards. Kimberley Abbott from Warri Beach is a finalist in the Harvey Norman Young Woman of the Year Award category. Kimberley has established a reputation as a young leader, entrepreneur and inspirational agent for change. Kimberley is an engineer at Thales, which is a multinational company where she has been recognised as an emerging leader in a male-dominated environment. Her success demonstrates her commitment and can-do attitude that is breaking gender barriers and giving young women a positive role model. Kimberley's dedication to empowering other young women, particularly in traditionally male-dominated fields, inspired her to start the "Yes WE can!" program—"WE" being women engineers. The program inspires and supports women to consider a career in engineering and science and is a wonderful initiative. During Kimberley's five years of study she gained two degrees with honours in science and engineering and completed a thesis by which she helped to develop the world's most advanced artificial heart. This is a phenomenal achievement for such a young woman. She is a very deserving finalist for the Young Woman of the Year Award. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

The other deserving finalist is Annette Holmes, who visited me in Parliament House yesterday. Annette is from Albion Park Rail and was an entrant in the A. H. Beard's Community Hero category. Annette has been

fostering children for 15 years and has taken care of 67 children aged from just a few days old to teenagers. Her passion is looking after babies born with drug and alcohol dependencies as she knows with love, patience and support they can grow up to be strong and healthy. Annette has dedicated much of her life to these children and is working hard to help them through their struggles. She is a shining example of someone who puts others before themselves and I am sure 67 children can attest to that fact. But Annette's volunteering and community work did not stop there. She has taken on many roles including volunteer work helping children learn to swim, teaching Sunday school at her local church, and being a community club leader as well as a board member at Illawarra Christian School. Annette recently became a spokesperson for CareSouth, which is a fostering agency that supports carers and encourages others to become carers. Madam Speaker, you and I are both very well aware of the great work done by CareSouth in our communities.

Annette also assists families within her community in rebuilding their lives by giving them the support and guidance to provide a loving and safe home for their children. Her down-to-earth attitude and appreciation for what children give back to her have made Annette a local community hero who deserves to be recognised. It is my pleasure to proclaim her many achievements in this House. I wish both Kimberley Abbott and Annette Holmes the absolute best as they are both very worthy recipients of the nominations they have received. Regardless of their gender, these women are outstanding local citizens who deserve the recognition they have received. I am grateful for their efforts in our community. I have no doubt they will continue to do great things as they serve the Kiama electorate in so many capacities. They are great women. They are wonderful citizens. They are very deserving nominees.

CRONULLA ELECTORATE BOATING FACILITIES UPGRADES

Mr MARK SPEAKMAN (Cronulla—Parliamentary Secretary) [6.20 p.m.]: I inform the House of the \$287,000 the New South Wales Government is providing to Sutherland Shire Council in 2013-14 to progress upgrades to boating facilities in the Cronulla electorate. The Better Boating Program funds the projects of local boating facilities, aiming to make recreational boating facilities safer, more accessible and better able to cater for increased demand. Under this program the Government supports local councils, boating clubs and agencies to upgrade and to improve facilities at popular local boat ramps. There are four projects that will share the \$287,000 funding for Cronulla. The first project will receive \$30,000 towards the upgrade of the Gunnamatta Bay boat ramp. The works include constructing a new 1.5 lane boat ramp, which will be six metres wide, to replace the existing ramp, and constructing a new floating pontoon at the boat ramp and a new fixed jetty for passive craft.

The second project will get about \$78,000 towards the upgrade of the Hospital Bay jetty. In early 2013 the local council decided to demolish the Hospital Bay jetty, but after local community complaints and activism the council consulted residents and decided to keep the jetty. Structural assessment has found that about half of the timber decking needs to be replaced. The jetty is about 100 years old. The task will be to replace the existing historic jetty at Hospital Bay with a new timber jetty and to construct a new pontoon off the jetty. The third project is additional funding of \$98,000 for the Wally's Wharf sewage pump-out. This will provide funding for a public sewage pump-out at the wharf in Dolans Bay. This funding is in addition to about \$87,000 the Government has already provided for Wally's Wharf. The fourth project is the largest project. It is additional funding of \$81,000 for the Bonna Point boat ramp and car park upgrade. This funding is in addition to the \$470,000 that the New South Wales Government has already provided for the Bonna Point boat ramp and car park in previous years.

The upgrade of the Bonna Point car park at Kurnell has recently been completed on time and within budget. It includes more formal traffic arrangements and designated car and trailer parking to protect the environmental features of the site. There are 76 angled car spaces, 40 car and trailer spaces, areas for boat preparation and a wash-down area for the boat ramp. East of the boat ramp a section of the road has been replanted for passive recreation to compensate for the open space and plants lost through expanding the car park. Other parts of the project include a new amenities block and a car park with mobility parking, improved pedestrian access, seating and more rubbish bins. Landscaping includes more than 7,000 native plants and defined tracks for beach access. The upgrade makes use of anti-graffiti coating, water-saving taps, anti-vandal plumbing and energy-efficient LED street lighting. Road millings—namely, recyclable waste product collected from the resurfacing of old roads—were used in constructing the new roads in the reserve, thus saving landfill costs.

This funding reflects a greater commitment by the New South Wales Government to boat-users in the Cronulla electorate, both in Port Hacking and Botany Bay. It will make recreational boating facilities in Cronulla safer, more accessible and better able to cater for local demand. I thank the Minister for Roads and Ports, the Hon. Duncan Gay, for his commitment to better boating facilities in Cronulla.

GAMBLING

Mr ALEX GREENWICH (Sydney) [6.24 p.m.]: When gambling becomes a problem there are serious social implications and costs, particularly for families. Homes and jobs are lost and law-abiding citizens engage in criminal behaviour. Family members, including elderly parents and children with no control of or participation in gambling, become victims. People's lives are ruined. A number of constituents continue to raise these concerns with me. The 2010 Productivity Commission report on gambling found Australians spend around \$19 billion on gambling products each year, equivalent to 3.1 per cent of household consumption expenditure. This is more than the \$12 billion spent on alcoholic beverages in retail outlets. For New South Wales the expenditure is \$7.15 billion, which is 3.5 per cent of household consumption and higher than any other State or Territory. The report points out that 55 per cent of this expenditure is on electronic gaming machines in clubs and hotels—that is, \$10.5 billion a year.

While most people do not spend 3.5 per cent of their household consumption on gambling, the report estimates that regular gaming machine players spend a mammoth \$7,000 to \$8,000 each year. The report estimates that between 80,000 and 160,000 Australian adults suffer from a significant gambling problem and a further 230,000 to 350,000 are vulnerable. It estimates that problem gamblers account for 22 to 60 per cent of gaming machine spending, which increases to 42 to 75 per cent when combined with use by moderate risk gamblers. These figures are alarming. I have talked to Hope Street caseworkers who see people with a gambling problem on a daily basis. They tell me problem gamblers come from all walks of life and that access to gaming activities at local pubs and clubs has major appeal for problem gamblers. I point out that at the time of the Productivity Commission report New South Wales had 1,719 hotels and 1,322 clubs with electronic gaming machines.

Research by the Victorian Government, the Salvation Army and Southern Cross University, cited in a City of Sydney 2008 submission on draft poker machine legislation, found that the people most likely to develop a gaming machine problem are males aged 20 to 24 or 65 to 69 years, renters, people living in one-bedroom accommodation, people without children, social security recipients and migrants of European and Asian descent. I fear the impact of poker machines is the greatest on communities that already experience hardship and it can exacerbate risks of homelessness.

Casinos regularly try to tell us that gambling in casinos is safe, with measures in place to prevent problem gambling. Casinos exist to make money and the odds are always considerably against the gambler. For some people gaming machines in pubs and clubs look depressing and provide no appeal, but the glitz of a casino, particularly on a Friday or Saturday night, lures them in. The Victorian Problem Gambling website contains personal stories of problem gamblers and their families including a number where problems began in casinos. One man, Bill, developed a gambling addiction after visiting Melbourne's Crown Casino for the first time with friends. He began visiting once a week and then more often until he was losing around \$600 a session.

I am deeply concerned by the growing popularity of online gaming and the difficulties in regulating what are often overseas providers. While real-money, online, interactive gambling services such as roulette, blackjack, poker and in-play sports betting are banned in Australia, overseas companies continue to offer these games. The Productivity Commission report estimates that the rapid growth in online gambling spending could have reached almost \$800 million. The Australian Medical Association argues that people who engage in interactive gambling are more likely to be problem gamblers and the commission expects an increase in serious gaming-related problems, particularly among young people. I hope that the Australian Government honours its election commitment and addresses this growing problem.

Sports betting remains prevalent and has been surrounded by recent rigging scandals. Betting on horseracing and dog racing has additional unscrupulous sides, with thousands of animals bred and then put down before they reach the track because they will not run fast enough. Animals that do race often face destruction when they retire, as there are not enough homes for them. I find it offensive that these live, sentient beings are treated as disposable commodities for an industry based on greed. Industries such as the greyhound industry are appalling and thrive on problem gambling and animal cruelty. There is widespread support for a long-term reduction in the provision of gaming activities. However, most changes before Parliament are aimed at club viability and economic value generated by gaming including casinos.

I am concerned that the new high-roller casino at Barangaroo will glamorise gambling, and the exclusion of both Star City and Barangaroo from the new central business district alcohol precinct may lure to

casinos new people who risk developing gambling problems. I join my constituents in requesting that future legislation and policies help wind back the proliferation of gambling in order to protect people with an existing gambling addiction and protect others from developing gaming problems.

MANUS ISLAND DETENTION CENTRE AND ASYLUM SEEKER REZA BARATI

Mr JAMIE PARKER (Balmain) [6.29 p.m.]: This evening I will tell the House a story. It is an appalling story and one that has dismayed and outraged many of my constituents. I speak for them, the thousands of Australians who have marched, rallied and held candlelit vigils across the nation. But most importantly I speak for the thousands of asylum seekers who are currently in detention centres and cannot speak for themselves. Reza Barati was a 23-year-old Iranian architect, the eldest of five children. Reza was from a small farming village and belonged to Iran's Kurdish ethnic minority, whose members often report widespread discrimination and inequality. After arriving in Australia as an asylum seeker, Reza was transferred to Manus Island under the Australian Government's policy of offshore processing, which was introduced by the former Labor Government and made even more militaristic and cruel under the Liberal Coalition as Operation Sovereign Borders.

Last month, as many members know, riots broke out in Manus Island detention centre after weeks of unrest and escalating tensions. In the chaos that followed, asylum seekers reported being savagely beaten by people outside the compound, after guards from the private security company G4S were evacuated as the violence escalated. During and immediately after the violence, refugee advocates received reports from asylum seekers saying that they had been attacked by Papua New Guinean police and angry locals who had come inside the detention centre boundaries. Immigration Minister Scott Morrison denied these reports, stating that the violence had occurred after what he termed "transferees" had breached the detention centre boundaries. Morrison inferred that Reza had been killed as a result of his own reckless behaviour.

A week later, the Minister admitted he had misled the Australian people, and that most of the violence probably took place within the Australian detention centre's fences; that is, the Minister admitted that Reza—a young man who had come to Australia seeking protection, as was his fundamental human right—was killed while under the care of our Government. Reza's story highlights the great injustice we are visiting upon asylum seekers who come to Australia seeking protection. In the days following Reza's death, immigration Minister Scott Morrison's comments and the retraction echoed those of defence Minister Philip Ruddock during the "children overboard" controversy. We must demand more. We need transparency, compassion and accountability. We need to respect the universal human right to seek asylum.

In January this year the price of a journalist visa to Nauru rose from \$200 to an astounding \$8,000. The Department of Immigration and Border Protection now employs a spin doctor team of 66 members, but the Minister repeatedly refuses requests for information. We know that the Federal Government is trying to stop us from finding out what really happened and Reza's story highlights the terrible impact of this secretive, offshore system. Our Government has a responsibility to lead. We, as members of this Parliament, have a responsibility to lead. It is simply not good enough for the Prime Minister to claim that his Government has a mandate to turn back the boats, no matter what cost, no matter how cruel or short-sighted. The Australian people have been subjected to generations of misinformation and scapegoating of asylum seekers. We have been denied the information we need to fully understand the challenges that asylum seekers face and the responsibilities that Australians have as signatories to the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.

I am telling Reza's story not only to honour his memory but also because this tragedy demonstrates the injustice and shame of the Australian Government's asylum seeker policy—a policy which has bipartisan support from the Labor and Liberal parties. I am also telling Reza's story for the thousands of Australians who lit candles in his memory. To those who are disgusted by the policies of our Government, to those who believe there must be a better way, I say this: We can make a difference. Every time we speak up or join a rally or light a candle, we stand alongside and on behalf of those in immigration detention who have been silenced and imprisoned by this Australian Government.

I recognise the dedicated work of my friends at the Refugee Action Coalition, Balmain for Refugees, Amnesty International, the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, Welcome to Australia, GetUp and the many other inspiring refugee advocates who have helped to provide a voice for those who cannot speak for themselves. What the community does makes a difference, and I am committed to standing alongside my community. The people I am addressing this evening in this House, across Sydney, across New South Wales and across this country form part of a great movement that will force the Australian Government to tell the truth. Together we can shine a light on what the Government is doing in our name, and in doing so we will demand justice.

Private members' statements concluded.

**The House adjourned, pursuant to standing and sessional orders, at 6.38 p.m. until
Tuesday 18 March 2014 at 12 noon.**
