

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Wednesday 25 June 2003

Mr Speaker (The Hon. John Joseph Aquilina) took the chair at 10.00 a.m.

Mr Speaker offered the Prayer.

NATIONAL PARKS AND WILDLIFE AMENDMENT (TELECOMMUNICATIONS FACILITIES) BILL

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 17 June.

Mr RICHARDSON (The Hills) [10.00 a.m.]: I lead for the Opposition in this debate. The bill will allow telecommunications facilities, such as mobile phone towers, optic fibre cables and copper cables, to be installed in national parks. Naturally some members would be concerned at the potential implications of such a move. Until July 1997 the Commonwealth Telecommunications Act took precedence but community outrage at the inappropriate location of mobile phone towers led to the Howard Government changing the Act. Now facilities not classified as low impact, such as those in national parks, are subject to State law. It could not be said that a mobile phone tower located in a national park is a low impact usage. State law does not currently permit telecommunications facilities to be located in national parks, although section 153 of the National Parks and Wildlife Act allows powerlines and pipelines to be routed through national parks, with strict environmental controls.

The Minister said in his second reading speech that the Act had not kept up with technology, and that the provisions for permitting the installation of new telecommunications facilities, such as mobile phones, predates the Act. However, in 1993 when the Coalition was in government and the honourable member for Gosford was the Minister for the Environment, there was huge controversy over the proposed installation of a sea-phone aerial on the top of Mount Imlay in Mount Imlay National Park near Eden. The Coalition government of the day rejected the proposal, saying it would be the thin end of the wedge. A spokesman for the Minister said, "Mount Imlay, one of the finest features of the South Coast, could end up looking like a porcupine". Perhaps not surprisingly, the National Parks Association and the National Parks and Wildlife Service [NPWS] were also against the proposals.

The concerns raised then are as valid today as they were in 1993. The bill allows the Minister to grant leases or licences for telecommunications facilities, including easements and rights of way, through any national park. In theory, there could be a mobile phone tower on top of every major mountain in Kosciuszko National Park. There could be one on top of Mount Warning, or Mootwingee, on Bald Rock, or Mount Kaputar, or on Pigeonhouse Mountain. No doubt some unscrupulous phone companies would be willing to engage in this sort of environmental vandalism for commercial gain. In his second reading speech the Minister cited improved safety for visitors as a major justification for placing mobile phone towers in national parks. He said:

I understand that just over a week ago, a group of four bushwalkers became lost in the Royal National Park. They were lucky in that they happened to be in a good location to get a signal and so managed to alert authorities by using their mobile phone, and this led to their successful rescue. However, in hilly terrain or remote areas such as Nattai or Blue Mountains National Park, if a walker is lost or injured he or she may simply be unable to use a mobile phone to seek emergency assistance without first climbing to the top of a hill or by walking a long way out to get help.

Is the Minister's goal to provide mobile phone coverage throughout national parks so that every lost bushwalker would be able to phone home for help? If so, we would have towers everywhere and that porcupine scenario would become a reality. If a person were down the bottom of a gorge with a broken leg, unless a mobile phone tower were on top of the hill above them, they would have no chance of making a call out.

The safety issue is a bit of a red herring. Sensible bushwalkers do not go blundering off into the bush by themselves without letting anyone know where they are. They leave a map of their route and their estimated time of arrival with friends, family, or with a ranger. They do not get lost in the Royal National Park—a park in which I walked extensively back to the 1960s—because in that park one only has to walk east to end up at the

sea. A very good path goes all the way along the cliffs and the beaches, and that will take bushwalkers to safety, back to where they started. There is no need for mobile phone towers to dot every hill in the Royal National Park to ensure people's safety.

The real beneficiaries of this bill will not be bushwalkers, they will not be people with no sense of direction, they will be mobile phone users, and not just in country areas. I understand that currently there are three applications for mobile phone towers before the NPWS, and two of those are in the city, one in the Royal National Park and the other at Mount Colah in the electorate of Hornsby. The proposed Mount Colah site is in Ku-ring-gai National Park, right next to the F3 expressway. I understand that park is in a very degraded condition and a small portion could be excised. The honourable member for Hornsby, who is in the Chamber, tells me that such a move would be strongly supported by her local community. It is not necessary to introduce legislation affecting the whole of the national park estate to achieve this comparatively simple end.

The other Sydney case is needed because the telecommunications tower in Cronulla sometimes becomes overloaded, which means that an emergency telephone in the Royal National Park often does not work. But surely, installing a phone tower in the park is using a sledgehammer to crack a walnut. Modern technology must be able to provide an alternative way of dealing with this problem. For example, upgrading the capacity of the existing telecommunications tower springs to mind. I do not think that either of those two cases provides sufficient justification for introducing this legislation.

However, the third application has real merit, and that is for the tower to be located on top of Hay Stack Mountain in Yabbra National Park. The honourable member for Lismore has lobbied strongly for it. The Minister has not made clear what facility is needed but, in fact, it is a cable going through 150 metres of bush from private land. We are talking about best practice and co-locating these mobile phone facilities with an existing tower facility so the environmental impact would be minimal. The proposal for Hay Stack Mountain is a good one and it will be of significant benefit to mobile phone users in the electorate of Lismore. That best practice model will not necessarily be the case elsewhere. This bill provides a number of safeguards. Proposed section 153D (4) provides:

- (4) The Minister must not grant a lease, licence, easement or right of way under this section unless the Minister is satisfied that:
- (a) there is no feasible alternative site for the proposed telecommunications facility concerned on land that is not reserved under this Act, and
 - (b) the proposed telecommunications facility is essential for the provision of telecommunications services for land reserved under this Act or for surrounding areas to be served by the facility, and
 - (c) the telecommunications facility is to be removed and the site of the facility is to be restored as soon as possible after the facility becomes redundant (for example, due to advances in technology), and
 - (d) the site of the proposed telecommunications facility has been selected after taking into account the objectives set out in any plan of management relating to the land concerned, and
 - (e) all existing leases, licences, easements and rights of way and all existing structures on the land concerned have been assessed to determine whether the proposed telecommunications facility could be co-located with an existing structure or whether the proposed facility could be located at a site that is already disturbed by an existing lease, licence, easement or right of way or an existing structure.

I spoke to the Minister's adviser—I note that Ted Plummer is present—and he is of the view that perhaps a subsection could be added to make the minimisation of visual impacts upon the environment mandatory. I understand that the Mobile Carriers Forum produced a booklet that shows models of best practice to minimise the visual impact upon the environment. It is interesting to note how far the telecommunications industry has moved in this direction from 9 or 10 years ago when I can remember an extraordinary number of bunfights over the location of these towers in my electorate and in adjacent electorates. I think all honourable members who have been in this Chamber for any length of time have had similar experiences.

People do not like the look of the towers, the electromagnetic radiation emanating from the towers, or the thought of them being near their homes or schools or anywhere near where people gather for a considerable length of time. It is exaggerating to say that if these towers were put in national parks they would fry little furry animals, as has been said to me. There are legitimate concerns about the potential health impacts of where these towers are located. The Mobile Carriers Forum in the telecommunications industry has moved in a very positive way in recent years to address the concerns of the community relating to the location of these towers. Nevertheless, to make the minimisation of the visual impacts upon the environment mandatory under the legislation would be a good idea and a win for both national parks and mobile phone users.

Easements are also a concern. I hope we will not see a repeat of the appalling environment vandalism exhibited recently by Transgrid in Kosciuszko National Park where bulldozers went in first and the fine was paid second. That is clearly unacceptable. I suspect that the mindset amongst some utility owners and operators has been that anything that they wanted to do was okay and fair game, because until 1997 under the Commonwealth Telecommunications Act individuals and local communities had no real rights—only to protest—in relation to the location of telecommunication facilities. I suggest that in the past the mindset was that anything goes as long as the legislation supports it. I say that in the context of the number of applications for new telecommunications facilities currently before the National Parks and Wildlife Service. The Minister mentioned only three in this second reading speech, but currently there are nine applications. It suggests that even though the Minister said there would not be a flood of applications, potentially there could be dozens, if not hundreds of applications in the future. For the benefit of honourable members I will itemise the requests so that they can assess whether they are appropriate.

The recent requests for installation of new telecommunications facilities are: in 1999, an antenna, Gap Bluff, Sydney Harbour National Park; in 2002, a mobile phone tower at Hay Stack Mountain, Yabba National Park; in 2002, a fibre optic cable at Possum Brush Road, Talawah Nature Reserve; in 2002, a fibre optic cable at Myall Lakes National Park; in 2002, a fibre optic cable at Morton National Park; in 2002, a fibre optic cable at Georges River National Park; in 2002, radio networking equipment for New South Wales Ambulance Service, at Barrenjoey Peninsula, Barrenjoey Headland and lighthouse—obviously a worthy cause but the location is of concern to some people; in 2002, a mobile phone tower at Mount Colah, Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park; and in 2003, an antenna in Goobang National Park, recommended by the Coroner as a result of the Goobang fire inquiry.

Many honourable members would agree with those applications but the most important matter is to minimise the environmental impacts on national parks so that it does not become open slather for the telecommunications industry. In relation to leases and licences and, of course, the almighty dollar, we know about this Government's addiction to taxes and raising revenue. I wonder if the price were right whether the Minister might agree to applications that otherwise would be rejected. It could be a way to supplement the budget of the National Parks and Wildlife [NPWS]. The NPWS has suffered a significant decrease in revenue under the budget, which is of considerable concern, given the increase in the size of the national park estate. Does the Minister intend to report regularly to the Parliament on the application of the Act? For example, will the annual report of the National Park and Wildlife Service outline the number of sites and easements that are granted in the course of a year, their location, any environmental impact statements that are undertaken and the length of time that the facilities will remain? The bill states that a facility is to be removed and the site restored as soon as possible after the facility becomes redundant.

I raise a number of other matters. I note that the Minister said in his second reading speech that, as a matter of policy, telecommunications facilities will also be subject to the National Parks and Wildlife Service construction assessment and approvals procedure, which ensures the safety of structures built within a national park estate. I question whether that is the same assessment and approvals procedure that applied to the reconstruction of the Alpine Way above Thredbo. The Roads and Traffic Authority has been extremely reluctant to take over the operation of that road because it was built by the NPWS and was not constructed according to Australian standards. That should be of real concern to all honourable members. It raises some serious questions about whether the NPWS construction assessment and approvals procedure is adequate to ensure the safety of structures built within the national park estate and whether the NPWS has sufficient expertise to guarantee the safety of infrastructure within the national park estate. The other issue raised by the Mobile Carriers Forum relates to new section 153D (3), which states:

The Minister may from time to time revoke or vary any grant under this section of an easement or right of way.

Safeguards must be put in place to ensure that environmental standards are maintained and that environmental impacts are minimised when towns or other facilities become part of national parks. It should equally be the case that when a telecommunications carrier invests significant sums of money to establish a facility, guarantees should be given that the money will not be thrown away. If the telecommunication carriers have acted in good faith and have met the requirements of the Australian Construction Industry Forum code, and the facility is as low impact as possible and environmentally friendly for a man-made structure within a natural environment, then the Minister should not arbitrarily revoke or vary any grants that he made previously. I seek clarification from the Minister on that important matter. Safeguards are equally important and I ask the Minister to give the House an estimate of the number of future applications that are likely to be made each year.

The Minister might say that is impossible to estimate. He might use the old line favoured by lawyers: How long is a piece of string? The Government has said that there will not be a flood of applications so I

assume that the Government and the NPWS would have made an estimate of the likely number of future applications. With those remarks I indicate that the Opposition will not oppose the bill. There will be some positive benefits flowing from the bill for country New South Wales in particular. Those benefits should be two-way and should have a minimal impact on the environment.

[Debate interrupted.]

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

Mr SPEAKER: I welcome to the public gallery members of the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration Council.

NATIONAL PARKS AND WILDLIFE AMENDMENT (TELECOMMUNICATIONS FACILITIES) BILL

Second Reading

[Debate resumed.]

Mr BARTLETT (Port Stephens) [10.25 a.m.]: I am pleased to speak on the National Parks and Wildlife Amendment (Telecommunications Facilities) Bill, which seeks to amend the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 to enable leases, licences, easements or rights of way to be granted for the purpose of telecommunications facilities in respect of land reserved under the Act. I listened for 25 minutes to the previous speaker stating why these facilities should not be in national parks, yet in his last line he indicated that he joins with his country colleagues in not opposing the bill. That is a very Sydney city-centric viewpoint and I wonder what his National Party colleagues will have to say about that.

Port Stephens is one of the most beautiful areas in New South Wales surrounded by national park. People travelling around the area become very familiar with it. I live within two minutes of a national park and the residents accept that their mobile phones will drop out when they travel close to a national park. Indeed, it is only a short time before the signal is lost. I am happy to put up with that situation in order to live in an area that is surrounded by national park. However, there is a safety perspective with regards to people who become lost in national parks, and officers of the Rural Fire Service and volunteer bushfire brigades who enter national parks to fight fires. Therefore, I support the bill because it is in response to a community need and the Government acknowledges that an increase in telecommunications mobile facilities will improve safety.

People in the city may wish to keep national parks pristine and therefore oppose the establishment of more telecommunications facilities in national parks. However, the realists from Country Labor and the National Party understand the need for these facilities and realise that the preservation of national parks should not exclude other solutions to community problems. Tomaree National Park was established in 1984, with 1,600 hectares of land from the Water Board added later. Other areas were added later to the national park and a further 2,000 hectares will become part of the Stockton Bight National Park, a continuation of the Tomaree National Park. Last year 700 hectares of Mount Karuah were added to the national park system. I commend the Government for allocating additional areas to the national park estate in my electorate.

I thought the House might be interested in what the Government has done statewide since March 1995. In March 1995 there were 4,030,000 hectares of national parks and nature conservation areas in this State. By May 2003 that had increased to 5,910,000 hectares—basically, from a four million hectare national park and reserve system to a six million hectare system. That is an enormous increase. These national park areas are not being established so much in cities like Sydney but in country areas. This huge increase in the national park estate in many respects compounds the problems being faced by residents and travellers who visit these areas as far as mobile reception is concerned.

The honourable member for The Hills came out with the throw-away line that the Government had reduced funding of national parks. The reality is that, despite the almost two million hectare increase in this estate, in that time the Government has nearly doubled the amount of money per hectare spent on the national park system. So, despite the throw-away line of the honourable member that the Government was reducing national park funding, the reality is that since 1995 we have almost doubled funding to national parks per hectare.

This bill will allow the Minister for the Environment to authorise, subject to rigorous assessment criteria, the installation of new telecommunications facilities on land reserved under the National Parks and

Wildlife Act 1974. In doing so, the bill will remove an impediment to the establishment of an effective statewide network of telecommunications services. By allowing the establishment of telecommunications facilities in appropriate locations within the national parks estate, mobile telephone coverage will be extended both within the parks as well as in the immediate surrounding areas—which, as I have indicated, is the case in Port Stephens. This will particularly benefit rural and regional parts of the State where communications services are often of a lower standard than those in urban areas.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service has been approached on nine occasions—as was mentioned by the honourable member for The Hills—with proposals to improve network coverage. Just because that number of approaches has been made does not mean all of them have been approved. When one considers that this State has six million hectares of national parks and reserves, the nine approaches made shows that the porcupine scenario put forward by the honourable member is without merit. Of course, the bill contains a number of safeguards to protect the environment. The Government is committed to creating the world's best system of protected areas. Since coming to office in 1995 this Government has established more than 330 new national parks and reserves. Many of the parks created by the Government are considered outstanding for their conservation values. Their importance to tourism, and the jobs that tourism generates, is clear for everyone to see.

Let me now talk about some of the conditions for the establishment of new telecommunications facilities on lands and reserves under the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974. The installation and ongoing maintenance of telecommunications facilities within the national park estate will be subject to rigorous environmental assessment processes. Such assessments will examine the impact of telecommunication proposals on the environment. In addition, the bill requires that telecommunications facilities cannot be approved in the national parks estate unless certain criteria are met. Before authorising a telecommunications facility within the national parks estate the Minister will need to be satisfied that there is no other feasible off-park option and that the facility is essential for the provision of telecommunications in the park or in surrounding areas that would be served by the facility.

Telecommunications carriers will have to provide evidence that they have examined all alternative locations outside the reserve area and explain why those locations are not feasible. Carriers also will have to provide evidence that the facility is essential to the communications network. Once the facility becomes redundant—for instance, due to advances in technology—it must be removed from the site and the site must be rehabilitated. This will ensure that redundant infrastructure does not proliferate in parks. Lastly, when the preferred location for a new telecommunications facility is being selected, any existing easements and structures within the park are to be assessed for suitability to co-locate the new infrastructure. So, any cable being laid would go down an existing roadway, an existing infrastructure.

Many national parks and wilderness areas have infrastructure and those infrastructure locations would be obvious places to establish additional telecommunications facilities. This is intended to consolidate impacts on sites that are already disturbed. To further minimise the impact of new telecommunications facilities in the national parks estate, carriers would be encouraged to be inventive with design of telecommunications facilities to minimise visual impacts upon the environment. In summary, might I say this is a necessary and sensible bill to bring the National Parks and Wildlife Act up-to-date with modern telecommunications technology, which will in turn benefit rural and regional New South Wales. The bill will not open up the floodgates for towers all through the national parks estate. Rather, it will ensure that decisions to allow the construction of telecommunications facilities in our national parks estate are based on a sensible process that enables the consideration of requests for facilities and the assessment of environmental issues. I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [10.35 a.m.]: This bill deals with the possibility of placement of telecommunications facilities in national parks. The National Parks and Wildlife Amendment (Telecommunications Facilities) Bill seeks to amend the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 with respect to the use of land reserved under the Act for the purpose of telecommunications facilities. It aims to enable leases, licences, easements or rights of way to be granted for the purpose of erecting telecommunications facilities in land reserved under the Act.

This amendment is designed for the purpose of the erection, use or maintenance of telecommunications facilities. The Minister may grant leases of, or licences to occupy or use, or easements or rights of way through, on or in, any land reserved under the Act. A lease, licence, easement or right of way under the proposed new section may be granted subject to such terms and conditions as the Minister may determine. Under the proposed section the Minister may from time to time revoke or vary any grant of an easement or right of way.

The Minister must not grant a lease, licence, easement or right of way under the proposed section unless the Minister is satisfied that: there is no feasible alternative site for the proposed telecommunications facility concerned on land that is not reserved under the Act; the proposed telecommunications facility is essential for the provision of telecommunications services for land reserved under this Act or for surrounding areas to be served by the facility; the telecommunications facility is to be removed and the site of the facility is to be restored as soon as possible after the facility becomes redundant; the site of the proposed telecommunications facility has been selected after taking into account the objectives set out in any plan of management relating to the land concerned; and all existing leases, licences, easements and rights of way and all existing structures on the land concerned have been assessed to determine whether the proposed telecommunications facility could be co-located with an existing structure or whether the proposed facility could be located at a site that is already disturbed by an existing lease, licence, easement or right of way or an existing structure.

In summary, the Minister is prevented from granting such a lease, licence, easement or a right of way under the proposed section unless the Minister is satisfied that there is no alternative site and the telecommunications facility is essential. The facility must be removed and the site totally rehabilitated should the facility become redundant. The site of the proposed telecommunications facility must be selected taking into account the objectives set out in any plan of management. I, too, live in an area that is bounded by national parks. Last year, soon after I was elected I was confronted with a very important issue relating to a telecommunications tower being placed in Mount Colah along Ku-ring-gai Chase Road.

I go back a little in time in relation to this matter, when I was working for the Hon. Philip Ruddock in 1996 and 1997, when two telecommunications towers were planned for Myall Road in Mount Colah. Mediation meetings were set up regarding the proposal and the numerous objections from local residents. When I left the employ of the Minister it was proposed that the telecommunications tower would be constructed eventually on the eastern side of the access road from Ku-ring-gai Chase Road onto the F3. Some years later the tower was constructed on the western side of the access entry onto the F3, thus causing a lot of angst among local residents.

In the meantime the legislation relating to telecommunications facilities had changed. The telecommunications company was required to obtain a development application from the local council to build the facility where it ultimately placed the facility—along Ku-ring-gai Chase Road—but unfortunately the process was not perfect. Only eight residents were given the privilege of finding out that a telecommunications tower would be located close to their residences—in some cases it was within 200 metres of a residence, and in another case it was within 200 metres of a child care centre. I found it interesting that the local council had guidelines that appeared to stipulate that no telecommunications tower could be placed within 300 metres of a residence. The residents were rightly alarmed and annoyed by this, but no amount of talking to the telecommunications company or other activities could persuade the company to change the site of the Telstra tower, and it duly went in.

Subsequent to that, another company interested in the area wanted to place a telecommunications tower within the nearby golf course. However, due to certain problems with negotiations with the golf club, the telecommunications company decided to co-locate with the original tower. In the middle of all these discussions a site within the national park, probably about 200 metres from the site chosen by the original telecommunications company, was found. The site was totally degraded. It had been used by the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] throughout the construction of the F3 for storing concrete, tar and other necessary parts of construction, and had then been transferred back to the national park. However, the area was still degraded and disturbed; it had not been rehabilitated. It had a large area into which a telecommunications tower could have happily been placed.

I wrote to the Minister for the Environment and was told in a reply that neither the Minister nor the National Parks and Wildlife Service had been approached in relation to siting the telecommunications tower in the national park. Unfortunately at that point in time the original company was building its tower along Ku-ring-gai Chase Road, so there was not much more I could do in relation to this tower. The second telecommunications company was engaged in complex discussions with local residents in relation to adding low-impact facilities on to the original tower. Again, the issue of moving the whole telecommunications tower facility, plus its low-impact future additions, into the park was raised, and the prospect of using the degraded but disturbed site was refused as a possibility.

There are advantages to being able to site telecommunications facilities on national parks and wildlife land. As the shadow Minister pointed out, this national park land is close to RTA land, the degraded land I was

talking about, and could easily have been subsumed into the RTA land or permission could have been given to site the tower on the land. It is a perfect site with an entranceway of about 200 metres. I have walked down onto the land and had a look at the site. It is an extremely large area of degraded land that could be used. We are now given the possibility of siting a tower on this land, but it is too late for the residents of Mount Colah because the second telecommunications company has already begun construction on, and almost completed, the additional low-impact facility.

I point out that last year there were serious fires in my electorate and in the adjoining electorate of Hawkesbury. At that time it was noted that telecommunication was difficult among the firefighters and other emergency services. So the original telecommunications tower, which was not due to be commissioned for another couple of months, was commissioned early to improve telecommunications facilities for those who were actively involved in fighting the fires. Obviously, in places where there is likely to be an emergency such as a bushfire, it is necessary to have the ability to communicate, and also for people who may be bushwalking in the area and who may need to contact someone if they should be injured.

I have another telecommunications issue in the Mount Ku-ring-gai area in my electorate. A telecommunications tower was built 10 years ago, and it now has a low-impact facility added to it. The tower was built in the middle of a shopping centre and immediately adjacent to a residential setting. It has caused a great deal of angst amongst the local residents. Had the possibility of erecting this telecommunications tower in the national park been available 10 years ago, the local residents would not have been put through 10 years of absolute nightmare worrying about the tower. Also, the visual impact of the tower is confronting, leaving me to ask further questions about the definition of "low impact".

When I was listening to the Minister's second reading speech I was surprised to learn that he would authorise the installation of telecommunications services within national parks. I am pleased that that possibility exists, but obviously we must hasten cautiously. We must have strict environmental impact considerations in relation to the placement of these towers. As I said, the Minister stressed that a telecommunications tower would only be placed in a national park when no other site outside the estate was available, that it was essential for communications within the park and that there would not be an overproliferation of telecommunications towers within national parks.

There must be strict rules associated with placing these towers in our national parks. The decision must take into account national parks and wildlife management objections. Co-location will be encouraged. I stress that if disturbed and degraded sites exist within national parks they should be chosen. There will be minimal visual impact if telecommunications towers are placed in national parks. That would alleviate the need for people to live near these towers, but that this should not be the reason for placing a tower in a national park.

I note the concerns expressed by the shadow Minister, and I would like to hear the answers to the questions he posed. There will be great difficulties in relation to siting some of these towers. Rural areas have a greater impact in terms of lack of signal and frustration for people with mobile phones. I reiterate the Mount Colah experience: had the national park site been available perhaps 18 months ago a lot of distress in the local area would have been alleviated. There are the advantages of increased signal in times of emergency, as well as convenience for people who own mobile phones, but cautious progression is necessary. I restate that the Opposition is not opposing this legislation. This legislation will be advantageous to my electorate as long as the towers are sited in totally suitable areas.

Mr BROWN (Kiama) [10.49 a.m.]: I am pleased to support the National Parks and Wildlife Amendment (Telecommunications Facilities) Bill. I am pleased to hear that the Opposition supports the Government's initiative. The bill will allow the Minister for the Environment to authorise, subject to rigorous assessment criteria, the installation of new telecommunications facilities on lands reserved under the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974, which will improve the management of our national parks. I am pleased that the Government has introduced a bill to balance the competing needs for advances in telecommunications and better communications on the one hand with environmental sensitivity on the other. We have heard many stories in this Chamber about the heavy-handed treatment of communities by telecommunications companies that erect such towers.

Numerous bushwalkers and those who appreciate national parks frequent the many national parks in the electorates of Kiama and the South Coast. National parks are wonderful for tourism, as well as being a great employer for people in the Illawarra and South Coast areas. An effective and efficient communications service is important for park management. The bill, by allowing telecommunications facilities in appropriate locations

within the national park estate, will provide the capacity to improve telecommunications, which will assist National Parks and Wildlife Service staff in the day-to-day park management, as well as emergency services staff who are required to work in remote and rugged areas that may not have radio coverage.

An improved communication network will also lead to an improvement in the safety of people visiting national parks and reserves throughout the State. Many of our parks contain hilly terrain or remote areas in which mobile phone coverage may be patchy or non-existent. Walkers who are lost or injured may be unable to use their mobile phones to seek emergency assistance without first climbing to the top of a hill or walking a long way to get help. This could mean the difference between life and death in an emergency. The rescue of lost or injured visitors would be assisted greatly by improved telecommunications services to our parks. Many of the parks created by this Government are considered outstanding for their conservation values.

I draw the attention of the House to the importance of hill and ridge tops to the survival of many butterfly species. The loss or degradation of such sites is recognised as a key threatening process under the Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995. I can assure the House that the conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity will be a fundamental consideration when determining whether the installation of telecommunications facilities within the national park estate should proceed. The National Parks and Wildlife Service will develop guidelines for environment, assessment and approval processes for all telecommunications facilities proposals. The guidelines will provide advice on the assessment of all telecommunications facilities, including the assessment of any impact on threatened species, ecological communities or their habitat.

Proposals for telecommunications facilities within the national park estate will be subject to rigorous environmental assessment processes under part 5 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979. If a proposal is likely to have a significant environmental impact, the proponent will be required to prepare an environmental impact statement, which will be placed on public exhibition to provide the community with an opportunity to comment. The Minister will take into consideration all representations made in response to a public exhibition. Such clauses separate this Government from the Opposition and demonstrate the Government's commitment to environmental sensitivity as well as community consultation. In addition to the environmental safeguards of audit by the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, the bill requires that telecommunications facilities cannot be approved in the national park estate unless certain criteria are met.

One criterion requires that the Minister be satisfied that no other feasible off-park option is available. This will ensure that impact on the park estate will be avoided where possible. The Minister will also need to be satisfied that the facility is essential for the provision of all communications in the park or surrounding areas that would be served by the facility. The onus will be on the telecommunications carriers to justify their proposals to the Minister. This is a good shift in onus. To ensure that redundant infrastructure does not proliferate in parks, the Minister must be satisfied that the facility will be removed and the site rehabilitated when it becomes redundant due to advances in technology.

We do not want a proliferation of national park junk throughout the parks. The erection of too many telecommunications towers on many sites around the State have already made quite ugly what was once a beautiful place to visit. The siting of all new telecommunications facilities must take into account park management objectives. This is important to ensure that the operation of the facility does not compromise the conservation values of the area and that the impact of the facility is minimised on park management and park users. When selecting the preferred location for new telecommunications facilities carriers will be encouraged to co-locate the new infrastructure on existing disturbed sites.

This commonsense provision, which is intended to consolidate impacts and minimise environmental disturbance, needs to be explored to reduce such impacts. To further minimise the impact of new telecommunications facilities in the national park estate carriers would be encouraged to be inventive with design of telecommunications facilities to minimise visual impacts on the environment. This necessary bill will allow the consideration of proposals for new facilities to improve telecommunications. The bill will ensure that decisions to allow the construction of all communications facilities in our national park estate are based on a sensible process that enables a thorough assessment of environmental issues. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr PRINGLE (Hawkesbury) [10.54 a.m.]: I join with members on the Government side of the House to support the bill. I also acknowledge the important effects of the bill on businesses, the Rural Fire Service, families and safety—the list goes on and on. The timing of the bill is particularly important. We note that the Federal Government has a very strong commitment to ensuring improved telecommunications services to regional and rural New South Wales. Today the Minister announced that the more than 100 recommendations

from a recent inquiry would be implemented. This side of the House and our fellow colleagues strongly support the need for good quality telecommunications across the country, particularly in rural and regional areas.

I am also concerned about the potential impact of many towers in areas such as the Hawkesbury, which is a rural regional area on the fringes of Sydney blessed with a large number of national parks that include the Blue Mountains, Wollemi, Yengo, Marramorra and Berowra Valley Regional Park, to name but a few. People choose to live in the area because of the largely untouched open spaces and the national parks, which provide a tremendous visual amenity. Without doubt the community is concerned about the potential proliferation of towers in what appears to be ideal national park country to erect them. Concerns that have been expressed in many hundreds of letters to me and in a large number of public meetings centre around the visual effect of the towers and their effect on health and property prices.

It would be fair to say that the community is largely in support of the general aims of the bill, but it is also concerned to ensure that the practices of the Act, when it is proclaimed, work to protect the community from potential abuse. I know that this side of the House will monitor the operation of the bill, and that the residents of Bilpin and Kurrajong, who have signs all the way along Old Bells Line of Road objecting to potential telecommunications towers, will examine the effects of the bill to ensure that it provides the much-needed services, but does not affect the qualities of national parks that we have all come to know and love as the qualities that are the very reasons why they exist: the qualities that ensure that the public has good access and that the visual amenity of our areas is protected. I commend the bill, but I want to ensure, as do my colleagues, that it is an effective bill that works to protect the wider interests of the community.

Mr WEST (Campbelltown—Parliamentary Secretary), on behalf of Mr Debus [10.59 a.m.], in reply: I thank honourable members for their contributions. As they have said, one of the main reasons this bill should be supported is to improve telecommunications services in rural and regional New South Wales. While the National Parks and Wildlife Act permits the installation of certain types of facilities, such as for electricity transmission pipelines, currently it does not allow for the installation of new telecommunications facilities on lands reserved under the Act. The Act also allows the Minister to grant a lease or licence to use and maintain a telecommunications facility that is already situated on reserved lands.

The Act has not kept up with technology. These provisions were drafted well before the invention of modern telecommunications technology such as optic fibre cable and mobile phones. The bill will correct this anomaly. In its current form the National Parks and Wildlife Act will continue to impede the establishment of an effective statewide network of telecommunications services. Since July 1997, when the Commonwealth's Telecommunications Act commenced, a limited number of proposals have been made to install telecommunications facilities within the national park estate. Most of these involve the laying of fibre optic cable, probably the most unobtrusive type of facility.

Other examples include radio networking equipment for the New South Wales Ambulance Service on Barrenjoey Headland; fibre optic cables at Gap Bluff, Possum Brush Road, part of Morton national Park, part of Myall Lakes National Park and part of Georges River National Park; a mobile phone tower at Haystack Mountain in Yabba National Park—the case brought to the Government's attention by the honourable member for Lismore; a mobile phone tower at Mount Colah in Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park, where the local community is asking for the facility to be moved from land owned by the Roads and Traffic Authority to the park; and a facility in Goobang National Park, as recommended by the State Coroner in his inquiry into the Goobang fire.

Given that there are somewhat more than 600 national parks and reserves in the State, it can be seen that there are not many instances in which carriers have asked to access the reserves system. Also, some of the examples given may be refused under this legislation simply because there are more appropriate and feasible off-park locations on which to site facilities. A number of other issues were raised either in debate or during briefings provided by the Minister's staff. The honourable member for The Hills, on behalf of the Opposition, raised the visual appearance of telecommunications facilities and a former proposal to locate a facility on Mount Imlay in south-east New South Wales. He alleged that facilities would appear on mountain tops across the State. This will not be the case.

The bill makes it very clear that, for an application to even be considered, there must be no feasible alternative to locating the facility in the park. In most cases there will be feasible alternatives. Even then, numerous other factors have to be considered, not the least being that an application will need to be rigorously accessed under part 5 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act. As the honourable member correctly

said, telecommunications carriers have, under community pressure, ensured facilities are now designed as unobtrusively as possible. That will be a core objective for the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Facilities that are unreasonably and excessively obtrusive are not likely to be approved.

The honourable member raised the issue of reporting and ensuring that information is made publicly available. I am advised that the annual report of the National Parks and Wildlife Service will contain such information. The honourable member also raised the likely operation of subsection (3) of proposed section 153D. I am advised that decisions made under this subsection will not be arbitrary. Indeed, basic administrative law requirements will ensure that this is the case. Of course, decisions will need to be reasonable.

Finally, the honourable member asked for an estimate of how many applications would be received. The basic answer is that it is unlikely that there will be many such applications. Since the Commonwealth legislation came into effect in 1997, there has been about one application per year, and many of those have been for unobtrusive, underground fibre optic cable. The statutory requirement that there be no feasible off-park location on which to place a facility will itself limit the number of likely applications. Concern has also been raised about the possibility that a telecommunications carrier may cause damage to a national park. This will not be tolerated and offending carriers will be severely penalised.

It is already a serious offence under section 156A for anyone to cause damage to land reserves under the National Parks and Wildlife Act. Penalties for breaching this section and damaging a park and any vegetation within it are up to 10,000 penalty units, or \$1.1 million. Any telecommunications carrier who caused damage to a park would be prosecuted under this section and would face a severe penalty. This is a necessary and sensible bill that will bring the National Parks and Wildlife Act up to date with modern telecommunications technology, which in turn will benefit rural and regional New South Wales, as well as have benefits for park staff and visitors in emergency, rescue or park management situations. I commend the bill to the House.

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a second time and passed through remaining stages.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY AMENDMENT (DANGEROUS GOODS) BILL

EXPLOSIVES BILL

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 17 June.

Mr HARTCHER (Gosford) [11.06 a.m.]: The Coalition does not oppose the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill and the cognate Explosives Bill. It accepts that these are designed to amend workplace guidelines to bring them into alignment with Federal workplace policy with respect to the handling of dangerous goods. In March 2001 the National Occupational Health and Safety Commission [NOHSC] published the national standard for the storage and handling of dangerous goods. In turn, New South Wales WorkCover held a review into the handling of dangerous goods in the workplace and the guidelines in place in New South Wales. For the purpose of keeping within the guidelines set by the national standards for the storage and handling of dangerous goods, the New South Wales Parliament now proposes to amend State legislation.

This is an ongoing part of the commitment of the States through the heads of Australian Government process to ensure a proper national standard. Clearly it is appropriate, as the economy becomes more national, that we have a national standard for the handling of explosives. It is becoming more and more clear that the role of the States in these matters is lessening, that the demands for national uniformity require Commonwealth leadership, and that State legislation will be complementary to Federal leadership. One wonders when the States will bite the bullet and refer these powers to Canberra and simply allow legislation to be enacted at one national level rather than the present system of everybody meeting together, agreeing on national guidelines and standards and then enacting those guidelines and standards separately through their own parliaments.

That was the original process that applied with regard to companies. For a long time State Attorneys General agreed to the Companies Act and all States would then enact their own complementary legislation. Finally they bit the bullet and agreed to the Federal Government issuing one Corporations Law, and that has

become the national standard and the only legislation applicable. Issues like this, which are such an important part of Australian trade, regularly cross State borders. It is only a matter of time before there will be one national legislative framework rather than the present system. At present no-one objects to this legislation, and the Coalition will not oppose it.

Mr STEWART (Bankstown—Parliamentary Secretary) [11.09 a.m.]: I support the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill and, in particular, the Explosives Bill, which addresses the concerns about fireworks that have been raised by communities throughout New South Wales. Previously the Government introduced stringent controls on fireworks to improve safety standards, to protect the community and, most importantly, to reduce injuries. Prior to the recent Queen's birthday long weekend the Minister for Commerce warned against the use of illegal fireworks, and noted that anyone who used fireworks without a WorkCover permit would risk an on-the-spot fine of up to \$1,100. These types of significant penalties have had a considerable impact on the illegal use of fireworks.

I noted that the honourable member for Gosford said in his speech that this legislation brings New South Wales into line with other States and conforms to Commonwealth legislation on dangerous goods in terms of the handling of explosives. However, the Commonwealth Government could do extra homework on the issue of fireworks. Unfortunately, while the States have introduced legislation and other initiatives on a unilateral basis, fireworks can be imported to Australia almost unchecked. Restrictions that apply to the importation of explosives do not apply to the importation of fireworks. As a result, container loads of fireworks are coming into Australia unchecked and it is only when the fireworks are distributed to the States that restrictions are placed on their sale. Often fireworks are sold as contraband out of car boots and in the back of shops, which has caused major concern in our communities.

Whilst the Carr Government has worked hard to impose stringent controls to ban illegal fireworks and to inform the community about the unacceptable use of fireworks, the Federal Government has not put in place any controls to stop the importation of illegal fireworks. They can be freely imported without proper restrictions. Prevention is better than cure. I urge the Federal Government to look at this issue. For five to six years the States have continually urged the Federal Government to take action about the unrestricted importation of fireworks into Australia.

The Explosives Bill continues the approach taken in the Dangerous Goods Act 1975 to provide, as far as possible, for the safe handling of fireworks and other explosive goods. Under clause 6 a person is prohibited from handling an explosive or explosive precursor where the regulations require the handling to be authorised by a licence granted under the Act and the person is not authorised to do so by a licence granted under the Act. As with the current Dangerous Goods Act 1975, this bill provides that fireworks will be one of the substances or articles prescribed by the regulations as an explosive. That is a very important provision. "Handling" is defined widely in the bill and includes, among other things, activities such as manufacturing, processing, storing, possessing, using, conveying, selling or supplying fireworks. The broadening of the definition of "handling" is an important initiative.

An example of the type of provision that will apply to fireworks is that a person will be able to use fireworks only if he or she has a licence authorising use. In determining whether to grant a licence under the Explosives Bill, WorkCover may request information from the Commissioner of Police about a licence applicant. That is another important initiative because it provides WorkCover with the authority to check the background of applicants. In the past it was a matter of concern that WorkCover did not have the authority to do so. The bill provides that WorkCover can now undertake proper and thorough checks.

Clause 14 allows a licence to be granted conditionally or subject to conditions. It is envisaged that, as with fireworks licences currently granted under the Dangerous Goods Act, fireworks licences under the Explosives Bill will be granted subject to conditions relating to where they may be used, at what time and by whom. The Explosives Bill retains the offence provisions of the Dangerous Goods Act 1975, including making it an offence to handle explosives without a licence, to negligently handle explosives and to supply explosives to a person under the age of 18 years. These provisions will apply to fireworks as a category of explosive. Where fireworks are handled at a workplace, such as a factory manufacturing fireworks, the provisions of the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2000, which requires employers to provide a safe workplace, will continue to apply. By maintaining the licensing approach of the Dangerous Goods Act to explosives, including fireworks, in the Explosives Bill the Government has demonstrated its continued strong commitment to the safe handling of fireworks. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr BROWN (Kiama) [11.15 a.m.]: I speak in favour of the bills. The Government acknowledges that small businesses will need time and information to understand and implement the new provisions of the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill and supporting regulations. These provisions will not come into effect until the supporting regulations have been developed through a thorough consultative process, including industry and small business representatives. It is recognised that many small business employers would appreciate assistance to help them understand the new provisions. In this regard, WorkCover will apply its current Small Business Assistance Strategy, currently in place for Occupational Health and Safety requirements, to the new provisions for dangerous goods.

A key part of the Small Business Assistance Strategy will be an increased focus on providing advice and education to small business owners and operators. Recognising that small business will need time to adjust to this new approach, for the first 12 months WorkCover will focus on assisting small business in implementing the new regulatory requirements. WorkCover inspectors will work with small business owners and managers on ways they can improve health and safety in their workplaces and on work sites. Of course, matters presenting an immediate risk to health and safety will continue to be dealt with in the usual manner.

As part of the strategy, WorkCover is establishing an ongoing one-on-one support program for small business operators. Inspectors will be available for confidential sessions with small business owners and managers on a regular basis at all WorkCover offices outside normal business hours. Small business employers will be able to ask for advice on a confidential basis on any matters to do with occupational health and safety, injury management and workers compensation that they do not understand. There will be an increased number of seminars and workshops targeted towards small business operators.

One of the outcomes of last year's Workplace Safety Summit was for a pilot Safer Towns and Cities Program to be undertaken. This program will bring local communities and government agencies together to run programs to improve safety in all aspects of life. Increased resource material will be available as part of the Small Business Assistance Strategy. In addition, WorkCover is establishing a special website, with all the information to be collected in a central location, to help small business manage their responsibilities. The WorkCover Assistance Service will be available to provide small business employers with the information they need. Our incentive programs, such as the Premium Discount Scheme, are also available for small business employers. The Government is committed to working closely with industry and, in particular, small business in assisting them to implement the new legislation. I commend the bills to the House.

Ms JUDGE (Strathfield) [11.18 a.m.]: In recent times there have been increasing community concerns about terrorism and its impact on public safety and security. Everyone feels very vulnerable, particularly in light of the events in New York and, more recently, right in our own region with the terrible Bali bombing. People feel overwhelmed, insecure and unsafe. There is no doubt that there have been increasing concerns about terrorism and its impact on public safety and security. Some of my constituents have expressed concern about train stations being potential targets. Those stations include Strathfield station, which is probably the second biggest station after Central station; Burwood station, which has 25,000 daily commuters; Ashfield station; Homebush station; Croydon station; and Summer Hill station.

Concern has also been expressed about the nearby Olympics site—the electorate of Strathfield abuts Homebush. It is seen as a potential danger given the major events held there. Many people travel through the region on a regular basis. Residents are particularly worried about terrorist attacks on sites at which dangerous goods are stored. The special dangers inherent in the storage and handling of explosives and the potential for explosives to be misused have been addressed by the Government in the Explosives Bill. Maintaining the licensing requirements for explosives will ensure that rigorous controls are imposed on all aspects of explosives, and that is appropriate. It is intended to cover all known explosives, examples of which include blasting explosives, such as gelnite, gunpowder, safety cartridges, military explosives such as bombs, depth charges, mines ammunition and flares, detonators, pyrotechnics—that is, fireworks—safety fuses and marine flares.

Each year, a week or two before Christmas the Strathfield area has a wonderful fireworks display after the famous Carols by Candlelight event at Flemington. Honourable members are most welcome to attend. I note that the honourable member for Blacktown has indicated an interest in the event, so I will ensure that he gets a personal invitation. The Chinese community also holds Chinese New Year celebrations that involve the lighting of fireworks. Very stringent controls must be imposed because penny bangers can easily cause the loss of an eye. I commend the Government for this initiative.

This bill also allows the Government to regulate explosive precursors, which are an emerging issue. Explosive precursors are chemicals or materials that, when mixed and put under heat and/or pressure, create an

explosive. No definitive list of explosive precursors is available. Explosive precursors include some commonly used substances, such as ammonium nitrate, so the circumstances in which they should be regulated will need to be considered carefully. The substances to be prescribed as explosive precursors and the circumstances in which their handling will need to be licensed will be the subject of consultation between WorkCover and other government agencies, such as our wonderful, hardworking police. Those bodies are also reviewing the issue.

To allow for the necessary flexibility, much of the detail of the substances and circumstances in which licensing of explosives and explosive precursors will apply is to be provided for in regulations. The draft regulations setting out the detail of the proposed licensing regime will be the subject of consultation by WorkCover with industry and the community. As a deterrent to the misuse of explosives, existing offence provisions applying to explosives have been retained, including provisions concerning handling of explosives and explosive precursors without a licence, requiring persons conveying explosives to take all precautions to prevent access to explosives by persons not lawfully entitled to have access to them, prohibiting the negligent handling of explosives and prohibiting the sale of explosives to persons under the age of 18 years.

The requirements for dangerous goods other than explosives are to be provided for under the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation 2001 by way of the amendment to the Occupational Health and Safety Act contained in the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill. Notification requirements that will apply under the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation will ensure that WorkCover is notified of the storage and handling of specified quantities of dangerous goods. The National Standard for the Storage and Handling of Workplace Dangerous Goods, which is to be adopted under the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation, addresses security in that it requires occupiers of premises where dangerous goods are kept to prevent unauthorised access and activity as far as practicable.

Such security provisions will be assessed for inclusion in the dangerous goods amendments to the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation when they are drafted. The regulations to be made under the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill will require packaging of dangerous goods and placarding of workplaces where dangerous goods are stored and handled in a way that is consistent with the requirements of road transport legislation. Federal Government initiatives in the area of terrorism and dangerous goods will also be taken into account in the drafting of the regulations that are intended to support the bills.

In late 2002 the Council of Australian Governments [COAG] announced that as part of the review of the nation's counter-terrorism preparedness there would be a national review of the regulation and reporting and security around the storage, sale and handling of hazardous materials. The review is to include relevant Commonwealth, State and Territory agencies. As far as time frames allow, these initiatives will be taken into account when drafting the regulations supporting the bills. If the COAG review is not completed by the time the supporting regulations have been drafted, the new legislative framework is sufficiently flexible to allow stricter controls to be adopted for dangerous goods if necessary.

One of the other hats I still wear is that of local councillor. Part of my municipal area has a large number of industrial sites, including enterprises such as TNT Australia, Weston Milling and some smaller operations that could be subject to these regulations. That is appropriate because many of them use the residential roads in the electorate. The Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill and its cognate bill, the Explosives Bill, address security and public safety concerns arising out of explosives and other dangerous goods. I commend the bill to the House. I also congratulate the Minister on her hard work and initiative in this area.

Mr PRICE (Maitland) [11.27 a.m.]: I support the bills. I will comment on a number of aspects of the bills and quote a couple of instances that occurred a few years ago in which these bills would have been of great value to the workers of this State and to workers generally. The risk-management approach to be adopted by way of regulations proposed to be enacted under the amendments contained in the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill will provide a range of benefits. Risk management provides a systematic approach to the identification, assessment and control of hazards. It is a three-step process.

The first step is to identify the hazards in a particular situation—in this case the hazards inherent in the presence of dangerous goods. The second step is to assess the risks imposed by those hazards. The third step is to put in place control measures that will either remove the risks altogether or control them to an acceptable level. The risk-management approach recognises that circumstances will vary from one site to another and that effective solutions to problems will reflect those differences. It also allows industry to develop and apply the best methods of controlling risks identified at each site at which dangerous goods are located. This means that

the individual needs and circumstances of the sites can be taken into account and that tailor-made control measures can be implemented.

Because the risk-management approach does not set limits on how safety outcomes can be achieved, industry is able to make use of flexible and innovative solutions in addressing and managing the hazards and risks associated with the handling and storage of dangerous goods. A major benefit is that new technologies and procedures can be readily implemented as they become available. Risk-management legislation aims for a quality approach to the storage and handling of dangerous goods, while allowing industry to manage premises at which dangerous goods are located using a best-practice approach to maintain safety standards.

The risk management approach of the proposed legislation will be combined with a duty to consult with employees and others whose health, safety and welfare may be affected by the presence of dangerous goods. This combination of risk management and consultation has the capacity to clearly frame the risk and draw out a consensus of its potential harm, and to formulate the best methods for controlling the identified risks. Consultation enables employers to draw on the skills and knowledge of their employees. It is these workers who are often best placed to identify hazards at work, ask questions and bring up safety concerns. By drawing on this pool of knowledge and expertise we are well on our way to reducing workplace incidents, injuries and illnesses.

The risk management and consultation process will be further supported by a notification system based on risk factors posed by the quantities of dangerous goods being held. The requirement to notify WorkCover will ensure that safety at premises where prescribed quantities of dangerous goods are located is not compromised. It is worth noting that any detailed information that may be removed by the repeal of prescriptive legislation can be readily replaced by guidance material. Workplaces that require detailed guidance will still be able to follow specific advice found in such guidance material.

There has been some comment about the dangers posed by fireworks. I have received a number of complaints from constituents about the sale of fireworks through certain outlets without the required WorkCover permit. I understand that those matters are currently under investigation and, hopefully, the problem will be resolved in my electorate and the nearby electorate of Port Stephens. The risks of fireworks to young people are significant, and the risks to parents who may activate fireworks devices are also considerable. If the operating requirements are not fully understood, fireworks can be extremely dangerous to life and limb. In some cases they can be fatal.

I should like to refer to a couple of incidents from relatively ancient history. Many years ago when I was a draftsman at the State dockyard in Newcastle we found a hazard in an explosive situation that no-one had thought of at the time. Anyone who is familiar with the building of large steel ships would know that there are double-bottom tanks in the ship's structure. In those days painters and dockers were sent in to prepare and paint the void spaces. So they could see what they were doing, they used to string up festooning throughout the double-bottom tanks. They would spray paint with an extremely volatile paint.

That paint was considered to be dangerous when it was in its can, but no-one seemed to bother about it once the spray was emitted. They sprayed away for years, and suddenly one day during the spraying operation a light bulb was broken in the festooning, and the entire void space in one vessel exploded from the fines in the paint. Three men died. They died because their lungs were severely burnt; as they were trying to get out of the tank the combustion entered their lungs and totally destroyed them. They experienced a most agonising death in most unpleasant circumstances. Of course, it was difficult to rescue the men because of the extremely confined void space.

The State Government and the relevant trade unions learnt some fairly serious lessons. It is all very well to get an allowance to work in a confined space, but two bob an hour did not mean much when the men were dead. They fought hard to get that confined space allowance, but other action was required. Legislation such as this would have covered a situation such as that. It is important to understand that the bill is not about being pedantic; it is about saving people's lives and making everyone—the employee, the employer and the supplier—responsible for dangerous goods. This bill has a lot to do with the accurate marking of products and the subsequent safety warning requirements regarding the use and storage of products.

I will go back a little further. Many years ago I was a ship's engineer in the merchant navy, and I was responsible for a ship that had been an empire class vessel in 1944 during the Second World War. I was not sailing in 1944; in the early 1960s I was. This decrepit, old vehicle had been renamed, repainted, resold and regenerated, but it still had the same old gear from 1944. I was trying to deal with what was known as a Cochran

boiler, which would never ignite the way it was supposed to. In a fairly rough area off the China Sea I had to restart this unit, which went out during some bad weather. Not realising it had been out for some time during the watch, I attempted to relight it. It was fuelled by what was called dirty diesel, and no-one was aware of a mass of fluid lying on the floor of the boiler.

I lit it and—talk about baldness—it took all the hair off my chest where my overalls were open, my eyebrows, the hair off the top of my head, and the hair and most of the skin off my arms. The chief engineer was extraordinarily gracious. He said, "Oh well, that's bugged you for the watch, hasn't it?" I said, "Well, yes it has, chief. Have you got anything you can put on it? It hurts." He said, "No, but I'll tell you what, you can go and write the log for the last three months in my cabin while you're recuperating." So I got out of standing watch, but I assure the House that eight hours a day of trying to interpret the chief's handwriting and put it into a sensible form in a log was not a simple task. Whilst that story has a humorous side to, it also highlights the lack of knowledge in those times about dangerous products and how they would react in certain circumstances. Heavy fuel oil is not supposed to ignite, but given the right set of circumstances it can—and it is explosive when it does.

With those few comments I thank the Minister for the care she has taken in the preparation of this legislation. The Government will ensure that adequate education and information is provided to support the introduction of the new dangerous goods regime. Detailed information and advice will be provided through guidance material, including codes of practice, and a public awareness program will be undertaken prior to the commencement of the regime. With great pleasure I commend the bills to the House, and I look forward to their speedy passage through Parliament.

Ms MEAGHER (Cabramatta—Minister for Fair Trading, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Commerce) [11.37 a.m.], in reply: I thank honourable members for their contributions to this debate. The adoption of the national standard for the storage and handling of dangerous goods, combined with the revised regime for explosives, marks a significant improvement in the approach to the effective control of the storage and handling of dangerous goods. The new regulatory regime in New South Wales will complement a nationally consistent framework for the storage and handling of dangerous goods. Not only will that regime assist New South Wales industry in conducting business across the State borders, it will also ensure that New South Wales is aligned with the highest possible standards available with respect to dangerous goods. The new legislation will encompass all situations and locations.

From industry's point of view the new approach will have practical benefits as well as economic benefits. The new regime will allow industry flexibility and promote the implementation of new technologies and processes in managing the hazards and risks associated with the storage and handling of dangerous goods to achieve prescribed safety outcomes. Industry will benefit from the elimination of the cost of compliance with differing State and Territory regimes. Industry will also benefit from the way in which the new legislation has been structured. By incorporating dangerous goods into the occupational health and safety regime, business has to comply with fewer legislative instruments.

Also, businesses will be able to adopt the same risk assessment and management procedures with respect to dangerous goods as they have with existing duties under occupational health and safety legislation. Most importantly, the new regulatory regime addresses the public's increasing concern about dangerous goods, how they are kept and by whom. A comprehensive database on dangerous goods will be maintained to ensure that the locations of stored chemicals within the State are identified and monitored. This information can then be used for the development of strategies to prevent potentially dangerous occurrences and to facilitate emergency procedures and planning.

The bill will adopt provisions, through regulation, that will require occupiers of premises where dangerous goods are kept to prevent unauthorized access and activity. In recognition of the special hazards posed to the community by explosives, especially in the current environment, the Government has retained and updated the licensing regime applying to manufacturers and users of explosives. The new regime will also extend the regulation of explosives to new substances. It will now regulate explosive precursors, which will allow materials that can be combined to create an explosive substance, such as some of those used in the Bali bombing, to be regulated and controlled. The regime provides modern responses to modern global concerns.

In relation to the licensing of explosives, there will be new flexibility for WorkCover to seek certain information before granting or renewing an explosives licence. WorkCover will be empowered to request a report from the Commissioner of Police, and the commissioner will be required to investigate the person to

which the request relates. That may cover matters such as whether the applicant or licence holder has a history of violence, or has made threats of violence, has any relevant convictions, or is the subject of a firearms prohibition order or apprehended violence order. Further, the regulation-making powers under the Explosives Bill will allow the Government to impose controls over the issue or renewal of licences if considered necessary.

By retaining licensing requirements the Explosives Bill addresses security concerns and public safety requirements. Those concerns are further addressed by the complementary provisions of the Crimes Act that provide for significant terms of imprisonment for a variety of offences involving explosives and dangerous substances and articles. Apart from protecting the public from the threats to public safety posed by those who misuse explosives, the regulatory regime will continue to protect children and others in more familiar circumstances where explosives or other substances are used, such as fireworks. Under the new provisions the supply and selling of explosives, including fireworks, to children will be prohibited. Further, negligent handling of explosives, including fireworks, which endangers life, causes injury or damages property, will be an offence.

The new regulatory regime is a comprehensive response to the dangers of explosives and other substances in a variety of settings and circumstances. WorkCover's inspectorate of about 300 officers will be deployed to ensure compliance with and enforcement of the new dangerous goods and explosives schemes. All WorkCover inspectors will be able to respond to dangerous goods issues as and when they arise in workplaces and elsewhere. The inspectorate will have available significant powers under the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2000 to support enforcement of the schemes. Those powers include the power to enter premises and make searches, to conduct examinations and tests, and to gather information and evidence. However, powers to enter residential dwellings will be subject to appropriate controls such as consent of the occupier or a search warrant. Naturally, the police will be able to exercise their powers of entry if necessary.

The range of enforcement measures has been expanded to enable inspectors to issue on-the-spot fines in the form of penalty notices when deemed appropriate. In this way the more minor infringements are dealt with immediately and efficiently. The revised legislative package, once implemented, is expected to result in the safer storage and handling of dangerous goods, leading to improved protection for people, property and the environment. Once again, I thank honourable members for their support of the Government's important initiative in the regulation and control of dangerous goods and explosives, and for their contributions to this debate. I commend the bills to the House.

Motion agreed to.

Bills read a second time and passed through remaining stages.

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AMENDMENT (ADOPTION LEAVE) BILL

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 17 June.

Mr HARTCHER (Gosford) [11.44 a.m.]: The Coalition does not oppose this bill, which will amend the Industrial Relations Act 1996. On the face of it, it is a minor amendment to change the age restriction from under 5 years to under 18 years for the purpose of adoption leave entitlements. The bill is a response to the Department of Community Services [DOCS] adoption policy, which requires parents who adopt to commit themselves to having the child cared for by one of the adopting parents for at least six months. The child cannot be placed in paid care, and that often means that one of the parents has to leave work for that period of time to fulfil the necessary requirements for the adoption of the child.

Until now, the child must have been under the age of five years for the adoptive parent to be able to claim leave under the Act. As children up to the age of 18 can be adopted, that posed a problem as the Act was not in line with DOCS requirements. One wonders to what age children need to be cared for on a full-time basis for six months. I cannot imagine that a 16-year-old, a 15-year-old, or even a 14-year-old would need to have a parent at home permanently for a six-month period. Obviously a 7-year-old, 8-year-old or 9-year-old child would benefit substantially from the development of a bond with the adoptive parents. While the under-18 limit might appear unrealistic, the bill brings the law into line with normal practice. For that reason the Coalition does not object to the amendment, although I record a concern about it.

Adoption is not as common in New South Wales as it once was. When the law was amended in 1989 to allow contact between adopted children and their natural parents, about 250,000 people in New South Wales

were affected by the change to the law. In the 1950s, 1960s and even in the 1970s, adoption was widespread. At one stage about one child in seven or eight was adopted. I understand the present figures are low: there were only about 270 adoption orders made throughout all of New South Wales last year. The process of adoption has radically changed. Notwithstanding that, it is important that the child be raised in a caring and nurturing environment by his or her adoptive parents.

It is important that people receive every opportunity that can be afforded to them to bond and to develop their family lives. That needs to be reflected in legislation. The taking of unpaid adoption leave entitlements for this purpose, which is already provided for in the Act in relation to adoptive parents of children under the age of five, needs to be extended to adoptive parents of older children as more mature children are now being adopted. The Coalition has consulted with interested organisations and understands that they have no objection to the bill. For those reasons, for the inherent support that we have for family values and family life, and to advance the interests of children being raised in caring and nurturing families, the Coalition does not oppose this bill.

Ms SALIBA (Illawarra) [11.48 a.m.]: As an adoptive parent I well understand the responsibilities of raising a family of children who are not the biological children of their parents. Nonetheless, my adopted children are part of my family. The bill acknowledges that adoption is an important way for people to establish families. I turn now to address a number of matters in the bill. The long-running community debate on paid maternity leave reflects the significance in New South Wales of this public policy issue. The release a year ago of the options paper of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission [HREOC] has generated debate in all sections of the community.

It is important for the community to be consulted and to have input. If it does not we, as politicians, are not in a position to make an informed decision. In its final report released last December the HREOC provided the Commonwealth Government with a proposal for a nationally paid maternity leave scheme. The Commonwealth Sex Discrimination Commissioner also considers that the scheme comes at an extremely modest cost and, at the same time, is broadly acceptable to Australian taxpayers. That scheme could and should be delivered in this budget cycle.

It is time for the Prime Minister to turn his Sunday afternoon barbecue rhetoric on work and family policy into Monday morning reality for Australian working women. There has been sufficient talk. Action must now be taken to acknowledge that women make an important contribution to the work force while juggling their family and other commitments. It is time to concede that the Commonwealth Government's family package, particularly Family Tax Benefit B, does not work. The baby bonus also does not satisfy the need for a uniform maternity leave entitlement. When that bonus was introduced adoptive parents raised serious concerns because a time limit was placed on when that bonus could be collected. Adoptive families normally do not get custody of their children until the children are six months or older. Therefore, they are not entitled to claim the baby bonus, despite establishing a family and incurring the same or even greater costs as other parents. Adoptive parents often have children who are traumatised and require more attention, time and resources.

The Commonwealth Government's approach that paid maternity leave is best left to individual workplace negotiations has failed to create a level playing field for Australian working women and their employers. Since the nation as a whole stands to benefit from the interlinked social and economic outcomes of a paid maternity scheme, the New South Wales Government supports a paid maternity leave entitlement, funded and administered by the Commonwealth Government. There is no excuse for such a scheme not being in place now. Supplementary benefits can be achieved through workplace negotiations, but a basic entitlement must be uniformly available to working women across the nation.

Although the New South Wales Government continues to support employees and employers in balancing their work and family commitments, a national approach is long overdue. The Federal Government must take control and take action. It is time for the Commonwealth Government to take responsibility for this issue, which is of national importance to both women and families across Australia. The Commonwealth Government should be serious about its rhetoric and the commitments it has proposed but not followed through. Uniform legislation is necessary to provide all families in Australia with the same opportunities and rights.

Ms D'AMORE (Drummoyne) [11.53 a.m.]: I am delighted to support a family-friendly bill such as the one before the House. Currently, adoption leave in the Industrial Relations Act 1996 is restricted to those who adopt a child under the age of five years. The object of the bill is to amend the Act to remove the age restriction and provide that adoption leave is available for those who adopt a child under the age of 18 years. The parental

leave provisions in the Act are about giving parents time away from the workplace to care for children and to develop the family bonds so vital for the future of their children. This legislation will assist prospective parents wishing to adopt an older child or children in need of loving care by giving them the same access to parental leave in the form of adoption leave as a biological parent has in the form of maternity or paternity leave. After all, parents are parents no matter whether their child is their natural child or their adopted child. Why should parents who wish to adopt children be denied parental leave just because the child is over five?

The bill will be vital in assisting parents who adopt children from overseas. For example, in the last financial year 71 children from other countries were adopted into New South Wales families. Eight of these children were over five years of age. Although the numbers of children who will be assisted by the passage of the bill may be small, there is a real social benefit for each and every child who is lent a helping hand. The Government is committed to promoting equity and fairness in the workplace for all working people. By extending equal access to adoption leave to all parents, whether natural or adoptive, the Government demonstrates best practice family-friendly initiatives.

Even more important, the proposed legislation enables older adopted children to benefit from having their new parents home with them on adoption leave while they adjust to their new life. This bill will also assist the trade union movement, which has so far thoroughly extended paid maternity and paternity leave provisions in the workplace. With the passing of the bill I call upon the union to further extend those provisions for adoption leave to include children over the age of five years. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms JUDGE (Strathfield) [11.56 a.m.]: I am pleased to register my endorsement of the Industrial Relations Amendment (Adoption Leave) Bill. I fully support this proposed legislative change, which is designed to enhance the work and family provisions of the Industrial Relations Act and to promote workplace equity in New South Wales. If passed, this compassionate legislation will change the maximum age of a child whose parents are entitled to parental leave from under 5 years of age to under 18 years of age. That will ensure that parents who adopt older children will then be entitled to such leave. That will allow parents to spend time with their adopted child in the important period straight after adoption, building their relationship and creating a strong foundation for the future. The Government is committed to improving the lives of children and their families. What a good place to start! Allowing that extra time for adopted children to come to know their adoptive families, and having the families available to them without the distraction and stresses of work, will be hugely beneficial. It will provide all parties with the required time and space to do all the little things that need to be done. Since adoption leave was first introduced in New South Wales adoption demographics have changed. Although it is now the case that few Australian-born infants need adoption places, the harsh reality is that children of all ages living overseas in extreme poverty and deprivation seek the support of secure families in countries like Australia.

Friends of mine adopted a baby from the island of Tonga. The mother of the baby was killed in a road accident on the island and the couple managed, after a long wait, to adopt this beautiful little baby named Charlotte. She is now eight or nine years of age. Members can imagine what it must be like for a child from a different environment and culture, who perhaps does not speak the language, to come to a new home. The child does not know her new mum, dad, brothers or sisters. The child may have lived in Tonga in a fale—a grass hut—or in New Delhi in India in a little hut built from mud bricks. It must be extremely difficult to then live in a two-storey house.

When I worked as an Australian volunteer abroad I was an adult with language and other skills. I arrived on the island not knowing anyone, not speaking the language, holding tightly on to my passport and wondering if anyone was going to meet me at the airport. Luckily I was well looked after. We take many things for granted. Perhaps the child has been traumatised. Perhaps they are from a refugee background and suddenly they must adjust and feel at home.

It should be noted that older children from intercountry adoptions sometimes do not attend school immediately after placement because of the need for a settlement period. However, settling into a new family takes time, whether the child is from overseas or is local. Trust is not something that happens in any relationship. One cannot simply go in and say, "Trust me". One must earn respect and trust, and it is the same with a little child. It takes time to develop and build that relationship; it is something one does slowly step by step, piece by piece. The Department of Community Services [DOCS] recognises this by requiring that parents agree not to place the child in full-time care. Imagine the child goes into a new home; suddenly the parents are working and they are put into a child care centre, where they do not know the other children or the teachers. It is an extra stress, an extra trauma that they must cope with. The Department of Community Services also asks that

at least one parent remain out of employment to be the child's primary carer for at least six months following placement. This is a compassionate decision.

This bill will ensure that when the settling in period has passed the primary carer has a right to return to work and an income to help support that new addition to the family if they so choose. In addition, changing the maximum age for a child to be adopted from under 5 years to under 18 years for parental leave purposes will achieve parity between birth parents and adoptive parents. It will align the parental adoption leave entitlements under the Act with those in the Adoption Act 2000 and with the DOCS adoption policies. This bill proposes to ensure that New South Wales working families who choose to share their family life with an older child from overseas may fulfil their obligations to that child while ensuring equal access to parental leave entitlements as other adopting families in New South Wales.

It is about equality. It recognises that older children require assistance to settle into their new environment, and enshrines in the law—it will be in black and white—the right of the parents to offer support to their children, the future citizens of this great country. It is absolutely vital that our industrial relations legislation provide for family friendly workplaces for the wellbeing of parents and children, the cornerstones of our community, of our neighbourhoods. Generally, we need to look at ways to ensure that there is a balance in our lives and that the needs of workers to have time with their families are respected. I am pleased to commend this bill to the House.

Mrs PALUZZANO (Penrith) [12.02 p.m.]: I support the Industrial Relations Amendment (Adoption Leave) Bill, which seeks to align the parental leave entitlements under the Act with those of the Adoption Act 2000 and with the Department of Community Services adoption provisions. My support is based on two aspects: firstly, the historical context of the Industrial Relations Act 1996 and the Adoption Act 2000; and, secondly, the nature of work and family, and adoption. In the 1996 second reading of the Industrial Relations Bill the Hon. J. W. Shaw, MLC, the then Attorney General and Minister for Industrial Relations, said:

It is a forward-looking piece of legislation which promotes workplace productivity and flexibility while maintaining equity and fairness.

The amendment to change the age restriction from under 5 years to under 18 years for the purpose of adoption leave entitlements further promotes that statement of equity and fairness. The honourable member for Granville further expressed the aspects of the Industrial Relations Act 1996 when in his second reading contribution he said:

In relation to discrimination and pay equity, industrial relations issues affecting women are a priority.

The adoption leave entitlements in this bill will continue to reduce the incidence of discrimination that may arise in a workplace. The Adoption Act 2000 replaced the Adoption of Children Act 1965. My predecessor, the previous Minister for Community Services, the Hon. Faye Lo' Po, introduced the 2000 Act almost three years ago to the day, on 21 June 2000. A key aspect of her second reading speech was that the 1965 Adoption of Children Act, which was some 34 years of age at that time, was enacted in an era when community attitudes to ex-nuptial births, the role of men and women in society, de facto relationships and many other aspects of family life were vastly different to community attitudes and expectations in 2000. The nuclear family, headed by a legally married husband and wife, was not only perceived to be the norm but was considered by many to be the only truly acceptable form of family life.

Australia had yet to establish itself in an essentially multicultural society. There was no developed widespread awareness of the value of other cultures, in particular that of indigenous people. The process of reconciliation with indigenous peoples had not begun. The change in the two Acts also showed the difference between the family Adoption Act 1965 reflected, and the workplace in which the 2000 Acts were enacted. What has now led the House to explore the nature of contemporary work and family? What are the key statistics? The proportion of couples with children in Australia where both parents work increased from 44 per cent in 1991 to 62 per cent in 2000. The proportion of single mothers in paid work increased from one-third in 1985 to one-half in 2000.

Most mothers—54 per cent—return to work after parental leave before their child's second birthday. The proportion of working mothers with children aged less than 12 months more than doubled from 17 per cent in 1976 to 36 per cent in 2001. Some 68 per cent of Australian women aged between 25 and 55 work; 57 per cent of unemployed mothers are part-time; 66 per cent of part-time jobs are casual; 40 per cent of unemployed mothers have no leave entitlements; 60 per cent of full-time mothers would prefer part-time work; 80 per cent of

workers of prime childrearing age support extending unpaid parental leave from 12 months to 24 months; and 2.3 million Australians care for someone because of their disability or age. That is the contemporary aspect of work and family.

Subsequent to that, yesterday the Australian Council of Trade Unions proposed a test case, which included a right to request variations in hours clause. That would oblige employers not to unreasonably refuse a request to change an employee's hours, start and finishing times or place of work. It states that the employer can only reject the request if it can demonstrate that the worker's attendance is essential and that no other options can meet the needs of the workplace. The test case also seeks to extend unpaid parental leave from 12 months to two years, including eight weeks simultaneous unpaid parental leave for both parents, and allow for further extensions by consent until the child reaches school age; establish a right for full-time workers returning from parental leave to return to work part-time until the child reaches school age; require employers to consult with employees about any significant change while they are on parental leave; enable workers to purchase extra leave; and provide employees with the right to unpaid emergency leave for family emergencies.

As Robert McClelland, Federal member of Parliament, said yesterday, this is a positive development in the work and family debate. Working Australians are crying out for more flexibility to balance their work and family commitments. McClelland also states that the case seeks to give working parents more time to care for their young children by extending parental leave and giving them a genuine right to seek part-time work on return from parental leave. The case also aims to place employees in a better position to request more flexible hours, for example, to enable working parents to pick up the children after school. The case would also improve the capacity of employees to attend to a family emergency, such as a sick or injured child, a partner or aged parent.

The change in the age restriction from under 5 years to under 18 years is a great step forward in leave entitlements for working families. The statistics on the nature of adoption in 2003 are important. During 2001-02 only 207 adoptions occurred in New South Wales. Eighty-two occurred where the child had a pre-existing relationship with the adoptive parents and therefore the parents were not entitled to adoption leave. Of the 54 locally placed adoptions, no child was over five and most were under two years of age. Of the 71 intercountry placement adoptions, eight children were over five years and none was over 10 years of age. We are not talking about large numbers but we are talking about equity of provision of entitlements for families adopting children over five years of age. As the honourable member for Strathfield said, caring for a child over five who has been placed with you is different from having placed with you a child who is under five.

One has to integrate a child over five into school and into social and cultural pursuits—which could be significant if it is an intercountry adoption and the awareness of the country of birth is important—and into the family's social community, whether it be a church group or a sporting group. That takes time, and the entitlement of the parents to this leave is important. The leave also allows adopting parents to comply with the Department of Community Services adoption policy, which requires as a condition of adoption that the parents agree not to place the child in full-time care and that at least one parent will remain out of employment to be the child's primary carer for at least six months. Having spoken to and knowing a number of adoptive parents, I know that a minimum of six months is often stretched to quite a number of years. One family in my electorate extended leave from work from six months until the child was placed in school. So, the time out of the workplace can be considerable when people become adoptive parents.

This bill is another step on the Government's path towards enabling the working population of New South Wales to be better able to balance work and family commitments. The aim of this legislative change and the Government's approach to working families is to promote an industrial environment in New South Wales in which employers, employees and their families can maximise the benefits of continued workplace participation without compromising family life. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms MEAGHER (Cabramatta—Minister for Fair Trading, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Commerce) [12.14 p.m.], in reply: I thank all honourable members who have contributed to the debate on the Industrial Relations Amendment (Adoption Leave) Bill. Adoption leave is a form of parental leave taken in connection with the adoption of a child by either the adoptive father or adoptive mother in order to be the primary caregiver of the child. Under the Industrial Relations Act 1996, adoption leave is currently restricted to the adoption of a child under the age of five years. The amendments contained in this bill will ensure that the Industrial Relations Act will be able to provide fair and equitable criteria for parental leave in New South Wales.

These amendments will remove the disparity of entitlements between birth parents and adopting parents, and will align the Industrial Relations Act with Department of Community Services protocols for

adoption, and with the New South Wales Adoption Act 2000. More importantly, the amendments in the bill will provide adopting parents who take leave to care for their new family member with protection of the right to return to their own job.

Prior to this bill, only parents adopting a child under the age of five years could take adoption leave. So while this is a relatively minor amendment, it removes a significant barrier for those working parents who adopt children over five years old. The purpose of the amendment in this bill is to remove the limit of a child being five years old for the adopting parents to have eligibility for unpaid adoption leave and replace it with the age of 18 years to accommodate the shift in adoption practices over the decades. Those shifts now mean that very few babies born in Australia are adopted, and between 2001 and 2002 most were under two years old.

Now more children are adopted from overseas countries. These overseas-born children could be 10, 12 or 15 but will still be in need of an adjustment period to allow for a transition from their previous circumstances to their new family. The bill allows for the adoption leave provisions in the Act to reflect the changing adoption practices in New South Wales and to protect the job tenure of working adopting parents who become primary caregivers of these children. I commend the Industrial Relations Amendment (Adoption Leave) Bill to the House.

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a second time and passed through remaining stages.

CONSUMER CREDIT ADMINISTRATION AMENDMENT (FINANCE BROKERS) BILL

In Committee

Consideration of the Legislative Council's amendments.

Schedule of amendments referred to in message of 20 May

- No. 1 Page 3, Schedule 1 [1], lines 25 and 26. Omit all words on those lines.
- No. 2 Page 4, Schedule 1 [5], lines 17-23. Omit all words on those lines.
- No. 3 Page 6, Schedule 1 [6], lines 15-25. Omit all words on those lines. Insert instead:
 - (c) if the consumer credit is intended to be repaid at regular intervals - the maximum periodic repayments the client is prepared to make in respect of the consumer credit (including the repayment of any credit application fee, credit establishment fee or other fee), and
 - (d) if the consumer credit is not intended to be repaid at regular intervals - the repayment arrangements acceptable to the client (including for the repayment of any credit application fee, credit establishment fee or other fee), and
 - (e) the maximum interest rate that will be payable in respect of the consumer credit, and
- No. 4 Page 8, Schedule 1 [6], lines 4-14. Omit all words on those lines. Insert instead:
 - (c) in the case of consumer credit intended to be repaid at regular intervals - the periodic repayments exceed the maximum periodic repayments specified in the contract, or
 - (d) in the case of consumer credit not intended to be repaid at regular intervals - the repayment arrangements are more onerous than the repayment arrangements specified in the contract, or
 - (e) the consumer credit is secured at a rate of interest that exceeds the maximum rate specified in the contract, or
- No. 5 Page 8, Schedule 1 [6]. Insert after line 20:
 - (3) A finance broker is not prevented by this section from demanding, receiving or accepting any commission in respect of finance broking merely because of the potential for an increase in the periodic repayments or interest rate, or for repayment arrangements that are more onerous, that arises because of a variation of the interest rate in accordance with the consumer credit contract.
- No. 6 Page 9, Schedule 1 [6], lines 20-31. Omit all words on those lines. Insert instead:
 - (iii) if the consumer credit is intended to be repaid at regular intervals- involves periodic repayments that do not exceed the maximum periodic repayments specified in the contract, and

- (iv) if the consumer credit is not intended to be repaid at regular intervals - involves repayment arrangements that are not more onerous than the repayment arrangements specified in the contract, and
- (v) is secured at a rate of interest that does not exceed the maximum rate specified in the contract, and

No. 7 Page 10, Schedule 1 [6]. Insert after line 4:

- (2) A finance broker is not prevented by this section from demanding, receiving or accepting any commission in respect of finance broking merely because of the potential for an increase in the periodic repayments or interest rate, or for repayment arrangements that are more onerous, that may have arisen because of a variation of the interest rate in accordance with the consumer credit contract.

Ms MEAGHER (Cabramatta—Minister for Fair Trading, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Commerce) [12.19 p.m.]: I move:

That the Legislative Council's amendments be agreed to.

The Government moved an amendment in the Legislative Council to clarify the intention of the bill, to ensure that finance brokers will not be prevented from claiming their commission simply because of normal variable rate fluctuations. The consumers' requirement, as stated in the finance broking contract regarding the maximum repayment amount they are prepared to pay and the interest rates that satisfy that requirement, are applicable only at the time the contract is made. Obviously, neither brokers nor consumers can predict with certainty what interest rates will do. It is up to the consumer and the credit provider to factor that uncertainty into their calculations. Credit providers must take into account possible rate fluctuations with every variable rate product when assessing consumers' capacity to repay their loan in the future. The bill was drafted with that in mind and the Government amendment has removed any ambiguity in that regard.

Ms HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck) [12.20 p.m.]: The Opposition does not oppose the Legislative Council amendments. Brokers and consumers can never predict with certainty what interest rates will do, and it is up to the consumer and the credit provider to make sure that the uncertainty is factored into their calculations. Credit providers have to take into account possible rate fluctuations with every variable rate product when looking at a consumer's capacity to repay a loan in the future. The Opposition recognises that these amendments will ensure that finance brokers are not prevented from being able to claim their commission simply because of a normal variation in rate fluctuations. The Opposition has discussed these amendments with finance brokers and they do not have any complaints about the amendments. In fact, the amendments strengthen their ability to claim their commission. The Opposition does not oppose the amendments.

Motion agreed to.

Legislative Council's amendments agreed to.

Resolution reported from Committee and report adopted.

Message sent to the Legislative Council advising it of the resolution.

INSTITUTE OF SPORT AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 18 June.

Mr ARMSTRONG (Lachlan) [12.22 p.m.]: It is with great pleasure that I speak to the amendments to the Institute of Sport Act 1995. I indicate at the outset that the Opposition will not oppose the proposed changes. As the Minister for Tourism and Sport and Recreation outlined in her speech, the approved changes are to clarify the authority of the board to employ staff and the director, to repeal the Sporting Development Advisory Committee and to insert a standard personal liability clause. A further amendment that has been proposed is evidence of the type of anomalies that can occur in bureaucracies. Currently the Director-General of the Department of Sport and Recreation employs the chief executive officer, but an anomaly occurs because the day-to-day and strategic responsibility of the position reports directly to the institute's board. Therefore, the employer does not have access to the employee. An amendment to the legislation clarifies that process. The Sporting Development Advisory Committee, which is being repealed in the Act, was never established and was deemed unnecessary by the board. The Opposition hopes that the department did not use much funding towards the committee, which never materialised.

I would be remiss if I did not say a couple of things about sport in general. There is no doubt that all those clichés about us being a sports-mad nation and a sports-crazy State are correct. Sport is one of the healthiest activities that we can participate in at any age. In recent times there has been a great deal of publicity about good health, particularly the prevention of obesity. In our daily publications, once we get through the local and world news, the back pages are filled with articles on healthy eating and living. These days nearly every article recommends low-fat foods, less sugar and exercise. Sport of the body and of the mind is the healthiest way to look after our wellbeing.

It is often forgotten that when we play physical sport, such as golf, tennis or football, we enjoy not only a physical activity but also a mental activity. I do not pretend to be the world's greatest sportsman but I enjoy walking probably 25 out of 30 mornings, and I find that it is as good for my mind as it is for my body. I play some very bad golf as often as I can. I get a lot of use out of the golf course because I probably hit the ball more than most people. Again, it is the mental activity that is so important to me. In this day and age every other person is being counselled for stress and strain. If those people got involved in sport, many of them could probably do away with counselling for the so-called pressures of life.

Junior sport is very important. I have grandchildren, and they all play soccer. One of my little granddaughters is the only girl in her soccer team and the last couple of Saturdays she has been the star of the team. Junior sport brings families together and gives them a common interest. It also teaches children the art of being dependent, it teaches them teamwork and co-ordination, and it gives them a purpose in life outside the grind that sometimes occurs in the education system. In addition, Australia has some great international sportspeople and international achievements in the sport of racing. I refer in particular to the wonderful result by Choisir in England last week.

Ms Nori: It is good exercise for the horse.

Mr ARMSTRONG: Absolutely, and it is not bad for the pocket either if you get it right. Choisir is one of the greatest horses that this country has ever produced in terms of international statistics. Recently I assisted at a charity auction where one of the items to be auctioned was a collage of four photographs of Phar Lap winning in November 1930. He won four classic races in eight days, including the Melbourne Cup. That was a tremendous effort. There has been nothing like it before and probably never will be again. From horses, to junior footy on a Saturday at Bankstown or Mosman, to Lleyton Hewitt trying to take on the tennis world, we are very much enmeshed in sport. Tonight there is another round in the State of Origin, New South Wales versus Queensland. Go the Blues! We sincerely hope that New South Wales gets up.

Quite clearly, at the end of the day it comes down to money. Communities need high-level sporting facilities, such as water-based fields for hockey, grandstand facilities for spectators at suburban grounds, or maximising the use of the Olympic stadium and showground. Governments and oppositions have a responsibility to ensure that we cater for the needs of the public, as far as is practicable. I am unashamedly a member for country New South Wales. I would like to put in a bid for regional New South Wales, which is lagging behind in high-level facilities in country towns. These days sport is almost entirely dependent on volunteers. Those volunteers do not get fair financial support from governments in recognition of their contribution to their communities. Unless something changes in the next five years, probably 70 per cent of the golf clubs and bowling clubs in small towns will be terminated. They need urgent assistance.

I understand that there are only two water-based hockey fields on the coast between Sydney and the Queensland border, and only a couple in inland New South Wales, one of them situated at Lithgow. Parkes has a very good hockey field but it needs a water-based hockey field. With the assistance of the State and Federal governments, in the past six months Junee has opened a magnificent sports facility which includes an Olympic-size swimming pool that is heated during winter, two indoor basketball courts, a gymnasium, a recreation area for semi-passive sports, a coffee shop, a meeting room and provision for a nursery. Cowra has a modified version of that and Blayney has had a similar facility for some years. It requires multiple millions of dollars to provide those facilities. Hopefully, on 25 August, when the sport and recreation budget is handed down, the State Government will recognise those towns that have made a bid for funding for those facilities.

Many retirees and young families are moving out of the metropolitan area to towns within four or five hours travelling time from Sydney. The cost of housing and safety are major issues. People living in Lithgow, Oberon, Parkes, Forbes, Cootamundra and Yass have a quality of life that is as good as, if not better than, that enjoyed by those living in suburban Sydney. They are closer to their local hospital, they are probably on first-name terms with their doctor, they certainly know their butcher and they undoubtedly have greater access to

sporting facilities. These towns are increasingly attractive to retired people. The teachers, nurses, local bank officers and other professionals are equally qualified and many country businesses have branches in Sydney. Therefore, the quality of life is certainly equivalent to, if not better than, that experienced in Sydney.

I ask the Government to recognise that fact when it is called upon to provide capital assistance for sporting facilities. The people living in those towns want to live there, and the Government—as the keeper of the public purse—has a responsibility to assist them. As the shadow Minister for Tourism and Sport and Recreation I look forward to working with the Government. I will always be the conscience of the people, but I would much rather work in co-operation to achieve positive results. At the same time, if I see a problem I will not hesitate to raise it with the Minister, who has said that she will resolve all my problems when it comes to country facilities.

Mrs PERRY (Auburn) [12.33 p.m.]: It is with great pleasure that I speak on the amendments to the Institute of Sport Act 1995. The Sydney Olympic Park precinct is within my electorate and the New South Wales Institute of Sport is located in the undercroft of the Sydney Athletics Centre at Homebush. In 1996 the New South Wales Institute of Sport [NSWIS] housed 550 athletes. In 1998-99 that number increased to 692 athletes, and it has increased to approximately 750 in 2003. NSWIS's focus is on elite athletes achieving world-class performances. The commitment extends beyond simply making the team to achieving world champion or Olympic medal status. NSWIS encourages co-operation and resource sharing between the nation's leading sporting institutes and has been instrumental in many of Australia's key national sporting and coaching program initiatives.

Since its inception in 1996 the institute has concentrated on attracting the best coaches, facilities, athletes and technical support staff. The institute presently has more than 30 sports programs, with the most recent addition being beach volleyball. These programs represent 26 different sports. Supporting the institute's athletes is a highly professional and dedicated team of coaches, sports psychologists, sports scientists, sports medical personnel and career/professional development advisors. These support personnel require extremely flexible working conditions on a day-to-day basis to be able to effectively support New South Wales' elite athletes.

A good example is the rowing coaches, who must be at training venues in advance of the 5.00 a.m. start time for morning training. It is essential for them to access the water when it is flat and wind free, and that is most likely to occur in the early morning. The coaches return with the rowers in the afternoon for a gym or aerobics session. The diving coaches are at the pool for a 5.00 a.m. start to make use of the excellent facilities at the Sydney International Aquatic Centre without interruption. My children regularly use that facility. The coaches are often joined at 6.00 a.m. by the water polo players and at 6.00 a.m. to 7.00 a.m. by the swimmers ready for their two-hour morning session. They return to the pool at 3.00 p.m. to 4.00 p.m. for an afternoon training session. The coaches for the ball sports—including netball, basketball, baseball and softball—usually have group training during the day and after hours when the athletes can train together after finishing work or study at university.

I will take honourable members through an actual day's schedule for a head coach. That will highlight the need for this legislation. The example is a working day of the institute's water polo head coach. Between 5.45 a.m. and 7.30 a.m. the coach is at the Sydney International Aquatic Centre, Homebush Bay for junior squad training. The squad comprises 17 NSWIS athletes who are working towards selection in the national junior team. The majority of the squad represent the New South Wales under 21 or under 17 squads. Between 7.00 a.m. and 9.00 a.m. the coach is at the aquatic centre for senior squad training in conjunction with NSWIS's Olympic skills coach. The majority of these athletes are members of the Australian national squad and/or Australian Institute of Sport's junior squad and are focused on Olympic athlete selection and preparation.

Between 10.30 a.m. and 2.00 p.m. the coach goes back to the NSWIS offices to undertake various tasks, including programming analysis and administration, which involves meeting with the women's water polo national coach, co-ordination of service staff at training, arrangement of courses for athletes, affiliated coach contact and video analysis. That takes between 45 minutes and one hour a day. Between 2.30 p.m. and 3.30 p.m. the coach is involved in NSWIS strength and conditioning at the State Sports Centre gym with the senior squad. Those sessions usually incorporate a mixture of strength exercises and cardio work. We think that members of Parliament work late, but we must remember that the head coach starts work at 5.00 a.m.

Between 5.45 p.m. and 8.15 p.m. he is at the aquatic centre for senior and junior athlete training. That training involves core stability sessions with NSWIS strength and conditioning, game skills analysis and sports

science and sports psychology group sessions. The coach's tasks are onerous and diverse. For most sports, games can be held at any time, although they are usually held in the evenings or on weekends during the sport season. The coaches may have players competing in different teams and be required to travel to local games to view them as they compete in different competitions. The support staff are available to provide expertise to the coaches and athletes as required and effectively remain on call. It is much more than a 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. job.

For example, the diving coach might want to have a training session videotaped and analysed by the biomechanists, the swimmers may require lactate testing, and the netball coach may wish to have a sports psychology expert on hand to prepare for a big game or assist an athlete recovering from recent injury. It is apparent that the provisions of the amendment bill will enable the institute's management to better accommodate this diversity of work practice, and to maintain the high standards of training that the institute currently enjoys. I fully support the amendments to the New South Wales Institute of Sport Act 1995, which are so evidently in the interests of our athletes and their support crews. I commend the Minister and her staff in relation to these amendments, which I am sure will assist all those involved with our elite athletes.

Mr HUNTER (Lake Macquarie) [12.40 p.m.]: It gives me great pleasure to support the Institute of Sport Amendment Bill. These amendments have come about due to the statutory requirement to review the Institute of Sport Act 1995 after five years of operation. As part of the review it was determined that several changes were required. These amendments are, first, to clarify the authority of the board to employ staff and the director; second, to repeal the Sporting Development Advisory Committee; and third, to insert a standard personal liability clause. However, the prime object of the bill is to amend the 1995 Act in relation to the employment of the chief executive officer and the staff at the institute.

Prior to the establishment of the New South Wales Institute of Sport only a small number of New South Wales elite athletes were trained by the Sydney Academy of Sport at Narrabeen. It will therefore come as no surprise to honourable members that there have been dramatic improvements in the training of athletes in this State since the establishment of the Institute of Sport. For instance, there has been a significant increase in the number of New South Wales residents on scholarship and achieving national representation and international success at significant world events. For the 1996 Olympics and Paralympics 63 New South Wales athletes were selected, and they brought home 7 gold, 5 silver and 19 bronze medals from Atlanta. By comparison, 156 New South Wales athletes were selected for the Sydney 2000 Olympics and Paralympics, and those athletes won 16 gold, 13 silver and 18 bronze medals.

Since the establishment of the institute there have been 100 world champions from New South Wales, 10 of which were crowned in a 10-day period in September 2002. These results are undoubtedly due to the increased number of scholarships available to athletes capable of contributing to Australia's Olympics and Paralympics success, together with the improved preparation and training of athletes prior to major international events.

[Quorum formed.]

The number of sports programs operating directly from high-quality premises has also increased dramatically. At Narrabeen there were five elite-level programs: sprint canoe, rowing, track and field, netball and swimming. At the New South Wales Institute of Sport there are 15 elite-level programs: basketball, sprint canoeing, cycling, diving, hockey, netball, rowing, soccer, softball, swimming, track and field, triathlon, water polo, wheelchair track and road, and wheelchair basketball. New South Wales is extremely fortunate to have a number of world-class facilities. The New South Wales Institute of Sport athletes make use of these facilities, bringing to them a highly professional attitude to training and an appreciation of the quality of those facilities.

Improved coach employment arrangements have also made a difference. Prior to the New South Wales Institute of Sport, only about four coaches were directly employed by an institution to look after our athletes. The others were generally employed by State sporting organisations or national sporting organisations—often without formal contracts, job descriptions, and performance management and appraisal systems. The institute changed this, with approximately 25 coaches now directly employed. Professional recruitment and appointment processes are in place, with coaches offered four-year employment terms in line with Olympics and Paralympics. There are also formal performance management, professional development and appraisal systems in place which are linked to annual salary increase provisions.

The benefits of having these quality systems in place include cross-fertilisation of ideas between elite coaches from varying sports; recruitment and detainment of best coaching staff, increased professionalism,

conditions and security for coaches, and exposure to high performance culture and access to state-of-the-art professional development resources. Joint management committees and service level agreements are now in place for each sport and require the co-operation of partners from the State and national sporting organisations for each of the 32 sports programs. There are annual and mid-year reviews of performance against agreed key performance indicators by joint management committees so that any problems are quickly identified and fixed. The process for the selection of athletes has likewise improved.

At the institute there are transparent selection policies for all NSWIS sports. This means that athletes, coaches and parents have access to standards and processes, allowing them greater opportunity to strive for improved performance. NSWIS now employs 15 sports science staff, 4 sports psychology staff plus up to 4 interns, 4 athlete career and professional development staff, and 7 program management and support staff. The concentration of dedicated and expert service staff enables a greater impact on athlete performance, and staff are capable of delivering services to regional athletes in their home training environment anywhere in New South Wales. NSWIS receives significant support from the New South Wales Government, sponsors, national sporting organisations and State sporting organisations. These diversified revenue streams, plus real partnerships between national sporting organisations and State sporting organisations, has resulted in NSWIS being the best-funded State sports institute in Australia.

The success of the New South Wales Institute of Sport is obvious when one looks at its results on the international stage. Some of the recent successes demonstrate this very well. Twenty-eight individual NSWIS athletes were involved in world championship winning performances during 2002. During September 2002 the institute celebrated 10 world champions in 10 days. During 2001-02, 211 NSWIS athletes won medals at significant international events, compared with 139 in 2000-01. In the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester 81 NSWIS scholarship holders represented Australia, comprising over 25 per cent of our country's total team. From those Commonwealth Games 44 NSWIS athletes brought home 64 medals—28 gold, 18 silver and 18 bronze. In all, NSWIS scholarship holders accounted for 26 per cent of Australia's record overall medal tally of 206, comprising 82 gold, 62 silver and 62 bronze.

NSWIS supplied competitors for more than one-third of the entire Australian cycling team and more than half of the Australian triathlon team. NSWIS supported 21 athletes for Campaign Salt Lake City, with 12 qualifying for the 2002 Winter Olympics and five qualifying for the Winter Paralympics. Last year NSWIS supported eight individual athletes in their pursuit of world championships. These athletes represented the sports of pistol shooting, squash, surf-lifesaving, barefoot waterskiing and inline speed skating. Through the Talent on Tour program 2001-02 NSWIS sent a total of 126 athletes to junior world championships or to other recognised international events where national sporting bodies could not fully cover the cost of national team tours.

Behind each of these athletes is a coach and a dedicated support crew. International travel and competition is essential for our athletes to remain competitive on the world stage. Their performance relies on access to the best possible support team, no matter where they are in the world. It is essential to provide NSWIS with the ability to engage the best coaches, sports scientists and other experts available, and then to negotiate with them, through a contract negotiation process, the terms and conditions that will achieve the best result for our athletes, New South Wales and Australia. The New South Wales Institute of Sport is the leading State institute and the changes outlined in this bill will ensure that it will continue to hold that place into the future, particularly for the preparation of athletes leading up to the 2004 Athens Olympics and the 2006 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne. Therefore, I fully support the bill.

Mr GREENE (Georges River) [12.52 p.m.]: I support this bill and congratulate the Minister on introducing it. As other speakers have clearly outlined, the New South Wales Institute of Sport [NSWIS] has made a magnificent contribution to sport, not only for athletes in New South Wales but also for sport generally throughout Australia. I will not go through the numbers of athletes who have been assisted by NSWIS and the records that they have achieved in the Olympics and the Manchester Commonwealth Games, and throughout various world championships, as that has been very adequately covered in the speeches of other members.

I, too, complement the institute on the work it is doing with elite athletes from our State. Currently the institute provides 34 programs across 26 sports, and those sports include not only the Olympic sports of athletics, swimming, rowing, soccer, hockey and basketball, but also cricket and many others that are not Olympic sports. The cricket program covers mainly the Colts cricket team coached by David Patterson and David Freedman. David Patterson is a development officer with Cricket New South Wales and David Freedman is also a development officer and a former New South Wales cricketer. That program is doing some outstanding work to extend the abilities of the young cricketers who are participating in the program.

In addition to men's cricket, the New South Wales women's cricket team is very much a part of the institute's programs. It is leading the way in women's cricket in Australia, and I congratulate the institute on its outstanding job. Last Saturday I attended the St George District Athletics Club for its annual general meeting and presentation. The annual report was presented by Albie Thomas, a former world-class athlete, world record holder and champion, who has made an enormous contribution to athletics in Australia and is still very much involved with St George. The report stated that four of the club's athletes are NSWIS scholarship holders: Shannon Delaney, who, I noted when I attended the St George Little Athletics general meeting, is now involved with the Institute; Zoe Pelbart, who unfortunately has a shoulder injury and cannot compete in the world youth championships as a javelin thrower; Damon Harris, a marathon runner; and Lachlan Chisholm, an 800 metres and 1,500 metres runner.

The institute is certainly having an impact on athletes from the St George district—part of which I represent—and across a wide variety of sports. The changes being introduced by the Minister clarify roles in the institute, particularly in regard to the employment of staff. With these changes the chief executive officer will report directly to the board rather than through the Director-General of the Department of Sport and Recreation, who is on the board of the New South Wales Institute of Sport. I congratulate the Minister and the New South Wales Institute of Sport on the magnificent work they are doing to promote the activities of our elite sports men and women, particularly the younger members of the sporting community. We look forward to their continued success under the new framework that is proposed by the Minister. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr WHAN (Monaro) [12.56 p.m.]: I support the bill and acknowledge the important work that the New South Wales Institute of Sport carries out as part of Australia's elite sports network. Australia is a world leader in the development of elite athletes. I worked for seven years at the Australian Sports Commission, which is the home of the Australian Institute of Sport [AIS], and I saw over a number of years the development of our elite sports system in Australia, including the development of the New South Wales Institute of Sport. Over the years since its establishment the institute has managed to develop its system so that it is now world-renowned as a group developing elite athletes in Australia. Developing elite athletes entails more than just having a coach who is able to dedicate the time; it entails accessing the sorts of services that we have heard about from other speakers today—the professional coaching, the education services for athletes, the sports scientists, things like nutrition advice for athletes, and even advice on careers and what to do after sport.

The New South Wales Institute of Sport has a number of roles, one being its important role in the structure for the development of elite athletes in New South Wales. In my totally unbiased opinion New South Wales has the best structure in Australia for the development of elite athletes. The entire State is covered by a network of regional academies of sport, which feed into the New South Wales Institute of Sport. I am lucky enough to be a member of the board of the South-east Regional Academy of Sport, which is based in the south-east corner of New South Wales. Opportunities are given to junior representatives and young athletes in New South Wales coming out of the club scene to be picked up through regional academies of sport. That gives them access to a level of sports science assistance and development assistance that enables them to make the leap from being local-based athletes or regional representatives to being athletes an elite level, from where they can be picked up by the New South Wales Institute of Sport.

That structure is working extremely well in New South Wales. It is part of the national elite sports structure, which includes the Australian Institute of Sport. Australia has become a world leader in sport, with terrific results at recent Olympic and Commonwealth Games. I am sure we will continue to do well in the future. I pay tribute to the management and staff of the New South Wales Institute of Sport, which is led by Charles Turner, the Acting Chief Executive Officer. He does a wonderful job, partly because he was one of the world's best water polo players, a sport I have played for 20 years. That type of experience is helping the New South Wales Institute of Sport to successfully develop its elite athletes, and it has contributed to our achieving great results at the Commonwealth and Olympic Games. With that brief contribution, I express my wholehearted support for the bill.

Ms NORI (Port Jackson—Minister for Tourism and Sport and Recreation, and Minister for Women) [1.00 p.m.], in reply: I thank all honourable members for their support for the bill. I particularly want to acknowledge the important points made by my colleague the honourable member for Auburn about the dedication of the coaches, sports psychologists, sports scientists, sports medical personnel and other key advisers at the New South Wales Institute of Sport. They all play a significant role in developing our peak athletes. The flexibility offered by the provisions of this amending bill will ensure that the best expertise remains available to train the athletes currently with the institute.

I acknowledge also those matters raised by my colleague the honourable member for Lake Macquarie relating to the recent successes of individual athletes trained by the institute. Whether it was at the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester, Campaign Salt Lake City or at the world championships, the successes recorded by those athletes supported by the New South Wales Institute of Sport demonstrate that the programs offered by the institute are effective and that the highly skilled, professional staff get results. The athletes also deserve great praise because it is their commitment, physical and mental effort, and dedication to their chosen sport that keep them receptive to the training disciplines offered at the institute. I also thank the mums and dads who, in the early years, took them to training at 5.00 a.m.

I thank also the honourable member for Monaro and the honourable member for Georges River for their contributions. It is apparent that as this legislation is obviously appropriate to the maintenance of high professional standards at the New South Wales Institute of Sport, politics have been rightly put to one side. With that in mind I thank the honourable member for Lachlan for his support and his contribution to the debate. I would like to close by reminding the House of the success of athletes supported by the New South Wales Institute of Sport at the 2000 Olympic and Paralympic Games. The institute supports one in five Australian Olympians. Indeed, had the institute competed as a country in its own right, it would have finished fourteenth in the medal tally.

As I said in this House when I introduced the bill, it is a graphic measure of the institute's achievements. From its inception in 1996 through to the present, there has been a steady increase in the number of athletes assisted by the institute. To be exact, the number has increased from 550 to 750. The institute has evolved and strengthened. It is now in a position to fully manage its own affairs through its chief executive officer and its board. I acknowledge Charles Turner, the Acting Chief Executive Officer, for his presence and support. I again thank all honourable members for their contributions to the debate. Go the Blues tonight!

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a second time and passed through remaining stages.

[Madam Acting-Speaker (Ms Andrews) left the chair at 1.03 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Routine of Business: Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Motion by Mr Scully agreed to:

That:

- (1) on Thursday 26 June 2003 standing and sessional orders be suspended to permit the business before the House to be interrupted at 11.00 a.m. for the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the National Party to speak on the Appropriation Bill and cognate bills.
- (2) the interrupted business be set down automatically as an order of the day for a later hour.

MINISTRY

Mr CARR: In the absence of the Minister for Gaming and Racing, who is ill, the Minister for Health will take questions on his behalf.

PETITIONS

Dunoon Dam

Petition requesting the fast-tracking of plans to build a dam at Dunoon, received from **Mr George**.

National Accident Scheme

Petition praying that a national accident scheme be established to cover all injured patients, received from **Mr Barr**.

Bushfires and Hazard Reduction

Petition requesting an inquiry into the causes of bushfires and their relationship to the lack of hazard reduction, received from **Ms Hodgkinson**.

Jingellic to Holbrook Road Upgrading

Petition requesting funding for the upgrading of the Jingellic to Holbrook road, received from **Mr Maguire**.

Windsor Road Traffic Arrangements

Petitions requesting a right turn bay on Windsor Road at Acres Road, received from **Mr Merton** and **Mr Richardson**.

Mental Health Act

Petition requesting that carers be included in the Mental Health Act, received from **Mr Barr**.

Northern Beaches Mental Health Services

Petition requesting increased funding, and no reduction in clinical staff, for mental health services in the northern beaches area, received from **Mr Barr**.

Bus Route 146

Petition requesting retention of bus route 146, received from **Mr Barr**.

Castle Cove Bus Services

Petition requesting a regular daily bus service between east Castle Cove and Wynyard, received from **Ms Berejikian**.

Cudgen Creek Seaway

Petitions requesting that the Cudgen Creek seaway at Kingscliff be cleared of silt, received from **Mr Cansdell**, **Mr Fraser** and **Mr R. W. Turner**.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**Reordering of General Business**

Mrs HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [2.25 p.m.]: I move:

That General Business Notice of Motion (General Notice) No. 42 [Hornsby hospital X-ray Department] standing in my name be reordered to have precedence on Thursday 26 June 2003.

The ability of patients to be adequately and efficiently serviced in the X-ray department of Hornsby hospital is being threatened by short-sighted decisions about the purchase of replacement X-ray processing equipment. My motion needs to be reordered so that decisions made by management in relation to the purchase of that equipment can be altered and today's X-ray system, not yesterday's, can be installed in the department. It came to my attention that the current film-based X-ray processing system was about to become obsolete due to the lack of available film—the company is no longer making it. That shows how old the Hornsby hospital facilities are. When I asked a question in the House about this matter the Minister provided a supplementary answer. He said that he had been told that one of the film processing units at Hornsby hospital is in need of replacement and that the replacement unit would be installed by the end of this financial year.

The problem is that the replacement will be an antiquated processing unit that also relies on film. The only reason the current processing unit could continue in use until the end of the financial year was that Westmead Hospital, which is now lucky to have a computerised digital processing unit, had no further use for its excess film and Hornsby Hospital was able to access it. An antiquated replacement processing unit, 15 to 20

years old, will cost \$186,000 of taxpayers' money. A new state-of-the-art computerised system would cost in the vicinity of \$460,000. It would set the hospital up for the future and offer patients and doctors efficient, cost-effective and environmentally friendly X-ray services. Images would be stored on computer rather than film.

Debate on the motion must take place immediately so that the equipment order can be changed and doctors can treat patients without having to wait for film development, reporting and X-rays that are missing in a pile somewhere. Computerised technology is the way forward and the purchase of old equipment is not. Acquiring an antiquated X-ray processing system is an unwise way to spend money. This motion needs to be reordered so we can debate overturning a poor decision for a commonsense one. Surely the order for the replacement processing unit can be altered. In short, there is a double standard involved. Royal North Shore Hospital, Ryde Hospital and Westmead Hospital all have computerised technology. The motion needs to be reordered in the budget session so that the true facts of the matter can be put before the House and the needs of the local Hornsby community can be served.

Mr SCULLY (Smithfield—Minister for Roads, and Minister for Housing) [2.28 p.m.]: The Government agrees to the motion.

Motion agreed to.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

STAMP DUTY

Mr BROGDEN: My question without notice is to the Premier. Following an \$830 million stamp duty windfall this year, will the Premier commit today to handing back to the taxpayers of New South Wales in the form of tax cuts any future windfalls from stamp duty?

Mr CARR: It must be understood that stamp duty pays for one-third of the cost of funding our hospitals or one-half of the cost of running our schools. No-one likes tax, but we all want good public schools and public hospitals. No-one likes that more than the honourable member for Gosford, who is quoted in his local paper today—

Mr Brogden: Point of order: My point of order relates to relevance. I asked the Premier what he intends to do with the windfall from stamp duty. I did not ask him about comments from members of this House.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Premier has been speaking for less than 30 seconds. Time and again the Leader of the Opposition has used the tactic of interrupting the Premier for the purpose of restating his question. I warn the Leader of the Opposition that I will not tolerate that point of order being taken in the future. It is a deliberate attempt to disrupt this House and it is grossly disorderly. The Premier has the call.

Mr CARR: Stamp duty pays for one-third of the cost of our hospitals, a point not lost on the honourable member for Gosford, who was quoted in his local paper this morning. The article states:

Member for Gosford Chris Hartcher has applauded the State Government's budget allocation for health services on the Central Coast.

The honourable member for Gosford is quoted as saying:

The Government is spending \$69 million on Central Coast health, which is the largest amount being spent in any area health service.

That is where the Government's tax revenues go.

Mr Brogden: What about the windfall?

Mr CARR: Here is a statement that is precisely about the windfall. The Leader of the Opposition was asked on 5 March by John Laws whether he would commit himself to any reduction in stamp duty.

Mr Brogden: What about the windfall?

Mr CARR: I am coming to the windfall. I will speak about the so-called windfall for 20 minutes; this is just the peroration to my speech on the windfall. The so-called windfall is a big part of this answer; this is just the prelude. The transcript records John Laws saying, "When you say stamp duty is another difficult one"—because that is what the Leader of the Opposition said—"what is difficult about it?" The Leader of the Opposition said, "Well"—thinking. Quite perceptively Laws said, "You need the money." The Leader of the Opposition said, "We need the money." His defence at his press conference today was, "When I said that, I didn't know about the windfall." If it takes me 25 minutes that is the proposition I want to dissect before the House. The Leader of the Opposition said at his press conference today, "When I said that back on the John Laws State election program, that windfall was being kept a great secret from me."

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will cease interjecting.

Mr CARR: At his press conference today a reporter put to him, "What right have you got to criticise the Government on stamp duty because you went to the last election saying you could not afford to cut it?" That was not an unreasonable question. The reply of the Leader of the Opposition was, "Well, they're back in Government." He is an astute political observer! The visitors in the gallery will note how perceptive he is. He went on to say, "With a massive increase that we knew nothing about." Did he know anything about it? The half-yearly budget statement was released on 23 December, in which the Treasurer said:

Taxation revenue is expected to be \$871 million above budget primarily due to the continued strength of the property market.

There it was on 23 December, spelt out in full by the Treasurer in what is known as the half-yearly budget statement. The Treasurer said:

Taxation revenue is expected to be \$871 million above budget primarily due to the continued renewed strength of the property market.

The Leader of the Opposition said this morning, "We knew nothing about that." He is the shadow Treasurer and he does not read the half-yearly budget statement!

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Fairfield to order.

Mr CARR: The Leader of the Opposition has no interest in how tax moves up or down. He is the shadow Treasurer and he was not aware that the Treasurer on 23 December spelt this out in full.

Mr Hazzard: It was the day before Christmas.

Mr CARR: It was not. One could say most often, one could say perhaps, one could say invariably that Christmas is traditionally celebrated on 25 December. I will not change that by legislation. It was the Christmas before a State election and the Opposition should have been on the watch for things like the half yearly budget statement. There it is, spelt out in detail on 23 December in the half yearly budget statement—\$871 million. The Leader of the Opposition dared to say today, "We couldn't promise a reduction in stamp duty because no-one told us about the windfall." That means as the shadow Treasurer he does not read these statements; he takes no interest in them. He is not up to the job.

KELLOGG (AUSTRALIA) PTY LTD CENTRAL COAST OPERATIONS

Mr CRITTENDEN: My question without notice is to the Premier. What is the Premier's response to the announcement by Kellogg (Australia) Pty Ltd today that it will expand operations on the Central Coast?

Mr CARR: Excited as I am by the praise of the honourable member for Gosford for what we are doing on the Central Coast—

[Interruption]

Yes, Jillian, the honourable member did praise us. That is very much on my mind. I think it is a generous thing to do. I am not saying it is uncharacteristically generous but it is a generous thing to do. The response to the Budget on the Central Coast is especially positive. We have delivered on the promises made to

voters, a bit for everyone. I do not know how much of the report I refer to is attributable to the honourable member for Gosford or to the reporter. The honourable member can clarify as I go through. The report states:

Central Coast due for \$68 million cash injection.
Record spending matches growth.
Commuters will enjoy easier ride.
Budget injects healthy share.

It is very good. Yesterday's announcement represents the biggest ever capital works program for the Central Coast. It has attracted a \$250 million investment this year for schools, hospitals, roads and other major infrastructure projects. It is said that it is the result of the work of a good local member. The *Northern Daily Leader* carries the headline "Region shares in spoils", and it does reflect the advocacy of the local member. The *Northern Star* in Lismore carries the headline "DOCS gets record budget". I do not think that even the honourable member for Lismore would claim a role in that. The *Daily Examiner* in Grafton states, "On track—Carr keeps promises on Grafton bridge plan, Yamba ambulance". That is not due to the work of the local member but to the work of his predecessor and the Labor candidate.

Looking through this smorgasbord of local press responses and using the arguments that suit me from case to case, I see that the *Barrier Daily Truth* contains headlines "Money for councils and roads" and "Budget boosts exploration". There is no doubt about who is responsible for that. The front page of the *Daily Advertiser* in Wagga Wagga claims, "Health services get big slice of budget pie". I am sure that honourable members will agree that the Government and not the local member has delivered. The *Daily News* in Tweed states, "Steady as she goes" and that this budget delivers all of the Government's major election promises. Honourable members must agree that the local member turned the tide in the Tweed.

Enough of these distractions! I will now refer to the Central Coast, which has attracted \$41 million more in the budget than it did last year; that is, it has a 20 per cent increase in capital works spending. That represents huge investment in local schools, hospitals and roads. Almost \$40 million has been allocated this year to improve safety and travel conditions, including almost \$10 million for The Entrance road. This is paying off in terms of heightened business confidence on the Central Coast. In January I was in Warnervale to announce that Australia's leading grocery retailer, Woolworth's Limited, will set up a \$100 million food distribution centre on the Central Coast that will generate up to 600 new permanent jobs over the next three years.

Honourable members will be interested to hear that this morning another big private sector commitment has been made to jobs growth on the Central Coast. Kellogg (Australia) Pty Ltd unveiled its plan to invest \$10 million and to create up to 100 jobs by expanding its manufacturing operation in Charmhaven. It is expected that the consolidated plant will be fully operational within the first half of next year. Kellogg has worked closely with the State Government and the Wyong Shire Council to develop its plan for the Central Coast. This expansion will mean that some of Australia's most recognised snack foods will be made on the Central Coast.

Indeed, people given to alliteration could well be tempted to say that the Central Coast will become a muesli bar manufacturing mecca. These foods will be exported to New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Israel, other parts of the Pacific rim, South East Asia and the Middle East. It is export-driven manufacturing investment and it means 100 new jobs on the Central Coast; that is, where these people live. I congratulate Kellogg on its decision to expand on the Central Coast. I also congratulate local honourable members representing the area on the huge capital works investment that is the essential background to the heightened business confidence in the region. I wish the present and future employees the best in their careers.

WORKERS COMPENSATION PREMIUMS FOR TRAINEES

Mr STONER: My question is directed to the Premier. Why has the Premier put the brakes on regional development by charging regional businesses the full cost of workers compensation premiums when employing young people in traineeships?

Mr CARR: Rural New South Wales has 26 per cent of the population and has attracted 36 per cent of the budget's capital works spending. New South Wales is the only State that has paid workers compensation premiums on behalf of the employers of trainees. The scheme was introduced in 1986 when trainee numbers were about 10,000. Regrettably it has led to rorting. In a number of cases companies have reclassified their employees as trainees to get the Government to pay workers compensation premiums.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the National Party will cease interjecting.

Mr CARR: That is rorting. The Government has an obligation to make sound decisions on behalf of the taxpayers of New South Wales. It is not prepared to see taxpayers' money diverted by rorting that has all employees classified as trainees to get this subsidy. From 1 January next year employers of trainees will be required to pay their workers compensation premiums like employers in all other States and as they already do for apprentices. At the same time we will exempt trainees from payroll tax.

POLICE DRUG TRAFFICKING OPERATION

Mr WHAN: I direct my question to the Minister for Police. What is the Government's response to community concerns about drug trafficking corridors in the State's south-west?

Mr WATKINS: I am pleased to advise the House that the Government has finalised new police powers to handle the trafficking of drugs across the New South Wales border from Victoria and South Australia. Intelligence gathered by New South Wales Police indicates that a new approach is needed. Police tell me that the roads between New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria are often used as corridors for drug runners. Officers say that the Sturt Highway, in particular, is being used to transport large quantities of drugs between States. Drug traffickers seeking to avoid bag searches and sniffer dogs at airports have taken to the road. These criminals often use hire cars and trucks, and police officers tell me that they have fitted fake fuel tanks in an attempt to avoid detection.

These new powers will allow police officers to stop vehicles in search areas and to use detection dogs to check vehicles for drugs. This is an important and necessary power for our hardworking police officers who patrol that part of the State. After approval from the commissioner or the deputy commissioner, officers will approach the Supreme Court for a warrant that is valid for only 72 hours. The application will detail the area to be searched, the police intelligence behind the operation, a plan of how the operation will work, including the number of officers and dogs to be used, and the proposed timing of the warrant. To be granted these powers police will need to demonstrate a reasonable suspicion that the area to be searched is used for trafficking indictable quantities of drugs.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Barwon to order.

Mr WATKINS: The Supreme Court judge must sign off on the warrant. The dimensions of the trial area have been determined in consultation with operational police. The trial will occur in a 100-kilometre area in southern and western New South Wales, from the borders of South Australia and Victoria. The legislation also covers three designated choke points outside that 100-kilometre-deep zone. Police officers tell me that these sites at Hay, Narrandera and a heavily frequented truck stop on the Sturt Highway known as the Birdcage will need to be included in the trial. It gives police officers flexibility to set up checkpoints in a variety of areas to keep drug traffickers guessing. They are sites at which main roads converge, they offer safe staging points at the side of the road and they have strong lighting, which means better safety for police officers, especially during night-time operations. There will be signage in the vicinity informing drivers that searches are occurring.

Mr Armstrong: Point of order: The Minister's answer is extremely important, but I simply ask: Why is he giving this information on what is a very serious measure to try to stop the drug trade? Surely the element of surprise would have to be involved in such a program.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The Minister has the call.

Mr WATKINS: The operation will involve police standing at the roadside with signs. It is difficult to keep that secret—in fact, that is the whole point of the operation. Once drivers are flagged down, a drug detection dog will then be used. In fact, the operation will not go ahead unless there is a drug detection dog at the checkpoint. Anyone obstructing police carrying out these searches could be fined up to \$1,100. The mayors of the State's western regions—I know that the honourable member for Lachlan is close to the mayors in his area, who also have approached me—are deeply concerned about drug trafficking throughout their towns and across the plains of western New South Wales. The Government has developed these powers partly as a response to those mayors. The trial will be in force for 18 months. After 12 months the Ombudsman will provide the Government with a report on the trial, taking into account the regular police monitoring, evaluation, reporting and operational results.

New South Wales police do an excellent job in stopping the spread of drugs. These new powers mean that we are adapting the laws to the behaviour of the criminals who are trafficking drugs in New South Wales. Police identified this as a problem, they asked for new laws, and the Government provided the powers. These laws will be enacted by police across New South Wales, operating under the State's first-ever \$2 billion police budget, a budget that will see police—who are patrolling regional areas of the State—wearing their new operational uniforms consisting of cargo pants, baseball caps and GP boots, a front-line uniform supplied at a cost of \$1.2 million as provided in the budget announced yesterday. The drug trafficking crackdown in these outlying regions of New South Wales comes at a time when the Government is also spending \$900,000 in the new budget on attracting police to remote areas of the State.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Baulkham Hills to order.

Mr WATKINS: The 2003-04 budget—which is a 91 per cent increase on the last Coalition budget—will also provide in-car video cameras for highway patrol vehicles at a cost of \$8.5 million over two years; \$3.3 million over three years for better prisoner transport vehicles; and \$8.8 million for the ongoing redevelopment of the police country communications network. All these provisions in our record police budget will assist police in the southern region as they put into practice these new legislative powers. Indeed, they will assist our record numbers of police right across New South Wales.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Blacktown to order.

Mr WATKINS: After excluding capital provisions relating to the relocation of police headquarters to Parramatta, this new budget represents an 8.3 per cent increase on last year's police budget. It shows how seriously the Government takes its promise to drive down crime and give police the powers they need to do that job.

STATE-OWNED CORPORATIONS COMPETITIVE NEUTRALITY

Mr HAZZARD: My question without notice is to the Minister for Energy and Utilities. Why is the Minister saddling government businesses, such as Macquarie Generation, EnergyAustralia and Sydney Water, with over \$6 billion in additional debt over four years whilst simultaneously ripping \$4 billion from them in dividends, guaranteeing that New South Wales families will be forced to pay substantially more for essential electricity and water?

Mr SARTOR: I do not have to refer to any notes to deal with this question.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Murrumbidgee to order. I call the honourable member for Coffs Harbour to order.

Mr SARTOR: Here we have the architects of corporatisation and competitive neutrality for government trading enterprises criticising the Government for policies relating to the competitive neutrality position of our State-owned corporations. The simple fact is that the honourable member for Wakehurst, as the shadow Minister's government's, was the architect of cutting \$700 million from the Department of Community Services [DOCS] programs, as well as 760 staff. The honourable member complains about the fact that we are running State-owned corporations in a way that is equivalent to other trading enterprises.

Mr Scully: Like a business.

Mr SARTOR: Like a business. In fact, he does not know that this is a question for the Treasurer, the shareholding Minister, and not for the portfolio Minister.

[Interruption]

The shadow Minister's government created that model. He probably created it with Bruce Baird. If only he had done that with the airport rail link!

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

Mr SARTOR: Kellogg might be making muesli on the Central Coast, but clearly they are still producing fruit loops in Wakehurst. This is the man who was going to gut DOCS; he was going to take away the

key promise for all those people suffering in our community. These are the people who introduced corporatisation and competitive neutrality, and now they are whingeing about the fact that we are running it like a business. Ask the Treasurer.

HEALTH BUDGET

Mrs PALUZZANO: My question without notice is to the Minister for Health. What has been the community response to the health component of the 2003 budget and other initiatives to assist New South Wales families and related matters?

Mr Humpherson: Point of order: The House has 45 minutes for question time and an average of 4½ minutes per question. We have now heard a number of very long answers to questions. If the Minister gives a long and rambling response to this question it will deny members the opportunity to ask other questions to which they seek answers. I ask you to rule that the words "and related matters" not be allowed in questions. In the last year or two it has become the common practice for those words to be added to enable Ministers to ramble about a whole range of areas within their portfolios. Questions are supposed to be succinct and precise, as are answers. I ask you to direct the member to rephrase the question so that it complies with the common practice.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I have heard enough to rule on the point of order.

Mr Richardson: To the point of order—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for The Hills will resume his seat. I call him to order. The point of order taken by the honourable member for Davidson was longer than the question. Indeed, it was longer than many of the answers provided in this House. I ruled recently on a point of order relating to the wording of a question. Previous Speakers have also ruled on the same matter. The question is in order. There is no point of order.

Mr IEMMA: The public health system is under great pressure. Bulk billing is in free fall, the Commonwealth Government is cutting funding, and an ageing population means that patients arrive at hospital more often and with ever-increasingly complex medical issues.

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

Mr IEMMA: The budget tabled in this House yesterday reaffirms this Government's commitment to meet the health needs of the people of New South Wales. It was a record health budget of \$9.3 billion, a \$920 million increase and 11 per cent more than last year. This is the largest ever health budget and the largest ever increase in a 12-month period. The community response to this budget has been very positive indeed. The President of the New South Wales branch of the Australian Medical Association [AMA] said:

The AMA welcomes the health budget. We recognise that it is a record amount of spending and certainly the Government seems committed to improving emergency departments and capital works in general.

He continued:

\$456 million for capital works spending for hospitals and health infrastructure will help improve services for patients.

Funding to expand kidney dialysis units is welcome and we would encourage the government to continue to concentrate their attention on such facilities.

I say to the AMA, absolutely. He said further:

The AMA acknowledges the government's commitment to mental health services with a 14 per cent increase in psychiatric spending.

Finally, on the key issue of medical indemnity for rural doctors, the AMA had this to say:

AMA (NSW) welcomes the government's commitment to spend \$5 million to expand medical indemnity to cover doctors treating private patients in public hospitals, in rural and regional areas.

But the overwhelmingly positive response of the community does not end with the endorsement of our doctors. As we have already heard from the Premier, quite a few members of the Opposition have been very positive

about the Government's initiatives in health. I will not detain the House to go over the comments made by the honourable member for Gosford.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Murray-Darling to order.

Mr IEMMA: The honourable member for Bega on radio this morning was very positive when he said that the community had achieved a win with the funds allocated for the Milton-Ulladulla hospital. Indeed, our old friend the former leader of the National Party and honourable member for Upper Hunter, said that his constituents had benefited greatly from the New South Wales health budget. It does not end with positive comments from the Hunter. The *Illawarra Mercury* in the past couple of weeks has had a few things to say about health and it published a very good statement saying that \$298 million represented a real shot in the arm for hospitals in the Illawarra region. That is a record amount indeed.

The Mayor of Newcastle—not someone who has always been favourable towards the Government—welcomes the record health budget for the Hunter and the huge capital works spending program for all of Newcastle. The health budget creates an environment that will help us attract and retain our staff. New South Wales nurses are the best paid in Australia, and the budget fully funds their recent wage increases. Nurses, along with other health professionals, are seeing significant improvement in their salaries this year. Our nurses will have improved access to training through scholarships to the value of \$3.5 million, and the budget also sets aside \$6.5 million to recruit additional nurse practitioners to improve career paths for nurses. This funding is a real boost for nurses.

The medical indemnity insurance issue, which the AMA has so welcomed, stands in stark contrast to the Commonwealth's inaction in this area. The budget also makes provision for delivering services closer to where people live, through the provision of the mobile surgical unit, at a cost of \$2.5 million. This mobile operating theatre is currently being trialled, and the Government is committed to continuing that initiative beyond the life of the trial. One of the real benefits of the budget is the improvement to our emergency departments. This is where the Government stands in stark contrast to the Commonwealth who have put on the table a funding formula that says hospitals, and in particular emergency departments, are not under the pressure that we all know that they are, and not as busy as we all know that they are. The budget makes provision for a continuation of the \$31 million funding for emergency medicine units and the rapid emergency assessment teams for emergency departments, which were announced just before the election. That is on top of the \$5.5 million for our aged care assessment teams to assist emergency departments in treating the needs of the elderly in our community.

More importantly than funding for these types of services, we are also rebuilding our emergency departments. Already we have rebuilt 70. The budget makes provision for redevelopment of a further 24 emergency departments. It is little wonder that the budget has received overwhelming endorsement from a wide section of the community, particularly from our doctors. It is part of a program to continue rebuilding the infrastructure of our hospitals, and to provide and fund the services where they are needed. The program is particularly focused on our emergency departments, and on supporting our nurses and providing them with additional skills to meet the needs of our health work force. In a climate of uncertainty we have delivered a record budget—the single greatest increase in a health budget in a 12-month period, which is based on a funding formula that recognises that our hospitals and our doctors need more support, and that is what we are delivering.

AUSTRALIAN LONG COURSE TRIATHLON

Mr OAKESHOTT: My question is addressed to the Premier. Will the State Government recognise the importance and economic benefits flowing to the Port Macquarie and North Coast communities from the Australian Long Course Triathlon and will it commit to providing financial support to the event in 2004?

Mr CARR: I want the Government to help secure this important event. That is why next Tuesday representatives from the New South Wales Major Events Board will visit Port Macquarie to begin discussions on a long-term involvement with the Australian Long Course Triathlon event.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Coffs Harbour to order for the second time.

Mr CARR: The members opposite are grumbling about the Independents. It is bad spirit to sit there grumbling about the Independents. If they got out and did something for their communities they might have a chance against the Independents. I am not happy with the Independents sitting here in such numbers in this Chamber. I would be the last person to express satisfaction at that.

Mr Armstrong: Join them up to the Labor Party.

Mr CARR: That sort of bitterness does not become the honourable member for Lachlan. The Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party is reading the *Spectator* magazine. Now, that could lead to very unhealthy thoughts, well to the right of centre. We contributed \$50,000 towards the staging of the event this year, among other things that helped the triathlon secure television coverage. In effect, it was one big television advertisement for the region. And what a great region it is. That is on top of the significant economic benefits that flow from having more than 300 athletes, mostly from other parts of Australia and overseas, stay in the city. It is a very important event. Sporting events like this bring money into the tourist sector of a regional city.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Myall Lakes to order.

Mr CARR: I acknowledge that it has had that effect in Port Macquarie. Of the 300 athletes taking part, I am informed that the honourable member for Port Macquarie was one of them. I congratulate him on completing the course, regardless of the position he enjoyed. I look forward to being briefed on the outcome of Tuesday's meeting.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Lachlan to order.

Mr CARR: I assure the honourable member that the New South Wales Government is paying very close attention to the future of this important event.

MANSLAUGHTER LAW REVIEW

Mr GIBSON: My question without notice is addressed to the Attorney General. What is the Government's response to the review into the law of manslaughter in New South Wales by Justice Finlay?

Mr DEBUS: I thank the honourable member for his question about a very serious matter. Last October I asked Justice Mervyn Finlay, a retired Supreme Court judge, to undertake a quite daunting task. I asked him to undertake a comprehensive study of the law of manslaughter and related offences in New South Wales. In particular, I asked him to look at the very distressing and difficult issues raised when a criminal act is perpetrated against the mother of an unborn child and that child dies as a consequence. The deficiencies of the law in New South Wales in this respect were brought into sharp relief by the ramming of the car containing Renee Shields, then seven months pregnant, and the subsequent stillbirth of her baby, Byron.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Illawarra to order.

Mr DEBUS: I know that Justice Finlay received a heartfelt submission from Renee Shields. I know from my conversation this morning with her that she is relieved that Justice Finlay has taken her concerns very seriously and has made recommendations to address the gap in the law that her tragedy brought to light. She still endures great distress at the death of her child and the consequences of her ordeal. Although nothing can compensate her for her loss, her efforts on behalf of Byron have not been in vain. I know that members on both sides of this House have expressed great sympathy for her plight and I am encouraged to believe that Justice Finlay's recommendations will be welcomed by both sides of the House.

Justice Finlay has had a most challenging task. He has undertaken a study of this most complex area of the criminal law, one which law reform commissions take years to deliberate upon. I respectfully thank him for the care and thought he has brought to the report and his recommendations. His major recommendation is the creation of an offence for the killing of an unborn child. Such a recommendation would bring the law in New South Wales into line with jurisdictions around Australia. The details of that proposal, with the appropriate safeguards that Justice Finlay recommends, are set out in his report. He has consulted widely and, of course, the Government will consult further, in particular, with health authorities.

The Government is carefully considering the recommendations of the report. For example, we need certainty that any proposed legislation will give protection for any legitimate medical interventions. I make it clear from the outset that in investigating this offence there is no intention to unsettle the well-established common-law position on abortion in this State. That remains the position and the offence, as proposed by Justice Finlay, is designed to safeguard that position. Justice Finlay's report considers in detail the possibility of legislating for differential penalties for degrees or categories of manslaughter.

In summary, he has concluded that the range of criminality covered by the category of manslaughter is simply too diverse to be reduced to subcategories in the statute book. On one hand are the mother in the grip of post-natal depression who gases her child, a mercy killing, a suicide pact, an abused child who turns on his or her assailant, and the farm worker who accidentally discharges a gun and kills his mate. On the other hand, right up the scale, are acts of killing that fall just short of murder, in the heat of passion, in excessive self-defence and in the grip of delusion.

Justice Finlay has studied the law as it applies around Australia and, indeed, around the common law world, and has concluded that to codify the law of manslaughter would result in substantial injustice. The judge reports also that submissions from women's groups, prosecutors and the police all opposed a statutory scheme for manslaughter on the basis of the injustices that it would create. I thank the judge for the care and consideration that he has given to this quite difficult issue. I advise the House that next session I shall bring before the House legislation implementing the recommendations that Justice Finlay has made.

DROUGHT ASSISTANCE

Mr SLACK-SMITH: My question is to the Minister for Regional Development, representing the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries. Why has the Minister budgeted to continue drought support funding only until the end of December based on the flawed forecast of the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics [ABARE], the very agency the Minister criticised last week, cutting Rural Assistance Authority drought assistance funding by 40 per cent?

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

Mr CAMPBELL: In the financial year just ending the Government expects to spend \$80 million on drought relief. Over the next six months the Government has budgeted a further \$47 million to maintain the high level of spending on drought assistance. As the Treasurer said yesterday, if the drought does not break we will have to spend more than that. That sums up the situation.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the National Party will cease interjecting.

Mr CAMPBELL: Substantial funding has been spent and allocated, and the Government has made a commitment to work with the industry on an as-needs basis.

Mr SLACK-SMITH: I ask a supplementary question. Why did the Minister take advice from ABARE on 14 April, and does the Minister think the drought is over too?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! That is not a supplementary question. It does not arise from the Minister's answer.

SCAM MAIL

Mr BROWN: My question without notice is to the Minister for Fair Trading. What is the latest information on the Government's efforts to crack down on scam mail?

Ms MEAGHER: I thank the honourable member for his question and note that he has received a complaint from a constituent who has received scam mail.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Epping to order. Question time has not yet concluded. If members continue to interject they will be removed from the Chamber. The Minister has the call.

Ms MEAGHER: The Carr Government is working to help protect families and business from scam mail. Honourable members may recall that earlier this month I announced a great victory in the war against overseas scam artists. The Supreme Court permitted the New South Wales Government to destroy more than 200,000 scam mail letters, ensuring that they never reach the hands of unsuspecting consumers. The letters, which originated from Canada, were seized by the Office of Fair Trading late last year. The letters, with the appearance of a fake cheque, promised a cash windfall of \$13,000 provided that the consumer sent \$50 to the company first. If each of those 200,000 letters had been received and responded to, it would have milked consumers of some \$10 million of their hard-earned money.

The decision by the Supreme Court to give Office of Fair Trading officers the power to destroy these letters before they hit the letterboxes of consumers was a first for Australia. What is disturbing is the sophistication of these operations. In this case the letters looked official and were marked urgent, and for a vulnerable consumer the prospect of a cash windfall of \$13,000 might have been an irresistible temptation. The message I want to send to consumers is simple: If it sounds too good to be true then it probably is.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Lane Cove to order.

Ms MEAGHER: I would like to advise honourable members of another scam mail floating around, the El Gordo Sweepstake Lotteria. The letters generally advise consumers that they have won a substantial amount of money and that to avoid any mix-up the sender of the letter needs to confirm the consumer's identity. Consumers are asked to fill in a so-called payment authority form and return it to the scam promoters. Similar to the infamous Nigerian letter scam, this form asks for personal and bank account details. These scam promoters then use this information to attempt to empty the consumer's bank account. The scams rely on consumers confusing the lottery with the authorised Spanish lotteries.

I can inform honourable members that the New South Wales Office of Fair Trading is working closely with interstate and overseas consumer protection agencies and postal authorities to minimise the influx of overseas scam mail. The strategy involves the development of a national database and scam alert system to assist investigators in identifying suspect offers. A special intergovernmental working group has been formed to also consider legislative options to strengthen law enforcement agencies to intercept and detain suspect mail. Recently I launched a new consumer education campaign—Scam Smart: Beat the Cheats. The importance of consumer awareness against these types of scams is crucial. The education campaign is aimed at the vulnerable members of our community, particularly the elderly, to help them avoid becoming a victim. The brochures and posters provide information to help consumers identify scam mail, as well as highlighting the tricks and traits of the shonky operators. These are available from the Office of Fair Trading.

Questions without notice concluded.

TAMWORTH COUNTRY LABOR CONFERENCE

Ministerial Statement

Mr CAMPBELL (Keira—Minister for Regional Development, Minister for the Illawarra, and Minister for Small Business) [3.19 p.m.]: It is on again—the annual Country Labor conference. It is a political assembly bigger than the conference of the entire State branch of the Liberal Party. On 5 and 6 July more than 400 delegates and their families will converge on the home of country music.

Mr O'Farrell: Point of order: My point of order relates to relevance. It is untrue to say that 400 people at a Country Labor conference is bigger than the State conference of the Liberal Party. It is simply untrue.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition may reply to the ministerial statement at the appropriate time if he wishes to do so.

Mr CAMPBELL: On 5 and 6 July more than 400 delegates and their families will converge on the home of country music, Tamworth. It is also the home of Ray Tait and Di Carter, the first ever Tamworth councillors elected under the Country Labor banner in New South Wales, and of the newly elected Country Labor MLC, Christine Robertson. The 2003 conference is anticipated to be an economic windfall for the local Tamworth economy. I am sure that small businesses in Tamworth will already be dusting off the welcome mats. Although the conference officially takes place over two days, Saturday 5 July and Sunday 6 July, many delegates take advantage of the weekend, arriving a day or two early to spend some time in the surrounding region.

I think the honourable member for Tamworth will join me in taking this opportunity to encourage delegates to extend their visit so that they can enjoy the hospitality of Tamworth and the New England region. On top of these 400 delegates and their families, a strong media contingent from Sydney and other regional centres will converge on Tamworth on the weekend of 5 and 6 July. The conference will also be attended by Country Labor MPs and MLCs—members who represent an area far and wide, stretching from the Tweed down through Monaro and the Riverina, and out to Broken Hill. All of these visitors will be staying in Tamworth hotels, motels, bed and breakfasts and farm stays. In true Country Labor style they will work hard but they will also support the local hospitality industry, injecting thousands of dollars into the local economy.

Tourism New South Wales estimates that this year's Country Labor conference will inject almost \$100,000 into Tamworth alone. Local domestic tourists on conventions such as the Country Labor conference spend an average of \$80 a day. All this spending helps to create local jobs. That is good news for local communities. In the end, that is what securing conferences is all about. As is a tradition with Country Labor conferences, the Premier will give the keynote address. He will be joined by senior Ministers, most of whom will be on hand for the full weekend. As well as debates on major rural and regional issues, such as economic development, health, education, law enforcement, land and water conservation, and agriculture, this conference will allow delegates to put their concerns directly to Ministers.

Unlike Liberal Party and National Party get-togethers, Country Labor is now the only true political country conference. Over the past four years Country Labor conferences were held at Goulburn in 1999, Coffs Harbour in 2000, Huskisson on the South Coast in 2001, Cooma in 2002 and now Tamworth in 2003. When it comes to a Country Labor conference that old bush saying sure rings true: Have saddle will travel. And this year's Country Labor conference will prove that we will also be bringing our money with us.

Mr PICCOLI (Murrumbidgee) [3.23 p.m.]: It is with some interest that I respond to this ministerial statement. First, I thought ministerial statements were supposed to be about issues relating to government, not party political issues such as the Country Labor conference. The Minister spouted on about the so-called Country Labor Party conference in Tamworth. I am sure it will be fascinating for the people of Tamworth to see the bus loads of trade unionists—

Mr Campbell: Point of order: My point of order is simple. Most people in regional centres know the importance of holding a conference in their centre. They know the important public policy issues of having a conference in their centre. Most people in regional centres in New South Wales would welcome a conference of 400 delegates to their community. It is unfortunate that the honourable member for Murrumbidgee does not recognise the important public policy aspects of attracting conferences of this nature.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The honourable member for Murrumbidgee may continue.

Mr PICCOLI: I am sure the people of Tamworth—indeed, the people of country New South Wales—will be fascinated when they see the trade union officials bussed into Tamworth to attend this farcical conference. I wonder how many genuine country people will attend the conference.

Mr Fraser: None.

Mr PICCOLI: As the honourable member for Coffs Harbour says, probably none. Labor Party officials are characterised as people who have never worked. They purport to represent the working class but they are not usually people who work. I heard the honourable member for Upper Hunter refer to the honourable member for Swansea as the "accidental worker". I thought that was appropriate. Some of the problems with the Federal Labor Party have been sheeted home to the fact that the party has professional unionists. That is the major problem with the Federal Labor Party.

Mr O'Farrell: Or the kids of former Labor members.

Mr PICCOLI: That is right, the kids of former Labor members. Members opposite do not like to hear that.

Mr Whan: Point of order: My point of order relates to relevance. The Minister made a statement on the importance of conventions to regional economies. Clearly, the Opposition spokesman is straying a long way from that, and I ask you to bring him back to the point.

Mr Fraser: To the point of order: The Country Labor conference in Coffs Harbour saw the Premier slip in the back door of the services club, and that is why he is known in Coffs Harbour as backdoor Bob. When he attends these conferences he will not talk to the people, the people members opposite purport to represent, but he refuses to meet them.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Coffs Harbour will resume his seat. The honourable member for Monaro is correct when he claims that the honourable member for Murrumbidgee should respond directly to the ministerial statement made by the Minister. I uphold the point of order.

Mr PICCOLI: I could have sworn that the Minister said "and related matters" in his ministerial statement. I am simply referring to your earlier ruling allowing me to stray.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! In this instance that is a figment of the imagination of the honourable member for Murrumbidgee.

Mr PICCOLI: Of course, country communities appreciate any money that is spent in their communities. We all appreciate conferences. I am sure the honourable member for Tamworth appreciates them. The \$100,000 that this conference will inject into Tamworth is probably more than the entire allocation for Tamworth out of the \$35 billion State budget. Of course the people of Tamworth will welcome the conference. But Country Labor should be doing something fair dinkum. It should invite the Namoi groundwater users and people on hospital waiting lists in Tamworth to the conference, and address all the things that should have been done while the Labor Party and Country Labor have been in government. [*Time expired.*]

MILTON-ULLADULLA HOSPITAL

Personal Explanation

Mr CONSTANCE, by leave: I wish to make a personal explanation. During question time the Minister impugned my role as the member for Bega by misrepresenting my statement on ABC radio this morning. I state for the record that the community had a win in Milton and Ulladulla as a result of the community and political pressure that was applied to the State Government to deliver upgrades to Milton-Ulladulla Hospital.

CONSIDERATION OF URGENT MOTIONS

Arabic and Pacific Islander Youth Partnerships

Mr STEWART (Bankstown—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.28 p.m.]: My motion is urgent because young people of Pacific Island and Arabic speaking backgrounds are in vital need of additional community and government support. It is urgent because we need to promote the wellbeing of young people of Pacific Island and Arabic speaking backgrounds in our communities. It is urgent because there is an important need to increase parental support and education to help prevent risk-taking behaviour by children and young people. It is urgent because we need to provide children and young people with learning and recreational activities to assist their long-term personal development. My motion is urgent because children and young people of all backgrounds are our future.

Princes Highway Upgrade

Mr CONSTANCE (Bega) [3.29 p.m.]: My motion is urgent because the Carr Labor Government has failed the communities of the far South Coast, including those in the electorates of Bega, Monaro and South Coast, by not committing funding to the Princes Highway. I note the presence of the honourable member for South Coast in this House this afternoon. The expenditure of \$38 million a year for 10 years, with over \$310 million of that funding being spent north of Kiama, is a disgrace. This matter is urgent because the state of the Princes Highway was ignored in the Labor Government's State budget yesterday. It is now time for the State Government to live up to its obligations and rectify the situation for the communities on the far South Coast.

This matter is urgent because the House should condemn the actions of the Minister for Roads, Carl Scully, in refusing to fund the highway south of Kiama when he knows there have been 6,531 serious accidents on the highway in the past 10 years that have injured or killed well over 4,000 people. The expenditure of \$38 million a year for 490 kilometres of State highway is a commitment that the Labor Government should be ashamed of. That will not even fill in the potholes! The Princes Highway is in need of increased funding, and while the Labor Government continues to ignore its obligation and argues with the Federal Government about who foots the bill the residents and tourists of the far South Coast continue to endure nightmare conditions. They know it is a State highway and a State responsibility.

This matter is urgent because the Princes Highway is the major transport carriageway through the south-east region. The highway is a State responsibility, carries a significant amount of freight and tourist transport, and opens the door to many far South Coast communities and industries. The very nature of the Princes Highway, being the only road in and out of the area, is in itself evidence of how crucial the upgrades are to the road. This matter is urgent because the NRMA has in the past 15 years conducted a series of performance

reviews on the highway, the most recent taking place in 2002. Some of the findings were shocking. The report concluded that the road is considered to be among the worst of the main roads in south-east New South Wales and, in particular, the rural length of road south of Nowra is considered to be the worst.

Mr Stewart: Point of order: The honourable member is entering into substantive debate on the subject. He knows the standing orders require him to argue urgency only. I ask you to direct him to do that.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! This point of order is taken during almost every debate of this type. I remind the honourable member for Bega that he must show why his motion should have priority; he should not argue the substance of that motion.

Mr CONSTANCE: The matter should receive urgent consideration because I cannot reiterate strongly enough how vital the quality of the road and bridge infrastructure of the Princes Highway is to safety and to ensuring the economic and social sustainability of the far South Coast. The Princes Highway is in desperate need of upgrades and improvements south of Nowra, as set out in the Roads and Traffic Authority's development plan, particularly in my electorate at Pambula Bridge, Brogo River Bridge, Wagonga Inlet, Dignams Creek, Victoria Creek, and Bega and Ulladulla. These areas make up a deadly package of dangerous conditions for our drivers—black spots from Sussex Inlet to Bawley Point, the 12 per cent of poor road shoulder conditions from Batemans Bay to the Victorian border, and poor pavement conditions and road shoulder widths from Batemans Bay to Bega. The highway below Kiama is in dire need of development, particularly as the NRMA report also states that the road is presenting an increasing trend in the incidence of road trauma accidents along the route. The state of the Princes Highway is failing the far South Coast. Since the change in international tourism, the country has witnessed—

Mr Stewart: Point of order: Unfortunately I have to take the same point of order. The honourable member is entering into the substantive debate by giving facts and figures to support what he is putting forward. This debate is about urgency, and the honourable member needs to substantiate urgency only, as required under the standing orders.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I have reminded the honourable member for Bega that he must show why his motion should have priority and that he should not deal with the substance of the motion. I again ask him to confine his remarks to why his motion should have priority over the motion of which the honourable member for Bankstown has given notice.

Mr CONSTANCE: This matter is urgent because the traffic volumes over the next 10 years are expected to increase by 30 per cent and the communities on the far South Coast will experience high levels of congestion, heavy delays and hazardous conditions. This matter is urgent because 98 per cent of visitors to the South Coast travel by road in private or rented vehicles or by bus or coach. This matter is urgent and the findings I have presented here today are clear evidence that the upgrades need to take place immediately. This matter is urgent and must be debated today.

Question—That the motion by the honourable member for Bankstown be proceeded with—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 53

Mr Amery	Ms Hay	Mr Pearce
Ms Andrews	Mr Hickey	Mrs Perry
Mr Bartlett	Mr Hunter	Mr Price
Ms Beamer	Mr Iemma	Dr Refshaug
Mr Black	Ms Judge	Ms Saliba
Mr Brown	Ms Keneally	Mr Sartor
Ms Burney	Mr Knowles	Mr Scully
Miss Burton	Mr Lynch	Mr Shearan
Mr Campbell	Mr McGrane	Mr Stewart
Mr Collier	Mr McLeay	Mr Torbay
Mr Corrigan	Ms Meagher	Mr Tripodi
Mr Crittenden	Ms Megarrity	Mr Watkins
Ms D'Amore	Mr Mills	Mr West
Mr Debus	Mr Morris	Mr Whan
Ms Gadiel	Mr Newell	Mr Yeadon
Mr Gaudry	Mr Oakeshott	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Gibson	Mr Orkopoulos	Mr Ashton
Mr Greene	Mrs Paluzzano	Mr Martin

Noes, 32

Mr Aplin	Mrs Hopwood	Ms Seaton
Mr Armstrong	Mr Humpherson	Mrs Skinner
Mr Barr	Mr Kerr	Mr Slack-Smith
Ms Berejikian	Mr Merton	Mr Souris
Mr Cansdell	Ms Moore	Mr Stoner
Mr Constance	Mr O'Farrell	Mr Tink
Mr Debnam	Mr Page	Mr J. H. Turner
Mr Fraser	Mr Piccoli	Mr R. W. Turner
Mrs Hancock	Mr Pringle	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Hartcher	Mr Richardson	Mr George
Ms Hodgkinson	Mr Roberts	Mr Maguire

Pairs

Ms Allan	Mr Brogden
Mr McBride	Mr Hazzard

Question resolved in the affirmative.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**Routine of Business: Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders****Motion by Mr Scully agreed to:**

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to permit:

- (1) up to four additional speakers to speak on the motion for urgent consideration for up to five minutes each; and
- (2) private members' statements to commence after the conclusion of the matter of public importance.

Motion by Mr Scully agreed to:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to provide at this sitting:

- (1) up to 22 private members' statements be taken after the inaugural speech of the member for Londonderry;
- (2) after the commencement of private members' statement no quorums or divisions be called; and
- (3) at the conclusion of private members' statements the House shall adjourn without motion until Thursday 26 June 2003 at 10.00 a.m.

ARABIC AND PACIFIC ISLANDER YOUTH PARTNERSHIPS**Urgent Motion**

Mr STEWART (Bankstown—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.45 p.m.]: I move:

That this House supports the State Government efforts to improve relations with the State's Arabic and Pacific Islander communities in Sydney's west and south-west, particularly through its Youth Partnerships.

I am very proud to speak to this urgent motion because I represent one of the most multiculturally diverse electorates in Australia. More than 122 different nationalities are represented in the electorate of Bankstown and surrounding areas such as Canterbury and Strathfield. Amongst the communities I represent are Arabic-speaking and Pacific Islander communities. Both those communities are very important in my electorate and the surrounding regions.

Last week the Premier launched an important initiative, Youth Partnerships, with Pacific Islander communities. This initiative is worth a whopping \$1.1 million over the next three years. It is modelled on the successful Youth Partnership plan for Arabic-speaking communities, which was launched by the Premier in July 2001. The very successful Youth Partnerships for Arabic-speaking communities has delivered tangible and

measurable results in my local area. The basic premise of the plan is to empower my local community, in partnership with the Carr Government, to take ownership of issues, to make positive and proactive changes and to understand and be committed to the cause.

Through the Youth Partnerships initiative, children and young people of Arabic-speaking background have been provided with a better learning opportunity for long-term personal development. The aim of the plan is to build young people's self-esteem and give them an opportunity to understand their real value and worth. The plan provides increased parental support and educates parents to help them prevent risk-taking behaviour amongst young people. Importantly, the plan aims to increase community harmony by strengthening community interaction through communication and to build on the capacity of the Government and the community to understand and effectively respond to young people of Arabic-speaking background.

This new Youth Partnerships plan will build on the same formula, provide the same opportunities and, I believe, have the same success. This new plan is a great example of how a community can work in partnership with the Carr Government. The plan has three objectives: to promote the wellbeing of young people of Pacific Islander background; to increase parental support and educate parents to help them prevent risk-taking behaviour by young people, to understand their roles and responsibilities and to recognise the needs of young people; and to provide young people and children with better learning opportunities and recreational activities for long-term personal development. The Government and the Pacific Island community have come together in partnership in a spirit of common purpose to prevent young people falling under the wrong influence. The community is very alarmed that young Pacific Islanders account for almost half the juvenile inmates in Sydney gaols. Community leader Mr Mir Siganiscu said on 2BL on 20 June:

My concern is that crime is a problem for our kids.

That is why this plan has been put in place. The *Northern Daily Leader*, a great local newspaper, carried a headline a few days ago stating, "Young Pacific Islanders fill Sydney jails". That is terrible. We must reflect on it as a community and do something about it. The same article reported that while at a recent function with the Pacific Island community the Premier stated:

... one-third of juvenile detainees last year were of Pacific Islander background ... Out in Campbelltown, in the outer south west, they accounted for a full 50 per cent of young inmates. ... it was a mystery why Pacific Islanders, who make up only 1.6 per cent of the NSW population, accounted for 3.6 per cent of violent crime.

It is clear that something needs to be done about it, and that is what this plan will do. Patterns of behaviour emerging in this community need to be corrected. The Minister for Police, the Hon. John Watkins, was at the same function and related similar concerns. He stressed:

... there needed to be a multi-pronged approach to tackling the problem.

"It's not just a police matter," ...

I agree; it is also a community matter. He went on to say:

We need to use all the resources of the Government including juvenile justice, education, health and community services to assist where there are high levels of crime.

For reasons unknown—we are still coming to grips with this in the plan—young people from a Pacific Island background account disproportionately for higher rates of crime in our community. Again, that is why this partnership was formed. One of the initiatives of the partnership includes NSW Police developing programs for young adult offenders from a Pacific Island background and mentorships with sporting identities. I note that the article I just quoted includes a report that rugby league legend Solomon Haumono has thrown his weight behind this scheme. He states:

We believe that sport helps give kids something to aim for.

That is what this program does: It provides opportunities for young people through sport. Another measure in the package is flying squads of Pacific Island elders in vans patrolling hotspots in Mount Druitt and surrounding areas. They establish links with young people from a Pacific Island background. They are similar to the Arabic-speaking youth liaison teams patrolling parts of Sydney, particularly Bankstown and Canterbury. To date they have made more than 3,000 positive connections with young people from Arabic-speaking backgrounds. That has had a fantastic and measurable positive result in my local community.

The plan also includes a student and family support project that will improve school outcomes for students in years 5 to 9—very formative education years. That project is the Youth Reconnect Program, involving NSW Police and the Police and Community Youth Clubs. We need to improve, as we are doing through this plan, communication and connections between young people, the local police and wider communities. A youth magazine will also be produced to assist communication with the younger community.

The Community Relations Commission will set up a New South Wales council for Pacific Island communities. The council will initially be chaired by the commission's chairman, Mr Stepan Kerkyasharian. I note that he is in the gallery today. I commend him for the fine work he has done in Bankstown and Canterbury through the youth Arabic plan. He will continue that fine work with the Pacific Island community. The New South Wales council for Pacific Island communities will support and advise the Youth Partnership, and Pacific Island communities will form an umbrella group. The implementation committee will be chaired by the Director-General of the Premier's Department, Mr Col Gellatly, and will include three community representatives and three young people from a Pacific Island background.

This plan responds to concerns about antisocial behaviour by the Australian Pacific Island community. This is a comprehensive package that aims to bridge the gap between parents and young people and between young people and the wider Australian community. As I said, we have a successful barometer in the Arabic Youth Partnership plan. The State schools of Bankstown have about 500 students from a Pacific Island background. In fact, demographically these young people form the fastest growing group of young people in my electorate. I trust that this plan will go a long way to helping those students and children to forge a positive future. That is what I want.

As I have pointed out, the Youth Partnership with Arabic-speaking communities has yielded great results. It has assisted hundreds of young people from Arabic-speaking backgrounds in numerous education initiatives such as Gateways, which is a fantastic program involving case management targeting students at risk of being suspended and which works through more than 20 schools in Liverpool, Granville, Bankstown and St George. Homework Plus provides support to identified students in years 7 to 10 who require additional support. It provides a bit of a push and an opportunity, particularly at school certificate level. That support is primarily directed at literacy and numeracy. The Machismo program involves working with boys to improve their communication skills and to help them to form better relationships with people and to deal with conflict in a more positive way.

These partnerships are going a long way to addressing the issues of concern to the community at large. I acknowledge that more still needs to be done. I ask this House to continue to support the Government's strong efforts to improve relations with the State's Arabic and Pacific Island communities in Sydney's west and south-west through these Youth Partnerships, which have proved to be a success in my local region. I am sure that with the support of the community and honourable members of this House it will continue to be effective for the wider community, and particularly for the Pacific Island community.

Mrs SKINNER (North Shore) [3.55 p.m.]: I am happy to start this debate on behalf of the Coalition. Members on this side of the House will not oppose the motion moved by the honourable member for Bankstown. Those honourable members who know me well will smile when I report that my colleagues said that I should speak on this motion because I have lived, slept, dreamed and eaten youth affairs for many years. The honourable member for Canterbury and the Chairman of the Community Relations Commission, Stepan Kerkyasharian, know that I was the Director of the Office of Youth affairs for five years immediately before being elected to this place. These were the exact initiatives we were invited to pursue. In fact, the Office of Youth Affairs emerged from concern about young people of a particular ethnic background who had behavioural problems and who were involved in crime.

I am very pleased to say that work in this area continued through the Greiner and Fahey governments. The headlines disappeared because we had phenomenal success. I well recall former Premier Greiner saying much the same as the honourable member for Bankstown has said today: that this is not a problem only for Government, it is a problem for everyone—the community, business and the Government. Many of the support structures that existed for young people have broken down, whether they be churches, families or extended support groups. We as a society must co-operate to provide support for the young, regardless of their ethnic, racial or family background. Anything that any group, individual or government does to support these young people will have my wholehearted support.

The Office of Youth Affairs examined government policies in every portfolio area. We understood that we needed to have a co-ordinated approach and that it was just as important to provide access to transport—so

that young people could get to schools, jobs and youth cultural programs, to be active and feel as though they were wanted as members of the community—as it was to provide educational opportunities. The issues that needed to be addressed in order to meet the total needs of young people included health, education, policing and many other issues.

The Coalition also focused upon providing opportunities for young disadvantaged people. One of the most important programs devised by the Office of Youth Affairs and provided by the former Coalition Government was a program called the Helping Early Leavers Program. The program was designed for young people who either dropped out of school early or were at risk of doing so, and it was exceptionally successful. It was funded by non-government organisations and provided by community groups to deliver improvements in literacy, numeracy and self-esteem—words used a few moments ago by the honourable member for Bankstown. Such programs are fundamental to these young people in gaining the skills to be able to fully participate in society in a way that makes them feel good about themselves and enables them to lead independent lives. Over the five years that I was involved in the Office of Youth Affairs, the Helping Early Leavers Program helped thousands of young people throughout New South Wales, from Broken Hill to the Tweed and Albury, and every suburb of Sydney.

The program was highly concentrated in areas in which there was a high level of youth unemployment and low school retention rates. Because I happen to be the member for North Shore, which does not have high youth unemployment or high school dropout rates, Government members often suggest that I know nothing about any of these issues confronting young people. I hazard a guess that I would have met more of these young people and would have been to more of their electorates than any Government member has. I am passionate about these issues, which the former Coalition Government made a number one priority, which meant that there were no headlines such as those that we have seen in recent years.

There were several offshoots of the Helping Early Leavers Program. One, the Koori Youth Program, was designed to assist young Koori and Torres Strait Islander people who were dropping out of school early or not staying on. It was a very special program. The woman who was working with us in the Office of Youth Affairs in developing the program was the first Aboriginal person, outside an Aboriginal unit, ever to work in the New South Wales bureaucracy. We were very proud of the fact that she was part of our team. I remain a friend of hers to this day, although I see her far too infrequently.

Another offshoot of the Helping Early Leavers Program was Circuit Breaker, a program specifically designed to deal with issues of people from a non-English speaking background who were identified by the then Ethnic Communities Council as having high rates of unemployment and who were therefore inclined not to lead the full, independent and satisfactory lives that their families and communities wanted for them. The Office of Youth Affairs developed the program in consultation with the Ethnic Affairs Commission, as it was known at that time. As I said earlier, the chairman of the commission, Stepan Kerkyasharian, would know about it, because his agency has played an important role in developing that very successful program.

The Coalition believes it is extremely important that governments provide a comprehensive range of programs for young people, no matter whether they are from an Arabic, Pacific Islander or Aboriginal background, or whether they are of low social, economic or geographical isolation—who need assistance to enable them to participate in society in a way that will advance their independent lives and not disrupt others in the community. The Coalition strongly supports such programs.

I wish to refer to a matter that demonstrates how innovative programs can assist in this regard. When I worked for the Office of Youth Affairs some of the most exciting programs were those tailored to meet the needs of young people in the local community. One program that springs to mind is conducted on the Central Coast. A community group submitted a tender to run a program to provide the literacy and numeracy part of the course, which was carefully disguised in horse riding activities. It was identified that horse riding was a major activity on the Central Coast and that by developing these skills the young people would get jobs in the industry. The program operated in areas across the State. An article appearing in the *Blacktown Sun* of 28 May under the heading "This band sure is top brass" reads:

A brass band which was formed to stop youngsters of Tongan background in Blacktown getting involved in crime has achieved remarkable results.

The Royal Hifofua Tongan Brass Band ... beat 92 bands to win six major awards in a national brass band competition in Newcastle last month.

Bandmaster Frederic Deroy Vi also won the best conductor award and Joshua Pita Fotofili won the best drum major award.

The band was started by the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga in Glendenning in 1996. Its aim was to get young people of Tongan origin involved in music instead of bad company and crime. The band not only achieved that, but it is now winning awards. It is a fantastic example of what lateral thinking can do to make young people feel involved in activity and positive about themselves. Many issues need to be addressed in relation to this matter, and the honourable member for Bankstown has raised some of those issues. They include the need for policing efforts, more police with bilingual skills, and matters of that nature. The Coalition will always support activities that assist young marginalised people to be part of the broader community.

Ms JUDGE (Strathfield) [4.05 p.m.]: The Carr Government has demonstrated its commitment to working with communities to overcome problems by establishing youth partnership initiatives with the Pacific Islander and Arabic-speaking communities. The population of people from Pacific Island backgrounds in New South Wales has increased steadily in the past 15 years. In the seat of Strathfield, which I have the privilege to represent, a number of people of Polynesian background live in the Ashfield area, and a number of Arabic-speaking youth live in the Burwood-Croydon area. The school census data for 2002 show that the State school districts with more than 300 primary and secondary school students of Fijian, Tongan and Samoan language backgrounds were Mount Druitt, Grenfell, Liverpool, Campbelltown, Fairfield, Bankstown, St George, Parramatta and Port Jackson.

Having spent some time living and working in the South Pacific I am acutely aware of the extensive traditional support systems that exist as part of the culture of countries such as Samoa, Tonga, Fiji and Vanuatu. An intrinsic feature of the culture in many of these island communities is an extensive extended family system, including the various churches which play a pivotal role in the social system with built-in ways of behaving, communicating and reacting with each other, right down to the traditional kava parties. Every member of the community has a respected role to play to contribute to the wellbeing of the broader community. Part of the culture is that everyone is interconnected, and everyone is included. Even the houses demonstrate this. In Tonga they are called fales. They are round, they do not have any corners, so no-one can be left out.

When islanders migrate and move into western society, the structures that are so familiar to them are replaced by new and unfamiliar ways of operating, new behaviours, new structures and new systems. Many parents are often confused about how to respond to their children's interactions with their new culture. The children are sometimes left to their own devices as the parents or relatives work long hours in shift work to pay rent, school fees, and so on. As a result, their youth often look to others of their own age for companionship and security and, sadly, sometimes they get involved with gangs. These gangs have an attraction because they speak the same language and they have the same set of rules and familiar structure. They also share resources, as people in the islands do. Sadly, some of these gangs also engage in lawbreaking activity and end up in trouble.

People who have recently arrived in Australia are often not aware of some of our laws. For example, Tonga has a matriarchal monarchical system. When Tongan people come to Australia they know about a democracy and they know that people in Australia have rights. However, they also know they do not have rights without the responsibility of doing things we take for granted, such as getting a drivers licence before we drive or paying the rent on time. To some people time has a different meaning. Anyone who has gone to the Pacific will know what I am talking about. There are different times for different islands. For example, for a scheduled meeting there is Solomon Islands time, which might mean two days later, or there is Fijian time, which might mean four hours later. But it is different and it is wonderful. It is a much more fluid system in the islands. Tasks like financial planning are difficult because in the islands things are used, they are not stored for long periods of time.

The Carr Government recognises these problems and is developing partnerships with communities to assist in supporting young people and combating antisocial behaviours. Hopefully, through those programs our youth will get back into schools and eventually have satisfying careers and job opportunities. The partnership project aims to promote the well-being of these young people, offer support and education to the parents, and provide better learning opportunities and recreational activities. The implementation of this project will include members of Pacific Island communities to progress the plan.

As I have already mentioned, a New South Wales Council for Pacific Island Communities will be established by the head of the Community Relations Commission, Stepan Kerkyasharian. That council will develop coordinated and innovative strategies to meet the needs of Pacific Islanders. A flying squad will be established. Two vans will be used by the Pacific Islanders to patrol areas and establish positive relationships with young people from Pacific Island backgrounds. This brilliant initiative is similar to the Point Zero program that, as mayor, I have recently set up in the Strathfield area. It will bring assistance and support right to where

the young people are. Under that initiative we are relating to the young people and interacting with them at their level. We are not saying, "You come to us". We are saying, "We will go to you." Two school-based family support and community development workers will also be employed to support students of Pacific Island backgrounds and improve school outcomes for students in the Canterbury Bankstown local government area. These are absolutely brilliant programs that seek to bring the community together to solve problems. They have my full support.

Ms BEREJIKLIAN (Willoughby) [4.10 p.m.]: As the honourable member for North Shore said, the Coalition does not oppose this motion. However, it is regrettable that the Government regards this matter as urgent. Making it urgent at this time implies that not enough has been done in the previous eight years. I am proud to represent an electorate that is extremely diverse in its culture. In the electorate of Willoughby 55 per cent of residents have at least one parent who was born overseas. When I visited Chatswood Public School recently I was pleasantly surprised to learn that 68 per cent of the pupils at that school were born overseas.

Because I come from a non-English-speaking background I am highly cognisant of the enormous challenges faced by youth in assimilating into mainstream culture, especially if they migrated to Australia at a certain age. I am also aware of the challenges they face as a result of being between two cultures. Youth partnerships need to be supported by important initiatives in education. Education is the key to ensuring that students from non-English-speaking backgrounds throughout our State system have sufficient resources to participate in mainstream society. That is why I am rather frustrated by the fact that the Intensive Language Centre in Chatswood High School is housed in a dilapidated building. The centre supports many students from non-English backgrounds. Students from as far away as the Central Coast utilise the service. The last time I checked the plans for the upgrade of Chatswood High School, regrettably the Intensive Language Centre was not part of the upgrade.

Although I do not oppose the motion, I believe it is important to acknowledge the work that is being done, especially in relation to the State's Arabic and Pacific Islander communities. Such initiatives will not work in isolation. I call upon the Government to increase the support it gives to students from non-English-speaking backgrounds through the State school system. I highlight again the Intensive Language Centre at Chatswood High School, which, as I mentioned, services a large number of students from diverse parts of New South Wales. The Government needs to match what it is saying on this issue with what it is doing through the State school system.

I place on the record how proud I am of the foresight and vision displayed by the Coalition under the Greiner and Fahey governments in establishing and promoting work done by ethnic communities throughout New South Wales. I believe the legacy they left on this State has allowed people such as myself and others from non-English-speaking backgrounds to make an enormous contribution to the wider community. It is also important to mention the contribution that non-government community organisations make to help their youth. I am aware of some of the work undertaken by the Australian Lebanese Association in the Arabic community, especially in relation to the special youth awards nights that it hosts. That community has fantastic role models. It is appropriate for the Government to acknowledge the enormous contribution made by the non-government sector.

Similarly, as mentioned in passing by the honourable member for Bankstown, the Pacific Islander community has enormously successful role models, and I encourage the Government to utilise more of those role models in the initiatives and partnerships. I also encourage such mentors and role models to become part of the State school system and not act only in isolation through so-called youth initiatives. Any of those measures will assist those young people enormously to feel proud of their cultural backgrounds and also to realise the enormous contribution they can make to the wider Australian society.

It is important, where possible, to support the State's efforts to improve youth opportunities and youth partnerships and to educate youth from non-English-speaking backgrounds, specifically Pacific Islander communities. However, I regret that the Government regards this motion as urgent. I would have thought that these activities had been ongoing for the past eight years. The Government needs to give greater acknowledgement to the work done by non-government communities. Again, I highlight my pride in the foresight displayed by the Greiner and Fahey governments in establishing the Ethnic Affairs Commission, now the Community Relations Commission, and the good work it has done in the community.

Ms BURNEY (Canterbury) [4.15 p.m.]: I am thrilled to support the motion of the honourable member for Bankstown, which seeks support for the Government's efforts to work closely with the Arabic and the

Pacific Islander communities in the west and the south-west of Sydney. I focus my remarks on the partnership plan targeting Pacific Islander young people. The name of this project is the Pacific Islander Student and Family Support Project. An allocation has been recently announced of \$430,000 to conduct a Pacific Islander student and family support project. Much of the project will operate in the electorate of Canterbury, but it will not be confined to that area. This is not only a highly significant initiative, it also fulfils an election commitment made by the Premier through our citizenship policy of promoting harmony and valuing diversity.

Stepan Kerkyasharian's presence in the Chamber today has been acknowledged. He is the chair of the Community Relations Commission, which has the important governance of these projects. This project is of particular importance in my electorate. We have a large and growing Pacific Islander population. In our local government area there are well over 3,000 people from many of the Pacific Islander nations, including Fiji, Samoa, the Cook Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu and Nuie. The fundamental thrust of the project is to support young people and their families in years 5 to 9 across 13 schools in the Canterbury Bankstown local government area and in Mt Druitt.

The project is the outcome of extensive consultation undertaken by the Premier's Department across the Canterbury-Bankstown Pacific Islander communities, community organisations and service providers. The governance of the project, which is important, will be a reference group comprised of government agencies, community representatives, auspice bodies and, most important, the Pacific Islander Council and the Pacific Islander Women's Advisory and Support Service. The honourable member for Bankstown referred to the three important aims of the project. Those aims are the promotion of wellbeing, the provision of support to parents so that they can cope with the challenging behaviours of the young people and support them in their endeavours, and the provision of better school outcomes and recreational activities for young people to encourage long-term personal development.

The project focuses on children between the ages of five and nine years, which is often the time when kids are most at risk of exiting the school system. The initiatives seek to establish an implementation group and a Council for Pacific Island Communities, to be chaired by Stepan Kerkyasharian, to identify young people at risk and to establish flying squads in the Mount Druitt area. I have seen that terrific initiative work in many Aboriginal communities. The elders or grannies run flying squads—or night patrols, as we in the Aboriginal community call them. Kids from indigenous backgrounds might give a bit of lip to police but they will not give lip to grannies. The project also includes education initiatives such as the employment of people with Pacific Island backgrounds and seeks to ensure that programs are culturally appropriate.

The project aims to address mentoring as a positive initiative to be developed by police and to identify youth development initiatives. Essentially, this is about important capacity building within communities. When a community has capacity, youth crime and risk taking can be reduced and family cohesion and cultural maintenance can be achieved. The essential challenges and motivation for that important initiative result from the fact that there are a disproportionate number of Pacific Islander young people in detention. Indeed, with the exception of the Koori population, they represent the largest group in detention.

The program should not regard Pacific Islander communities as an homogenous group. In fact, Pacific Islander communities comprise a number of diverse communities with different languages, cultures and beliefs. That diversity must be acknowledged as a key component of the program. Special recognition must be given to the fact that these kids are from indigenous backgrounds and that must be the basis for going forward in the program. I conclude by stating that this wonderful initiative addresses many of the issues that are important in our communities.

Mr GEORGE (Lismore) [4.20 p.m.]: I am honoured to support the contributions of the honourable member for North Shore and the honourable member for Willoughby to the debate on this motion for urgent consideration, which states:

That this House supports the State Government efforts to improve relations with the State's Arabic and Pacific Islander communities in Sydney's west and south-west, particularly through its Youth Partnerships.

Mr Stewart: I moved the motion.

Mr GEORGE: I know that, but the honourable member for North Shore and the honourable member for Willoughby highlighted the fact that the Greiner-Fahey governments commenced the work. I am pleased that the Government acknowledges the fact that continuing support must be given to this important program. I am proud to be the son of Lebanese migrants to Australia. Sadly, my electorate does not have many Arabic-

speaking or Pacific Islander communities. However, because of my heritage and my position as a member of Parliament, I have an excellent relationship with the Australian Lebanese Association in Sydney. Its contribution to Arabic-speaking youth in Sydney is unequalled. The association has put in the effort, time and expense to provide a future for the youth of Lebanese and Arabic backgrounds.

I am pleased that Stepan Kerkyasharian is in the gallery. I have met him at various Australian-Lebanese functions. He also attended the youth awards where Hazem El Masri from Canterbury Bulldogs was named as Youth Sports person of the Year. The Australian Lebanese Association presents apprenticeship awards to students and highlights the accolades and achievements of young Lebanese people throughout the State. Those functions have always been well attended because Lebanese and Arabic speaking youth need support to help connect them with the community statewide.

I pay tribute also to Gary Hardgraves, the Federal Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, who has been supportive of a number of programs in New South Wales by providing community grants, living and harmony grants, and other initiatives to help Arabic speaking youth and Pacific Islander communities in the west and south-west of Sydney through youth partnerships. The Greiner-Fahey governments laid the foundation for the program and it is up to the honourable member for Bankstown to encourage the Carr Government to continue to provide support. The Opposition gives bipartisan support to this program, which encourages these young people to feel they are part of our wonderful community, and to be active participants in it. I support the motion.

Mrs PERRY (Auburn) [4.25 p.m.]: I support this motion for urgent consideration and commend the honourable member for Bankstown for bringing the matter to the attention of the House. I have been involved in the Youth Partnerships with Arabic Speaking Communities Program since I became the member for Auburn, so I can say without qualification that the program is helping the very people it was designed to help. I have seen first-hand the difference it has made. A cursory glance at my electorate shows how the program is working in a range of areas to assist young people targeted by the program. First, the program seeks to encourage young people to minimise and avoid risk-taking behaviour and, second, gives them greater access to learning opportunities.

At Auburn Girls High School and Birrong Boys High School the Gateways Program has provided invaluable individual support to those students deemed to be at risk of not completing their schooling. At Birrong Boys High School, the homework plus initiative has provided useful educational assistance to students from Arabic-speaking backgrounds. At local railway stations, sporting venues and shopping malls, youth liaison teams consisting of community leaders have been successful in removing young people from situations where they might get into trouble. They redirect them towards support networks such as family and community organisations. These teams play a key role in Auburn. More recently, the Premier approved a grant to the Association of Bhanin El Minieh, a local community organisation, to promote the Shifa Leadership Program. That wonderful organisation has strong links to young people in the Auburn area. Generally, the results of the program have been positive, with many mutually beneficial contacts being made by young people. The feedback from police and the Arabic-speaking community has also been encouraging.

Further to that, though, are the changes it has made to individual lives, which is especially significant given the multicultural nature of the Auburn electorate. As such, it is achieving its core objective remarkably well. Anything that achieves such a desirable social aim is something that I believe should be not only supported but, rather, actively pursued. Given the success of the program in relation to youth of Arabic-speaking backgrounds, I fully support the extension of the program to address issues relating to youth from the Pacific Islander community who also form an integral part of the Auburn electorate.

I believe that the success of the program is partly attributable to the way it facilitates community partnerships. Indeed, it was the Arabic-speaking community that approached the Government for assistance in dealing with such issues. It represents a localised solution to a problem for which there are no easy answers. As we all know, there is no substitute for sheer hard work and dedication, plenty of which has gone into making the program such a success to date. I offer my heartfelt thanks and appreciation to John Choueifate, Dr Jamal Rifi and Randa Kattan for their excellent contributions as community representatives on the implementation group.

Stepan Kerkyasharian, the head of the Community Relations Commission and member of the group, along with its chairperson, Dr Col Gellatly, have brought much in the way of insight and good guidance, for which they are owed a debt of gratitude. I note that Mr Kerkyasharian will also initially chair the New South Wales Council for Pacific Islander Communities. The Hon. Eddie Obeid, along with a member of his staff,

Michael Ross, have also been valuable contributors from the commencement of the Arabic youth program. A special thanks to Nada Nasser, who, as senior project manager, has worked so tirelessly and brilliantly at ground level to develop, co-ordinate and manage the program. Her efforts have not gone unnoticed.

Lastly, I extend special thanks to a very special woman—the Governor, Marie Bashir—who has served as such a wonderful role model for the Arabic-speaking community and the wider community. That support for this program, in the truest sense, has been invaluable. I also take this opportunity to express my pleasure with regard to the 2003-04 budget, which secures \$1.4 million for the youth partnership for Arabic-speaking communities and \$1.1 million for the youth partnership for Pacific Islander communities. Ultimately, as representatives of the people, it is incumbent on us to work in partnership with the community to address the issues affecting it, issues that can only be effectively engaged through the participation of all parties who are stakeholders in our community alike.

Mr TORBAY (Northern Tablelands) [4.30 p.m.]: I am pleased to contribute to the debate on the motion moved by the honourable member for Bankstown. I congratulate him on bringing the motion forward. I also congratulate the previous speakers from both sides of the House, who support not only the State Government's efforts to improve relations with the Arabic and Pacific Islander communities in Sydney's west and south-west and its youth programs, but also youth relations generally. That support is certainly welcomed. I listened closely to all the speakers in the debate, who referred to past initiatives under previous governments and requested that the programs be extended. I support that request.

Like my colleagues the honourable member for Auburn and the honourable member for Lismore, I am from an Arabic background. I spent time growing up in the electorates of Bankstown and East Hills. I remember the issues for young people like they were yesterday. As previous speakers have said, we cannot focus on these issues as policing issues. Indeed, that is the wrong way to be debating the issues. As a young person from a non-English speaking background, an Arabic background—no doubt Pacific Islander young people have the same issues—I believe it is important to continue these programs, and that the people who participate in them have a good understanding of the cultural issues: tolerance, respect, understanding and ability to support young people through challenging and difficult times.

When I was at school I remember a careers adviser telling me, "You could probably get a job on a building site. Manual labour is perhaps the best thing we can do for you." But I had loving parents, and I had strong support from community leaders and organisations. That made a big difference to me. In celebrating those programs, it is important that we acknowledge the significance and importance of parenting, families, friendships and support if we are to make a real contribution to the serious challenges ahead of us in youth relations. I congratulate the Community Relations Commission on its work. Stepan Kerkyasharian has not only been a city dweller; he has also lived in regional New South Wales. I can recall Stepan spending some time in Armidale when I was the mayor.

I left school at a young age—indeed, I did not finish year 10—but returned to studies in later life. As someone who now serves on a university council, I remember the irony of some of the issues that arose when I was younger and the fact that I was paid the great honour of being elected to serve as a mayor and a local member of Parliament. I remember the opportunity I had of speaking to other young people—in my case from an Arabic background—in metropolitan Sydney who told me that they were surprised that someone in country New South Wales from a non-English speaking background, from an Arabic background, could be elected to this place. That is the beauty and tolerance of this country, and it is important that we celebrate that. It is important that we support the initiatives, programs and processes that allow us to celebrate that and to support our young people.

The worst thing we can do is give up on our young people. The next worst thing we can do is simply treat this issue as a policing problem, which would result in an expansion of our prison system. It is important that we do not do that. I know that there is a lot of criticism of this work. It is important that our programs get down and get personal, and support and assist our young people. If I can be of any assistance in that regard, be it in metropolitan areas or in country New South Wales, I am certainly happy to offer what support I can.

Mr WEST (Campbelltown—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.35 p.m.]: All members agree that partnership is the only way to go when dealing with issues that affect our electorates. I pay particular attention to the few people who have worked to develop those partnerships in the Campbelltown area. The Pacific Islander community is an important part of the Campbelltown area. We have more than 1,000 Pacific Islander students in our local schools, plus the wider community. Involved in the entire process has been Phil Costa and the team at

the Macarthur Migrant Resource Centre. They were championing the cause of migrants long before many others got involved. They have specialist migrant placement officers. They run art workshops, prizes, hip-hop dance projects and many other projects. Indeed, there are too many projects to go into details here.

The best evidence of how dedicated they are is that about a year ago they opened a new facility. The paint was still wet when it was being announced. A year later they have so many projects running, so much community involvement, that they need to look at getting even bigger premises. I congratulate the team at the Macarthur Migrant Resource Centre. Keep up the good work in developing those partnerships! I mention also a number of special people in the Pacific Islander community. Two people with whom I have had many dealings are Moira Tuisila and her husband, Chief Tuisila. They are active in the Pacific Islander community. Often they come knocking on my door and talk to me about issues affecting their culture, their community and, more important, their youth. They want to know how to help their youth. The chief knows the importance of culture and of ensuring that young people are taught that culture.

The Chief has compiled a book of cultural stories and traditions of the Pacific Islander community. He promotes that to his community wherever he can. He is also a guiding hand amongst young people, mentoring them wherever he can. Both he and Moira were instrumental in the establishment of a community garden in Claymore together with Argyle Housing, in an area that was experiencing some problems. That community garden is the envy of many other communities in New South Wales. Moira was singled out with a Centenary of Federation Medal and I know the Chief is held in high esteem. This came out in the Pacific Islander cultural awareness day that I attended. As well as doing the obligatory dances—and I am not a very good dancer—we were treated to food and, more importantly, to the warmth and hospitality that is characteristic of the Pacific Islander community.

Another person instrumental in working with our community, and with the Pacific Islander community in particular, is Molly Thomas, who is known throughout the region for her hard work, together with her husband who passed away a while ago from cancer. The Minister for Infrastructure and Planning, and Minister for Natural Resources, who also represents an electorate in the area, and I attended a cultural day at Minto, where we opened a new facility. Once again, that facility is not just bricks and mortar but is a focus for the community. Molly has been actively involved in working with youth and with the police, and brings the two together at Ingleburn. She gets them involved in fund raising and working with the police, and she continues to work on the police and community training in our area, bringing her expertise to policing matters. She is a tireless campaigner for the Pacific Islander community and the wider Campbelltown community.

Also in Campbelltown we are fortunate in having two of the new Pacific Islander liaison officers. I meet one of them quite regularly at Mass when the Tongan and Pacific Islander choir sing. He and his family not only are involved in practical crime prevention in our local area but are also part of the community. That is something that singles these people out. They get involved in the community and it is the most important thing in their minds. The feedback about these two Pacific Islander liaison officers has been sensational. I am told by community leaders that the two of them have got people together in the one room who would usually not entertain the thought of sitting at the same table. I make particular mention of them, and the efforts of the police. As the honourable member for Bankstown, who is a champion of this issue, reminded the House, partnership with the community is the only long-term solution to these issues.

Mr STEWART (Bankstown—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.40 p.m.], in reply: I thank all honourable members who have contributed to this most important debate this afternoon. Members of the Opposition indicated their support for the motion and I thank them for that. As the honourable member for North Shore put it, one could hardly not support this motion. It is a very important motion that deals with community relations at the coalface and recognises those in need. The honourable member almost convinced me today that she is potentially a nice person. Perhaps she needs to work on that. She has worked on these issues with young people in the past.

We need to continue with our youth partnership plan. It has been road-tested already with the Arabic-speaking community in my area of Canterbury-Bankstown. It has been a great success and the opportunities that came out of that have demonstrated clearly to the wider community that it is a worthwhile project. We want to continue that with representatives of the Pacific Islander community who are in need. I was a little perplexed by the honourable member for Willoughby, who mentioned that this motion should not be urgent. As I said when I argued for urgency, this motion should be urgent because young people are our future. I do not see the sense in anyone saying this is not an urgent motion. The honourable member also indicated that perhaps not enough had been done in the past and we are now reacting a little too late. Work has been done on a continuous basis by the Carr Government through the broader community and within specific communities.

That is what happened with the Arabic-speaking community and the Indo-Chinese community and now we are targeting members of the Pacific Islander community. They have reached out to us and said they want to work in partnership towards a common end to establish in their community what we have done elsewhere. What the honourable member for Willoughby said is a little nonsensical and I would have thought that she, having scraped into the House by the skin of her teeth, needs to connect more with her community before she is suitably qualified to make comments about the needs of the broader community.

Nevertheless, it is important that we move on in a constructive way. The partnership will receive \$1.1 million in government funding over the next three years. That money will be used in a formative way to provide a youth plan. As I say, it has already been road-tested elsewhere, but it will be reshaped to meet the needs of the Pacific Islander community. As a result, young people will have better learning opportunities to help their personal development. It is important to help build their self-esteem. We know that is a problem with this community, as it has been with some other communities. We need to help these young people, push them along and give them the opportunity that they deserve for the future.

This program will also look at parent education. This is such an important aspect of the partnership. The partnership will not work unless parents are given the support structures and opportunities that we have provided elsewhere, so they can see how to make an input to their children's needs and how to keep their children away from behaviour patterns that will cause problems in the future. That parent education is an important ingredient of the partnership plan. The plan also provides for building on the capacity of the Government and the community to respond together to the needs of the Pacific Islander community. The essence of this plan is recognising that we can work together towards a common end, with community representatives—and we have already heard about them in today's debate—and with government support structures.

We are looking at partnership support from the Department of Education and Training, from the Department of Community Services, from the Department of Sport and Recreation, from the Department of Health and from the New South Wales police service—coming together in a holistic approach to get an end result that will be positive to the community, and working in partnership with community members themselves. This is commendable and I am sure the House acknowledges it is the best approach. I appreciate the support the Government has received from all honourable members today.

Motion agreed to.

ROLE OF INDEPENDENTS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Matter of Public Importance

Mr TORBAY (Northern Tablelands) [4.46 p.m.]: I am delighted to have the opportunity to raise this matter of public importance today. Country people have always had to battle to have their views and concerns taken seriously in the parliaments of Australia. That was the reason the Country Party was formed, to unashamedly represent rural interests in the face of the indifference of centralised city-based governments. The Country Party met in the New South Wales House of Parliament for the first time in June 1894 with policy planks on land reform, local government, Federation, the encouragement of natural industries, water conservation and the establishment of a national bank. According to historian Ulrich Ellis in his book *The Country Party, a political and social history of the party in NSW*, the party consolidated around 1920 and its representatives served for considerable periods as Federal and State Ministers. However, he wrote:

As a minority party which challenged the major political groups its intrusion was resented even by those who found its co-operation vital in government and valuable in parliamentary affairs. Often holding the balance of power the small Country parties with definite political objectives brought a new dimension into Australian politics.

In other words, that party sat on the crossbenches—where my Independent colleagues and I sit—and unashamedly represented the interests of country people. It served a very relevant purpose and had a real position of power and influence. When the Country Party merged with the Liberals and then changed its name to the National Party, it abrogated that position and left a political vacuum in its wake. No-one really represented country interests without the say-so of the metropolitan-based centralist political parties, which created enormous discontent in rural regions. As recently as 14 June the State National Party leader was quoted in the *Sydney Morning Herald* as saying:

While we are primarily a rural party, there's no guarantee that that's the way we are always going to stay.

The article also suggested:

... if the Nationals wanted to see a threatened species all they had to do was step inside a room full of mirrors.

It is another way of saying that the National Party is committing suicide by abandoning its regional base for a contest in the metropolitan arena against the Liberal and Labor parties. This snub has been felt in country and regional communities. They are now looking outside the party system for committed and direct representation. When Tony Windsor convincingly won the seat of Tamworth as an Independent and held the balance of power in the Greiner Government, he was able to achieve very positive results, which his electorate had not seen for a long time. He continued that representation, becoming the most popular politician in New South Wales, according to the most important poll of all—the election. He was able to tap successfully into the discontent in the country over the economic rationalist policies adopted by both Labor and Coalition governments, which discriminated in favour of large metropolitan centres.

Mr O'Farrell: Point of order: I refer to Standing Order 121. This is a definite matter of public importance under the hand of the honourable member for Northern Tablelands entitled "Role of Independents in New South Wales". This matter of public importance is not confined to country Independents. It has nothing to do with Tony Windsor attending Liberal-National Party meetings during the years of the Fahey and Greiner governments. It is not a history of the National Party, nor of Liberal representation in rural areas. It is about the role of Independents in New South Wales. Independents exist in the city as well. This matter of public importance does not confine debate to country areas. I ask that the honourable member for Northern Tablelands be directed to return to the substance of the debate.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Andrews): Order! The honourable member for Northern Tablelands may resume his contribution.

Mr TORBAY: I am delighted to have the keen attention of the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party in New South Wales. As I said before I was rudely interrupted, the economic rationalist policies adopted by Labor and the Coalition discriminated in favour of large metropolitan centers. Country districts lost banks, government services, transport and communication services in the name of economic rationalism, and we see that continuing in a whole range of ways. Cross-subsidisation, which had created a fair society, became a dirty word. Government policy focused on economic analysis without taking into serious consideration any social and economic impacts. The result of all this was that country communities were demoralised. They were neglected and put in the political wilderness. The parties trotted out their rhetoric, but very few elected representatives spoke fearlessly about the plight of regional New South Wales. They did not speak out because their hands were tied and politics makes many idealists into cowards.

Tony Windsor in State Parliament and Peter Andren in the Federal Parliament demonstrated that the strength of the Independent position was to voice unashamedly the issues, angst and concerns of regional communities. There was no-one to gag them and they could not be ignored because their vote was important in the numbers game of Parliament. When I decided to stand as an Independent, I wanted to follow their example. It was clear that the views of the people of the Northern Tablelands were not being well represented and that the National Party complacently considered that it could not lose the seat. People were sick to death of the passivity of receiving directives from Macquarie Street rather than having their views and concerns taken straight to Parliament for consideration. It was this complacency and the born-to-rule attitude that undid the Nationals in the Northern Tablelands. There is a great irony in this because the country people went back to where they started at the end of the nineteenth century. Their concerns were not being addressed, they had no voice, and a centralist Government was speaking on their behalf.

Since I won the seat of Northern Tablelands in 1999 I have been joined by the honourable member for Dubbo, a former mayor; by the honourable member for Port Macquarie, a former member of the National Party and a shadow Minister in this place; and, more recently, by the honourable member for Tamworth. I congratulate the honourable member for Tamworth on his stunning victory. I was also joined in 1999 by the honourable member for Manly. His election continued a very long stretch of Independent representation in that seat. Of course, the honourable member for Bligh is the longest-serving Independent in this place and, I believe, many other parliaments in Australia.

There has been constant flak—and there has been interjection today—about the relevance of Independents and criticism that Independents cannot be effective unless they join a party. If statistics prove anything, the Independents have delivered. We have delivered services, new and upgraded hospitals, vital road

funding, upgraded police stations and record funding for school maintenance. Those statistics can be checked; they are on the record. Independents can work with the Government of the day and they are pragmatic about achieving results for their communities. Our record on results is strong. Just as important is that we have created a new confidence within our electorates. People now believe they can achieve the outcomes they want. They are coming out of the doldrums and are thinking independently and optimistically and planning for the future. There is a new vitality abroad.

I am inundated with proposals and demands for representation on issues and projects. My office is incredibly busy, and that is the case with all of my Independent colleagues. We are an example of democracy in action. As Independents our strength is that we are unaligned and can represent our communities without being hindered by party dogma and processes. We can negotiate with both Government and Opposition to achieve the best outcomes for the people we represent. The need for Independent representation is to counter the metrocentric approach of the major parties, which have little interest in the regions except at election time.

Independents who represent coastal and inland areas face many different problems. They have the freedom to unashamedly and without compromise put the views of their electorates to Parliament. They are community advocates who take the concerns of the electorate to Parliament, rather than vice-versa. Independents are effective because they are unaligned, they are prepared to negotiate across party lines and they do not have to engage in inter-party brawling. Their seats cannot be taken for granted. Therefore, they are seen as a bit of an insurance policy by both the Government and the Opposition.

We are not a party, but we can unite behind issues such as payroll tax exemption for regional areas, the introduction of zonal tax incentives, the relocation of government departments and agencies to the regions and a whole range of issues on health, transport and police, which are very important to all Independent members. This position is our strength and has strong support from the community. The recent budget for the Northern Tablelands boasts new and renovated police stations and significant funding for our roads and hospitals. We look forward to improving that position by getting the Government to make better decisions for our area.

Ms MOORE (Bligh) [4.56 p.m.]: The Independent movement is based upon a set of ideals and principles and derives its momentum from the failure of Australia's traditional political system. It is not a political party, has no formal organisation and has arisen spontaneously across Australia over the past two decades. The Independent movement is increasingly seen as an alternative to the failures of successive State and Federal Governments. We are seen as an alternative because of the lack of choice and the merging of policies of the major parties as they abandon their traditional positions at the behest of big business, big media and big unions. Independents are considered an alternative because of corruption—I refer to the Fitzgerald inquiry, the ICAC inquiries, and the royal commissions in Western Australia, Tasmania and New South Wales—and because of the self-serving political institutions, nepotism, cronyism, junketing, careerism and institutional failure. Governments have failed to deliver economically and administratively at both State and Federal level.

We are considered an alternative because of public service politicisation and growth, domination of parliaments by Executive Government with little accountability, factionalism and leadership struggles, the instability of parliaments, and centralised power in parties and the consequent lack of grassroots support. The Premier often speaks in this House about proud party traditions. I would like to speak about a proud Independent tradition, which includes in this Parliament John Hatton, Ted Mack and Peter Macdonald and the extraordinary success of country Independents Tony Windsor, Richard Torbay, Rob Oakeshott, Tony McGrane and most recently Peter Draper, and in the Federal Parliament Peter Andren. In the city the Independent tradition continues in Manly with the re-election of David Barr in an otherwise staunchly conservative area, and in my own electorate of Bligh in which, notwithstanding that it is Australia's most diverse and densely populated electorate with a 50 per cent turnover between elections, I received 65 per cent of the vote after preferences at the last election.

The party line and often the media line is that Independents are no good unless they hold the balance of power and if they do there is chaos. Yet, during the Fiftieth Parliament, a greater percentage—88.6 per cent—of government bills introduced became law compared with when the Government had a majority in the previous Parliament and only 85 per cent of its bills became law. The Independents were not the handbrake that former Premier Fahey, the member for Ku-ring-gai and the media accuse us of being. New South Wales had also retained its triple-A credit rating. In five successive State elections I do not believe that people voted for me in the belief that I would hold the balance of power. People vote Independent for good representation, hard work, a voice for their aspirations and concerns, and for someone who is free of vested influence and who has essentially the same broad values that they have.

I want to deal with the issue of holding the balance of power. John Hatton, Peter Macdonald and I used the opportunity to co-author the Charter of Reform, which Mark Coulton of the *Sydney Morning Herald* described as the most radical reform agenda proposed in State politics this century. It was aimed at opening up political decision-making processes, increasing scrutiny of public administration, making freedom of information processes more accessible, protecting whistleblowers and strengthening the independence of the Auditor-General, the judiciary and the Ombudsman. The Charter of Reform was founded on five principles, the first of which was open government. It is essential for democracy that the community and the media have full scrutiny of public decisions and the process by which they are made, whether at the political or bureaucratic level.

The second principle was decentralisation of power. Real community participation and consultation is essential as decisions taken by the community as a whole will normally be right. We need to reverse the trend to exclude the community and to centralise power within the political and bureaucratic systems. Public decisions must be taken at the lowest possible level with the greatest possible participation of the community. The third principle was accountability. All levels of government, both on an organisational and individual basis, must face formal and open mechanisms for continuous appraisal. This must be enshrined in legislation covering all levels of public decision-making and administration.

The fourth principle was representation. Elected members and governments must represent the individual at all times and respond to the wishes of the community. Members of Parliament must represent their electorates and be accountable to them without the intervention of a party machine or vested interests. The final principle was integrity. The proper functioning of our political system is dependent on the integrity of the members of Parliament and the political system. Public office must not be utilised for private profit, and we need legislative mechanisms to ensure ethical conduct and proper use of public resources. The preamble to the memorandum of understanding that we signed with the Government and the Opposition stated:

The NSW Government, having considered the submission from the Independent members, accepts that over the 135 years since the advent of responsible government in NSW in 1856, the balance of power between the Parliament and the executive government has shifted unduly in favour of the executive government.

Our work to reform Parliament led to the current four-year fixed terms of State Government, reducing the number of elections and the political manipulation of their timing. That move was resoundingly supported by the New South Wales community at a referendum.

Other Independent initiatives included: the Royal Commission into the Police Service; entrenching the independence of the judiciary in the Constitution—again endorsed by the community at the referendum; the establishment of the Legal Services Commissioner; reform of question time; greater independence of the Speaker; and increased resources for the Parliamentary Library. During those three years of the Fiftieth Parliament we had, as the result of our reforms and for the first time in the history of Australia's oldest Parliament, real parliamentary democracy involving: weekly parliamentary agendas set each Friday for the following week, instead of programs on the run and midnight introduction of legislation; a reformed question time, with at least 10 questions or 45 minutes every question time; provision to allow members of Parliament to introduce legislation plus a day for private members' business every week; and matters of public importance debates and urgency motions to permit non-Government members to raise matters of importance after question time.

We also introduced estimates committees, which allowed members of Parliament to question Ministers and senior bureaucrats about budget decisions. Bills had to lie on the table for five days, legislation committees would scrutinise legislation, and we had 28-day scrutiny of important bills. We put an end to gagging and guillotining and legislation by exhaustion, and introduced civilised sitting hours—an end to the 2.00 a.m. or 3.00 a.m. and even all-night, 30-hour marathons, a feature of the John Dowd leadership of this Parliament. We finished at 10.30 p.m. every night, which greatly improved our health and performance. Most importantly, decisions were made in this Chamber not behind closed doors by the Executive.

Since the return of majority government following the 1995 election, some of the parliamentary reforms we achieved have been watered down or effectively set aside. This reversal is despite Premier Carr's signature and resounding public commitment to the principles of the charter. He said he would not reverse any of the reforms in the charter if he won the next election with a clear majority. However, his Government has used its numbers to stifle debate and to restrict parliamentary scrutiny. Standing orders are regularly overridden by sessional orders, which in turn can lead to a legacy of important legislation being introduced into Parliament without adequate public consultation and pushed through with inadequate public scrutiny. Honourable members

should compare this with the situation in England, where bills may take 18 months to pass through the House of Commons with the aim of getting it right.

In light of the prevailing culture of the major parties, future parliamentary reforms would need to ensure that the balance between government and non-government parliamentary business is set and maintained at all times—even if sitting times or sitting days need to be increased to accommodate this. Amendments to the standing orders, or the adoption of sessional orders that impact on the rights of individual members of Parliament—for example, to introduce legislation, to raise matters of public importance, to move urgency motions and so on—must have the leave of the Parliament, and are subject to strict controls on how and when such matters should be proposed. I will conclude by quoting Mike Steketee of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, who stated when referring to the Independents:

[they] ... have left their mark ... through the quality of their representation. Only the most committed individuals could hope to get elected in their own right without major party backing.

Bob Carr, as Leader of the Opposition, stated:

Although [Independents] have voted against me 50 per cent of the time, I acknowledge their quality. Whether you like them or not, they are rational, well-briefed people. They could be ministers in any government.

[*Interruption*]

Madam Acting Speaker, will you try to call the Deputy Leader of the Opposition to order. I realise that this is cutting to the quick and he does not like it—

Mr O'Farrell: I abhor hypocrisy and you epitomise it.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Andrews): Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat.

Ms MOORE: John Hatton told me when he decided not to recontest the seat of South Coast after a 20-year meritorious parliamentary career that he was leaving with the most important thing—his integrity. I commend that to all honourable members.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Andrews): I call the honourable member for Dubbo.

Mr Tink: Point of order: My respectful submission is that the call should go to the Leader of the National Party. This is a debate, but the honourable member who represents 30 per cent of this House is not getting a go in this debate. There has been a conga line of Independents speaking privately to you, Madam Acting Speaker, to organise a pre-arranged list of speakers to prevent 30 per cent of the Parliament being represented. This is appalling. Honourable members have said that the Independents are the conscience of the House, but they have worked together with the Government to stop an honourable member who represents 30 per cent of the House getting the call. It is a disgrace. I ask you to give the call to the Leader of the National Party so that we can have a debate rather than a conga line of propagandists pre-arranged with the Government and the Chair to suppress the debate. Give the call to the Leader of the National Party!

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Andrews): There is no point of order. This is a matter of public importance about the role of Independents in New South Wales. It is appropriate that I call on Independents to speak.

Mr Stoner: Point of order: A matter of public importance is an important debate in this Parliament. To have such a debate it is necessary that the House hears opposing points of view, and that is why the Chamber has two sides. You have allowed the Independents to place themselves artificially on either side of the Chamber, but there is no debate. This is a prearranged topic between these three Independents, it is a prearranged speaking order, and you have not provided any opportunity for members other than the Independents who are behind this matter of public importance to debate it.

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

Ms Megarrity: Point of order: You have given your ruling. You have called the honourable member for Dubbo, and we should proceed.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Andrews): Order! I uphold the point of order. The honourable member for Dubbo has the call.

Mr McGRANE (Dubbo) [5.12 p.m.]: To clarify the situation, I never approached you in the chair.

Mr O'Farrell: Point of order: My privilege as a member of this House has been affected by the deal done by the honourable member for Northern Tablelands to exclude Coalition members from this debate.

Mr Tink: You're an utter disgrace, Clover. You are in there with the best of them, mucking about, bending the rules to suit you and to suppress the debate.

Mr O'Farrell: I concur with the comments of the honourable member for Epping. Madam Acting-Speaker, you know full well that the Leader of the National Party approached you about speaking in this debate. He was given an indication that he would be considered for the call. The honourable member for Northern Tablelands then approached you, and the next minute we find that the honourable member for Dubbo is given the call. My privilege has been affected, in direct contravention of what the honourable member for Bligh has said, because a grubby deal was done, on this occasion by Independents, in front of the Chair. It ensures that those who represent the Liberal and National parties in this place are excluded from this debate. No other members, on either side the Chamber, have the opportunity to speak.

The deal has been prearranged to ensure that no member has the opportunity to contribute to this debate, other than the three wise, or dumb, men—the three Independents participating in this debate. I seek your prerogative, as the Acting-Speaker in the chair, to stand up for the individual privileges of members of this House, who have a right and duty to participate in these sorts of debates on behalf of their constituents. You should not support the sleazy deal entered into by these Independents to deny members of the Labor Party, the Liberal Party and the National Party the right to participate in this important debate. I would happily discuss the role of Independents in this House, but you will not let me, because you are prepared to support their sleazy deals in this Chamber.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Andrews): Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition has raised a matter of privilege. It should not have been raised as a point of order. Matters of privilege can be raised only when there is no other business before the House, and the House is now discussing a matter of public importance.

Ms Megarrity: Point of order: My point of order refers to Standing Order 121 (9). The honourable member did not use these words, but certainly he was dissenting from your ruling. Standing Order 121 (9) states that there shall be no dissent from the ruling of the Speaker in relation to the operation of this standing order, which relates to the procedure for matters of public importance.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Andrews): Order! I uphold the point of order. The honourable member for Dubbo has the call.

Mr McGRANE: What I am about to say is quite tame compared with what has been said in the last couple of minutes. I support—

Mr Armstrong: Point of order: I have not seen a debate of this nature in this Parliament in the past 21 years. It is the democratic right of every member of this place to have an equal opportunity to seek the call from the Chair. If the process is to work as it was designed, with free speech, it is important that all 93 members have an equal opportunity to contribute to the debate. I ask you to consider that this is a unique debate, and that the extent of democracy should be stretched to the full length of the elastic.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Andrews): Order! There is no point of order. The call is given to the member who first seeks the call. The honourable member for Dubbo first sought the call, and I call on him to resume his contribution.

[Interruption]

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Andrews): Order! I call on the honourable member for Epping to extend to the honourable member for Dubbo the courtesy of allowing him to resume his contribution.

Mr McGRANE: I support my two colleagues in this debate. As I have only 30 seconds left, the role of Independents is becoming increasingly vital in all levels of government—

Mr Armstrong: Point of order: Madam Acting-Speaker, I ask that the members give you a fair go by addressing you. The honourable member for Dubbo was not addressing the Chair, which is the proper protocol.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Andrews): Order! I do not recall giving the honourable member for Lachlan the call.

Mr O'Farrell: Point of order: If you cannot remember giving the honourable member for Lachlan the call, I ask you to recall for the House your conversation with the member for Northern Tablelands, which directly excluded us from this debate.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Andrews): Order! There is no point of order. The honourable member for Northern Tablelands has the call.

Mr TORBAY (Northern Tablelands) [5.17 p.m.], in reply: I thank honourable members for their contributions to this debate. In particular I thank the honourable member for Bligh and also the honourable member for Dubbo, who attempted to make a contribution on this matter of public importance but was unable to do so because of the deliberate interjections of Opposition members to use up his time. The matter of public importance was submitted in accordance with the rules, and I am delighted that it has caused this sort of interest, which is exactly the purpose of bringing it forward.

Mr O'Farrell: Point of order: It is now after 5.15 p.m. Look at the clock!

Mr Gaudry: To the point of order: The Deputy Leader of the Opposition is out of order. The Leader of the House moved suspension of standing and sessional orders to defer the commencement of private members' statements until the conclusion of this matter of public importance, and therefore there is no point of order.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Andrews): Order! There is no point of order. The honourable member for Northern Tablelands has the call.

Mr TORBAY: While we are on the issue of being given a fair go, if Opposition members would like to add Independents to their speakers list for their matters of public importance and other matters, I would be very happy to agree to that process because I have been excluded from debate on numerous occasions. I return to the matter of public importance. In congratulating members on their contributions—

Mr Fraser: Point of order: The honourable member for Northern Tablelands raised the issue as to whether the Independents are excluded. The ruling given by the Chair in the past five minutes was that any member can seek the call and that the Chair will recognise the call. The aspersions cast by the member for Northern Tablelands are totally incorrect.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Mills): Order! The honourable member for Northern Tablelands has the call.

Mr TORBAY: I am absolutely delighted to have raised this matter of public importance in this place. If there was ever a doubt about the impact of Independents, it has been obvious this afternoon in this Chamber. I congratulate members of the Opposition on using all that oxygen against Independent members, and I am delighted with the contribution of the honourable member for Bligh. I congratulate my colleagues. We are going to continue to stir the water in this place by bringing forward issues of concern to country people in New South Wales. I love youse all.

Discussion concluded.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

GEORGES RIVER PENSHURST-ST GEORGE JUNIOR CRICKET ASSOCIATION PRESENTATION NIGHT

Mr GREENE (Georges River) [5.20 p.m.]: As many honourable members would be aware, I have had the pleasure and privilege of being associated with junior cricket in an administrative sense for in excess of 25 years. But my association with junior cricket goes back to the days when I commenced playing in the under 10s in 1968.

Mr O'Farrell: What was your first score?

Mr GREENE: For the information of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition my first score was 2, and it was at Beverly Hills Park No. 2. I was bowled by a mullygrubber. Last Monday evening I continued in my role as president of the Georges River Penshurst-St George Junior Cricket Association and hosted the annual presentation night. It was very pleasing to welcome more than 600 people to the Marana Hall of Hurstville City Council. I congratulate and thank Hurstville City Council, particularly the Mayor, Councillor Vince Badalati, for the manner in which they look after everyone each year at the annual presentation evening.

I raise this matter to reflect on the enormous efforts of junior players who have participated in the competition in the past 12 months. I will mention some individuals who received trophies on that evening. The St Joseph's Riverwood 10B player, Joshua Auth Sacco, took home five trophies, including the all-rounders award, as a result of scoring 207 runs and taking 19 wickets and 12 catches. Ben Jones from Ramsgate RSL's 10As also achieved five trophies after scoring 380 runs and capturing 14 wickets and 12 catches. He is also the under-10 representative player of the year. Rajeev Pillay from Kingsgrove Cricket Club's 14As received four trophies for a batting aggregate of 468 and taking 23 wickets and 10 catches. These are outstanding individual performances. Most importantly, they reflect the efforts of the team. That is what these presentation nights are all about.

While we highlight the contributions of individuals, most importantly we recognise that those individuals are part of a team performance. This is most significant. I must comment on the individual performances of a number of players in representative cricket. Josh Brown scored 110 not out for the Moore Shield, the under-14s competition. Samantha Han scored 127 not out in the Margaret Peden under-16 girls competition. Luke Slowgrove took 7 for 42 in the under-13 Gee Shield. Steven Cazzulino scored 117 for the Watson Shield team that won the representative competition, and he was also the association's Cricketer of the Year, an award for the outstanding 16A player.

As well as winning individual trophies, Steven was awarded the Best Batsman in the Watson Shield. He has been a long-term representative player for the association for seven years, and for the past three years has also played A. W. Green Shield for the St George District Cricket Club. Steven also won the inaugural Warren Saunders scholarship that is awarded by the St George District Cricket Club to a player whom it believes has outstanding potential and will be a good contributor for that club in years to come. The scholarship was named in honour of Warren Saunders, the patron and former president of the St George club, and also a former New South Wales captain and one of the outstanding cricketers of the 1960s. The Cricket Association awards a representative player of the year, and this year that was won by Andrew Pandelis.

The Georges River Penshurst-St George Junior Cricket Association provides cricket for approximately 100 teams, from under-8s through to under-16s every week of the summer season. It has a very long and proud tradition. The St George association has a history of more than 100 years. The Georges River Penshurst juniors commenced in 1967-68, and there was an amalgamation in the early 1990s. It has been my privilege for nearly 15 years to be president of the association. Last year I coached in the under-8s competition and I look forward to continuing my involvement with cricket in the district for many years to come. Any sport that we can provide to promote junior sportsmen has to be of benefit to our community. I congratulate all those who give so generously of their time and effort as coaches, managers and scorers with junior cricket sides, and all junior sport in the district. Their contributions and the efforts of individual players are valuable to our society, and it is most important to recognise that.

Mr GAUDRY (Newcastle—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.25 p.m.]: Today is a day when I believe everyone in New South Wales will be focusing on the great sport of rugby league and the battle tonight between New South Wales and Queensland. It is appropriate that the honourable member for Georges River has today brought to our attention the tremendous work done in the Georges River Penshurst-St George Junior Cricket Association, of which he has the honour of being president. We heard about his score of 2 at his first cricket match there as a junior. Today he has shown us the wonderful activity that sport provides and the great and important work done by officials within the area that he represents. I congratulate him on bringing this matter to the attention of the House today.

THE SPIT BRIDGE WIDENING

Mrs SKINNER (North Shore) [5.26 p.m.]: Traffic along Military Road and Spit Road is of great concern to people in my electorate. I raise in particular the objections of my constituents to the Government's

proposal to widen The Spit Bridge. I commend the 2,000-plus residents of my electorate and the neighbouring electorate of Manly who attended a rally at the Spit Reserve last Sunday. Those who know my electorate will understand that the rallying of 2,000 people from Mosman is almost unheard of. These are people who protest silently. Government members may laugh. I have explained that these are people who usually express their protests in silence. They are not lightly moved to gather and rally.

The fact that 2,000 residents were prepared to come out on a Sunday to express their views to this extent is really quite something. They were joined by members of the public from Manly because they are all disturbed about the Government's proposal to spend \$35 million on a project that is going to make the problem worse. That is, another drawbridge—two extra lanes to be added onto The Spit Bridge, which opens several times a day to let boats pass underneath. Spit Road, Military Road, and the roads that lead to them act together as a funnel into my electorate of North Shore and into traffic that is heading south, or north up to the northern peninsula.

The NRMA and other traffic authorities have described these roads as at gridlock. They are absolutely right. This problem is made even worse because the width of the lanes on the Spit Hill and The Spit Bridge are below the required national safety standard. This proposal is based on an idea of the Independent member for Manly to widen this bridge, and it is being funded by the Government. All it will do is create two extra lanes, but traffic will go absolutely nowhere. In fact, the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] has applied to both Manly and Mosman councils for approval to widen the bridge from four to six lanes at an estimated cost of \$35 million.

Both Manly and Mosman councils commissioned a report from independent planning consultant James Nangle, who said that the plan would not reduce traffic congestion and air pollution during peak hour or when the bridge opens for water traffic. He recommended that the proposal be referred to the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning. On Monday night Manly Council considered and rejected the proposal, despite the fact that the honourable member for Manly is a member of that council. He is out of step with his own council and constituents but is propped up by the Government, which is prepared to outlay \$33 million for a solution that will merely aggravate the traffic problems. Last night Mosman Municipal Council unanimously rejected the proposal.

I commend the actions and hard work of local constituents from the Mosman area who have formed the Sensible Traffic Accident Group [STAG]. STAG has been joined by the Warringah Action Group, which represents people north of the Spit Bridge. Last Sunday at the rally it was pointed out that thousands of people from all around the State drive to the northern beaches. Indeed, traffic congestion is as bad as or worse on Saturdays or Sundays than it is during peak hours. Many people from across Sydney drive along the northern beaches to enjoy the beauty that they offer.

Mr O'Farrell: Forty per cent of Sydney's best beaches.

Mrs SKINNER: There is no question that they are the best beaches in Sydney. The number of people who drive to visit the beaches tells the story. By refusing to provide a long-term solution to the problem the Government is rejecting not only the needs of my constituents but also the needs of all Sydneysiders who use this road to visit the northern beaches.

GURNANG LIFE CHALLENGE

Mr MARTIN (Bathurst) [5.31 p.m.]: On Saturday 21 June I attended an impressive graduation ceremony at the Oberon Young Offender Correctional Centre for inmates who participated in Intake 129 of the Gurnang Life Challenge. Official guests included the Hon. John Hatzistergos, Minister for Justice, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Citizenship; Bob Hooper, Mayor of Oberon Council; Ron Woodham, Commissioner for Correctional Services; Ian McLean, Senior Assistant Commissioner; and regional commanders. Also in attendance were the family and friends of the participants of the program.

The Minister pointed out that because 15 of the 16 participants graduated from the course, this placed the class in the top 5 per cent of the 129 classes to have completed the program in the past 10 years. The centre runs one of the most ambitious programs in the State for reversing the antisocial behaviour of young offenders. This program is so successful that correctional centres in both Queensland and Tasmania have sought the department's guidance to establish similar programs. A Victorian correctional centre is modelling its program on Oberon and I understand that Canada has sought advice on the program also.

It is pleasing that 90 per cent of young offenders without prior incarceration who have participated in this program have not returned to gaol. In 1990 the recidivism rate for young adult inmates was exceptionally high, with 90 per cent returning to incarceration. A 2001 study showed that the recidivism rate for graduates of the Oberon Young Adult Program in the 18 to 25 year age group with no prior incarceration had dropped to 10 per cent. The New South Wales average at that time was 30 per cent.

The 15 graduates were introduced to the audience and a rundown was given of their formal education, vocational education and other activities undertaken during the 4½-month program by this mix of Asian, Caucasian and Pacific Islander young men. It was inspiring to witness the camaraderie between the inmates, some being incarcerated for six years and obviously serious offenders. Without exception they demonstrated a great respect for one another. Following their resumes a number of awards were given to the highest achievers, after which each inmate was asked to give a two-minute speech. They all said that the course had given them an opportunity to rebuild their lives. They did not believe they had been incarcerated unjustly but, without exception, they drew on each other's strength for education, the outdoor adventure activities or work-related skills, such as bricklaying.

Their strong spirit of co-operation and support was evident to all those present. Family, friends, visiting dignitaries and the course supervisors were all impressed by this. The inmates spoke eloquently and from the heart. They said that the program had made them more determined, especially when they completed the last part at the John Morony Centre, and they looked forward with hope and enthusiasm to becoming good citizens. I congratulate the staff of the Oberon Young Offender Correctional Centre, in particular, Governor Hoskins and his staff, on a magnificent outcome. I know that the Minister was impressed by the scheme and will be seeking more funding for the educational side of rehabilitation programs in our gaols. This program demonstrates what can be achieved when inmates are provided with opportunities to help them reform.

Mr GAUDRY (Newcastle—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.36 p.m.]: I commend the honourable member for Bathurst for bringing this positive program, the Gurnang Life Challenge, to the attention of the House. I recall a wonderful Aboriginal Yetta Dhinakaal program being undertaken near Brewarrina that deals specifically with young Aboriginal offenders in the 18 to 25 age group. The program targets young offenders with high rates of recidivism and gives them the life and practical skills and provides an outdoor recreational approach to build on their self-esteem and pride. With those skills they can lead positive lives in the community rather than, as is often the case, being caught up in recidivism that not only puts them in a young offender correctional centre but also often precipitates a pathway to more serious crime. The more resources we can allocate to such programs the better it will be for young offenders and the communities to which they return. I thank the honourable member for bringing the matter to the attention of the House.

CADIA MINE ACCIDENT

Mr R. W. TURNER (Orange) [5.38 p.m.]: It is with sadness that I bring to the attention of the House the tragedy that occurred just outside Orange yesterday at the Cadia Valley operation. The Minister for Mineral Resources raised this matter in the House but I would like to place on record the details. Unfortunately, a 34-year-old man from Blayney was electrocuted and lost his life. The other two men who were involved remain in Orange Base Hospital in a satisfactory condition. An article in the *Central Western Daily* today stated:

A 34-year-old Blayney man died after being electrocuted while working on a property at the Cadia Valley Operations late yesterday morning.

Two other workmates, a 56-year-old Orange man and a 35-year-old Byng man, also sustained electric shocks in the accident but are now in a stable condition in Orange Base Hospital after treatment for burns to their hands and feet.

Ambulance, police and CareFlight were called to the mine's Tunbridge Wells property on the Four Mile Creek Road just after 10.45 a.m. yesterday.

The accident occurred while a group of workers from various rural engineering and contracting firms were using a crane to move a number of steel trusses away from a farm building.

One of the trusses came in contact with overhead powerlines with the 34-year-old man, who was standing on the ground guiding the trusses, being critically injured.

He was treated at the scene by paramedics and ambulance officers but died on the way to Orange Base Hospital.

A spokesman for Cadia Valley Operations, which owns the property, said the accident on the Newcrest pastoral property was not related to any of Cadia Valley's mining operations.

I have visited the mine on a number of occasions; I have always been impressed with the safety standards at the mine. I remind the House that this was not a mining accident but a pastoral accident on a rural property owned by Cadia Valley Operations. Indeed, Tunbridge Wells is the property above the Ridgeway underground gold mine. Part of the operation involves the caving technique of mining; there is a detonation at the bottom of the mine and materials falls in, which ultimately results in the property on top subsiding. That is why these workers were removing what was in effect the pre-existing shearing shed before it fell into the mine.

Unfortunately, accidents happen, although precautions are taken. CareFlight's involvement in this accident highlights how lucky the people of Orange are to have a CareFlight paramedic team based there that can quickly be called on to attend accidents. While CareFlight did not convey the injured persons to the base hospital, its paramedic team assisted at the scene. As I said, we feel for the families of the injured workers, especially the family of the deceased man. We must always be mindful of how quickly accidents can happen when people turn their backs for one second. This accident is a tragic reminder that we must be ever mindful of how easily accidents can happen.

As I said, this was not a mine accident. It was a pastoral accident, although that does not undo the fact that a death occurred. Cadia mine and Ridgeway mine, which are owned by Newcrest Mining, are ever mindful of accidents. They have an excellent record in terms of accidents. Some 500 to 600 people work at the mine, and they go many hundreds of days at a time without the slightest accident. This is a timely reminder that we must be ever mindful to keeping accidents to an absolute minimum, whether they are in mines or elsewhere. I extend our sympathy to the family of the deceased person.

Mr HICKEY (Cessnock—Minister for Mineral Resources) [5.43 p.m.]: I too extend my sympathy to the families of the injured workers and the deceased man. I thank the honourable member for Orange for raising this matter. As the accident took place on a property owned by the mine operator Newcrest, the Department of Mineral Resources special investigation unit and WorkCover are on site. Whether the accident was a mine accident has yet to be determined. The scene has been secured, with all aspects of the accident being investigated, and a report is being prepared for the Coroner. Clearly, one accident is one accident too many, and we should all ensure that safety is paramount. That is highlighted by the Carr Government's allocation of dollars to mine safety and the mine safety reform initiative. The program has been extended for another year, bringing the total funding to \$17.4 million. Any accident is one too many; any fatality is one too many. On behalf of honourable members I extend sympathy to the workers and their families. The investigation needs to take place. I thank the honourable member for drawing attention to this important issue.

BANKSTOWN GOLF CLUB SEVENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY

Mr ASHTON (East Hills) [5.45 p.m.]: In a completely different light, I refer to a function I attended on Saturday night. Bankstown Golf Club in my electorate celebrated its seventy-fifth anniversary with a dinner. Remembering that everyone achieves a certain degree of fame or infamy for 15 minutes, it is great that a golf club has existed for 75 years, especially in the suburbs of south-western Sydney. As mentioned earlier, too often the suburbs of south-western Sydney are derided. It is a great credit to the Bankstown Golf Club that it is not only in existence 75 years later but is looking forward to celebrating its centenary in 25 years. The club began in 1928. The seventy-fifth celebration program states that the club was formed by 14 gentlemen for the purpose of forming a golf club. I am sure we would all like to belong to a golf club with only 14 members. You could play golf all day long, and no-one would see if you used a foot wedge to kick a ball from behind the trees. It would be great.

But from those small things, great golf courses grow. Since 1996 Bankstown Golf Club has been a group one golf course. Indeed, it was one of the first group one golf courses outside the traditional golf belt of the Lakes Golf Club, the New South Wales Golf Club and the Royal Sydney Golf Club. The year the club achieved group one status the pennant team led by Vic Bolgen, who was also a great rugby league player and a cricketer at times, won the pennant on its first attempt. It is the only time that has happened. As I said, the club was formed in 1928. It had no course or clubhouse, but 14 members got the club going. By 1937 the club had a membership of 200. During World War II the clubhouse was occupied by the military, including the Americans.

Mr Gaudry: Oversexed and over here.

Mr ASHTON: Yes, and overpaid, as we saw last week. The Americans were welcomed during World War II. In 1955 a new clubhouse was opened. In 1959 associate membership reached 150 and 200 by 1960. Bankstown Golf Club is a club of a very high standard. It is a good club because it has one of the few courses in

Sydney that is fairly flat. It is good for older members. Honourable members would know that, unfortunately, Sydney is not creating enough new golf courses. The price of land is prohibitive. Some years ago a group of Japanese people attempted to buy golf clubs in my electorate, particularly the East Hills Golf Club. That club did not survive the Asian economic crash; it is up and running again but it sat idle for many years. No doubt as people get older if they do not take up bowls, like some of my parliamentary colleagues in this House, golf may be their sport. It is great that the club is still operating.

In 1988 the course was closed for three months. At the time I was a member of Bankstown council. I am sure many people remember the terrible rain that year. I was a teacher, but every Tuesday was washed out and I had to teach extra lessons. It was a difficult year. In 1994 Bankstown won the group one pennant competition again. In 2002 it adopted a 10-year program to improve the course and develop plans for juniors, and in 2003 the juniors won their second consecutive junior pennant. I congratulate Allen Syme and Mitchell Brown, two of the older and younger stars of the club, and life members Keith Jameson, Bill Blacker, Eric Lusk, Len Tregenza, Brian McNamara, Ken King and Mavis King. On behalf of my wife and myself, I thank the members for their hospitality on the night of the dinner, particularly John Campbell, the President, and Ian Cowper, the captain of the club between 1992 and 1995 and president between 1996 and 1997. Three years ago I also had the privilege of opening the club's extensions. [*Time expired.*]

Mr GAUDRY (Newcastle—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.50 p.m.]: It is always a pleasure to celebrate significant milestones with sporting and community groups. The honourable member has told us of the important role that Bankstown Golf Club plays in providing a social atmosphere for the people of Bankstown as well as a nice flat golf course for the competitive members like the honourable member that does not have the stress and strains of a hilly and sandy golf course. The honourable member has rightly paid tribute to the champions of the club, to the life members and to the club's executive. That is important in maintaining the standards and the social atmosphere of a club. I congratulate both the honourable member and the Bankstown Golf Club.

KU-RING-GAI ELECTORATE BUILDING DEVELOPMENTS

Mr O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [5.51 p.m.]: I again raise the issue of the State Government's planning policies as they affect my electorate. I do so following the latest residents meeting held last Saturday at St Ives. The 200 people who attended reflected the local community's discontent with the Government's statewide planning instruments. At the outset I express some regret at the political undertones that were evident at the meeting. The political party Save Our Suburbs [SOS], which was trying to sign up new members at the end of the meeting, offers no help to those residents affected by the impact of State environmental planning policy [SEPP] 5 and other inappropriate developments on their homes, families, amenity and local infrastructure. The actions of SOS highlighted its cynicism in putting political interests ahead of the concerns of local residents who confront planning nightmares.

No-one could regret more than I the re-election of Labor in March and the continuation of its flawed planning policies. However, Labor has been elected for a four-year term and it was dishonest of SOS to claim last weekend that it could stop the planning policies that are currently the root cause of the problem confronting Ku-ring-gai residents. Unfortunately, that approach represents a continuation of the council politicking in this area that I have criticised before, the type of politicking that stupidly resulted in councillors contributing to delays in settling a residential strategy for Ku-ring-gai. It was stupid because it was based on the flawed view that if the issue was delayed and deferred it would somehow go away. Even a child learns that putting off a problem or a difficult task never makes it go away or any easier to resolve. Indeed, it often worsens the situation.

In this case Ku-ring-gai suffered as a result, as I have said before in this place, and the delay allowed SEPP 5 to run amok across Ku-ring-gai, which never benefited from the municipal-wide SEPP 5 exemptions obtained by those councils that had managed to reach agreement on their residential strategies. Instead, SEPP 5 developments have run rampant across our suburbs, and places like St Ives, Turramurra and Wahroonga have been changed forever. It is important that residents demand an end to this type of politicking by local councillors, which has worsened, not improved, the planning situation facing Ku-ring-gai.

This afternoon I want to raise two issues. First, as I indicated last month, there is a serious flaw within existing planning laws that is creating a major headache in areas like North Turramurra. I remind the House that last year, following community action led by the North Turramurra Action Group, the former planning Minister decided to exempt North Turramurra and similar bushfire-prone areas from further SEPP 5 developments due to

concerns about access in the event of a fire emergency. It was a good decision, which was welcomed by the local community, and came about after the former Minister, Dr Refshauge, finally agreed to accept my invitation to visit North Turramurra to see the problem for himself.

Due to inconsistencies between the two SEPPs—that is, SEPP 5 and SEPP 53—developers are currently driving a truck through the ban the former Minister agreed to last year. The good news is that on 28 May the current planning Minister acknowledged the problem faced by Ku-ring-gai and announced a review. The bad news is that without a moratorium applying while the review is under way, developers are speedily lodging SEPP 53 applications. They are marketing similar developments to the same over-55 age group. Properties previously exempted from SEPP 5 or the subject of successful objections in the Land and Environment Court are now coming within the ambit of these developments. Last year the Land and Environment Court rejected one site because of the unacceptable level of risk of bushfire evacuation. This year council was required to approve it for development under SEPP 53. SEPP 5 applications are being withdrawn and replaced with the same or similar levels of density as a series of development applications for subdivisions down to areas as small as 400 square metres. At 233 Bobbin Head Road a 13-unit SEPP 5 proposal has been replaced with a proposed 12-unit development, that is, six attached dual occupancies.

Urgent action is required, not just to preserve the North Turramurra community and ensure adequate access in the event of fire emergencies but also to uphold the decision made by the Carr Government just seven months ago. More than 46 per cent of the population of North Turramurra is aged over 55 years, compared to a Ku-ring-gai-wide level of 27 per cent. Twenty-two per cent of the population of North Turramurra is aged over 75 years. I use this opportunity to plead for a moratorium or an urgent amendment to SEPP 53 in line with the bushfire-prone amendments to SEPP 5 to stop this bastardisation of last year's decision.

Second, I make a plea to the assistant planning Minister to respond positively to the requests for a meeting that I and Ku-ring-gai council have made directly to her. Some new people are now holding the levers of planning in this State, and only good can come from the assistant planning Minister hearing first-hand about the planning issues confronting Ku-ring-gai, the progress with the residential strategy and the need, in relation to North Turramurra, to resolve the conflict between SEPP 5 and SEPP 53. I have spoken to the Minister about this matter, and even though she could not attend the House this afternoon I am delighted that she has consented to meet council in August. It offers some hope, however slight, of progress. At this point, given the length of the saga and the adverse impact on the amenity and character of Ku-ring-gai, it is an opportunity that ought to be seized by councillors.

Mr GAUDRY (Newcastle—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.56 p.m.]: I thank the honourable member for bringing this matter before the House. Obviously he has also brought it to the attention of the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning and the assistant Minister. I am sure they have taken into account the matters he has laid before us today regarding SEPP 5 and SEPP 53, and his view about the manipulation of those planning instruments. I am sure that matter will be looked at.

HUNTER COMMUNITY DRUG ACTION TEAMS

Mr GAUDRY (Newcastle—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.56 p.m.]: On Monday of this week I had the pleasure of opening, on behalf of the Special Minister of State and the Premier, the Drug Information at Your Local Library project at Newcastle City Library. The project is a tremendous facility for education not only of young people but also of families about the dangers of drug use and positive approaches to deal with drugs. I know my colleague the honourable member for Charlestown opened a similar project at the Charlestown library. Thanks to the Premier's Department and the State Library these projects are now at 70 libraries across the State. They are important because they give people information when they are ready to use it. That is one of the things we are keen to have. Drug education is important in schools, but the delivery of it may not coincide with the times that young people want that information. If it is available in our libraries and on the web site that libraries provide, it is an important service.

That day I also had the pleasure of attending, speaking at and officially launching the community drug action team awards for the Hunter and Central Coast. That function was held at the Panthers Club Nova, Newcastle. The master of ceremonies was Craig Hamilton, our renowned sports commentator and presenter, who obviously had a great interest in the awards. We heard a presentation from Dr Bob Batey, the director of drug and alcohol services at Hunter Health. He outlined for us the positive government programs in our health service dealing with diagnosis and treatment for a range of drug disorders, as well as positive community programs that are run across the Hunter region. I had the pleasure, along with the Lord Mayor of Newcastle,

John Tate, and the Mayor of Lake Macquarie, John Kilpatrick, of presenting awards to an individual, a group and a young person, all of whom have been important in drug education and positive drug programs in the community.

Paul Murphy, a businessman in Newcastle, was recognised for his work as an individual assisting people, particularly young people, and raising funds to improve drug awareness in the community. Paul was a worthy recipient of that award. The Samaritans were awarded the group award for their tremendous range of programs. Basically, the whole social justice area is serviced by the Samaritans of the Anglican Church. John Kilpatrick, when presenting the award to Cec Shevels, the Director of the Samaritans, said that the Samaritans have been delivering services across Newcastle and the Hunter for 20 years. Cec Shevels has been the driving force behind the Samaritans, and he and his large work force have delivered these services for the benefit of the community.

I would particularly like to mention the award that was presented to Erin Stegeman, a 21-year-old woman who benefited greatly from her contact with both the Salvation Army and the Samaritans. She paid tribute to those groups on receiving her award. Erin is an outstanding young woman who came to Newcastle from Canberra to find a drug-free environment. She took up education at the Alesco Learning Centre, which is run by the Workers Educational Association [WEA] to give young people the opportunity to return to a learning environment and undertake their school certificate. Not only did she obtain her school certificate, she has gone on to further education to become a nursing aid. Erin paid tribute to the support she received to break free from the drug cycle, to involve herself in education and to move towards a worthwhile career. She wants to devote her energies to assisting other young people who have drug problems. The launch of the community drug action teams in the Hunter was a tremendous day.

EMERGENCY SERVICES NETWORK

Mr ARMSTRONG (Lachlan) [6.01 p.m.]: I want to speak about an incident that occurred recently at Ardlethan in the south-west of the State. I refer to an article in the Wagga Wagga *Daily Advertiser* earlier this week, which states:

An Ardlethan man has criticised the 000 emergency services network after his wife died from an asthma attack.

Marian Flagg, 64, died on March 28 at her Moombooldool property after the ambulance her husband called for got lost.

While it is agreed the ambulance got lost, the New South Wales Ambulance Service claims it was given incorrect directions, a claim that George Flagg disputes.

When Mr Flagg, 68, called 000 when his wife first had difficulty breathing, the Wollongong-based ambulance operator allegedly asked him what street Ardlethan was in.

Mr Flagg said he gave clear instructions to the operator for the ambulance to follow the Moombooldool-Buryalangi road from Ardlethan to his property.

He claimed the operator in Wollongong had no idea where Ardlethan was.

"I think the ambulance was late because they didn't get the message properly," Mr Flagg said.

"I'm not blaming the ambulance officers, but they got lost on the way and when they arrived, Marian had already died.

"We could have saved her if the ambulance had arrived earlier.

"The only reason I have come forward about this is because I wouldn't want this to happen to anyone else, but I bear the ambulance service no ill will."

Mr Flagg said he could not remember at what time he called 000, or exactly how long it took for help to arrive and the ambulance service would not release the call times when contacted last night.

While receiving treatment himself for medical conditions at both Wagga and Griffith Base Hospitals, Mr Flagg claimed several nurses had told him of similar cases they had heard of local ambulances getting lost after receiving incorrect directions from Wollongong.

After asking the New South Wales Ambulance Service why Wollongong operators were directing Riverina officers to emergencies, Mr Flagg was told the 000 dispatch had been centralised at Wollongong "to save costs".

"I told them it might save costs but it wouldn't save lives," he said.

"Wagga is the centre of our region, people there know where small towns are and so the telephone dispatch should be in Wagga."

There is a further article about this matter in the same newspaper. I emphasise that I do not in any way intend to criticise the ambulance officers. I praise them for doing a wonderful job. However, they have an extremely difficult job to do when they are called to farm properties, particularly on small roads in country towns; they may not be familiar with the geography of the area. Honourable members listening to my private member's statement may be familiar with the experience of calling a taxi or other service and the operator says, "Where is it? What is State is it in? Is that a town or a suburb? Is it in Sydney?" As we get smarter technology, we face a new set of problems.

These days many shires have every house number painted on every street and every road. I am a strong advocate of that initiative. I must confess that I opposed it when it was introduced into my shire because I thought it was unnecessary. But there is nothing like the light of day to make one realise how sensible it is, particularly when we hear of incidents such as the one I have referred to. I ask the Government to note the tragedy of the Flagg family and try to improve the 000 service. We should bear in mind that when people call the emergency number they are usually under enormous stress. In most cases, they have not experienced similar circumstances. They may have difficulty describing exactly where they are and they may not know exactly what time it is because their minds are not focused on all the details.

As members of Parliament, both Government and Opposition, we have to understand the psychology of stress and trauma and adapt our initiatives. If we go down the road of using remote technology in our services—and there is no doubt it is here to stay—we must make sure that it is sufficiently refined so that it adequately services our communities and achieves its objective of getting our paramedics and ambulances to the sites so that they can carry out their professional duties. They are not meant to be pathfinders. They are not expected to know every house in every district. I ask that this sad story of the Flagg family be used to improve the system in the future and, as Mr Flagg said, save lives.

Mr GAUDRY (Newcastle—Parliamentary Secretary) [6.06 p.m.]: I thank the honourable member for Lachlan for his thoughtful presentation. It is obviously a tragic situation in which a family member calls for assistance and, unfortunately, the assistance arrives after a loved partner has died. I will bring this matter to the attention of the Minister. I know that a lot of work has been done to co-ordinate the operations and response of emergency services, including the utilisation of GPS and other technologies. I am sure that the Minister will consider this issue seriously.

FAIRFIELD HARNESS RACING CLUB

Mr TRIPODI (Fairfield—Parliamentary Secretary) [6.08 p.m.]: I draw to the attention of the House an issue relating to Fairfield Harness Racing Club. Last week I referred to a decision by Harness Racing New South Wales to draw up a list of targeted racetracks for closure. I have finally got my hands on a strategic plan which was put together by Harness Racing New South Wales, in which it has flagged plans for the closure of a range of tracks, including the track at Fairfield. I have read the document quickly. I cannot understand how Harness Racing New South Wales has come to its decision. I thought that the document would set out clear financial, economic and commercial criteria and offer an explanation as to the basis on which the decisions were made. Rather, the document, which seeks industry comment, contains a list of tracks proposed to be amalgamated or closed.

I have already raised in the House my concerns about the impact of the closure of Fairfield track on my local community. I have spoken about the track's historical significance and how highly the sport is regarded in our community. I have also brought to the attention of the House the lack of consultation that has occurred to date. However, I am pleased that we finally have a document that seeks industry comment. Of particular interest to me are a couple of paragraphs in the executive summary of the document which state:

The available TAB race dates are spread across too many locations to deliver the best result to the industry. The Board has determined that the key to maximising turnover and reducing costs is to consolidate the available TAB race dates and allocate to them to best advantage across fewer locations.

I understand that the Fairfield track does well in terms of TAB turnover. If it is suggested that TAB turnover is an indication of the commercial criteria employed in making this decision, Fairfield cannot objectively be seen as appropriate for closure. It is important that in assessing the commercial success of these competing tracks we determine which have received government support in the past. I understand that the Fairfield track has not received any government or industry support for many years. Some of the other tracks have received direct assistance from the industry fund or interest-free loans from the Government, the fund or other sources. Fairfield has remained profitable and has received no assistance for many years.

A unilateral decision appears to have been made. There has been a pretence of consultation, because the document suggests that the decision has already been made despite the fact that we have been led to believe that we have a chance to reverse the decision. I have spoken to people and people have written to me about this issue. It is only fair to harness racing in New South Wales that those making the decision at least come to the Fairfield track to listen to the people affected before a decision is made. Those making the decision should be directly accountable, just as politicians would be expected to front up to a community affected by a government decision. That is a fair part of the consultation process.

What criteria have been used to make these decisions? As I mentioned previously, I am concerned that a unilateral decision has been made or that people have ganged up and decided which tracks they like and which they do not. I am also concerned that this situation is a result of politics in the industry rather than an objective process to make sensible, justifiable and accountable decisions. The people who have made these decisions should face the people at the Fairfield harness racing track, listen to their concerns and specify the economic basis for the decision. I would also like to know which tracks have been subsidised either by the Government or the industry in the past eight years or longer to establish whether they have been propped up by the Government while Fairfield has progressed independent of government.

Mr GAUDRY (Newcastle—Parliamentary Secretary) [6.13 p.m.]: I thank the member for Fairfield for raising this issue again. I heard his contribution last week and once again he is obviously standing up for his community. This takes me back to the privatisation of the Totalisator Agency Board [TAB] and the commercialisation of the racing industry, whether that is flat tracks, harness racing or greyhounds. They are all commercial activities but they also provide great social activities. I well understand the feelings of a community when this type of thing happens. My electorate has suffered the loss of a dog racing track, but it still has a good harness racing track. These facilities create a great deal of social interest and commercial activity. The honourable member has appropriately invited representatives of Harness Racing New South Wales to justify the economics behind the decision. I thank him for raising the matter in this House.

SHOALHAVEN RIVER, NOWRA, BRIDGE CROSSING FEASIBILITY STUDY

Mrs HANCOCK (South Coast) [6.18 p.m.]: I speak about a third bridge crossing over the Shoalhaven River at Nowra. I have great sympathy for the residents of the South Coast and, in particular, those who need to use the bridges crossing the Shoalhaven River. For too long the bridge crossings have been inadequate to cope with increased traffic volumes in the area, and in peak tourist times the bridges provide just one of a parcel of disincentives to travellers wishing to travel south along the Princes Highway to tourist havens beyond.

After the community applied considerable pressure to the Carr Labor Government and to the then local member, Wayne Smith, the Hon. Carl Scully made a rare visit to the South Coast electorate to announce that a feasibility study would be completed within 12 months. This pre-election promise was made just days before the March election and, despite some cynical reactions from the community, the promise was clear. The Minister recognised that a medium to long-term approach to the traffic problems in Nowra needed to begin immediately to achieve satisfactory outcomes. That was the reason for the feasibility study.

The problems of the two bridge crossings are serious. The oldest of the two bridges was constructed in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Questions have been raised about its foundations, which are of great concern to the community considering traffic volumes on the bridge. The second bridge was constructed more than 20 years ago and is also proving to be grossly inadequate. The solutions to these serious problems will require the vision and determination of a Government that thinks beyond four-year terms and begins now to plan strategically for traffic solutions in the Nowra area generally. Growth and development pressure on the South Coast require that we plan for the long term and not wait for the crises that are inevitable when transport infrastructure facilities are not addressed by government.

I asked a question on notice in my second week in this place and waited patiently for what I hoped would be a commitment to the Minister's promise regarding the Shoalhaven River bridge crossing. The answer I finally received was remarkable. It stated that the feasibility study is a matter for the local council and the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA]. I could hardly believe the stupidity of that reply given the pre-election promise made by the Minister. Of course, this is not a matter for Shoalhaven City Council, although it is considering the problem. This is a State Government problem and it should direct the RTA immediately to commence the feasibility study for this project. The ball is in the State Government's court and I am awaiting an announcement about the Government keeping faith with the people of the South Coast. On his whirlwind visit to the South Coast, the Minister correctly identified that the feasibility study he promised would be the first stage of addressing the river crossings. He stated:

The investigation would also look at possible locations and styles of bridges, and traffic routes.

That is visionary stuff. I look forward now to a commitment from this Government that it will proceed posthaste, immediately and right now with this pre-election promise and get on with the feasibility study so that the people of Nowra, who must constantly cross the two bridges—one of which is old and almost beyond repair with serious pylon problems because it was built in the late nineteenth century—have some hope that perhaps within 10 years they will get a third river crossing. I am not asking for a commitment to that now; I am simply asking for a start to the feasibility study. That is the first step and it does not involve huge expenditure. I ask for a commitment to that pre-election promise made by the Carr Government.

BRUDERHOF COMMUNITY, INVERELL

Mr TORBAY (Northern Tablelands) [6.23 p.m.]: The arrival of 80 members of the Bruderhof community in the Inverell district in 1999 was a great boost to the local economy. The group, primarily from the United States and the United Kingdom, toured regional New South Wales and parts of Queensland extensively before it decided to settle in Inverell. The choice was based on proximity to the University of New England in Armidale, the land available and the friendliness of the local community. So far, the Bruderhof have invested \$9 million in buying 4,300 hectares of land near Inverell comprising two properties—Newstead and Danthonia—and in refurbishing existing buildings and building new ones. The group estimates that it spends \$141,000 a month to provide for its residents and its business activities. It is estimated that the group will spend a further \$10 million to establish the community and build its numbers to approximately 400.

Around 15 members of the community have established a unique sign-writing business, Danthonia Designs, producing high-quality, technologically advanced, handcrafted signs that are sold locally and internationally. Currently 50 per cent of the products are exported abroad, with the bulk of orders going to the United States of America. The group has also received inquiries from Indonesia and South Korea. Community leaders have told me that there are many business opportunities available in the Pacific rim, and that they are pursuing these markets with enthusiasm.

The group has become recognised as one of the top dimensional sign manufacturers in the world, and last year it was awarded the Inverell Best New Business Award. I was very pleased to be able to attend that function. In the December 2002 Sign Business Magazine two of the Danthonia designs were placed in the top 20 for the year, and the business won third place in the Signs of the Times international contest for its Inverell entrance sign. I congratulate Joe McKernen, Jeff Kippit, Randy Gauger and other members of the Bruderhof community for this success and their contribution to the Inverell district and the New England community.

Members of the Bruderhof community have told me that they prefer to live in regional areas because of the healthy lifestyle and business opportunities. They see no business disadvantage in living and working in rural New South Wales. I have met many members of this Christian group, and I have been impressed by their willingness to participate in the life of the local community. The development and ongoing maintenance of the Bruderhof community will create employment opportunity. As well as employing its own members, the group anticipates that it will create five new full-time jobs for local people within the next five years.

Qualified members frequently volunteer as medical technicians and fire fighters, and serve with local emergency response units. Several of the men are currently volunteer members of the New South Wales Fire Service. These fire fighters were recognised for their assistance in fighting area bushfires, particularly during last year's severe fires. The members also participate in local agricultural and horticultural societies. The young people and adults in the community regularly visit local retirement villages to interact with elderly citizens, offering their friendship and support. Bruderhof men are members of the Inverell male choir, and 19 community members recently participated in the town's combined churches choir.

Bruderhof children are home-schooled from kindergarten to Year 8, and they then go to local schools from Year 9 onwards, paying \$6,000 a year per student. The group encourages international visitors. It hosted 52 guests from the United States, 11 from the United Kingdom, 5 from South Korea, and 1 each from Hungary and Switzerland. In addition, the group welcomed ministers and priests from regional Protestant and Catholic churches. Group visits to Danthonia included Probus clubs from many local towns, schoolchildren, people with disabilities and many others. The group also hosted several open houses, including one for the local Aboriginal community as part of Reconciliation Week. At a time when people speak of the decline in rural areas, the Bruderhof community, its commitment, its industry and its local involvement represent a shining example of what can be achieved. I believe that the inland offers many opportunities for business, it is a wonderful lifestyle, and people like the Bruderhofs are proving this to be correct.

Mr GAUDRY (Newcastle—Parliamentary Secretary) [6.28 p.m.]: I thank the honourable member for Northern Tablelands, who is a great promoter of his region, for bringing the Bruderhof community to the attention of the House. As the honourable member said, the group shows commitment to the local area, it attracts industry to the local area, and he gave clear examples of the group's commitment to being involved in the local community. It is obviously an extremely positive group with regard to the development of the New England region, and particularly the Inverell area.

PORT MACQUARIE EDUCATION

Mr OAKESHOTT (Port Macquarie) [6.28 p.m.]: I raise the concerns of a large number of people in the education sector about education on the mid North Coast. Both Hastings Council and Greater Taree City Council are passionate supporters of education as one of the key growth initiatives for the mid North Coast. A great deal of positive planning has been done to accommodate improvements at universities and primary schools in areas such as the Lake Cattai-Bonny Hills area, and at community college and TAFE facilities in the local area. However, concerns have been expressed about some of the initiatives announced last night in the budget with regard to changes in the payment of student TAFE fees and the restructure of the life-long learning package announced by the Minister a fortnight ago.

The local community has also expressed concern about teachers award issues, which hopefully will be resolved in the near future. I received a letter from John Fisher, a teacher at Westport Public School and the President of the Port Macquarie Teachers Association, to whom I spoke on the phone yesterday. Mr Fisher expressed his concern, on behalf of all the teachers in the Port Macquarie area, about the current funding from the Carr Government with regard to the teachers award. I believe it is a very strong argument that John and the teachers association present, and I hope that the Government addresses the matter.

I also received a letter from Joneen Troup, the manager of Camden Haven Community College, and Leanne Alexander, the manager of Port Macquarie Community College, which is the largest college of its type in New South Wales. Statistics show that almost 20 per cent of the local population enrol in adult education courses at the college. The managers of the colleges are concerned about the restructure and its implications for the Board of Adult and Community Education and the flow-on effect to those community colleges.

I also received a letter from Barry Johnson, the General Secretary of the Teachers Federation, which I believe echoes the concerns expressed throughout the State with regard to the non-supply of the funding referred to in the Vinson report, a major issue raised during the election campaign. I would hope that a government that espoused a commitment to funding election promises will honour that commitment with regard to the funding referred to in the Vinson report. As the three letters refer to concerns raised in the Port Macquarie electorate and other electorates, I seek leave to table them for the interest of honourable members.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Mills): Order! Leave cannot be granted. Only Ministers can table papers in the House. However, the honourable member may lay the documents on the table for the information of other members.

Mr OAKESHOTT: I will be pleased to advise the authors that honourable members will diligently read their letters, as they also reflect the concerns raised in other electorates. With regard to building issues in the Port Macquarie electorate, I seek the support of the Department of Education and Training and the Minister in ensuring that capital works improvements take place at Lake Cattai primary school in the near future. I also urge the Commonwealth to provide the funding necessary to initiate improvements to Hastings University. All the local planning work is being done, and recurrent funding from the Commonwealth is all that is required to make the improvements a reality. Everyone is twiddling their thumbs waiting for that to happen. I encourage the Commonwealth to get on with the job and support our local community by providing better education services, which all of us deserve.

Mr GAUDRY (Newcastle—Parliamentary Secretary) [6.33 p.m.]: I thank the honourable member for Port Macquarie for his contribution. He has tabled for the information of members letters setting out the concerns of his constituents regarding education in his electorate. The honourable member would be aware, of course, that yesterday the Treasurer, in delivering the Budget Speech, outlined record spending in education and health, and an absolute commitment by the Carr Government to meeting its election promises, including promises in relation to reduced class sizes for K-2, thus emphasising the importance of the early phases of learning.

The honourable member mentioned TAFE fees. About 120,000 students, or 60 per cent of students in the TAFE system, are fee exempt and can undertake a wide range of TAFE activities without paying fees. If the

students who will have no fee change are added to that number, we are talking about a significant proportion of all those undertaking TAFE studies. Apart from in the Northern Territory—I believe the Treasurer said in the budget yesterday that the Northern Territory is probably the most heavily subsidised area in Australia—New South Wales has the lowest TAFE fees of any of the other States. The honourable member has raised points that require further consideration. The Hon. Dr Refshauge has announced a period of consultation on the restructures, and those matters will definitely be taken into account within that period. [*Time expired.*]

[*Mr Acting-Speaker (Mr Mills) left the chair at 6.35 p.m. The House resumed at 7.30 p.m.*]

Private members' statements noted.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Allocation of Time for Discussion

Mr SCULLY: On behalf of the Premier I give notice to the House, pursuant to Standing Order 100, that it is the intention of the Government to deal with the following business on Thursday 26 June 2003:

Nature of Business	Stage to be dealt with	Specified time for completion of Business		Date
		In the House	In Committee	
Appropriation Bill	All remaining stages	12 noon	12 noon	26 June 2003
Appropriation (Parliament) Bill	All remaining stages	12 noon	12 noon	26 June 2003
Appropriation (Special Offices) Bill	All remaining stages	12 noon	12 noon	26 June 2003
State Revenue Legislation Amendment Bill	All remaining stages	12 noon	12 noon	26 June 2003

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Inaugural Speeches

Motion by Mr Scully agreed to:

That the business of the House be interrupted to permit the honourable member for Londonderry to make his inaugural speech forthwith.

INAUGURAL SPEECHES

Mr SHEARAN (Londonderry) [7.33 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): It is indeed an honour to be in this historic Chamber as the newest member of the oldest Parliament in Australia. I do not underestimate the responsibility placed upon me by the people of the Londonderry electorate. I am conscious of the enormity of the role I will play in trying to further enhance the wellbeing of those within the Londonderry electorate.

There are many various attributes and backgrounds of those who are privileged to represent their community as members of Parliament. My early background is probably one of the most unlikely to find in a modern Parliament. I was born in Grenfell, but spent the majority of my youth in a number of country towns. My father was employed in the then Bank of Australasia, later taken over by the ANZ Bank, and was posted to different banks throughout New South Wales. As a consequence, I attended a number of schools commencing with Goulburn Public School, then Yass Public School, Albert Park Public School in Lismore, Lismore Heights Public School, Bathurst Demonstration School, Bathurst High School, Cleveland Street Boys High School, and Endeavour High School at Caringbah—eight schools, all in the public school system. It sounds like it goes on for ever.

The disruption of so many schools was at many times quite emotional. Towards the end of my schooling my father was well aware of the impact these changes had upon my learning and future. Accordingly, he applied for a transfer to Sydney in order to give me the chance to improve my educational opportunities and employment prospects, a move that neither he nor my mother desired, but one that he felt was a necessity for my

future. My sisters Cathy and Lynette were too young for this move to have a significant impact, but it was a move that was most dramatic to me. It took me from a familiar country environment to the city, and a long time to assimilate. Fortunately, I was lucky enough to gain passes at a standard that allowed me to enter into and complete legal studies and to gain employment in the New South Wales Public Service.

This background has led to my awareness of the need for students to have some consistency in their schooling, and it is of concern to learn of a priority school in my electorate, which has difficulty in retaining teachers for reasonable periods of time. I acknowledge the initiative of our Government in attracting and retaining teachers in the public school system, but more needs to be done to encourage teachers to remain at priority schools for a suitable period, rather than having a large turnover of staff after teachers serve at a school for a limited time. The confidence of students is affected, and no doubt their learning quality is impacted when such turnovers become the norm. I appreciate my brief passing discussions with the Minister for Education, who indicated he would give careful consideration to any proposal that may help to rectify this problem, and I shall certainly pursue this issue.

My path to this Parliament is linked to the public service as a professional career. After leaving school I worked in the Attorney General's Department, the Premier's Department, Energy Authority, and the New South Wales Police Department. Initially, my ambition for the first eight years of employment was within the legal environment, but after working in the then Cabinet Division of the Premier's Department I found an interest in Government policy and the political process.

Along the way I was most impressed by the dedication of my colleagues and the standards they set. Whatever the government of the day might be, the professionalism of the public service in the areas in which I worked was second to none. The briefings and service provided was without bias and, I understand, met with the satisfaction of the Minister of the day. During the early 1990's, in the Ministerial Liaison Unit of the then Police Department, I had the pleasure of dealing with a young member of Minister Ted Pickering's staff, a person who went on to become a member of this House. I would like to take this opportunity to offer belated congratulations on his success in gaining the position of Leader of the Opposition. Congratulations to John Brogden, and I wish him and his wife well for the future with the anticipated addition to his family.

Prior to my success in the recent election I was employed in the Police Ministry. I want to place on record my appreciation for the support and encouragement by the Director General, Les Tree, my Unit Manager Graeme Stevens, and all my former colleagues within the Ministerial Liaison Unit and the Police Ministry. Their commitment and inspiration will be long remembered. I note there are a number of former public servants in the current Parliament from various occupations. This diversity of employment makes the task of unionism very difficult, but I can say that the Public Service Association of New South Wales, the union in which I was and continue to be a member, represents the interests of all public servants very effectively. The successful leadership of Maurie O'Sullivan will no doubt miss the input of former Assistant Secretary, my new colleague Paul McLeay.

As a member of the Rooty Hill branch of the Labor Party for nearly 25 years, I held a number of positions ranging from delegate to the Federal and State electorate councils, President of the State Electorate Council for over 10 years and, in particular, Branch Secretary since 1983. On many occasions I had been asked to consider running for council but, as many members would know, the commitment to public life takes its toll on a young family, one which I was not prepared to ignore. However, in 1995, a time when I had completed my legal studies and my then three children, Adrian, Nathan and Danielle, had reached an age at which the demand on my presence was not as great, I was urged to run by the Branch President, Tom Kenny, along with the support of Richard Amery and Roger Price.

Members will be well aware of my predecessor, Jim Anderson. You will recall that in 1995 Jim, then a Blacktown city councillor, was elected to the State seat of St Marys, which led to him not contesting the council elections later that year. I was the successful candidate who took over his position on council. Jim was later elected as the member for Londonderry and it is ironic that I have now followed his path into State Parliament as the member for Londonderry. Jim was a great role model. He taught me the importance of the community in our society. He had a fantastic ability to make those he met feel that they were participating and making major contributions to the betterment of our community—a rare talent indeed. While I had known Jim for over 20 years and appreciated his dedication to the community, it was very pleasing when I was doorknocking during my election campaign to learn of the respect and admiration in which he was held by the community. He will be truly missed.

Tom Kenny, Charlie Lowles and Vince Ross urged me to consider contesting the Londonderry preselection. Their encouragement gave me the confidence to pursue the contest. I must also acknowledge the

assistance provided during the preselection campaign by my loyal friend Richard Amery and a new friend of recent years, Shirley Brown. I am pleased to say that despite a vigorous campaign, in true Labor tradition my fellow preselection candidates, especially Joe Fisher, were supportive in the Londonderry campaign.

The importance of Western Sydney as a part of the Sydney metropolitan area is increasingly being recognised by all governments. Projections by the Western Sydney Economic Development Board anticipate that by 2006 Western Sydney's population will reach over 1.5 million, a growth rate of 9.7 per cent compared to the expected growth of 5.6 per cent for the rest of Sydney. No longer can Western Sydney be merely regarded as dormitory suburbs serving Sydney generally. In 1998 the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning, in a document entitled "Shaping Western Sydney", estimated that Western Sydney employs over 35 per cent of the total work force in Sydney and produces more than \$35 billion in products and services, or one-quarter of the State's gross domestic product. These figures demand that governments must develop appropriate policies that promote further employment, economic growth, improved transportation, and safer environments, together with appropriate facilities.

The ever-increasing population growth, as recently mentioned by our Premier, demands further incentives to encourage people to live elsewhere other than Sydney. The limitations of resources and the physical restrictions of Sydney call for other enticements. During the 1970s the Whitlam Labor Government embarked on a number of decentralisation projects, with limited success. Perhaps it is time to consider some artificial incentive such as the establishment of an administrative centre of government, thereby creating another Canberra. Stable employment will create a cascading effect leading to a demand for other services that could be met by those who now make Sydney their new home.

Of particular concern in the electorate of Londonderry is urban consolidation. Although there may be a ready market for some, residents generally do not want to see their environment become overdeveloped or resources being overtaxed. Urban consolidation is only a bandaid remedy and no-one wants housing that invades the privacy of their backyard. Whatever the stimulus may be, government or private sector, the issue of decentralisation needs to be revisited. I note the announcement by the Minister for Western Sydney, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning (Planning Administration), the Hon Diane Beamer, about the first release of the former ADI site at St Marys. While the Commonwealth is the landowner and joint developer, I acknowledge the Minister's recent statement that now the Commonwealth has made its decision "we've got to make sure we make this a success". I am particularly pleased with the approach that the development and infrastructure provisions must happen together. I will certainly be monitoring this development to ensure it does not impact upon the quality of life currently enjoyed by our residents.

My role over nearly eight years as a Blacktown city councillor perhaps best demonstrates the commitment I have for the Western Sydney region—one that I intend to continue as member for Londonderry. As a councillor I was conscious of the need for a proper cultural entertainment centre. Our residents, particularly our children, should not have to travel long distances to the city for quality entertainment. While an entertainment centre such as those at Sydney and Homebush is financially out of the reach of council, I fought hard for the establishment of an ampitheatre at The Hill at Rooty Hill. I am pleased to say that after a number of years my councillor colleagues finally approved the funding for a \$4.38 million ampitheatre. This facility will be unique to Western Sydney and will be able to cater for small community presentations to grand orchestral productions, and even pop concerts with an audience of more than 20,000. Planning and construction will be over two financial years commencing in the 2003-04 financial year. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

Often Western Sydney's economic and social problems receive greater coverage from the media than do its many achievements. I believe that as a significant region Western Sydney deserves the best services for its residential and business communities. I understand that the Federal Government is considering the future of television services and I have concerns that the community and business needs of Western Sydney are not being met. Incumbent licencees have failed to recognise the need to report on issues of importance in our community. Accordingly, through council and the Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils, I have called for a commercial television station to be established, with its terms of reference focusing on Western Sydney. Areas such as Canberra, Wollongong and Newcastle have three commercial stations, yet their combined population is less than that of Western Sydney. The establishment of such a station in Western Sydney would achieve greater equity for the region by broadcasting positive news of economic developments and business opportunities, along with matters of community interest.

The electorate of Londonderry is very diverse, with the urbanised southern suburbs bounded by the Mount Druitt area, north St Marys, Werrington, Kingswood, Cambridge Park and Cranebrook, along with

agriculture interests throughout and the special issues affecting the northern areas of Richmond and Windsor. The encroaching urban environment and the need for proper infrastructure is my overall concern.

The success of my election is in some way an endorsement of the policies of the Carr Government. No Government is perfect, but I feel that the community recognises that the Carr Government is trying to address the issues of concern. I understand elections of the type I contested are similar to by-elections, where generally there is a swing against the Government. That did not occur; in fact, we gained a swing of nearly 3 per cent.

Of course, a lot of work goes into an election campaign. I concentrated my efforts on trying to promote myself by the old-fashioned doorknocking. Doorknocking gives one the opportunity to meet and learn the concerns of constituents. On the last day of the election campaign I was doorknocking when I received a phone call. I was speaking to a resident, and because of the importance I placed on meeting my constituent I ignored the call. Little did I know that it was the Premier, ringing to wish me well. I am sorry, boss, but I am afraid my constituent takes priority and I would take the same action again if the same circumstances recur.

Behind the scenes a lot of action was being conducted by hardworking Labor Party members, many of whom are in the gallery tonight. In particular, I would like to record my thanks to Verity Firth, who worked tirelessly as my campaign co-ordinator. She was invaluable. There was also a never-ending commitment by Joe and Elaine Fisher, Cathy and George Young, Vince Ross and Camille, Nick Numeruck, Jessie Wynbergen, Kerry Busuttil, Tim Hennessy, the Hayek family, Keven Cross and Ron Lopez. In addition, I had extraordinary assistance from members of Young Labor and ongoing support from Mark Arbib and Carl Bitar from ALP head office, Roger Price and my electorate neighbour, Karyn Paluzzano.

Loyalty is a rare commodity these days, but I am fortunate to have a great relationship with Tom Kenny, Richard Amery and Charlie Lowles. Their exceptional friendship gave me the spirit to follow the path here tonight. Many people, both ALP members and others, provided help especially on election day, and I am forever grateful for their efforts.

The victory I have had is shared by my family. Earlier I mentioned my initial hesitation in pursuing public office until my three children had reached a certain age. Since that time my wife Sharyn and I have been blessed with another child, our six-year-old daughter, Erin. Although Erin may not fully comprehend the position I now hold, she is very much aware of the time I put in and is disappointed when I cannot spend as much time with her as she wants. Fortunately, she does seem to understand, although I note she is hiding in the gallery. Sharyn is also very supportive. I do not think any member can succeed without the support of their partner. I am eternally grateful for Sharyn's support and encouragement. The backing of Sharyn and my family has given me the courage to embark on the path of representative public life.

Unfortunately, due to illness, my mother and father are unable to be physically in attendance tonight but I know they are proud of me. I also know that they are here in other ways. Regretfully, my father-in-law, Don McLean, is also not here tonight. He passed away over three years ago. Don was not merely a father-in-law; he became one of the closest friends a person can ever have. He was a staunch Labor supporter, and would have been extremely pleased to be here tonight. I am honoured to represent the people of Londonderry, and I commit myself to serving their needs to the best of my ability.

Mr SPEAKER: I congratulate the honourable member for Londonderry. I note the presence in the gallery of a large contingent of the family and friends of the honourable member, including representatives from the electorates of Londonderry, Mount Druitt, Riverstone and Blacktown.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

NOAH'S ARK TOY LIBRARY FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Ms BEREJIKLIAN (Willoughby) [7.54 p.m.]: This evening my private member's statement is about an important organisation in my electorate called the Noah's Ark Toy Library for Children with Special Needs. This toy library has been operating for a number of years but regrettably, due to lack of funding, now finds that it is unable to provide services to the extent that it would like. The aims of the toy library are to provide a variety of quality toys and play equipment to assist the development of children with special needs, particularly in the age range of zero to six years; to provide advice to parents and professionals in choosing and using toys;

to suggest play alternatives to encourage development of a particular skill; to provide support and encouragement to families in which there is a child with a special need and to professionals working with children with special needs; to refer families to other agencies which may be able to meet the particular need of a family or a child with a disability; and to provide a service in a manner and at a time and place that best suits the library's clients.

Many people who utilise the services of the toy library have not one but a number of children with special needs and often find it expensive to purchase toys and special education equipment. Therefore, the toy library fulfils an important service. The toy library is situated in Artarmon in my electorate. It is interesting that in addition to a limited number of paid staff, more than 1,000 volunteer hours are provided annually. More than 700 of those hours are given to running the borrowing stops alone. These borrowing stops consist of a mobile van travelling around and delivering toys to parents who may not be able to pick up the toys from the specially designated areas.

Unfortunately the toy library receives no recurrent government funding. With this in mind, I will make strenuous representations to the Minister for Community Services in the other place to draw her attention to the valuable work the toy library does for the broader community and the need to provide funding to ensure that children in need and parents of children in need have access to these specially made toys, particularly in the most formative years. Often if children with special needs are not able to reach their full potential in their formative years and utilise the important equipment provided by the toy library it keeps them further behind as they get older. Naturally, the stress on parents is exacerbated because of this.

The staff who currently work at the Noah's Ark Toy Library are Catherine Christodoulou, the toy manager, Joy Wyllie, and Diana Denny, who runs the office. These women do a fantastic job. I visited the toy library a couple of weeks ago and witnessed first-hand the specialist equipment that exists and the extent to which both the part-time paid staff and, significantly, the many volunteers contribute. If it were not for the volunteers, many of whom have either studied occupational therapy or worked with children with special needs previously, and their many hours of dedication, the consequences for many parents and families that utilise the service would be dire.

I commend the toy library staff and volunteers for their fundraising activities, the donations they receive from individuals and service clubs, and the one-off grants they have received from local councils. Clearly, there is a huge need for the State Government also to recognise the fantastic work done by the toy library. As I said, on behalf of Noah's Ark I will make representations to the Minister in the other place. In addition, 23 volunteers assist with the operation of Noah's Ark Toy Library, 14 of whom have formal qualifications in occupational therapy, physiotherapy, early childhood teaching or nursing. That is such a positive indictment on the operations of the toy library, because it ensures that people with experience of volunteering show support. The State Government must come to the party and provide grants as well. I commend the activities of Noah's Ark Toy Library, and indicate that I will be making representations on the library's behalf. [*Time expired.*]

PERFECT START HOME LOAN SCHEME

Mr GIBSON (Blacktown) [7.59 p.m.]: Last week I had the pleasure of launching the Perfect Start Home Loan Scheme at a function in Blacktown Civic Centre hosted by the Mayor of Blacktown, Mr Alan Pendleton. Under the scheme, loans are available through the Metropolitan and Country Co-op Housing Society, a not-for-profit organisation. Aspiring homebuyers should find the perfect start home loan particularly attractive. The big bonus is that no mortgage insurance premium is required, which is something that can save the people involved some \$3,500. The chairman of the society, Mr Ross Mallam, who attended the launch, said:

The fact that applicants do not have to pay a mortgage insurance premium provides a substantial financial saving when purchasing a home. I am delighted that the new perfect start home loan is available to help many in the community achieve home ownership.

The product is specifically designed to assist those struggling to get into the residential owner-occupied home market. The society can lend up to 95 per cent of the property value. Also, up to one half of the 5 per cent deposit required may be sourced from the First Home Owner Grant Scheme if the applicant is eligible. The other 2.5 per cent needs to be verifiable savings. An important aim is to provide help for the low to moderate incomes segment of the market, who are quite often overlooked or pushed towards more expensive financial options.

The State Government is supporting the program by providing undertakings to the Commonwealth Bank, which is funding the scheme. This, coupled with the opportunity to borrow up to 95 per cent without the

need for mortgage insurance, provides great opportunities to local constituents to purchase a home. The loan scheme is by no means limited to first home buyers. It is also available to assist people who are upgrading from their first home with a subsequent purchase, renovating, or a range of other reasons including a property settlement as a result of divorce or separation. The interest rate charged is equivalent to the standard variable home loan interest rate charged by the Commonwealth Bank.

The introduction of the perfect start home loan will provide people with a real opportunity to own a home. It is recognised that aspiring homeowners have difficulty saving sufficient deposit to purchase a home while meeting rental commitments and servicing other debts. The perfect start home loan goes a long way towards satisfying their needs with its low deposit requirement of only 5 per cent, which can include a portion of the first home owners grant. The scheme is by no means limited to first home buyers. It seeks to assist people who are upgrading from their first home for whatever reason. Perfect start home loans can be made to borrowers with a combined income of up to \$75,000.

The maximum loan under the scheme is \$225,000, and the maximum property value is some \$350,000. The maximum household income is \$75,000, and the loans may be up to 95 per cent of the property value without the added cost burden of mortgage insurance. Societies in New South Wales are governed by the Co-operative Housing and Starr Bowkett Societies Act and operate under the supervision of the State Government's Registry of Co-operatives, a division of the Department of Fair Trading. Perfect start home loans are provided by the Metropolitan and Country Co-op Housing Society.

I often think about two people I had a lot to do with some years ago. One couple decided to pay rent while the other couple decided to do it fairly hard and save as much as they could by not going out and doing those things that people like to do when they are young. They decided to get enough money together for a deposit on a home. That couple actually bought a home for \$14,500. Unfortunately, 25 years later the couple who decided to rent are still renting but the couple who decided to put a deposit on a home and paid \$14,500 have an investment today worth in the vicinity of \$320,000 or \$330,000. They have a great asset. It is great to see people being looked after in this way. The waiting lists for Department of Housing homes are very long. Some people may be on those lists for 10 years and still not get into a home. These loans give people with a combined income of \$75,000 the opportunity to buy their own home, and it is great to see them operating in Blacktown.

TAREE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS TRANSPORT

Mr J. H. TURNER (Myall Lakes) [8.04 p.m.]: I raise the matter of school transport in my electorate, particularly to Taree High School. The problem commenced at the start of term and has been ongoing. My electorate has always had a fairly good transport scheme. The problem may have been caused by two new schools coming on stream in the area—the Manning Anglican College, the opening of which I was privileged to attend yesterday, and the Tuncurry campus of the Great Lakes High School. Students are being disadvantaged by being left at Taree High School for up to 50 minutes as well as having trouble getting to the school in the mornings.

I raised this matter on a number of occasions prior to the election and formally wrote to the then Minister for Transport, the Hon. Carl Scully. That culminated in a final letter to him on 5 March in which I said that the problem had to be sorted out and that I had received representations from a number of principals in the Taree area. Following the election, on 15 April, I received a letter from Transport NSW, which stated that the Transport Co-ordination Authority had raised my concerns with Mr Eggins, the School Student Transport Scheme co-ordinator, and a meeting was to be held with school principals to discuss their concerns. On 17 April I received advice from the Taree district office of the Department of Education and Training that meetings had been held, particularly with the principal of Taree High School, and that some agreement would be reached. I thought that was the end of the matter and that things were in hand, but I am now told by a number of my constituents with children at Taree High School that there are still real problems. A letter from Mark and Ellen Davies states, *inter alia*:

Our child is being picked up at 7.50 am and let off at the school at 8.10 am, with school not commencing until 8.55 am, and then in the afternoon school finishes at 3.15 pm and the bus does not pick him up until 3.55 pm and arrives at home at 4.05 pm. We are concerned that the extended waiting time affects the welfare of our child who should expect to be able to leave school and arrive home within a reasonable time after the conclusion of the school day.

They go on to say:

It is also creating problems co-ordinating other activities after school as by the time the children arrive home from school on the bus, they generally have to be at another venue such as sports training etc.

Sue Wade, also of Taree, wrote to me along the same lines. She said:

My children began to travel to and from high school on Eggins Comfort Coaches but I no longer feel confident to send them by bus due to the bus company's time schedule. So although my children hold a bus pass they are unable to use them because of my concerns regarding their safety.

She goes on to say:

Taree High School hours are 8.55am to 3.15pm or 3.00pm on Wednesdays. We live at Taree West when they board the bus at 8 am and arrive at school at approximately 8.10am. Then in the afternoons the bus doesn't collect them from the front of Taree High until 4pm or a little later ...

I find this totally unacceptable and unsafe for our children and it worries me about the sort of trouble our kids can get into while waiting around bored for these lengths of time.

Similar letters have been received from Lindy Elliott of Taree, Mrs Ellen Thomas, Monica Masters, Diana Sky, Michael Osborne, Wayne Piper, Geoff Powditch and Mr and Mrs Layton. Obviously there is a problem but it can be solved with goodwill on all sides. It has been going on for far too long—it is now six months into the school year—and I have heard other alarming reports of another school where children are arriving at about 9.40 in the morning. The Department of Transport needs to look at the matter and resolve it positively for these children. It is not fair for them to be so close to home yet so far away.

Mr STEWART (Bankstown—Parliamentary Secretary) [8.09 p.m.]: I have noted the comments made by the honourable member for Myall Lakes and I will pass them on to the Minister for Transport Services. I also note that the honourable member has been involved in deliberations over a period of time about bus transport for Taree High School students. Obviously, the issue has not been fully resolved. There seems to be a communication problem. It is unacceptable that students have to wait for transport for extended periods. I will make strong representations to the Minister on the member's behalf.

GAN GAN ARMY CAMP SITE SALE

Mr BARTLETT (Port Stephens) [8.10 p.m.]: Last week I spoke in the House about the proposed sale by the Commonwealth Government of Gan Gan Army Camp. It is my unfortunate duty to inform the Parliament that the land was sold last weekend. The Port Stephens community was told that the land was sold to a private developer. However, we do not even know the name of the developer or the price that was paid for approximately 100 hectares of land in the Port Stephens area. Everyone believes that the Commonwealth Government should have donated the land to the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Two-thirds of the land is surrounded by Tomaree National Park and one-third is adjacent to the Tomaree sports ground complex. Today I want to refer to two issues. First, the Federal member for Paterson, Bob Baldwin, seems to have been treated with absolute contempt by his Federal Liberal colleagues. He has pleaded for the land to be made part of the national park, but his colleagues do deals behind his back which he knows nothing about. In a speech in Federal Parliament last week the Federal member said:

Despite repeated requests, why hasn't the Department of Defence provided any record of communications dated 17 November 1999 from the National Parks and Wildlife Service to Defence allegedly recording an interest in the property?

In the short time I have available I will read onto the record part of a letter sent on 16 December 1999 by the Department of Defence to the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service. The Federal member denies that there was any correspondence between New South Wales and the Department of Defence about the land at Gan Gan. The second paragraph of the letter states:

NSW NPWS interest in the Gan Gan Army Camp is acknowledged. The disposal strategy for the Camp will include an environmental assessment of the property to assist in identifying future land use options. It is envisaged that the assessment will commence in February 2000 via a consultant selected from the Defence Environment Panel. My office will advise the consultant to meet with you, or your representative, early in the consultancy to discuss the property.

That letter from the Department of Defence to the National Parks and Wildlife Service refutes the Federal member's allegations that the State has made no effort to acquire the land. The Department of Defence acknowledges the claim and indicates that consultation will take place. The second issue I refer to is the Federal member's statement that New South Wales should have made a claim for the land pursuant to priority sales in the Lands Acquisition Commonwealth Property Disposals Policy. When I first mentioned this matter to Minister

Debus neither he nor his staff knew of priority sales. Yet the Federal member said that was the policy under which New South Wales was to buy the land from the Commonwealth. The State originally gave the land to the Commonwealth in 1955 at no cost for the purpose of defence. Under the heading "Priority Sales", the Lands Acquisition Commonwealth Property Disposals Policy states:

Disposal to State or Local Government for road and/or railway easements, road widening, or other minor access purposes.

As I read the policy, the only way the State or local government can acquire the land as a priority is if they want to use it for railway easements, a road or road widening. We wanted the land to be included as a part of the national park. Port Stephens Council attempted to get a priority sale and buy the land for the Port Stephens area. Under the disposals policy, there was no opportunity for Port Stephens Council to dedicate two-thirds of the land as national park and use one-third for its own purpose or for the State to acquire the land. The Federal member for Paterson has put up these arguments to shift blame away from himself and onto the State. The fact that he could not obtain any correspondence from the Department of Defence shows what the department thinks of him. The department and his Liberal colleagues obviously do not have a high opinion of him because they have kept him completely in the dark. He has failed the people of Port Stephens. Every time he makes a claim, that claim is proved to be false.

EPPING TO CASTLE HILL RAIL LINK

Mr MERTON (Baulkham Hills) [8.15 p.m.]: I speak about an important issue for the residents of north-western Sydney. I refer to the north-west rail link, which will link Epping to Castle Hill and later to Rouse Hill. In November 1998 the then Minister for Transport issued a press release headed "Bright Future for Western Sydney Transport" which read:

The Carr Government will fulfil its promise to improve public transport in Western Sydney with a comprehensive 10-year plan to improve the quality and efficiency of rail, bus and road services.

The Minister for Transport, Mr Carl Scully, said the Government's integrated transport plan, Action for Transport 2010, offered solutions backed by a firm financial commitment, giving Western Sydney families and businesses an unprecedented level of support.

"Action for Transport 2010 is a fully funded, 10-year construction plan to improve public transport infrastructure, build new roads and create jobs in Western Sydney," Mr Scully said.

"More than half of Sydney's population live in the western suburbs. Action for Transport 2010 will meet this growth into new rail and bus services, better roads and cleaner air."

Mr Scully said Western Sydney would benefit from an unparalleled boost to major rail construction projects during the next decade at a cost of \$2.6 billion.

The press release then lists a number of projects, including extending the rail line from Epping to Castle Hill. That project was to be completed by 2010. The press release also refers to constructing the Parramatta rail link. That rail link was to go to Epping and Chatswood and was to be completed by the year 2006. The press release continued:

"The Carr Government is determined to give Western Sydney commuters the very best level of public transport—unlike the former Coalition Government, which ignored the plight of public transport services in Western Sydney throughout its eight-year term," Mr Scully said.

The press release further stated:

The Carr Government's commitment to better public transport is solid. However, Western Sydney's upgrades must be improved to a standard similar to that of inner-urban roads to help commuters and industry conduct their business more efficiently.

We then skip to 2004, four years later. A press release issued in March 2002 refers to the preferred route of the proposed north-west Sydney rail link. The press release stated:

The North West Rail Link is part of a package of transport improvements planned for the rapidly growing areas of Sydney's North West.

The plan is to build a new 19 km link from Epping to Mungerie Park at Rouse Hill via Castle Hill.

The press release continued:

Based on current projections, more than 140,000 new residents will live in the North West region by 2026.

The press release went on:

Initial works include completion of the Chatswood-Epping section by 2008 and a new Parramatta Transport interchange by the end of 2006.

A press release issued in October 2002, which is not all that long ago, stated:

The Minister for Transport, Carl Scully, has announced two new studies to progress development work for the proposed North West Rail Link.

The press release continued:

One of these is the possibility of extending a transport link between the western end of the proposed North West Rail Link at Rouse Hill and the existing Richmond line, to serve potential urban development areas.

Four years later and the project is still on the books. The 2002-03 budget papers show that \$2 million was allocated to investigate the Epping to Castle Hill rail link. I am concerned that in the current budget presented yesterday I can see no reference to any funds being made available or allocated for the continuation of this rail link. Given Minister Costa's comments about the Parramatta to Epping link, which appears to have been abandoned, I am concerned that the Castle Hill to Epping link is heading in the same direction.

I note that the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning has agreed to visit the Baulkham Hills area to discuss the transport and infrastructure problems experienced by residents and, in particular, the proposed route of the rail link in the Balmoral Road release area. The Hills residential development area will be the size of Canberra. The residents are simply seeking a guarantee that a rail link will be built between Rouse Hill and Epping so that they have an option of avoiding Windsor Road. This is an important issue. We are seeking an assurance from the Government that the rail link will be built. At the moment the residents are captive to Windsor Road, albeit it is being upgraded. They will have only buses if there is no rail link. I call on the Government to implement the original promises that go back to 1998.

TRIBUTE TO DR BRUCE LAMBTON MENZIES

Ms D'AMORE (Drummoyne) [8.20 p.m.]: Today I pay tribute to one of Sydney's longest-serving general practitioners, Dr Bruce Menzies, who has been in practice in Drummoyne for 57 years. His father, the late Dr Guy Menzies, was also a medical practitioner in Drummoyne. Their tenure represents unbroken service between father and son of more than 90 years. Dr Bruce Menzies is a much-loved local identity and is described by those who know him well as a family doctor of a type now rarely seen outside a television series. His smile is like a tonic, as is his courteous style of greeting—and all this before he has even asked a patient the nature of the visit. The phrase "bedside manner" might have been invented for him. In the surgery and on calls, he is an immaculate figure, always in his white coat. When he is off duty he is likewise a familiar figure, with a nod and a few friendly words for those he meets in the neighbourhood.

Dr Bruce Menzies was born on 2 March 1917 and graduated from Sydney University in 1944. He was elected to membership of the Australian Medical Association on 30 June 1944. After two years at the Royal North Shore Hospital, he commenced general practice in Drummoyne in 1946. His father also spent much of his working life in Drummoyne, having founded with two others the old Seacombe Hospital in 1912. Dr Bruce Menzies' entry into medicine was interrupted by war service in the Royal Australian Naval Volunteer Reserve, which he joined under the yachtsmen's scheme for skilled sailors. After a spell on destroyers, he was sent to England for officer training, but was pulled from the course on the eve of graduation to resume his medical studies. Nevertheless, he had the satisfaction of being gazetted as a surgeon lieutenant in that branch of the service. The Second World War brought him other setbacks and disappointments, including the death of both his brothers.

In addition to his work in general practice, Dr Menzies had a close association with Balmain Hospital and the residential homes for old people in the district. For about 40 years Dr Menzies has been responsible for the immunisation program for all children in Drummoyne. For this he was recently honoured by the City of Canada Bay. Five years ago his only daughter, Dr Jane Pike, was killed in a plane crash along with her doctor husband and four friends. Dr Menzies bore this loss bravely, hardly departing from his normal routine. When his wife, Constance, passed away in 2002, it was a similar story: he was back in his surgery within 48 hours of the event. I acknowledge his only sister, Kathleen Henderson, and his four grandchildren.

Formerly a keen sportsman, Dr Menzies played tennis until his seventies and is still an active golfer. Until recently, retirement was never mentioned in his company. He has now purchased a computer and is quoted as saying, "Now I have a bit more time." He has also enrolled in a computer training course. I thank Alan Gill, a close friend of Dr Menzies, for providing me with an insight into who this great man is and the outstanding work he has done in Drummoyne. Dr Menzies will retire on 30 June 2003. On behalf of the people of the State seat of Drummoyne I thank him for his service and dedication to our community in medical practice.

RURAL DISABLED STUDENTS SPECIALIST THERAPY SERVICES

Ms HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck) [8.25 p.m.]: I bring to the attention of the House a problem that I have raised several times previously. Disabled students in rural areas are being denied access to specialist therapy services. That is the result of several factors that the Government is well able to rectify. It is the lack of rectification by the Government that is of great concern to me and, more particularly, to parents in my electorate. Disability services for schoolchildren in Burrinjuck are provided by organisations ranging from the Crescent School for Special Purposes in Goulburn to the Yass special education support classes at Yass Public School and Yass High School to individual support programs for disabled students at smaller schools.

The disabilities faced by these students range from moderate intellectual delay combined with mild physical disabilities to more challenging problems that require significant therapy intervention. Access to high-quality speech, occupational and physiotherapy services is vital to the development of these special children. The Government's aim should be to give these children the best possible chance to realise their potential. The Department of Education and Training has contracted the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care [DADHC] to provide speech, occupational and physiotherapy services to students across the State. That is not happening. Over the past four years I have made many representations to various Ministers for Disability Services on behalf of parents at both the Crescent School and the Yass Special Education Support Class, which is known locally as the Andalini Special Unit. The Ministers acknowledged the lack of services and assured me that the positions are there and fully funded, and I believed them. However, the Ministers then plead problems in recruiting in rural areas. Minister Lo Po' wrote to me in October 2000 saying:

The positions are fully funded but have remained vacant due to difficulties in attracting therapists to work in Goulburn. This is not a problem unique to the Department of Community Services but is also experienced by the Department of Health, and rural areas in general.

On Tuesday I received a letter from Mr Mark and Mrs Sharon Anderson of Yass, whose son Daniel attends Andalini. Daniel requires significant speech therapy. Sharon wrote:

I'm forced once again to voice my concerns over the lack of service from DADHC to Yass Public School Special Needs Unit.

Three years I've been fighting this battle, to get a regular service provided for the children.

DADHC doesn't consider Yass Public School Special Needs Unit as a priority!!

I want some action on this matter now!!

I want my son to have a chance in society!

Three years later and this problem has still not been addressed. Last year, on behalf of Sharon Anderson, I sought information from Minister Tebbutt about the level of services provided to the students at Andalini. The response from the Minister smoothly informed me that there was a strong positive working relationship between local DADHC officers and the Department of Education and Training. I have since sought comment from Sharon and other parents involved with Andalini and I am now disturbed by the Minister's reply. The responses I have received include "I wish there were a strong relationship", "There is no relationship", "Please, we need the speech therapy in Andalini now" and "But these services are not being provided".

I am afraid that Minister Tebbutt has received bad advice from her department. In her response the Minister informed me that there had been only one speech referral from Andalini. That is not correct; there have been four. The Minister further informed me that Andalini receives regular monthly visits from DADHC therapists. That is wrong. Until the end of May this year the DADHC speech therapist had visited the Andalini unit on only one occasion. Parents have told me that the school has raised formal concerns but they have not been addressed. Honourable members may not be aware that the provision of therapy services to these special students requires significant one-on-one interaction between a therapist and the child. When the DADHC speech therapist occasionally turns up at the school, the practice is to instruct the teacher in how to provide the therapy. It is disgraceful that an overworked teacher must provide specialist therapy treatment to four or even five children while still carrying out his or her teaching duties.

Is this good enough? Is this how the Government wants to help these special children to realise their potential? The solution is an honest acceptance by the department that it is not meeting the needs of these children and positive action to recruit sufficient therapists to fix this problem. Placing advertisements in papers and then saying, as Minister Lo Po' did, that every effort has been made to address the lack of therapy is just not good enough. Higher wages, incentives for working in rural areas, job sharing, flexible working hours and conditions for therapists returning to the work force should be introduced, but that has not happened. The department advertises for therapist staff offering specific working hours and the lowest wage possible. Is this making every effort to address the lack of therapy services? No, it is not. It is pathetic. The Minister for Disability Services should be remonstrating with and taking charge of her department. She should ensure that departmental officers tell her the truth and resolve this problem, which has been dragging on for years, once and for all.

BLUE MOUNTAINS GROUP OF AUSTRALIAN PLANTS SOCIETY

Mrs PALUZZANO (Penrith) [8.30 p.m.]: The Australian Plants Society is a nationwide organisation dedicated to fostering and promoting an appreciation of Australian native plants throughout the community, and to supporting the preservation and conservation of these plants. Established in 1958 by a group of people committed to the aforementioned goals, the society quickly grew in number and now has more than 3,000 members in the State of New South Wales alone. Each State has a number of district groups that hold regular meetings and organise activities for members, and I wish to inform honourable members about one of those groups.

The Blue Mountains group of the Australian Plants Society was established shortly after 1958 by a group of residents of Penrith and the lower Blue Mountains whose aim was to promote preservation through cultivation and conservation. The society still holds these same beliefs today. In 1963 the group of locals decided they wanted to take a more hands-on approach to the protection of the Blue Mountains environment, and it began to inspect sites in the local area. A short time later the group selected a reserve in Glenbrook from which to base the organisation. In 1967 the land was gazetted for preservation of the native flora under the care and control of a trust, and this gave the Blue Mountains group access to the reserve.

It is worth noting the efforts of the early volunteers who cleared the land of all the weeds, erected fences, raised money through various fundraising efforts, constructed paths, and began the planting of native species to the Blue Mountains region. Without their dedication and hard work the site may not be the magnificent venue it is today. In 1971 the Captain Cook Bicentenary Committee donated money to the society, which enabled it to build the Cook Bicentenary Native Plant Information Centre on the site. Today the building is still used regularly by its members. It houses an extensive collection of books, journals and research papers primarily dealing with the native environment. Also in 1971 the society received a donation from Heather Christie, which enabled the construction of a plant nursery.

Over the last 30 years volunteers have continued to pay special attention to the Glenbrook Native Plant Reserve, and each Wednesday a group of dedicated volunteers gathers at the reserve to carry out necessary maintenance work, as well as the continued upkeep of the premises. As I mentioned earlier, the reserve has an on-site plant nursery at which members of the public are able to purchase native plants. The funds raised from the sale of native plants are put back into the reserve to cover the cost of any maintenance work that needs to be carried out. The money also funds improvements to the reserve. An example of this is a bridge constructed across a small creek that runs through the land. The bridge was constructed by volunteers, who used wood from a tree found in the local area. A small part of the money is used to help fund activities organised by the group, such as visits to other district groups around the State.

As honourable members can imagine, the large number of native plants in the reserve attract a similarly large number of native animals. Presently all the volunteers are excited that a rare and endangered glossy black cockatoo, which is native to the local area, has decided to visit regularly. One of the most spectacular sites in the reserve is the *boronia fraseri*, which is a highlight during spring. To coincide with the flowering of this rare plant the reserve holds an annual display, showcasing the many flowering plants. In the 40-year history of the Glenbrook Native Plant Reserve a number of individuals have worked tirelessly to ensure that the reserve is well maintained.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge one of these individuals, who passed away recently. Ruth Overton was a founding member of the Glenbrook Native Plant Reserve and volunteered her services for more than 40 years. On 1 June this year a beautiful water feature was opened to commemorate the life of Ruth

Overton and pay tribute to the incredible work she performed. I take this opportunity also to thank all the volunteers, and especially the president, Mr Dick Turner, whose considerable knowledge of local flora and fauna has helped the site become the wonderful resource it is today. I also extend my thanks to the other members. The vice-president, Des Tuck, the secretary, Theresa Bernacki, and the treasurer, Jim Plummer, deserve special thanks. I also extend my sincerest thanks to all the volunteers at the site.

BOAMBEE BEACH DEEP-SEA RELEASE OUTFALL PROPOSAL

Mr FRASER (Coffs Harbour) [8.35 p.m.]: I raise the concerns of Coffs Harbour prawn trawl fishermen about the proposed deep-sea release outfall off Boambee Beach. Over recent years, with the reservation of the marine park as a marine reserve and the new regulations imposed in the marine park area, the areas in which prawn trawl fishermen are able to trawl have been severely restricted. The fishermen have been forced to trawl off Boambee Beach in an area south of Coffs Harbour, out of the marine park area. Boambee Beach is a magnificent seven-kilometre beach that is well utilised by fishermen and swimmers. Currently the prawn trawl fishermen are able to trawl an area that gives them a good length of haul and where prawns obviously congregate. The prawn trawl industry in Coffs Harbour is vital not only to the local fishermen but also to the Sydney Fish Market and the residents of the North Coast region.

John Wait requested Coffs Harbour City Council to relocate the deep-sea release outfall about 500 metres north-east of the proposed site. The council advised that this would be too expensive. However, I believe that it would be cheaper for the council to relocate the outfall to that site because it would be closer to the treatment works. I point out that the effluent at the treatment works is tertiary treated. In fact, some say you could drink it—however, I do not think I would drink it. Relocating the deep-sea release outfall site, at a fairly small cost compared with the \$120 million cost that is proposed for the entire scheme, would provide an excellent opportunity for the prawn trawl fishermen to continue their activities unhindered. If the outfall is located at the proposed site it will severely affect the prawn trawl in the sandy-bottom area where the prawn trawl fishermen trawl on a regular basis.

The project is conducted in conjunction with the State Government, and has been many years in the making. In the scheme of things, a small amount of money and time spent in design works to relocate the outfall would allow the fishermen to continue to trawl and make their livelihood. I ask the Minister to discuss the issue with the Department of Public Works and Services and Coffs Harbour City Council and, if necessary, to issue an instruction to the council and the relevant design engineers of the department to relocate the deep-sea release outfall. I do not believe it is an impossible task; in fact, it is the sensible option. I ask the honourable member for Campbelltown, who is at the table, to convey to the Minister for Public Works the concerns of the fishermen in the Coffs Harbour electorate. Those magnificent prawns—which are shipped to the Sydney Fish Market and, in all likelihood, served in the Parliamentary Dining Room—are important to the Coffs Harbour economy and are often an important addition to the lunches of Sydney and Coffs Harbour residents.

WESTERN PLAINS ZOO

Mr McGRANE (Dubbo) [8.39 p.m.]: I bring to the attention of the House the history of the Western Plains Zoo. That zoo was a development concept in 1960. It was only when Tom Lewis became the Minister for Lands and then Premier that the decision was made that the 300-hectare army site at Dubbo would become the breeding centre for the Taronga Park Zoo. In 1977 Sir Roden Cutler opened the Western Plains Zoo at Dubbo. At that time the zoo was in the Talbragar shire area, not the Dubbo city council area, and as I was then shire president of Gilgandra I attended the official opening. From 1979 to 1984 the zoo underwent considerable development, with new exhibits of koalas, white rhinoceros, Bengal tigers, spider monkeys, dingoes, and banteng cattle.

During that period the number of zoo staff significantly increased. In 1984 the breeding program for endangered species got into full swing. In 1992 Queen Elizabeth visited the zoo and many children from the west and the Far West were present at the zoo for her visit. In 1993 the Western Plains Zoo won the major New South Wales tourism award for record visitation numbers of 300,653 people. In 1994 the Zoofari Lodge was opened and in 1997 the zoo celebrated its twentieth anniversary. During the celebrations for the twenty-fifth anniversary in 2002 the Government announced a \$35 million expenditure program over the next 12 years.

Last week I witnessed the opening of the new white rhinoceros exhibition area by the Hon. Bob Debus as part of the \$4.8 million spent at the zoo over the past two years. After 25 years of operation the appearance of the zoo was getting a little bit tired. I commend the Government for its foresight in regard to the management of

what is a major tourist mecca for regional New South Wales and for its promise of \$35 million over 12 years, with \$2.9 million announced in this year's budget. The expenditure in the past two years has seen a marked increase in patronage to the zoo. Changes must be made to the zoo and constant renovations must be undertaken. That is the current position at the Western Plains Zoo.

The zoo not only is beneficial to Dubbo, but is a mecca that attracts tourists to western New South Wales. Indeed, western New South Wales has the Western Plains Zoo, the telescope at Parkes, the Warrumbungles and the caves at Wellington. Bourke also has a new exhibition called the "Back of Bourke Exhibition", which was launched in Sydney two weeks ago. That exhibition is almost completed and will be opened shortly. Once people visit western New South Wales they tour many places throughout the region. I appreciate the Government's allocation of \$35 million over 12 years. The first allocation of \$5 million was well spent and I am pleased to acknowledge the allocation of a further \$2.9 million in this year's budget. I commend the Western Plains Zoo as a mecca for tourism in New South Wales.

NRMA AND DEATH OF MISS BETHANY VIOLET HOLDER

Mr HAZZARD (Wakehurst) [8.44 p.m.]: I raise a serious issue that involves the death of a five-year-old girl, Bethany Violet Holder. Bethany died on 24 July 2002 in circumstances that were quite horrific. She was on her way to school and had just entered the school grounds. She was with her dad and her older sister. Unfortunately, Bethany had apparently moved away from her dad and, sadly, was struck and killed by a four-wheel-drive vehicle. As the driver of the vehicle is currently before the courts, I do not propose to go into detail and traverse the precise facts. Indeed, I shall exercise caution in what I say in that regard. It is quite amazing and beyond belief that the insurer of the motor vehicle, which is one of the biggest companies in Australia, the NRMA, has denied responsibility for the various expenses incurred by Bethany's parents as a result of this accident. I note that the NRMA wrote to Maurice Blackburn Cashman on 28 March, only a short time ago. The letter, signed by Ngaire Irwin, a so-called senior injury claims consultant at the NRMA, stated:

I confirm that we have completed our inquiries into the circumstances of the accident and we deny liability on behalf of our insured, M. S. Waterhouse. We make this denial on the basis of the following material:

- Our factual inquiries in relation to the circumstances of the accident.

The NRMA likes to suggest that it is the H.E.L.P. company, yet five-year-old Bethany died; she was run over by a motor vehicle. The courts will appropriately deal with whether or not a breach of the Motor Traffic Act or a criminal offence has been committed. As I said, I do not propose to traverse those issues. But what I would say to the NRMA, and to the broader community, is that the response to Bethany's parents is quite stunning and ridiculous, especially from a company that purports to care about people and help them.

The expenses being claimed by Danny and Lisa Holder are not unreasonable. These include the cost of Bethany's funeral, Bethany's headstone, the function after the funeral for family who came from England and even further afield, and the airfares for Bethany's grandparents, who came to Australia to support Bethany's parents in the sad aftermath of this terrible incident. I call on the NRMA to engage its most senior officer to reconsider the file as quickly as possible. When a little child is hit by a motor vehicle, the balance of probabilities standard should apply to the NRMA and, therefore, it must be kidding to suggest it is not liable. This typical bureaucratic response is so insensitive and inappropriate that I find it absolutely mind-boggling to believe it came from the NRMA.

For years many of us have been members of the NRMA in some form or other, and that company should not respond so insensitively to a family that has suffered so much. I visited the family shortly after Bethany's death and I know the level of misery they have suffered. No parent should have to suffer like this, and no family should have to endure an insurance company behaving so insensitively by writing a bureaucratic letter in this manner. I call on the NRMA to become more responsive and to actually do what it says it will do, that is, H.E.L.P.

TRIBUTE TO MR HOWARD RAYMOND CLARK, OAM

Ms JUDGE (Strathfield) [8.49 p.m.]: I congratulate a constituent of mine, Mr Howard Raymond Clark, who was recently awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia. Mr Clark has been a lifelong resident of Croydon. I would like to quote from a letter he wrote to me recently in which he stated:

I am proud to be part of an entirely volunteer run organisation responsible for the development and operating of the museum, preserving one part of the State's and the Nation's heritage. Since it opened on its present site in 1988 at Loftus station (on a

reserve set aside by the Dept of Lands for museum purposes) the museum has grown and developed into an important community asset.

I think the museum is a most unique example of the spirit of co-operation and what volunteer groups can achieve in the community. The museum would not have reached this stage without the additional support of mostly \$ for \$ funding grants from various Government agencies, particularly NSW Heritage and NSW Ministry for Arts funding for restoration and other programs.

On a personal note I have been a lifelong resident of Croydon [which is in the centre of my seat of Strathfield] with some 30 years at Burns Street, where I expect to return near the end of the year when renovations are completed next door ... I gained my interest in tramways and their modern light rail successors through attendance at Cleveland Street Boys High in the period to 1960.

Mr Clark told me by telephone that he became interested in trains and trams when he was travelling by bus from his home in Croydon to Cleveland Street. The interest remained with him until he had the opportunity to become involved in them. Mr Clark has been the chairman of the museum's board since 1989 and has been an active member of the board since 1983. Sydney Tramway Museum provides a nostalgic and educational insight into the lifestyle of Sydneysiders during the 100-year period of tramways operation from 1861 to 1961, with information on running and restoration works in progress, and exhibits and photographs depicting the development and operation of tramways during this period.

The museum has received a variety of funding. Its operational fleet includes an extensive collection of Sydney trams and trams from Brisbane, Melbourne, Ballarat, San Francisco, Nagasaki, Berlin, Munich and Milan, which enabled comparisons to be made of tramcar designs. The project has received enormous support from the honourable member for Miranda, in whose electorate the museum is situated. Volunteers of the museum have a high regard for the honourable member for Miranda because of his support for the project from its inception.

Sydney Tramway Museum began life in 1950. From 1957 the museum operated from a large corrugated iron shed alongside what is today the Parkline tramline—on the opposite side of the Princes Highway to the current site. This location has had its share of history. During the latter years of World War II the area was an army camp site, and from December 1946 to January 1947 it was the site of the first national Boy Scouts Corroboree. In 1988 the museum moved to its current premises next to Loftus railway station. Today the museum remains a non-profit community organisation, run entirely by volunteers. Mr Clark has been involved in the tram museum since 1960.

A fellow tram enthusiast and friend, Peter Kahn, told my office that since Mr Clark retired two years ago he has spent more time than ever at the museum. Sydney Tramway Museum is also a registered charity in New South Wales and people can become a Friend of the Museum or become involved in its preservation, restoration and operational activities. Mr Clark's involvement in transport goes back further, with 25 years dedicated to the monthly magazine of the Australian Electric Traction Association. Mr Clark was also co-founder of Transit Press between 1979 and 1998. These achievements demonstrate Mr Clark's dedication to the project in all its forms. It is no wonder that he has received the fantastic accolade of being awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia. The commitment and hard work of people such as Mr Clark help us to remember how we developed as a nation, and to appreciate the efforts of people who have brought about the technological, engineering and other changes that characterise modern public transport. [*Time expired.*]

CENTRAL COAST BUILDING CONTRACTORS OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Mr HARTCHER (Gosford) [8.54 p.m.]: I raise concerns in the House about the health of people on the Central Coast and to express my concern about the lack of action by WorkCover and its inspectors to ensure the health of people on the Central Coast. My concerns stem from unsafe work practices, which have been reported to me over the last two weeks and which have also been reported to WorkCover. One such report detailed the demolition of a house in a residential area. This demolition was seen and noted by many residents in the surrounding area. The building in question was identified as containing asbestos. However, several of the workers involved were wearing only a T-shirt and shorts, with no protective clothing of any sort. In one instance, workers were seen punching holes with a hammer in the old roof and pulling asbestos material out piece by piece.

The WorkCover Authority was called to protect surrounding residents, who by that stage were aware of the problems and had locked their windows and doors. After a considerable delay WorkCover officers finally arrived, checked the paperwork of the contractors carrying out the demolition and then left without any further inspection or follow-up, despite the serious nature of the complaints. This residents considered this action was inappropriate and called again to report that the workers in question were continuing to perform their task of

dismantling the house without protective clothing or equipment and without taking any precautions to protect surrounding residents.

WorkCover officers arrived again and this time met with the residents but simply informed them that the workers could only be fined up to \$1,000 and that further action was not considered warranted. Because of the seriousness of the claims and the money that would have been made by the workers in the completion of this task, residents considered this lack of action inappropriate. It is now clear to modern builders—as it is to the whole community—that asbestos is a dangerous product. One need only attend the Dust Diseases Tribunal to see the many people who suffer from asbestosis. Asbestosis claims still affect companies from many years ago.

But it seems that some builders, contractors and demolishers are prepared to take the risk or consider the risk not worth worrying about. They continue to act in a manner that endangers the lives of those who live around them. These contractors put the lives of residents, in this case residents on the Central Coast, at risk. I am concerned that the WorkCover Authority in the instance I have related—and possibly in other instances—has not taken a sufficiently proactive stance. Of even more concern is the reaction of the WorkCover Authority. Residents in this case told WorkCover officers that they felt put at risk by the practices of these builders but the WorkCover officers only checked their paperwork.

When these unsafe work practices continued, they simply arrived and informed the residents that the most they could, and would, do is impose a fine of up to \$1,000. To this day, residents do not know if this did happen or will happen. They are simply left wondering if the next breeze will bring asbestos particles into their living rooms. In this day and age, with the knowledge of the significant risk of asbestosis and the many people who suffered from it, together with the many stringent regulations that are in force, it is irresponsible of WorkCover not to take a strong and proactive stand to protect workers and residents by ensuring compliance with regulations. As is well known, the WorkCover Authority is now located at Gosford on the Central Coast. One hopes that the WorkCover Authority, or those administering it, will ensure a greater proactive stance in the protection of residents on the Central Coast and of contractors and workers who become involved, knowingly or unknowingly, with asbestosis. The dangers of asbestosis are too real and too well known.

ST JOSEPH'S REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL, ALBION PARK, RESEARCH EXPO

Ms SALIBA (Illawarra) [8.59 p.m.]: Last Friday I had the privilege of visiting a school which is not in my electorate but which caters for students in my electorate—St Joseph's High School in Albion Park. I was invited to the school to be a judge at a research expo. This was the first time such an event had been held in the Illawarra region. The event was organised by the school and in particular by a teacher by the name of Kerry Ayre. Kerry has a real passion for science. She is a science teacher at St Joseph's High School, and has visited America on at least two occasions. On one occasion she was an Australian judge at an international science expo. She was instrumental in setting up this regional expo in the Illawarra.

All the participants were students at St Joseph's High School, but in the future we hope to encourage other high schools in the Illawarra to take part in the expo. I had the opportunity to look at all the projects. I was fascinated, and it was a learning experience for me. I had the opportunity to see an electronic mouse trap designed by students in year 9. A motor lifted up the front door of a box; when the mouse walked on a small plate the door dropped down and trapped the mouse inside. I asked the students, "What if the mouse is sneaky enough to go around the side?" They had a plan for that. The mouse trap was a great invention.

I looked at another research project by a young man who was researching different types of chocolate and how they melt. I remember saying to him, "How do you melt the chocolate?" He said, "We put it in our mouths." I said I would like to be a guinea pig for that. The project was interesting. The student discovered a lot of things about how chocolate melts and what ingredients in chocolate prevent it from melting quickly. All the displays were very well presented by the students, who spoke to the judges, explaining explicitly the process they went through to choose their subject and how they developed their research and outcomes.

It was an interesting learning experience for everyone involved. I acknowledge all the people who were involved in the expo. There were a number of sponsors, including local radio stations. Several lecturers and tutors from the University of Wollongong were judges at the expo. People from across the region became involved in the process. It took a day to decide on the winning projects. As I said, it was a difficult decision to make. I am glad that I was not the only judge. There were at least three judges for each project. The judges then added up all the points and made decisions on which students should win the prizes. From what I could see, all the students should have won prizes. All the students should be congratulated because they put a lot of time and effort into their projects.

I remember looking at one project about carrots. One young student started with carrot seeds; she left some seeds plain and she soaked others in different chemicals, ranging from gin to Morning Fresh dishwashing detergent. The idea was to look at the different processes the seeds go through, whether they grow quickly and what inhibited growth. I was interested to see that olive oil inhibited growth of the carrots. I learnt a lot of things on the day, some of it useless and some of it important. However, all of it was important to the students, who decided on a subject, undertook the research and reached a conclusion. Each student I spoke to was able to tell me what they learnt and what they would change if they conducted the experiment again. I congratulate St Joseph's High School, Principal, Peter McGovern, Kerry Ayre, the science teacher who was instrumental in setting up the expo, and all the teachers at St Joseph's High School for the work they did. It was a real credit to the students of St Joseph's High School.

AKUBRA HAT FACTORY, KEMPSEY

Mr STONER (Oxley—Leader of the National Party) [9.04 p.m.]: Recently I had the pleasure of visiting the Akubra hat factory located at Kempsey, courtesy of the proprietor, Mr Stephen Keir senior, and the manager, Mr Roy Wilkinson. The Akubra hat factory at Kempsey is an Australian icon. Indeed, Mr Keir is the second Stephen Keir involved in making Akubra hats, the third being Stephen junior. Both Stephen senior and Stephen junior are identities in Kempsey and on the mid North Coast, contributing a great deal to the local community of Kempsey and the local economy with their Akubra hat factory.

The business of Akubra started in Tasmania, moved to Sydney, and moved to Kempsey in the 1970s. It is one of the great success stories of decentralisation of industry in New South Wales. It has survived exceedingly well over the past 30 years or so in Kempsey. The factory employs about 50 people, and exports Akubra hats around the world. These are known as a great Australian icon worn by heads of State, royalty, presidents, and film and sporting personalities. I was fascinated to see the process as Roy Wilkinson guided me around the factory. Making an Akubra hat is a highly labour-intensive process. I was unaware that the felt used in Akubra hats is unique in that it is amongst the strongest and smoothest of fabrics. It is also amongst the lightest and the most impervious to water of any type of fabric.

The felt is made from the pelts of rabbits. These days the rabbit pelts are imported principally from England because of the effectiveness of myxomatosis. The process is highly labour intensive, starting with cutting the fur from the rabbit pelts. The fur goes through a machine to produce a long downy cotton type of material. It is then blown on to a cone that forms the basic shape of the hat but at this stage it is still very loose rabbit fur. It is then wrapped in cloth, sprayed with water and shrunk through rollers. It undergoes a number of shrinking processes, and several staff are involved in each stage of the process. It is all hands on. There are a number of shrinkings, then a dying process and then a tip stretching and blocking process that starts to form the shape of the hat.

Then there is something called stoving, which is the final drying of the hats before trimming. Then a process of stretching shapes the hat. There are a number of hats to which I will refer shortly. During the ironing process the fur is taking shape where it interlocks, and by this stage the material is very strong. Then there is a finishing process of stacking. There is a pre-creasing process with the crown, followed by further trimming, sweatbands, brows and silk linings, and then a flanging process that gives the hat its final shape.

Finally there is a sanding before you have the finished product, which is the famous Akubra hat. Among the models one can purchase in Australia and overseas are the Snowy River, the Cattleman, the Stockman, the Downunder, the Bobby and the Gymkhana. This is a great rural industry, providing employment for people in regional New South Wales. It is an export industry that contributes a great deal to the local economy. I congratulate the Keir family—Stephen senior and Stephen Junior—and all the workers of Akubra for producing this great Australian icon, the Akubra hat.

SYDNEY WATER GEORGES RIVER SEWERAGE PROGRAM

Mr LYNCH (Liverpool) [9.09 p.m.]: Tonight I inform the House of certain aspects of developments undertaken in my electorate by Sydney Water. In particular, this is the sewerage program known as the Georges River Program. This is a massive and very expensive expansion of the sewage capacity of the present system. It is a \$100 million upgrade of sewerage systems in south-western Sydney. The need for this is driven by the significant residential expansion in south-western Sydney. New houses and new suburbs require expanded sewerage services. There are a number of issues with this program. One, to which I will return at a later date, involves the preposterous notion of carrying out various work 24 hours a day, seven days a week in Memorial

Avenue, Moore Street and Elizabeth Street. Some of this work is near to residential areas. It takes a certain degree of arrogance on the part of Sydney Water to think it can treat residents of Liverpool in this cavalier and contemptuous fashion.

That attitude is replicated in the other aspect of this program that I wish to raise, which involves the damage inflicted on at least one house as a result of the construction and excavation work carried out by Sydney Water. The Dela Cruz family are constituents of mine whom I have known for some time. They live in Balmain Street, Cartwright. At the end of last year a massive and deep pit was excavated in the roadway of Balmain Street in front of the Dela Cruz home. The size of the pit was quite substantial and the street was closed. The excavation was roughly five to six metres deep and the opening on the surface six to seven metres square. The edge of the pit was about 10 metres away from the Dela Cruz home. The work was eventually completed. The completion of that work involved jack hammering out the steel supports in the pit. That had a dramatic effect. A massive vibration resulted. My constituents likened it to an earthquake. It caused substantial vibration to their house. The vibration was so severe that a Sydney Water instrument—believed by my constituents to be a seismograph—fell down on the pavement.

The Dela Cruz family fear that the structural floor beams of their front room, which is a lounge room, have been weakened by this vibration. They have observed a number of noticeable things. I should add that I inspected the house last Sunday, 22 June. Their concerns are these: the floor of the lounge room has dropped; there is a noticeable gap between the floor and part of the skirting board; the lounge room floor now creaks when walked upon; the wall unit in the lounge room moves and vibrates when occupants walk upon the floor in that room; a crack has appeared in the ceiling of the lounge room; there are also cracks in the driveway and the council-owned pavement and the paths to the house. My constituents are also concerned that the front wall of the house is not stable. None of these phenomena were observed before the work that I have described by Sydney Water.

I anticipate two possible defences by Sydney Water. Yes, the Dela Cruz family is doing some work on the house at the moment but this is mainly painting and certainly nothing that would involve structural integrity. Yes, they did have some extensions added to the house—but they were council approved, done last year and at the back of the house, not the front and thus not near the lounge room. In addition, the items they complain of appeared after, not before, the vibration. In some of these examples the Dela Cruz family were lucky enough to have photographs of the house taken before the vibration occurred. This is a very serious matter. A family's house has been affected and perhaps seriously damaged by the actions of a major public organisation. Unfortunately the situation has been worsened by the dilatory way in which the organisation has responded. Its attitude is best exemplified by a meeting I had with staff of Sydney Water two weeks ago, on 11 June, concerning this project.

Some of those present were people whom the Dela Cruz family were dealing with. I asked them—at that stage not knowing anything of the Dela Cruz problem—how the residents of Balmain Street had coped with the project. I was assured that there were no problems, everything was well and the residents were happy. That was patently untrue. Misleading the local member is not a good way to conduct a public project. Five days after that conversation with me the Dela Cruz family approached me about this problem. A list given to me by Mr Dela Cruz shows that there has been a plethora of broken appointments by Sydney Water or its representatives, including as recently as last week, when people were supposed to arrive on Thursday or Friday but did not.

The family advised Sydney Water of the occurrence on the day that it happened. Two people eventually inspected the house on 28 May and took photographs of the lounge room floor and ceiling. They said they would discuss it with the engineers and contractors. As of last Sunday my constituents advised me that nothing substantial has happened. On 15 June a Sydney Water representative contacted Mr Dela Cruz to arrange for a building inspector to inspect the house on 16 June. He did not turn up. Another appointment was made for 20 June. He did not turn up then either. I suspect that the problems suffered by this family are not unique. The family believes theirs is not the only house in Balmain Street to have suffered damage following the closing of the pit and the earthquake-like vibration. I ask the relevant Minister to urgently intervene in the case. Sydney Water should immediately take steps to rectify any damage it has caused to houses in Balmain Street. It should stop treating my constituents with contempt and condescension. And it should stop trying to mislead me.

REGIONAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr CONSTANCE (Bega) [9.14 p.m.]: I speak this evening about a letter that has been circulated among my colleagues in this place from a constituent of the Bega electorate from Kianga near Narooma on the

far South Coast. This constituent has contacted members of Parliament about a health matter that has been a concern of mine locally—the level of support provided within the hospital system in regional New South Wales. I take the opportunity this evening to read this constituent's letter, because the issues she has raised require a response from the Government and the Minister. I hope the Minister will take on board the concerns she has raised and ensure that situations such as this do not occur in the future. I am conscious that my constituent has contacted members of Parliament. I spoke briefly to her today and will meet with her in the next two weeks. The letter to members reads as follows:

Just over four weeks ago my brother-in-law ... underwent an operation at the St. George Hospital in Kogarah. The doctors and nursing staff at this hospital gave him wonderful care and attention. However, when the doctors decided that he could return home, it was suggested that owing to the condition he was in, it would be better to have him sent by ambulance to his home in Narooma (a journey of just over five hours under normal conditions). His condition was such that the wound ... on his body was still open, to which the medical staff applied a bag to drain the wound. He also has a colostomy bag and in addition to this the doctors also had to insert a catheter to the bladder, as the bladder was not working. The ambulance service was denied to him, however last Thursday afternoon ... my sister was informed that he would be transferred by helicopter to the Moruya Hospital where he would be assessed for twenty four hours before allowing him to go home. I might add here that arrangements had been made with the Community Health Nursing staff at Narooma to attend him on his return home. However this all changed on Friday morning (June 13), when my sister was advised that they would not provide the helicopter, as this would only start a precedent for others!! My sister had already booked herself out of Bezzina House where she had been residing for over three weeks: she had packed the car and was preparing to return to the Moruya Hospital, when she was given this unbelievable news. She drove from Sydney to Nowra with my brother-in-law in the car, where she met my husband and me, as arranged, to assist in bringing him back to Narooma. Unfortunately on the way to Nowra, his colostomy bag leaked, and she had to stop at Bomaderry Station to clean him up, using cold tap water from a public faucet. We also had to call in to the Moruya Hospital to obtain their assistance as his bag again leaked as we travelled to Narooma, and the danger was it would leak into the wound, which it had already happened four times at the St. George Hospital whilst he was lying in bed.

I wonder if you can imagine the outrage we feel when a 74 year old pensioner was offered no dignity, no thought of the horrendous journey that faced him, and to be told that his condition didn't warrant the cost of an ambulance or the promised helicopter to bring him nearer home.

I might add here that I have contacted the Department of Aged Care, The Patient Support at St. George Hospital and I have been asked if I wish to pursue this complaint, and I have made it abundantly clear that I, and others who are prepared to support me, most certainly do.

I raise this issue this evening in the hope that the Minister for Health will look into it. It is a great concern of mine. I recognise the difficulties of being in regional areas and the difference in transportation that exists between metropolitan and regional areas, but these circumstances warrant further investigation. I hope the Minister will look into this matter as soon as possible and provide a response both to my constituent and to me in the hope that we can have this matter rectified.

CAMPSIE UNITING CHURCH

Ms BURNEY (Canterbury) [9.19 p.m.]: Campsie Uniting Church is a multicentred congregation encompassing three worship centres located in Campsie, Earlwood and Clempton Park. They know their community well and accommodate their parishioners' ever-changing needs effectively and with understanding and compassion. The church, headed by Reverend Bill Thomas, provides a huge range of activities. I will list some of them briefly. I want to place on record my very deep appreciation to the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress and the Campsie-Earlwood-Clempton Park congregation of the Campsie Uniting Church.

Last Sunday evening they held a service of thanksgiving and dedication in recognition of my election as the local member for Canterbury. I do not make this statement as an exercise in self-promotion but in the spirit of being deeply humbled by the motivation of those who participated and the enormous effort that went into the nature of the service. The service was to guide me as the local representative to encourage me to have the capacity to provide good leadership, to have a strong and decent heart and to speak up for the people in our community who do not have a voice.

In particular, I acknowledge Reverend Bill Thomas, Pearl Wymarra, Reverend Walter Fejo, the Clempton Park Children's Choir, Mark Yettica Paulson, Lynette Riley Mundine, Juliette Tohi and a number of parishioners who offered prayers for our community and for me and my family. I was moved by the symbolic gifts presented: an electoral roll from a member of the Korean community; a beautiful tappa map from the Pacific Islander community; clap sticks and boomerangs from the congress; and a symbolic candle and earth and fire sticks from Pearl. I was also presented with a wonderful painting from Claude Douglas, who is a Koori constituent. Claude is a single dad with three girls. Claude's daughter Alicia has recently returned from a trip to central Australia, which was sponsored by Fusion. I digress to say how pleased I was to see that Campsie Fusion Youth Cafe recently received recurrent funding of \$226,000.

In addition to regular worship, children's needs are met at Earlwood church with the operation of a child-care centre, which accommodates 59 children per day. This centre first opened its doors in 1949. Church programs include the Kids Club at Clempton Park, which operates after school on Tuesdays. The Clempton Park church caters for family-style worship and Sunday school for the children. A youth group conducted at Campsie parish targets high school students mainly from Pacific Islander background, and tutoring by volunteer university students has been offered to those attending the group. It is a great deal of fun. Community programs are offered catering for people who have drug and alcohol problems and a friendship club, catering for people with intellectual disability, also operates at the Campsie parish.

On 1 July 2003 Rodney Isaac will commence as a full-time community worker for the multicentred congregation. His role will be to oversee existing programs and to develop new ones. A holiday program, which commenced last year and will continue this year, is offered to primary-aged children whose parents are recovering heroin addicts. They are referred to the Uniting Church in Campsie by the methadone clinic. The program operates five days per week during day-time hours and offers a range of activities, including dance, craft, visits to wildlife parks, music and so on. I add that the church receives funding from the Premier's Department to provide this service.

As honourable members can see, Campsie-Clempton Park-Earlwood Uniting Church, a multicentred congregation, provides services as diverse as the community it serves. I applaud all those associated with this multicentred congregation and thank them for honouring me last Sunday evening with the special service. During the service Reverend Fejo from the Aboriginal congress led us through an action song called "March on with hearts courageous". That is a good thing for all members in this place to do.

CASTLE HILL ROAD AND NEW LINE ROAD INTERSECTION, WEST PENNANT HILLS

Mr RICHARDSON (The Hills) [9.24 p.m.]: At about 4.00 p.m. on Friday 30 May, on my way back to my electorate office from Parliament House, I drove past the intersection of New Line Road and Castle Hill Road, West Pennant Hills, as I always do. But something was different this day. A postie's bike was lying on Castle Hill Road and there was an ominous looking lump lying on the roadway covered by a white sheet. Unfortunately, my worst fears were realised. Laurie Bohle, a postman doing his job for the community, had become another road statistic. The local papers reported the accident the following week. Mr Bohle was in his early 30s and had been working with Australia Post for 13 years. He was a union representative for the Dural delivery centre, as well as being a member of the Army Reserve. He leaves behind his wife, Lisa, and their three-week-old baby girl, Lara. To Lisa and other members of his family I extend my sincerest sympathy.

It was Australia Post's first work-related road death in 10 years. I understand that is across the whole of Australia. When Keiasha Naidoo, a journalist with the *Hills Shire Times*, rang to ask me what could be done to make the intersection safer, I was stumped. It is far too busy to close, and short of a grade separation there is no such thing as a 100 per cent safe intersection. Through her paper I asked for suggestions from my constituents for safety improvements. I am delighted to say I received several suggestions. One of the great strengths of The Hills is its community-mindedness. That quality was demonstrated yet again on this occasion. I am grateful to those who thought this issue was important enough to write or phone me. Matthew Jenkins, who lives only a few doors from the intersection, wrote:

Unfortunately my wife and I were leaving our house about 30 seconds after Laurie Bohle, the Australia Post postman, was hit by the van on that day, 30 May. We raced to the scene of the accident as my wife is a nurse and fully qualified in cardio pulmonary resuscitation. My wife and I were there trying to revive this poor man until the police and ambulance arrived, to no avail as you would be aware.

This instance has shaken us up a fair bit as you can imagine, it was not a pretty sight, and was extremely traumatic.

This is obviously not the first fatality at this intersection, from memory there was another only 12 months ago. There are also other numerous accidents there that do not result in fatalities. I even recall having my first minor accident at this intersection back in 1988, and note that nothing in relation to the intersection has changed in that time.

In my opinion the solution to fixing this intersection to make it far safer is very simple. All that needs to be done is have a red arrow in the right hand turn lane on Castle Hill Road turning into New Line Road. That way no one can turn right into New Line Road from Castle Hill Road without there being a green arrow. Easy, and avoids people turning in front of cars going straight ahead.

I don't even believe this will greatly affect the traffic flow as in peak hour traffic in the afternoon/evenings, not many cars get to turn before the green arrow comes on anyway.

In addition to the above suggestion, a red light camera would also assist I believe in reducing the likelihood of accidents.

Other constituents, including Vicki Mason of Cherrybrook, also believe a red arrow for traffic turning right into New Line Road would be beneficial. The only problem I see with this option is that New Line Road is an extremely busy road and any restrictions on traffic flow may cause cars to bank up for an unacceptably long distance on New Line Road. The right-turn bay frequently overflows, blocking traffic in the outside lane on Castle Hill Road. Glen Doherty of Castle Hill wrote to me giving details of two radar-based speed safety products he said might help. Mr Doherty has been working in the United Kingdom for the past 18 months and has supplied these units to more than 30 councils and various police authorities.

The first is the Radarclass, a portable radar-based system that collects time, date, speed and class of vehicle data for 14 days. This data could then be used to assess traffic movements and evaluate options for controlling them. The second is the Speedvisor, a traffic-calming device similar to the ones used by Castle Hill Local Area Command Volunteers in Policing to slow traffic outside local schools. It provides a highly visible display of vehicle speeds. It can be attached to a telegraph pole, run off batteries, solar or mains power, and left unsupervised.

The other suggestion I would make is that the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] considers putting a median strip on Castle Hill Road alongside the right-turn bay to New Line Road. I have stood on the corner outside St Matthews Anglican Church and watched as many as 14 cars cut the corner at this intersection turning into New Line Road. Whether this is the lemming factor at work or they are all desperate to get around before the next car comes along is immaterial. The fact is by cutting the corner they are travelling around too fast and too close to cars waiting in New Line Road. That, in itself, increases the risk of an accident.

Perhaps from this unfortunate tragedy some good can come. I ask that the Minister for Roads instruct the RTA immediately to consider the options I have discussed tonight and any other options that might be available. This is clearly a dangerous intersection and I, as the local member, and the Government have a duty to mitigate against future accidents. The intersection of New Line Road and Castle Hill Road may be a black spot today, but it does not have to remain that way. We clearly cannot guarantee that no accident will ever occur here again. We cannot safeguard against every eventuality, including human error. But the expenditure of a small amount of money could significantly reduce the risk for generations of future motorists and motorcyclists.

LIGHT AND HOPE CAMPAIGN

Ms HAY (Wollongong) [9.29 p.m.]: The Light and Hope campaign in Wollongong is raising funds in support of research into schizophrenia and, in particular, to purchase a Beta Imager, which is a high-tech camera that provides state-of-the-art, high resolution images of the brain that allow scientists to better understand brain chemistry. Mental health is an issue that touches most Australians in one way or another. In most cases it affects us directly, either through personal suffering or the suffering of a loved one.

I have been touched by the pain of watching a loved one struggling with the effects of mental illness. I have lost a husband and my children have lost a father to those effects. In my view my late husband, Christopher Martin Hay, died of a mental illness when he took his life on 19 April 1991. His death certificate could easily have and should have read, "Died of a curable disease". It does not; his death is registered as a suicide with all of the questions that that begs for the loved ones left behind. Having had 13 years to reflect on the loss of life of such a thoroughly decent man, I believe that his was a treatable condition. I am even more certain that he had been suffering for many years. It concerns me that either he did not know he needed help or that he did not know how to ask for it.

Treatments for mental patients cause crippling and debilitating side effects. The Beta Imager will be located at the University of Wollongong campus and will assist in developing better treatments for patients with schizophrenia. Additionally, the machine will improve research turnaround times by a factor of 300 and avoid the delay caused by sending films to the United States for processing. The machine will be the first in the Southern Hemisphere and will be linked to a network of other cameras worldwide that will allow global research into this disorder. The machine will create a new centre of excellence for schizophrenia research and attract the best of the next generation of neuroscientists to the university and the Illawarra to pursue this research task.

The foundation has raised \$170,000 towards the \$200,000 required for the purchase of the machine, leaving a deficit of \$30,000. I have raised this issue with the Minister for Health and requested that the Government seriously consider providing the \$30,000 shortfall. As a society it is important that we talk about mental health more openly and assist people to understand that chemical imbalances that we do not understand

occur in the brain. The families who are suffering—there are many in Wollongong—because of the loss of loved ones from suicide, particularly young males, are left asking why, what they could have done and so on. Guilt creates its own problems for those families and the community. I will strongly pursue the Minister for Health for the \$30,000 as a first step in providing a more up-to-date treatment for schizophrenics, in particular, and encourage more open discussion about the effects of mental health issues.

Mr CAMPBELL (Keira—Minister for Regional Development, Minister for the Illawarra, and Minister for Small Business) [9.34 p.m.]: I congratulate the honourable member for Wollongong on raising this issue and having the courage to talk in such a personal way about her experiences with mental illness. The House should always acknowledge when honourable members have the courage to do that. I support wholeheartedly her call for broader community discussion about mental health issues. I recall making a private member's statement last year or the year before about this issue.

I also acknowledge and congratulate those people leading the Light and Hope campaign in the Illawarra region and Wollongong, particularly Stephen Mayers, the chair of the campaign. As we have heard, the campaign is a joint initiative involving the community and the University of Wollongong, which is an excellent and important institution in the Illawarra region. I note that the honourable member for Wollongong indicated that she has made representations to the Minister for Health. As the Minister at the table this evening I undertake to draw his attention to her contribution to this debate. As a local member for the Illawarra and as the Minister for the Illawarra I place on the record my support for the initiative and for the honourable member's representations to obtain funding to ensure the Beta Imager is provided for research and treatment purposes at the University of Wollongong.

UNDERGROUND POWER CABLES

Ms MOORE (Bligh) [9.36 p.m.]: Undergrounding electricity cables in New South Wales would provide future generations with a permanent legacy of greater energy reliability, improved safety and a better urban environment. I have raised this issue in the House previously. Underground systems cost half as much to maintain and are four times more reliable than overhead cabling. Overhead power requires expensive and unacceptable mutilation of urban street trees to keep foliage clear of wires. Overhead cables are vulnerable to damage from storms and collisions. About 10 per cent of traffic accidents involve power poles, and cost over \$250 million each year. Overhead cables start hundreds of bushfires. A typical example is the Helensburgh fire started by Integral Energy's overhead mains, which resulted in about 40 families being left homeless. Power disruptions affect the economy, cost jobs and create hardships for households and businesses alike.

Our nineteenth century power distribution infrastructure undermines our credibility as the premier and smart State. The solution is to redesign our electricity and communications system using modern technology. New South Wales lags behind Western Australia, South Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory, not to mention international cities like New York, London, Paris, Rome and Singapore, plus an increasing number of Third World countries. An independent survey by Ingenuity Research indicates that two-thirds of Sydney residents are prepared to pay to underground Sydney's cables. Unanimous resolutions at successive Lgov NSW conferences have cut across factional, regional and party lines. All this has occurred without any Government support.

This issue will not go away. There will be ongoing problems and community anger that this Government has not been proactive. I welcome the recent campaign by Lgov NSW to increase public awareness through the use of creative and provocative slogans such as "Bury power cables not people" and "Lop power poles not trees". New South Wales has not begun a visionary project to underground our unreliable and archaic overhead electricity system because the public authorities charged with developing an achievable plan did not provide the Government with the requested advice. In response to my call in Parliament in November 2001, the Premier asked the Minister for Energy to develop an implementable plan.

In September 2002 the former Minister reported that a plan had not been developed and proposed an expensive voluntary system that has produced no outcome. The intervening Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal [IPART] inquiry wasted \$147,000 of public funds by not providing the required advice. IPART did not comply with its terms of reference or integrate public input. Its report underestimated quantifiable benefits, failed to adequately deal with so-called unquantifiable benefits, and used a mixed methodology that disguised the project's true viability.

A specific problem is the cost of vehicle collisions with utility poles. From research undertaken by the Bureau of Transport Economics and Motor Accident Commission, Sydney Cables Downunder estimates a

benefit of \$142.9 million a year, substantially more than IPART's estimated \$48 million to \$53 million. Similarly, Sydney Cables Downunder has examined supposedly unquantifiable benefits. In 2001 EnergyAustralia reported five natural events that cumulatively blacked out one-third of its customers for an average of 2.8 days. If 80 per cent of these customers were residents with \$50 worth of refrigerated food spoiled, these blackouts would have caused a loss of \$19.3 million.

Similar calculations on issues described by the IPART as unquantifiable include total losses through blackouts from natural disasters and increased real estate values from undergrounding. Sydney Cables Downunder estimates total benefits to be in excess of \$900 million per annum. This research should have been undertaken by the IPART during its expensive and useless inquiry. Further research using the IPART's data concludes that an optimised underground system would break even, through cost savings alone, seven years after completion of a 40-year project and the benefits would continue indefinitely.

The "beneficiary pays" funding mechanism proposed by the IPART was also unnecessarily complex, ideologically driven, lacking in transparency, and costly to administer. Continued research by Sydney Cables Downunder and the Local Government Association demonstrates that funding methods exist to make the burial of overhead cables affordable without placing a heavy burden on the community or diverting funds from other government services—for example, health, education, and law and order. The estimated cost to consumers in areas with overhead cabling could be less than \$1 per week over 40 years. In recognition of the road safety benefits, a levy of \$21 per year would be imposed on motor vehicle registrations. Pensioners would be exempt from both levies.

These proposals have been developed from figures contained in New South Wales Government reports and calculated in a computer-based model verified by a chartered accountant and an economist. The challenges of undergrounding can be dealt with if there is political will to secure a long-term benefit for New South Wales. I call on the Government to proactively review the available research, and recommit to an achievable plan beginning in Sydney and extending throughout the State.

MEMORIAL DAY OBSERVANCE AT KOKODA PARK, KENSINGTON

Ms KENEALLY (Heffron) [9.41 p.m.]: I wish to acknowledge the efforts of the Eastern Suburbs Sub-branch of the National Servicemen's Association of Australia to remember and honour those who have died serving on active duty in Australia's armed forces. On 1 June this year the sub-branch held a moving and dignified Memorial Day observance in Kokoda Park in Kensington. I was honoured to be invited to the Memorial Day observance, and I was also happy to represent the Premier at this important and solemn event. Reverend Dr Parker, the President of the Eastern Suburbs Sub-Branch of the National Servicemen's Association of Australia, led the service, which was attended by many local residents. Other members of the sub-branch who ably supported the Memorial Day event included Mr Les Haggert, Mr Bryan Powell and Mr Wal Benington.

The sub-branch was joined in honouring our fallen servicemen by the President of the New South Wales branch of the National Servicemen's Association, Mr. Ron Brown, Mr. Graham Boggie of the Maroubra RSL sub-branch, Lieutenant Colonel Peter Jones, representing the commanding officer of the second division Randwick, Ms Joanna Barbara, the General Manager of the Kensington War Memorial RSL Club, Mr Ron Healey of the Matraville RSL sub-branch, and Mr Noel Hartric of the Matraville RSL sub-branch. Local councillors also attended, including Councillor George Glinatsis of Botany Bay Council, and Councillors Peter Schick and John Procopiadis of Randwick City Council. The honourable member for Coogee and the honourable member for Vacluse also joined me at the service.

This year's Memorial Day observance was made even more special by the fact that once again recently Australian forces have been on active duty on foreign soil—in the Middle East, where so many Australians fought and died before them. As the Premier noted on Anzac Day this year, Australians have been on active duty on no fewer than 28 of the 88 Anzac Days since Gallipoli. Whatever our thoughts on this latest war, we can be sure of one thing: Australia's fighting services responded to a call of duty, representing their country with dignity and courage, as they always have: 330,000, from a total population of five million, in the First World War; more than 800,000, from a population of seven million, in the Second World War; 12,000 in Korea; 7,000 in the Malayan campaign; and more than 50,000 in Vietnam. All have put their lives at risk in peacekeeping efforts around the world—in Timor, Afghanistan and the Gulf.

The efforts of the National Servicemen's Association in honouring those who have fought and died for Australia are important in maintaining their memory in our local community, especially among young people,

who have never known what it is like to have a foreign army attack Australian soil or see family members called up to do national service during a foreign war. Due to the efforts of groups such as the National Servicemen's Association, each year we see in the community increasing numbers of youngsters marking observances such as Memorial Day and Anzac Day. Many young people attended the Memorial Day observance at Kokoda Park, including my five-year-old son Daniel, who is the great-grandson of Sergeant Edmund Thomas Keneally, who was stationed with the RAAF liaison unit attached to No. 3 squadron in Cairo during World War II.

I am confident that the spirit of the Anzac—of all Australian service personnel—will be carried forward by Daniel's generation and supported and developed by community organisations such as the Eastern Suburbs Sub-branch of the National Servicemen's Association. The Anzac spirit is not backward-looking or sentimental; it is nation building. I thank the National Servicemen's Association for helping the local community in Heffron to remember and honour the fallen of all Australia's wars and the serving men and women on duty in peace-keeping efforts around the world. Due to their efforts the Anzac spirit lives in Australians of all ages and backgrounds.

Private members' statements noted.

BILL RETURNED

The following bill was returned from the Legislative Council without amendment:

Gaming Machines Amendment (Shutdown Periods) Bill

The House adjourned at 9.45 p.m. until Thursday 26 June 2003 at 10.00 a.m.
