

# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Thursday 26 May 2005

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

**Mr Speaker** offered the Prayer.

## AUDIT OFFICE

### Report

**Mr Speaker** tabled, pursuant to section 38E of the Public Finance and Audit Act 1983, the performance audit report of the Auditor-General entitled "Emergency Mental Health Services: NSW Department of Health", dated May 2005.

**Ordered to be printed.**

## CROSS-BORDER COMMISSION BILL

### Second Reading

**Debate resumed from 5 May 2005.**

**Mr GREG APLIN** (Albury) [10.02 a.m.]: I seek an extension of time. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

As I said on the last occasion, cross-border anomalies keep stacking up, and I will cite an example provided by Ross Ludlow, the training co-ordinator for the Wodonga Institute of TAFE. The college conducts earthmoving courses, wherein students are assessed for licences to operate front end loaders, excavators, backhoes, and skid steers. However, the TAFE college can now only issue Victorian qualifications, which are not recognised in New South Wales. To issue a New South Wales qualification, the Wodonga Institute of TAFE has to physically transport its equipment to a site located in New South Wales. The co-ordinator told me that to complete their written assessment, students had to be transported from an air-conditioned classroom in the middle of summer to sit under a tree in a field in New South Wales so that both the theory and practical assessments are undertaken in New South Wales. This is a complete impracticality and a clarion call for a national certification standard.

Forklift drivers face a similar problem, with no system in place for mutual recognition of each State's licensing system. Bus and coach operators also face difficulties. In March last year I received a letter from Eric Pfeiffer, the proprietor of Border Country Coach Tours, highlighting some of the anomalies hindering his industry. To operate a bus or coach in New South Wales, accreditation from the Department of Transport is required, whereas in Victoria such accreditation is issued by the Department of Infrastructure. One of the problems New South Wales bus or coach operators face is that while their Victorian counterparts are allowed to pick up and set down passengers in New South Wales, they cannot travel into Victoria to pick up passengers under any circumstance without dual accreditation.

I will cite another example. One of our local bus companies, Mylon Motorways, operates in Victoria and New South Wales. The company's buses need to be fitted with two separate flashing light mechanisms, one for Victoria and one for New South Wales. This type of unnecessary regulation in a cross-border area has a significant negative impact on the company's bottom line, with 22 buses requiring dual flashing light mechanisms at a cost of over \$1,000 per bus. Border anomalies not only inconvenience people living in border areas, they also result in our State losing investment, with businesses looking to move to other States where costs are lower. Surely our tax-hungry Government would sit up and take note of that loss of income. But, no. At a 1999 conference on border issues one shire councillor said:

In the Murray Shire we had the experience of losing a large processing plant to Victoria because of a policy regarding water supply. We were told that "if Murray Shire wants water for industry they can go and buy it on the open market" and that was not said by a bureaucrat but by a State Minister. A week later, I was at the Coliban Water (Victorian) Business Breakfast and it was

stated, "We will not lose industry expansion or opportunities to other areas or interstate, we will supply the water and infrastructure."

What a difference in attitude! The Government forgoes vast sums in vehicle registration fees all along the border because costs are lower in Victoria and residents find ways to circumvent the rules. Motor traders operating on both sides of the Victorian-New South Wales border also face border anomalies. New South Wales and Victorian regulations require that vehicles garaged in the respective States must hold registration in those States, but a problem arises when motor traders wish to move the vehicles between facilities on both sides of the border. This is very complex, requiring a change of registration each time the vehicle is moved from State to State. To overcome this problem, an amendment to regulations would be required. Again, the Cross-Border Commission would be perfectly suited to look into that.

Dual registration and licensing is a common problem faced by people of all professions in border areas. Nuclear medicine technologists who wish to work in Wangaratta and Albury must be licensed in both States, even though the qualification requirements are identical in New South Wales and Victoria and are provided by the same national body. The same goes for general practitioners [GPs], who are required to have dual Medical Board registration if they wish to practise on the other side of the border. This is an impractical policy imposing needless paperwork and cost on GPs when we should be encouraging them to set up in regional areas.

The Business Development Manager of Albury Wodonga Business, Tim Stewart, says that the big issue is the duplication of paperwork for all professionals and trades people living on the border and working on both sides. He says there is a real need for the two State governments to get together to eliminate duplication and work towards one set of rules for licences, registrations and regulations that can apply across the border. As an example, the Building Code of Australia was launched in 1995 as a national code of regulations for the building industry, to replace the separate codes then operating in the different States. Since that time the regulators in each State have been busily adding to each State appendix, to the point where each appendix is almost as big as the original code!

Fishing licences are also a matter of contention. Some progress has been made, with the States dividing up Lake Hume and Lake Mulwala between them, thus requiring anglers to possess only one licence if they wish to fish in one lake. However, there is still some confusion about other areas, and there have been calls from a number of organisations, including the South West Anglers Association and the Lake Hume Recreational Co-ordination Committee, for a reciprocal licensing agreement that would allow anglers from both sides of the border to fish uninhibited.

On the subject of waterways let me advise the House of the emotional distress caused by the lack of cross-border arrangements. Last Easter there was a tragic drowning in Lake Hume. The Albury and Border Rescue Squad, which is a member of the New South Wales Volunteer Rescue Association and is the accredited primary rescue unit for Albury, offered the services of its dive team to search for a missing boy in the lake. New South Wales Police advised the rescue squad that the incident had occurred in Victorian waters and that it was a Victorian Police matter.

The services were then offered to Wodonga Police as the squad's dive team was the only response unit available in the area. The boy's body remained in 1.6 metres of water 10 metres from the bank until mid afternoon on the following day because Victorian Police protocols required a dive team to travel up from Melbourne. The distress to the relatives and all other parties could have been avoided by accrediting the squad's divers on both sides of the border. This is something I have taken up with our local area commander. These are just some examples from a long list of border anomalies affecting the lives of people living in border communities, yet the Carr Government continues to argue that the current arrangements are working adequately. There is a need for this bill. When speaking on the original bill, my predecessor, the late Mr Ian Glachan, said:

This legislation will help tens of thousands of people living in cross-border communities, and surely that is why we are elected—to help people and solve problems.

That still holds true. There is immense dissatisfaction with the current arrangements for solving cross-border anomalies and strong support for the establishment of a formal mechanism to do that. Let me conclude by illustrating the duplicity of government in this sorry saga. In 1997 the New South Wales Government transferred obstetrics from the Mercy Hospital in Albury to Wodonga District Hospital in Victoria, but arranged that parents can opt to have the birth registered in New South Wales. This is a convenient misrepresentation. It overcomes an unpalatable anomaly for the Government. If only all border anomalies were so easy to fix. I urge the support of the House for the Cross-Border Commission Bill.

**Mr IAN SLACK-SMITH** (Barwon) [10.10 a.m.]: I support my colleague the honourable member for Albury. His speech was indisputable evidence of the need for this bill. There really is one set of rules for one side of the border and another set of rules for the other. I come from the northern part of New South Wales and the honourable member for Albury, of course, comes from the south, but our problems are the same. The purpose of the bill is to create a body away from the Premier's Department, which is obviously a very ad hoc sort of organisation that does not come up with very much at all in the way of cross-border problem resolution.

We believe that this commission should hear submissions, take evidence, undertake all other action necessary to resolve cross-border issues—and I can assure the House there are a lot of issues—make recommendations to the Premier regarding cross-border solutions, and compile an annual report. That really means accountability to the Parliament to ensure that this action actually takes place. The commission will be representative of the New South Wales Government, consumers, businesses, farmers, and local government, and it will have the power to appoint other representatives, to a total maximum of eight. I believe that eight is a pretty lucky number for a commission like this because it will allow representation from all bodies that are actively involved in this issue. The commission will be reviewed after five years. If it can solve all the problems in five years you, Mr Speaker, should adjourn the House when the next State of Origin match is played so we can watch it.

I would like to give as an example the relative positions of Goondiwindi, which is in Queensland, and Boggabilla, which is in the north of New South Wales. Boggabilla is a small town and it will not grow any more, quite simply because the advantages of living and doing business in Boggabilla are so great compared with New South Wales that all the contractors in the contracting industry—for example, in the cotton chipping industry, the stick pickers, the burr cutters and casual labour—are all based in Goondiwindi simply because all their taxes, vehicle registration, workers compensation, and all the other costs incurred in employing people are much cheaper in Queensland compared with New South Wales. As a consequence of that, Boggabilla is sitting pat and Goondiwindi is racing ahead in leaps and bounds.

Of course, the same thing happens to the west of that area along the Macintyre River to Mungindi. It is a New South Wales town and has a New South Wales postcode but most of its business is conducted on the other side of the border. Although it is in New South Wales, daylight saving is not an issue in Mungindi. It is the same in Yetman, Boggabilla and North Star, because all the cows in New South Wales completely disregard daylight saving; they remain on "fowl yard time" rather than the daylight saving "mongrel time". Consequently it is sometimes very confusing when you arrive an hour early or an hour late at a function at Mungindi. That happens frequently with me because I fail to check whether it is fowl yard time or mongrel time. These are just some of the very small anomalies that happen.

The biggest single cotton handler in the world is Namoi Cotton. Although Australia produces only 5 per cent of the world's cotton and exports 95 per cent of its cotton, Australia is about the fifth largest cotton exporter in the world. Namoi Cotton left Wee Waa a few years ago and relocated to Goondiwindi. The savings of that enterprise on payroll tax, WorkCover, and all the other associated State costs are approximately \$1 million per year to its shareholders. The honourable member for Murrumbidgee informed the House some time ago that Peter Bartter, the poultry producer in the southern part of New South Wales, has relocated to Victoria for the very same reason.

I believe that things like this can be avoided. I think that business can return to New South Wales, but it needs something like this to solve these problems and drive that return. Of course, the truckies come rolling down the Newell Highway and 2,400 trucks pass through Narrabri every day going from Brisbane to Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth, or wherever, and most of those trucks are registered in Queensland. Many truckies say that if they could possibly organise it they would have their base in Goondiwindi—and they always fill up with fuel there because it is much cheaper than in New South Wales.

**Mr Neville Newell:** They have a fuel subsidy there. Acknowledge the fuel subsidy there. It is \$40 million in New South Wales.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The honourable member for Tweed will come to order.

**Mr IAN SLACK-SMITH:** The honourable member for Tweed very rudely interjects. I do not think there is any cross-subsidy on registration charges and I do not think there is any cross-subsidy on payroll tax, so I think the honourable member for Tweed is just trying to throw a red herring across my path. Queensland has volumetric loading of livestock. That means a driver there can load a truck without having to weigh stock

individually, as has to be done in New South Wales. In Queensland the quantity is determined by how many the truck is built to carry. However, if the truck crosses over the border into New South Wales the driver will be fined if the truck is overloaded. That, to me, is a very, very serious anomaly and it has to be taken account of in this bill.

I have covered workers compensation with the premiums calculated. WorkCover for the construction industry is about 7.8 per cent in New South Wales, 4.3 per cent in Queensland and 3.8 per cent in Victoria. WorkCover for agriculture is, of course, a much higher rate; it is about 9 per cent in New South Wales. My electorate is not particularly affected by fish licensing. As the House is probably aware, the great marketing point for my electorate of Barwon is that it is tsunami-free; if there is a big tsunami in the Pacific Ocean it will not affect Barwon. I believe that is a very good selling point with future land sales. Also, something that used to be dear to my heart, but is not anymore, is the differential in tobacco excise that applies between southern and northern New South Wales. New South Wales has the fuel tax, which adds to the cost of running a business, a tax that is not imposed on businesses across our north or south borders. I conclude by saying that I look forward to the contribution of the honourable member for Tweed. If this bill is not passed, New South Wales will continue to lose business to Queensland and Victoria.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI** (Murrumbidgee) [10.20 a.m.]: I support the Opposition's Cross-Border Commission Bill and congratulate the honourable member for Ballina, the Deputy Leader of The Nationals, on his efforts to have this bill passed through the Parliament. Back in 2000 a similar bill was introduced but the Government did not support it. I anticipate that the Government will also vote against this bill. One must question why the Government would vote against such legislation. A couple of Labor seats share borders with other States, such as the electorate of Murray-Darling, which borders Queensland, South Australia and Victoria; the electorate of Tweed, which borders Queensland; and the electorate of Monaro, which borders Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory. The members who purport to represent those constituencies should be fully aware of cross-border problems and they should be examining positive and constructive ways to solve them.

The electorate of Murrumbidgee borders Victoria, and my constituents agree with me that the bill goes a significant way towards dealing with these issues. In the six years I have been the local member, many cross-border problems have been raised with me, yet it does not appear that the Government has dealt with them, neither through the Premier's Department, NSW Health, the Department of Education and Training or any other agency. We have been told that the Premier's Department has some sort of secret cross-border committee, but to my knowledge it has not met for five or six years. No-one knows the members of the committee or the role it should play. The committee has not called for submissions and it has not made public any of its inquiries or recommendations. This committee is just an excuse for why it has not taken any action to address these numerous cross-border issues.

Members with electorates that border other States are conscious of the impact on their constituents; it is important to highlight that to the House. For instance, many people would like to use the educational facilities in other States, particularly TAFE, but there are problems with New South Wales residents accessing those facilities. In many instances TAFE colleges in Victoria or Queensland are much closer than those in New South Wales and it is more practical for residents to use them. I concede that on occasion TAFE NSW has corresponded with the Victorian TAFE and that some exceptions have been made, but a broad process should be in place to correct anomalies. A student in Deniliquin wanted to attend Echuca TAFE, and significant representations had to be made before approval was given. The establishment of a Cross Border Commission, as proposed in the bill, would go some way towards solving these problems, although I accept that any issues with financial implications may never be solved.

In the past the Premier has acknowledged that cross-border issues can cause significant difficulties. The honourable member for Albury would remember that a few years ago the Premier visited Albury-Wodonga and stood on the bridge with the mayor of Wodonga and the mayor of Albury. They shook hands and made announcements about the grand détente between New South Wales and Victoria. The Premier promised then that Albury and Wodonga councils were to be amalgamated, but since that photo opportunity no action has been taken. When we saw those images on the television, we thought the Premier had woken up to the problems facing people in border electorates but, unfortunately, that was not the case.

It does highlight, however, that this Government is only concerned about media opportunities and grand announcements, but not action. I acknowledge that it was never going to be easy to forge a relationship between Albury and Wodonga, but when the Premier became involved I thought it would be dealt with as a priority. Unfortunately, while people in border areas wait, he is walking down the red carpet with Nicole

Kidman and having lunch with Danny DeVito. I, too, would love to lunch with Danny DeVito, but the Premier seems to have forgotten that he has a responsibility to the six million people who live in New South Wales. While he is having lunch with Danny DeVito, people in border areas are being prevented from accessing health services in Victoria.

A man from Barham, which is in the electorate of Murray-Darling, contacted me because of the lack of representation from his local member. Murray-Darling constituents can only ring the pub to see if their local member happens to be there, and if he is not they ring my office. They know that The Nationals represent their constituents with great vigour and effectiveness. This Barham man is a 45-year-old paraplegic who lives in a nursing home because he is unable to look after himself. He wants to buy a new wheelchair. Although he can buy one from a company in Bendigo for \$10,000, the Southern Area Health Service, which is based in Wagga Wagga, insists that he buy one that costs \$18,000 from a company in Albury—it must have a contract with the area health service. The Premier should forget about media opportunities and the bridge over the Murray; he should deal with the practical problems that people in border areas face. A cross-border commission could solve these problems. We have been informed that the Premier's Department has certain processes in place but if that is so they are not working. I will provide honourable members with the name and address of the Barham man, who will attest to that fact.

Elderly people with a Seniors Card who reside in places such as Deniliquin and Finley, which are only 2½ hours from Melbourne, may wish to visit their grandchildren at school, watch a football game or access health services in Melbourne. They all gravitate to Melbourne because Sydney is seven or eight hours away. They can use their Seniors Card when they travel on a bus and train to Sydney. It is eight hours by car so it is probably 12 hours by train and bus. However, they cannot use their Seniors Card when they travel to Melbourne, and that is a serious problem. We support our seniors, and we support the notion of a Seniors Card to help them with the cost of travel. We value what they have contributed to the community throughout their lives, and this is an opportunity to give them something back. However, for people living in a border area who want to travel outside New South Wales the Premier has said, "Sorry, we will not give you that opportunity." It would simply be a matter of getting together with the Victorian Government and talking it through. Perhaps there could be a contra deal. People in Victoria travel to New South Wales, just as people in New South Wales travel to Victoria. A contra deal would be relatively simple.

I listened to the presentation by the honourable member for Barwon, who rightly said that there is no incentive for businesses to stay in New South Wales, and that that is why they locate to other States. He mentioned business-related taxes—payroll tax, workers compensation premiums and the like. He referred to Barters Industries, which is based in Griffith. Although the honourable member said that the company had moved to Victoria, fortunately it has not yet done so; it has stayed in the Riverina. However, it is looking at places such as Shepparton because of the support provided by the Victorian Government in terms of lower taxes, et cetera, which are a great incentive for the company to relocate. I suppose one thing stopping the company from relocating is the millions of dollars it would cost to move such a large operation.

The company is not necessarily inclined to expand in New South Wales; it is inclined to expand in other States, such as Victoria and Queensland. That would be a lost opportunity for New South Wales because of our business tax regime. We have seen costs blow out in the New South Wales public service. This Labor Government imposes taxes simply to pay for its cost blow-outs in its departments and bureaucracies. The Government does not like to make the hard decisions; it always takes the soft option, although there are hard decisions to be made. Over the past 10 years the Labor Government has failed to undertake necessary reforms, which would have put a cap on the cost blow-outs in the public service.

The Government has refused to undertake reforms because the unions donate millions of dollars to the Labor Party, and it is reluctant to do anything to jeopardise that funding. To me, that is corruption; and I am sorry the courts do not see it that way. At the end of the day we all pay for the relationship between the union and the Labor Government, which is afraid to take on the unions. We all pay through business taxes, land tax and property taxes. Taxes jeopardise our children's ability to obtain employment. If New South Wales does not have a competitive tax regime the jobs will go to Queensland and Victoria. We have heard about the investors who are flocking to Queensland. Premier Beattie mocked Premier Carr; when this Government introduced the vendor duty Premier Beattie rubbed his hands and said, "Thank you very much."

Investment is going to Queensland, and jobs are going with it. If New South Wales does not become competitive with the other States we will pay for that in the end. That is why a cross-border commission is a good idea. Let us get people to sit down. We would hope that such a commission would not be politicised, that it

would have logical nominees who knew what they are talking about—people who are keen to get solutions for the people of New South Wales. We want to achieve outcomes so that it is easier to live and be competitive in New South Wales. We want to remove some of the burden on businesses so that they have the confidence to invest in New South Wales and create jobs. We want our children to have better employment opportunities, particularly in regional New South Wales. We do not want our children to go to other States or to Sydney to get a job. Cross-border issues are significant not only for constituents but for New South Wales across the board and for our economy. I commend the cross-border commission to the House.

**Mr GEOFF CORRIGAN** (Camden) [10.34 a.m.]: I listened with interest to the comments of Opposition members about this bill. They made sensible comments at times. However, I cannot find anything in the bill that would alleviate any of the problems they identified. I thought, perhaps naively, that the Coalition stood for small government, not large government. All the Cross-border Commission Bill would do is create another bureaucracy. The bill's aims and objectives would not achieve anything. I note the comments of the honourable member for Tweed, who said:

That the Government opposes the bill because, first, it would create an unnecessary level of bureaucracy and, second, satisfactory arrangements for dealing with border problems are already in place.

**Mr Thomas George:** Where?

**Mr GEOFF CORRIGAN:** The honourable member for Tweed has already told the House but I will repeat it. He said:

Two cross-border committees currently deal with cross-border anomalies, one each for the New South Wales-Queensland border and the New South Wales-Victorian border. These committees are jointly chaired by the central agencies of each State. There are insufficient anomalies in relation to the New South Wales-South Australian border to warrant a committee. With respect to the New South Wales-Australian Capital Territory border, the Premier met earlier this year with the Chief Minister for the Australian Capital Territory and they have agreed to develop a framework for better co-operation and co-ordination.

I did not wish to take up the time of the House; I simply make that contribution. I can see nothing in this bill that would relieve the problems identified by members opposite.

**Mr DONALD PAGE** (Ballina—Deputy Leader of The Nationals) [10.36 a.m.], in reply: First, I thank honourable members who participated in this debate. In particular I thank those who supported the bill: the honourable member for Upper Hunter, the honourable member for Lismore, the honourable member for Northern Tablelands, the Leader of The Nationals, the honourable member for Burrinjuck, the honourable member for Albury, the honourable member for Barwon and the honourable member for Murrumbidgee. I acknowledge the contributions of the honourable member for Tweed and the honourable member for Camden. Eight members have spoken in favour of the bill, in addition to me; two Government members have spoken against the legislation.

One observation I make is that two so-called Country Labor members who have cross-border issues in their electorates did not speak in the debate, namely, the honourable member for Murray-Darling and the honourable member for Monaro. The Premier of Queensland, Mr Peter Beattie, is a significant political figure. If he had had the opportunity to speak in this debate I am confident he would have been on our side. How can I be so confident of that? Because when the idea was floated a couple of years ago, the Tweed *Daily News* reported the Queensland Premier as saying, "It doesn't matter if the proposal is put forward by Labor, Liberal, Nationals or Independents. If it's a good idea, it's a good idea."

The Queensland Premier further said, "I am very receptive to a suggestion like this. If we can do anything to work together to find a solution we should try." Essentially, that is the Premier of Queensland endorsing this legislation, which is about setting up a very small group of people. I want to deal individually with the issues raised by the Government. In essence, a very small group of individuals will receive evidence, which will go to the government of the day, and both the commission's propositions and the Government's response will be tabled in Parliament. That is not what happens at the moment; at present we have an unaccountable arrangement. We want to get action on some of the problems identified by the speakers in this debate and get accountability in the whole process. At the moment, whether the Government deals with a cross-border anomaly depends on whether an officer in the Premier's Department is of a mind to address the issue. It is a totally unacceptable situation.

In thanking members who have participated in the debate, I note that this bill was introduced in January last year. The House has been dealing with this legislation for 1½ years. Members who contributed to this

debate—and many of them gave thoughtful speeches—identified a huge number of cross-border problems. I do not want to refer to all of issues, but it is important to highlight some of the issues that were raised by members during this debate. Members referred to the differences in State tax regimes—payroll, land and vendor—which have the impact of disadvantaging the people of New South Wales. That is a significant issue that the Government and all honourable members should take on board. Generally speaking, taxes, such as payroll and land taxes, are much higher in New South Wales than in other States. New South Wales is the only State that has vendor tax. Therefore, the people of New South Wales are disadvantaged.

Further examples honourable members gave of issues that affect cross-border communities include stamp duty on motor vehicles. Workers compensation rates are higher in New South Wales. If a business operates on both sides of the border—as do most businesses situated near a border—it must have two workers compensation premiums to cover its capacity to work in both States. The Government should do something about that. The most important New South Wales-Queensland cross-border issue is daylight saving. I do not pretend it is an easy problem to solve, but it ought to be dealt with in a mature way. The issue of daylight saving between New South Wales and Victoria has been dealt with. The honourable member for Albury, who made a stunningly erudite and clear contribution to this debate, would be aware that following negotiations the Victorian and New South Wales Governments have sorted out the problem. The issue between New South Wales and Queensland could be handled by a commission, such as the one proposed in the legislation.

Members referred to anomalies that occur in petrol taxes, fishing licences and hospitality—such as the non-recognition of the responsible service of alcohol in Queensland. The honourable member for Northern Tablelands and the honourable member for Lismore referred to cross-border anomalies with 1800 and 1300 numbers. In health the problems include access to interstate services and ambulances. Seniors cards apply in some States and not others. Members who contributed to this debate raised a multitude of issues, all of which could be dealt with by a cross-border commission.

I now turn to the contribution of the honourable member for Tweed—which was repeated, in much shorter form, by the honourable member for Camden. It is ironic that the honourable member for Tweed, of all people, defends the Government's lack of activity on cross-border issues. The electorate of Tweed probably has the most cross-border issues in the State, yet he takes the Government's position. I do not know how he sleeps at night. In his heart he must know that the cross-border issues that plague his community are probably the worst of any electorate in the State. I was very disappointed that he did not take the opportunity, even if he could not support the bill, to acknowledge that the commission could be a useful vehicle in resolving cross-border issues. Instead, he trotted out the Government line as if the electorate of Tweed did not have any cross-border problems.

People in his electorate contact me all the time about cross-border issues. They are supportive of this legislation. Yet the honourable member for Tweed, of all people, defends the Government's position. As I said, his electorate has more cross-border issues than any electorate in the State. I want to deal with the arguments put by the Government. First, the Government says the establishment of a commission will create an unnecessary level of bureaucracy. That is not the case. The bill provides that the commission will comprise a small number of members. There will be one representative from the New South Wales Government, one representing the interests of consumers, one representing the interests of business, one representing the interests of farmers and one from local government. That is a total of five members, plus secretarial support. That would mean employing three staff at the most. The legislation provides for a maximum of eight members, so we are talking about a total of ten people. That is not a large bureaucracy, particularly when we consider the number and magnitude of problems to be addressed.

In addition, the legislation provides that the body will be reviewed at the end of five years. The intention of the legislation is that if the commission were successful, as I expect it would be, in dealing with the issues—the ones that are solvable—there would be no need for the commission to continue. If it has done its work properly the commission will disappear because there would be no more cross-border problems to solve. The body will be small and focused on a particular task, and the legislation provides that the commission will be reviewed after five years. If the commission were no longer required because it had solved all the problems then it will be abolished. That is an important point to recognise.

Second—and this is the most ridiculous defence put by the Government—the Government argued that satisfactory arrangements are already in place. Sorry, but if they are in place, why are there so many problems? Why have nine members of Parliament spoken in this debate in this Chamber and given a long list of issues that remain unsolved? If the officers working in the Premier's Department on cross-border issues were doing their

job properly there would not be any problems. The argument put by the Government that satisfactory arrangements are already in place is clearly ridiculous. If that were the case there would not be the problems that were outlined during the debate.

The honourable member for Tweed stated that the committees meet on a regular basis. That is not true. As I understand it, the committee in Victoria has been abolished in recent times. I do not think anything is happening in the Premier's Department so far as Victoria and New South Wales cross-border issues are concerned. A meeting was held in the Tweed electorate prior to an election campaign, I think back in 1999. Cross-border issues were floating around, so the honourable member for Tweed organised a public forum so that people could vent their spleen. As I understand it, since then very few meetings or forums have been held for the public to put forward their concerns to Government. For the honourable member for Tweed to say that existing arrangements are working satisfactorily is nonsense.

There is no accountability in the existing arrangements. As I said previously, a few officers in the Premier's Department are supposedly playing some role. They never do anything, no-one ever hears about them. There is no accountability, no report to Parliament, nothing. This legislation provides a form of accountability so that people who have an interest in or are affected by cross-border issues can make a submission to the body and receive a response. At least they will know the Government has heard their message and what action, if any, will be taken.

The third argument the Government put is that the cross-border commission does not have jurisdiction over other States. I would have thought it was self-evident that New South Wales Parliament does not have the capacity constitutionally to legislate for people in other States. Under the Constitution we only have power to implement laws that relate to New South Wales. We do not have the capacity to require people in Victoria or Queensland to comply with New South Wales legislation.

However, that said, this model provides ample opportunity for a person from interstate to sit on the commission. There is no restriction in relation to a person from interstate sitting on this cross-border commission, and there is certainly no restriction in relation to a person from interstate giving evidence to the commission. I would suggest to the Government that people on the other sides of the border of New South Wales are frequently just as concerned about cross-border issues as we are. They would be only too happy to be constructive and, if invited, to take up one of the positions provided for in the legislation in addition to those that I mentioned, which were: a representative of the New South Wales Government, a representative of consumers, a representative of business, a representative of farmers and a representative of local government.

There is that capacity because the bill provides for a maximum of eight representatives. There is no reason why we could not have a representative from the Queensland Government or the Queensland business community on the commission. That can be done, and the commission would certainly be able to call witnesses from across the border in order to hear what they have to say. It is churlish to suggest that somehow or other this legislation is inadequate because it does not have jurisdiction in other States. We are not able constitutionally to legislate to compulsorily require anyone in another State to do anything.

I conclude my remarks by saying that the Government's response to this legislation has been absolutely appalling. It is very depressing that, for the second time, the Government has decided to reject this legislation—and for no good reason. The Government is not serious about looking constructively at some of the myriad cross-border issues. If it were, and had some concerns about the legislation, it would say, "We like the idea but we are not 100 per cent happy with it. We would like to mend it." But, no, it has not done that; it has simply decided not to support the legislation. Only two Government members spoke in the debate, one of whom I am sure means well but does not necessarily have a great knowledge of cross-border issues. The other should have a much better knowledge but chose to trot out the three arguments that I have just dismissed as a reason for not supporting the legislation. Be it on the Government's head because we are certainly going to make much of the fact that the Government has rejected this constructive proposal. Shame on the Government for having done so.

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

**The House divided.**



**Ayes, 35**

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

**Noes, 49**

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

**Pair**

Mr Merton

Mrs Perry

**Question resolved in the negative.****Motion negatived.****Pursuant to resolution business interrupted.****APPROPRIATION BILL****APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL****APPROPRIATION (SPECIAL OFFICES) BILL****FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY BILL****STATE REVENUE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (BUDGET MEASURES) BILL****Second Reading****Debate resumed from 24 May 2005.**

**Mr JOHN BROGDEN** (Pittwater—Leader of the Opposition) [11.00 a.m.]: Today I pronounce the Premier's eleventh budget dead on arrival. It is a budget that increases taxes and debt. It does nothing to address the major crises facing New South Wales. This week the Carr Government delivered an incompetent and irresponsible budget that will not rebuild New South Wales. It is a budget of strong and detailed deception. I can

reveal that the budget has not provided for the pay increases awarded to our nurses and police last week. The Government's stated policy on public sector wages is to deliver "nominal pay rises of up to 3 per cent per year through negotiated settlements". Last week, on 20 May, the Government agreed to two sets of pay rises: 14 per cent over 3½ years for our nurses and 17 per cent over 3½ years for our police. However, the budget papers reveal the following:

In coming months settlements will need to be negotiated for other major employee groups, including public hospital nurses ... police ... and public school and TAFE teachers ...

At this stage, there remains considerable risk to budget outcomes unless settlements are consistent with the Government's wages policy.

That is the wages policy of only 3 per cent per annum. The document continues:

Outcomes in excess of the Government's wages policy could require a structural response such as reduced expenditure elsewhere and/or higher taxation.

The Premier has not budgeted for these pay rises. Either our nurses and police will not get their pay rise, taxes will rise to pay for the wage bill, or services will be cut, hospital beds will be closed and police stations will not be upgraded. I ask the Treasurer: what taxes are going up to pay for his wages blunder? Will there be higher payroll tax, even higher insurance taxes, even higher vendor duty? The budget is also strongly deceptive in relation to expected stamp duty revenue. Despite the budget forecasting growth in purchaser stamp duty on property of \$220 million, the day after delivery of the budget the Real Estate Institute revealed that in the March quarter property turnover fell by 27 per cent for houses and by more than 30 per cent for units. The Government's expected increase in stamp duty from property transactions is not supported by the continuing, clear decline in the property market, courtesy of Labor's dumb vendor duty. Two days after this budget is released, it is dead on arrival—pay rises not budgeted for and stamp duty revenue that will not be realised.

Labor is keen to talk about the records in this budget. Let us talk about the record high taxes. Every household in New South Wales will lose from this budget. Higher insurances taxes mean that every household in the State will suffer to the tune of an extra \$50 a year on their home and contents insurance. First home buyers and people renegotiating their mortgages will be sluggish with higher taxes on mortgage insurance. On an average Sydney house and mortgage, the increase will be \$250. Even people travelling overseas will be sluggish with higher tax on their travel insurance.

Just over a year ago in my reply to the mini-budget I said that the Government's attempt to cool the property market by introducing the vendor duty would kill the property market. It was obvious then, and it is obvious today, but what do the Premier and Labor do about the obvious? They ignore it. It gives me no pleasure to say we told them the property market would go into terminal decline courtesy of the vendor duty. But building approvals plummeted from around 3,600 in November 2003 to 2,800 in November 2004 and, according to the "HIA NSW State Outlook for December 2004", dwelling starts are already down 11 per cent on last year.

Access Economics demonstrated in its April report, released by the Property Council, that Labor's vendor duty was dampening economic activity in New South Wales. Access Economics also said that abolishing the vendor duty, which raised \$340 million this year and is forecast to rake in \$358 next financial year, would claw back up to \$280 million in purchaser revenues killed off by the additional property tax and kick-start economic growth in New South Wales. With New South Wales remaining the highest-taxed State in Australia, it is no coincidence that over the term of the Carr Government it has been the slowest-growing mainland State in Australia. That is forecast to continue. According to Econtech, over the next three years New South Wales will continue to be the slowest-growing State in Australia.

Gross State product growth in Western Australia will average 6 per cent, in Queensland 4.3 per cent, in Victoria 3.2 per cent, in Tasmania 3 per cent, in South Australia 2.8 per cent, and New South Wales 2.4 per cent. New South Wales will continue to be the slowest-growing State in Australia. There is a clear choice between Labor, who will punish hardworking people, and a Liberal-Nationals Coalition that will reward and encourage them. There is a clear choice between Labor, who stunts economic growth, and a Liberal-Nationals Coalition government that will encourage and generate economic growth. Only a Liberal-Nationals Coalition will abolish the vendor duty. No ifs, no buts, no maybes. Today I recommit the Coalition to abolishing Labor's dreaded 2¼ per cent vendor duty. Under a Brogden-Stoner government Labor's world's dumbest tax will go.

In the budget the Government also announced significant borrowings. Labor will borrow a total of \$10 billion over the next five years. But where are the major projects to deal with the State's water crisis and to

get our trains to run on time? The budget contained no new announcements from Labor in these critical areas. When Sydney is on the cusp of further water restrictions, as Warragamba Dam drops below 40 per cent, there is nothing from Labor in this budget embracing major water use programs to capture the billion litres a day we send out from our coastline. There is absolutely nothing in this budget to embrace the big-vision solution to Sydney's drinking water crisis. The Government must embrace new solutions in the heat of Sydney's continuing water crisis, and we must embrace a significant water reuse solution. When Australia's first inland city, Goulburn, is set to run out of water in six short weeks, there are no solutions to deal with the rural water crisis either.

On Tuesday we heard the spin that the budget builds for the future by investing in infrastructure. That is what the Government says, but let us have a look at what it actually does. The budget papers reveal that 171 infrastructure projects have been delayed or are over budget, with the total cost of the blow-outs standing at \$515 million. If the Premier and his incompetent Government had done their job and managed these projects properly, that \$515 million in project blow-outs could have been used to fund new and additional projects.

Included in the list of delayed or blown-out projects are the Sydney Catchment Authority upper canal upgrade, which has blown out by three years and \$70 million; the north-west transitway network stage 1, which has blown out by \$31 million; the Wollongong northern distributor extension, which has blown out by one year and \$20 million; the Darling Island stage 3, which has blown out by three years and \$33 million; and the Burrendong Dam upgrade, which has blown out by two years and \$22 million. The evidence is clear and unequivocal: the Premier and his tired, old government cannot be trusted to deliver any project on time or on budget.

Indeed, the contrast is clear: the projects that the Premier ties his wagon to are the private sector projects delivered on time and under budget. But the projects for which the Premier is responsible more often than not have blown out and are running late. That is not a plan from Labor to rebuild New South Wales, because Labor has no plan to rebuild New South Wales. Let me put into context the \$515 million of blow-outs, and the billions upon billions of budget blow-outs in the previous 10 budgets from the Government. What could they have bought for the people of New South Wales?

In the 2000-01 budget the Government announced funding for the north-west rail link. The Government budgeted the cost of the entire project at \$364 million. It also announced funding of \$646 million for a Newcastle high-speed rail link. That was a little over \$1 billion to build two rail links that the people of this city and this State are screaming for. If the Government had lived up to its promises, the people of New South Wales could be using those rail lines now. All that and more could have been funded if the Government had stopped the blow-outs in its capital projects and recurrent expenditure. This is not the way to rebuild New South Wales. A government cannot provide for the future by wasting an unexpected additional tax windfall of \$7.2 billion of the past 10 years and then when the economy is slowing down increase debt to the tune of \$10 billion. That is not an act of fiscal responsibility. The fact is that the Government is now spending more than it earns. The budget papers reveal:

Over the past four years, expenditure growth in the general government sector averaged 5.7 per cent, while revenue growth averaged 4.8 per cent.

The papers go on to conclude:

The imbalance between revenue and expenditure growth has impacted on the budget position.

That imbalance is self-inflicted and if the measure used for each of the previous 10 Labor budgets is applied, the imbalance this financial year stands at \$979 million. Indeed, under the old budgeting system the Government abandoned at Christmas time, the State of New South Wales is in deficit to the tune of \$979 million. Since 1996 the Government has spent more than it originally forecast in each and every budget. Last year those blow-outs totalled \$678 million. Since 1996-97 blow-outs year on year accumulated together totalled a massive \$9.5 billion. The amount by which the budgets have blown out over the past 10 years almost equals the amount the State will borrow over the next five years. If the Government had kept to budget and delivered its projects the State would not have to borrow a cent to deal with our future infrastructure needs. Given its track record of irresponsible waste and mismanagement, there is no reason to believe this budget will be any different. The solution is best summed up by a radio talkback caller who said on 2GB yesterday:

No one keeps a car after 10 years because it becomes way too expensive to run.

[*Interruption*]

The Deputy Leader of the Opposition suggests it was the honourable member for Blacktown. As I speak the tape is down at the police lab. After 10 years this Bob Carr is too expensive for the people of New South Wales and it is time for him to go to the scrap yard.

I turn now to Labor's failure to deliver wage increases tied to productivity gains. This year, for the first time, the general government sector wages bill, including superannuation, will pass \$20 billion. More and more people are employed on higher wages and there is no mechanism to ensure we are getting value for the record amount of money now being spent on wages and salaries. There are no productivity trade-offs in the so-called wage negotiations. Let me quote from the Treasury's submission on the pay determination for senior public servants:

Using the Wage Cost Index (from its start in September 1997 to March 2004), NSW public sector wages have increased by 1.5% per annum in real terms relative to a 0.7% increase for NSW private sector employees.

That means that compared with the private sector, public sector wages have doubled. Likewise, the Government is hostage to public sector unions when it comes to the growth in the number of public servants, the majority of whom do not teach one child, treat one patient or patrol one street. The budget is irresponsible because the Government refuses to stand up to its union benefactors and end its policy of no forced redundancies in the public sector. It is a policy designed to appease the unions, not deliver improved services and value for money to the people of New South Wales.

A Brogden-Stoner government will take a different approach. We will negotiate pay rises with productivity improvements that guarantee fair pay increases with improved services and value for money for taxpayers. We will slim the public sector, especially fat cat bureaucrats, and achieve significant savings to be returned in tax cuts and front-line services. Essential front-line employees will be exempt from our pursuit of waste in the public sector. A Liberal-Nationals Coalition government will abandon Labor's policy of no forced redundancies. We will not continue to pay hundreds of public servants every year who do not have a job. Let us look at what the independent experts say about this budget. International ratings agency Standard and Poor's says:

Because New South Wales is one of the highest taxing states, there is not much flexibility to repair finances if things go wrong.

There is every chance that things will go wrong as a result of this budget. Standard and Poor's says that the position New South Wales faces at the moment because of Tuesday's budget is a material weakening in its financial position. The Government is pinning its hopes on an upturn in the property market. Why would the property market pick up with the world's dumbest tax, the vendor duty, still in place? The budget is a high-wire act without a harness. That is why we have to look broadly at the economic indicators for the State. The Reserve Bank's quarterly statement on monetary policy, which was released just three weeks ago, highlights the level of divergence in New South Wales employment from the rates in better-performing competitor States. The Reserve Bank of Australia figures show that Queensland jobs growth rate of 6.6 per cent is nearly double the national rate of 3.4 per cent, while the New South Wales employment growth is a lazy 1.3 per cent.

The Carr Government has failed to ensure a consistent and planned stream of new and much-needed infrastructure projects, especially in transport-related and water service areas, where the private sector is keen to participate. A Liberal-Nationals Coalition government will embrace aggressively opportunities for public-private partnerships to deliver quality public services to the people of New South Wales. Despite its rhetoric the Government continues to pay little more than lip-service to public-private partnerships in this State and to the capacity of this State to improve its infrastructure now to deal with the crises it faces today and the challenges it faces in the future. The Government clearly is a government of lost opportunity.

The eleventh budget has done little to advance New South Wales. We remain the highest-taxed State in Australia. In fact, in the round of State budgets, every other State and the Commonwealth have cut taxes, but New South Wales is unique by standing out and increasing taxes. Our infrastructure crisis has worsened, with no commitment and no vision from the Government on a big solution to our drinking water crisis. Our growth remains sluggish at best, and the anti-competitive tax rates and policies that discourage employment continue. Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia benefit from the failures of this tired, old Government.

As every dreaded day of the Carr Government drags on and with the budget now in place, it is clear to the people of New South Wales that both the budget and the Government will leave us with a legacy of lost opportunity. The Premier will celebrate his record tomorrow alone because, for the people of New South Wales, a record term in office and 11 budgets have resulted in the State moving backwards, not forward. Higher taxes,

higher debt and slow growth are the legacy of the Treasurer's first budget and the Carr Government's eleventh budget. It is now abundantly clear that with a declining property market and a government unable to manage its budget properly, the State faces challenges that it is simply unable to deal with under this Government. There has never been a greater argument that the time for change in New South Wales is now. After more than 10 years of Labor, after a record period of service by the Premier, it is time for him to go.

**Mr ANDREW STONER** (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [11.23 a.m.]: It is interesting to note that as the Federal Government delivers a budget described as the best in decades, the Carr Labor Government delivers its worst-ever budget, attracting headlines like "Beg, borrow and steal". Is this the swansong budget, the budget the Premier delivers to us as he prepares to exit left and leave it to the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning, and Minister for Natural Resources and the Treasurer to do the dodging and weaving? This is a classic Labor smoke-and-mirrors budget, a budget that promises big-ticket infrastructure items but will be remembered for the continuing murder of the New South Wales property market and the plunging of the State into \$10 billion of extra debt over the next five years.

The hugely spun infrastructure spend is a hastily cobbled together list of previously announced projects, routine maintenance items and Federal Government and private sector funded projects. The people of New South Wales have heard it all before and, after 10 years, Labor still has no solutions to the looming power and water crises, choked and dangerous roads and inefficient public transport. An examination of government infrastructure projects shows that 171 projects have been significantly delayed or had major cost blow-outs. The Leader of the Opposition listed a litany of projects that have been significantly delayed and have experienced major cost blow-outs. I give the example of the Pacific Highway. In 1996 the Government promised that 80 per cent of the Pacific Highway would be upgraded between Brisbane and Sydney by next year. At this point just 33 per cent has been done.

Of grave concern is the fact that the budget is demonstrably based on false assumptions. The Government's wages policy assumes a 3 per cent nominal pay rise annually for the public sector and the budget papers state that outcomes in excess of that 3 per cent could require a structural response, such as reduced expenditure elsewhere and/or higher taxation. Already there have been police and nurse pay rises well in excess of 3 per cent, meaning that Labor could not meet its expenditure and taxation promises even before Dr Doom delivered the budget on Tuesday. It looks like we will experience another savage mini-budget just around the corner, with more new taxes or the billions borrowed being spent on wages instead of roads, rail, schools, hospitals and water.

The Treasurer's first budget is built on a house of cards that has already started to tumble. Already people are calling it the "fudget". The Government's decision to continue the controversial vendor tax on investment property transactions is without common sense. It will serve to hurt only the property market and the smaller mum and dad investors, particularly those in border regions. The Government has just voted down a commonsense bill to look at cross-border anomalies. The vendor tax is a big cross-border anomaly that will hurt the people of the Tweed, Monaro and southern New South Wales because this savage tax has not been imposed across the border.

I note also that the new threshold for land tax is \$330,000. That figure is well below the estimated \$377,000 had the previous threshold been indexed in line with property price increases. Again, this is smoke and mirrors from Labor because many property investors will miss out on a land tax break because this miserable threshold concession is combined with steep valuation increases. The near doubling of stamp duty on a range of general insurance is guaranteed to result in widespread condemnation. Indeed, it already has. This slugs those responsible families that take out insurance and it perpetuates Labor's cruel tax-on-a-tax philosophy: it is calculated on the post-GST price. We should remember that the State Government receives the benefit of the GST.

Other than those shortcomings, this Labor budget lacks serious innovation and reform. It fails to address the problems of the rural sector, especially in the current worsening drought. Labor has directed just \$16 million towards drought-relief measures, despite the fact that nearly 90 per cent of the State is gripped by a disastrous drought and rural communities are facing serious difficulties. This is simply a partially funded continuation of existing drought assistance programs, which are proving inadequate in this, the worst drought in over 100 years and, in some districts, the worst drought ever.

The Government appears to have no real awareness of the depth of the drought and how savagely it is biting communities and individuals. It seems that Labor only becomes aware of drought when the price of meat,

fruit and vegetables skyrockets in city shops. By then, it is usually too late to provide much help to the farmer. I reiterate: this budget contains no new drought measures, despite the drought entering its fifth year and the fact that it is becoming more widespread and harsher.

There is no new assistance for drought-ravaged farmers and their communities in the form of crop replanting subsidies or low-interest loans for agriculture-related small businesses, which are currently taking a belting as a result of the drought. I might add that both of these measures were made available to drought-stricken communities by the previous Coalition Government during the severe drought in the early 1990s, and they were highly successful in enabling farmers and their communities to survive until the rains came. There are no government initiatives designed to encourage farmers to store feed and water to help them to survive future droughts.

The Government's so-called big picture infrastructure program fails to address the need for a more reliable water supply to rural communities that are prone to drought. Where are the initiatives to introduce water recycling schemes and increased water storage capacities by raising dam wall heights in addition to deep water storage tanks? We should be excavating sediment from dam catchment areas while dam levels are at their lowest, but there is nothing in the budget for that.

Many initiatives are available to governments to help blunt the effects of drought, but this Government appears unwilling to break new ground to help drought-stricken communities. Indeed, last week the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister toured drought-ravaged communities in the State. But where was the Premier? He could not be bothered to attend the drought summit in Parkes last week; nor has he visited drought-stricken areas in the State. He is too busy partying and whooping up the 10 years of misery that he has imposed on people in country New South Wales.

This attitude is not confined to drought-related matters; it extends to other shortcomings in the way the Government relates to country New South Wales in terms of rural and regional roads and country rail. While city roads and rail services received budget funding, there is very little new money for rural and regional roads and bridges, many of which are in an advanced state of disrepair. The branch line system that is used to freight the State's grain crop is in need of substantial maintenance and repair. Indeed, four branch lines in various parts of the State have been closed by the Government. The Government could not bring itself to mouth the word "closed" but it has mothballed those lines and left them to rust and rot rather than be used.

There is no investment money in this budget to enable those lines to be reopened or the other branch lines in the State to be used to maximum capacity. What is the consequence? More trucks on already crumbling country roads, creating a greater road safety problem in a part of the State where fatalities are already far too high! I could talk about the Casino to Murwillumbah line, which the Government closed last year. That did not rate a mention in this budget, despite an offer of Federal money to reopen the line and give back a much-valued form of public transport to the people of northern New South Wales. No wonder the honourable member for Tweed left the Chamber in a hurry!

By any comparison, Labor's so-called \$35 billion infrastructure spend, which we will believe when we see it, is a huge amount of public money but it only serves to prove how the Government has neglected capital works programs over the past 10 years. Despite the Government's rhetoric of a visionary infrastructure program, true to form, little of that funding will find its way to rural and regional areas. From a regional viewpoint, the budget fails to lift its vision from Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong. That is the Government's version of NSW—Newcastle, Sydney, Wollongong. Country people will have every justification for feeling that the Labor Government regards them as second-class citizens.

Labor missed the opportunity to invest in vital infrastructure in regional and rural New South Wales during unprecedented economic times in the past decade. As the Leader of the Opposition said, it received more than \$7 billion of windfall revenue, and country people—and I think people generally in New South Wales—are asking where has all the money gone. It is irresponsible of the Government to now borrow an additional \$10 billion when it had that golden stream of revenue, that windfall. That is when the Government should have got on with the job of rebuilding New South Wales. The Government let that opportunity go, and now it has plunged us into debt. Yet the Government asks us to trust it to deliver. We do not trust the Government, and neither do country people. The Government boasts about investing more than \$1 billion in new and existing rail projects, yet a mere \$9 million out of that \$1 billion will go to country New South Wales for an upgrade of the XPT fleet.

**Mr Bryce Gaudry:** Don't you want it?

**Mr ANDREW STONER:** We want more than \$9 million out of \$1 billion. We want a viable country rail service in New South Wales. The Government will invest \$83 million this year to upgrade city bus fleets and depots, while country people are left with few, if any, public transport options. In addition, the Roads budget delivers yet another disappointment for country people who are now accustomed to being treated as second-class citizens by Labor. No money whatever has been allocated to progress a new highway over the Blue Mountains—a project of enormous importance to the people of the central west. The Health budget is no different. The Government has allocated \$466 million for capital works in progress, of which just \$93 million is designated for country New South Wales. That represents just 20 per cent of the allocation. That is a disgrace and an insult to country people who are becoming totally frustrated by Labor's bias against rural and regional residents.

In addition, Labor has slashed government funding to the vital country town water and sewerage supply scheme; it has been cut to just \$32 million in this budget. This comes after Labor promised in 1995 to deliver \$850 million funding over 10 years. That is supposed to be an \$85 million a year budget, which has been cut to \$32 million by a Labor government for which country New South Wales is out of sight, out of mind. Cuts of this magnitude to such essential services are a measure of just how little regard Labor has for the welfare of country people. Despite the hoopla and the smoke and mirrors, this budget fails every test of a budget for country people. The decade of neglect of regional and rural New South Wales continues unabated, and I have no hesitation in declaring that the Labor Government has failed those good people, and failed them at a time of great difficulty as the drought continues to tighten its grip. More than ever, this budget confirms that it is time for the Premier and this irresponsible and incompetent Labor Government to go.

**Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Tony Stewart.**

#### **HAYMARKET ATTEMPTED MURDER POLICE INVESTIGATION**

**Mr PETER DEBNAM** (Vaucluse) [11.37 a.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) expresses concern at delays in the investigation of an attempted murder at Haymarket on 8 October 2002;
- (2) calls on any members of the public who were in the Haymarket area on 8 October 2002 to contact police with any information which may assist the investigation; and
- (3) asks the Minister for Police to explain what impact the current police budget crisis has had on the Haymarket investigation.

Almost two years ago to the day I raised this issue in the House and gave notice of this motion. It has taken a while to get to this point, and I shall make a couple of points about that. First, we often do not get to deal with private members' business because the Carr Government is so disorganised in managing the House, as it is in terms of the budget. Private members' day is intended to be a clearing house for community concern. It is legitimate to raise and discuss matters of great concern. It is damning of the management of the House that sometimes it takes several years for a notice of motion to come on. I have also asked the former Minister for Police a question without notice on this issue. That Minister is now the Minister for Transport, so it is always a delight to follow him into portfolios and watch his performance. At the time he responded with the standard Carr Government mantra of record dollars and record police numbers. On 27 May 2003 he said:

We have record numbers of police in New South Wales, a record budget, record resources, and high officer morale, and the force is being led by a fine commissioner.

Without wanting to comment on Commissioner Ken Moroney, the rest was just plain wrong. In that year police numbers were still going up but the Minister knew as well as everybody else that they were about to peak and were going to drop by 700 officers. By the middle of this year they will have dropped by 700 officers. He spoke about a record budget, the standard Labor mantra—"We are spending a huge amount of money so things must be going well."—but we all know we are not getting value for money in any of these portfolios. We are now seeing that come home to roost. The Treasurer is feeling proud that he is supposedly spending \$1 million an hour on infrastructure, but as the Leader of the Opposition just demonstrated, we are not getting value for money on any of these issues. That is demonstrated by the investigation that is the subject of the motion.

What happened at Haymarket on 8 October was extraordinary, as highlighted in the *Daily Telegraph* at the time. The Government's initial response was to suggest that the story was wrong. Then, in the extraordinary day-two story, the Government apologised for suggesting that the story was wrong and sought the agreement of

the *Daily Telegraph* that the Government would do better in future. It was all about resources. At the time the Minister was saying there was a record budget and record police numbers but everyone knew there was a lack of detective resources.

One has to ask why has this come about, and the reason is fairly simple. After the royal commission, "criminal investigation" and "detectives" became dirty terms to the Labor Party, and it ran down the number of detectives. There is some uncertainty whether the number dropped by 700, 800 or 900 officers in New South Wales but it dropped from something in the order of 1,600 detectives to well below 1,000. The Government has never come clean on the exact number. As a result we did not have—and still today to a large extent we do not have—sufficient detective resources to investigate crime. That is one of the reasons why the clear-up rate in New South Wales has been dropping over recent years. One of the major performance indicators in crime and justice is the crime clear-up rate. It is not made up by the Opposition or by the media. It is the Government's performance indicator, and it indicates a very clear problem—as there was on that day in 2002.

The other problem that was highlighted on that day was government spin. The Government's only response to any problem is to say it is spending a heap of money, so things should be all right. That is because the Government has no sense of what management is all about. It has no sense of what should be value for money for taxpayers, who are paying billions in excess tax to the Carr Government. It has no sense of delivering services on the ground. The police are trying to do a good job. Nobody in New South Wales would argue against the motion that the majority of police are professional. They see it as a calling. They want to do the best job possible every day of the week, but they are not being given the resources and the direction from the Government to focus on real policing. Instead, we see a focus on media policing.

This week the Leader of the Opposition spoke about Operation Vikings, which is really just a media-friendly strategy. It is all about making sure there is the perception of a large number of police on the street. We know that is not true. We know that if you can put a TV camera on the street at a pre-arranged time the Carr Government will arrange for a large number of police to be in front of the camera for the period of filming. The Government will not invest in street or beat policing, with one exception. There was a dramatic leap in the number of police in the central business district [CBD] who were transferred into The Rocks local area command for the early period of this year to don fluorescent caps and be seen around the CBD for the Festival of Sydney and the following months of this year. One reason for that was that it is one of the spots in the city where a large number of people—hundreds of thousands of people—would see the police on the streets. So, the Government put its efforts into that. That is consistent with its Operation Vikings strategy.

Meanwhile, on the streets in 2002, as the *Daily Telegraph* described it, a hired assassin, Sydney's untouchable hit man, brazenly shot a man eight times in a crowded city bar, and police are powerless to arrest him. Then we found that the investigation was stopped or slowed because of resources. Then there was the extraordinary suggestion by the Government that that story was not right, and then an admission that it was correct. Time and again we see that, and it all goes back to resources. That is what we have to keep focused on with the Carr Government in the remaining 22 months of its life in New South Wales; and say that we want police out on the streets and investigating crime.

Last month I spoke about a Sefton shop owner who had been robbed twice in a week, and about Birrong shops being shot up just around the corner on the same weekend. Suddenly, after two robberies in seven days and shops around the corner being sprayed with bullets, the police appeared for a couple of weeks. That shop owner had been robbed about nine times over the past six years, and had four burglaries and many thefts by runners. Shop owners and citizens are not getting the protection they need from police because the police do not have sufficient resources on the street. That was the basic complaint the detectives had in the Haymarket case: that they did not have the resources to pursue it. This year the Government has managed to put through one training course of about 300 detectives, but that was largely to confirm detectives who were basically trying to do the job untrained. We need to see a much larger effort put into the transparency, accountability, and management of policing in New South Wales.

**Mr TONY STEWART** (Bankstown—Parliamentary Secretary) [11.47 a.m.]: The honourable member for Vacluse has to stop being so critical of police, who are doing a terrific job and working hard with record budgets sustained by the Carr Government over a 10-year period, without parallel by comparison with the Coalition Government. The honourable member needs to be more positive about what police do and their achievements rather than criticise police activity almost daily. The best barometer of that criticism by the honourable member is that he is no longer the police shadow minister. That says something about what his own party thinks about his policing initiatives. Nevertheless, we need to put the record straight today. The



honourable member suggested that the investigation into an attempted murder at the Haymarket suffered due to the broader problem of Police budgets.

Let us be realistic. Like a lot of the remarks made by the honourable member for Vacluse on the subject of policing, that is simply not true. On 8 October 2002 a man was shot while sitting in a bar in the Haymarket. Witnesses have stated that a single offender fired a pistol through the window of the bar. This person then fled, but not before setting fire to a vehicle containing two handguns, a police radio scanner, and a mobile phone. The offence was clearly premeditated, with considerable thought given to destroying very valuable evidence. Thankfully, the victim survived the attack. Police informed the Minister that an investigation commenced, involving 12 detectives and specialists from ballistics, crime scene technicians, intelligence analysts, and general duties police. That does not sound like a delayed investigation, as portrayed by the honourable member for Vacluse. Nor does it sound like a cut-price investigation. The police undertook an intensive investigation of that crime.

Of course, not all investigations are immediately successful, and it takes time for the hard work of criminal investigators to bring about results. But we do get results, and the runs are on the board. Unfortunately in this case, there has been no arrest to date. Doubtless, the professional behaviour of the would-be assassin, who destroyed a lot of forensic evidence, hindered the police in their investigation. Following standard procedures, in 2003 the police reviewed the case—as happens with all major crimes. Five detectives not involved in the case recommended that the investigation be suspended and resources directed to other cases. That is normal procedure when prioritising cases. It was a sensible move. If further information comes to light the case will be reopened. However, in the meantime, the appropriate action is to put these highly skilled officers to work investigating other crimes.

The honourable member for Vacluse has asked the House to call on the public to contact police with any information they may have about this crime. His request, whilst constructive, is significantly belated. As part of the review process, police have already gone back over the ground. Additional community sources were found during this process, but unfortunately they did not result in an arrest. One of the major problems has been that two witnesses were reluctant to speak to police because of the way they were described by the media at the time. I do not intend to comment further on this matter, except to say that police have worked hard and diligently to obtain statements from these witnesses.

Rather than dwell on a particular case, which may yet—and probably will—lead to a prosecution, I want to take up the principal point made by the honourable member for Vacluse that a lack of resources is hindering police in doing their job. That is simply not the case, as the honourable member knows very well. In 2004-05 the Carr Government allocated another \$2 billion—that is \$2,000 million, a record budget—to New South Wales Police, which is an increase of \$119 million from the previous year. It is the tenth successive record budget and represents a 6.3 per cent increase on the 2003-04 budget. The record budget demonstrates how seriously the Government takes its promise to drive down crime and give police the powers, resources, equipment and support they require to get on with the job and do it effectively.

As at 31 December 2004 NSW Police had an authorised strength of 14,454 officers. More probationary police are being recruited, and in April last year 169 probationary constables graduated from the New South Wales Police College at Goulburn. Additionally, in August 2004, 140 probationary constables were sworn in, and on 29 April 2005 another 117 officers were sworn in. A further 113 new recruits were attested in December 2004, and another class will attest this month. It is a shallow argument, an easy way out, to say that NSW Police does not have adequate resources or numbers. It is not the case.

We have never had more police than we have now, and that demonstrates that the Government is committed to achieving our authorised police strength. I make it clear that, in contrast, when the Coalition had their hands on the reins, police strength was considerably lower. In November 1994, towards the end of the last Coalition Government's term, there were a total of 12,678 officers. Specifically in regard to criminal investigation, the Government has adopted a range of measures to increase the number of detectives, foster their professionalism and career development, and provide a more effective central detective agency, that is, the State Crime Command.

The runs are on the board. A further 275 officers completed training in December 2004 and a further 150 officers are scheduled to complete the Detective Education Program in June 2005. What are the results? The data for the 24 months to December 2004 shows statewide major decreases in crime. This has been heralded by all sections of the media and the community as a major achievement. The results have come about from

effective policing because NSW Police has been resourced with record budgets and the equipment it deserves and needs. The data shows that robbery without a weapon is down 21.5 per cent, robbery with a weapon not a firearm is down 12.6 per cent, break and enter of dwellings is down 10.7 per cent, break and enter of non-dwellings is down 18.4 per cent, motor vehicle theft is down 5.0 per cent, steal from motor vehicle is down 8.8 per cent, steal from retail store is down 16.8 per cent, steal from dwelling is down 10.4 per cent, and steal from person is down 23.9 per cent.

In my electorate of Bankstown—which is the largest police command in Australia and an area of media focus in terms of crime—break and enter is down by 38 per cent, robberies are down 44 per cent, stealing is down by 24 per cent, and stolen motor vehicles are down by 25 per cent. These are massive reductions in key areas of crime that have been of major concern in the community. We are getting on with the job, we are doing it effectively, we are resourcing officers, and we are treating officers the way they deserve.

That is much more than, unfortunately, the honourable member for Vacluse has done. He is not a bad bloke when you get to know him, but he has little idea about policing and the needs of police. Unfortunately, he has not come to grips with an effective policing strategy. His continual criticism, almost on a daily basis, of NSW Police for not doing its job properly is improper, wrong, and shallow. He needs to look at the facts. He needs to go out and talk to his community and see what is occurring. The people of New South Wales are now getting much more effective policing. He knows that; he just does not want to admit it publicly. To base his argument on shallow criticism about underfunding and lack of resources is improper and, as the community knows, ineffective.

I commend the Minister for Police for getting on with the job and providing resources to NSW Police. I also strongly commend the Carr Government for providing yet another record Police budget so they can reduce crime and do their job in a satisfactory and suitable way. It is about time the honourable member for Vacluse realised he is in the twenty-first century and recognised the effectiveness of our police force. Rather than criticise, he should give positive accounts about the effectiveness of police and thank them for the job they are doing.

**Mr GREG APLIN** (Albury) [11.57 a.m.]: The remarks of the honourable member for Bankstown, particularly his attack on the honourable member for Vacluse, are totally without foundation, motivated by pure political prejudice, and absolutely rejected. He will find no greater supporter of the police than the honourable member for Vacluse, who was the former shadow Minister for Police. He gave notice of this motion in 2003 because he was concerned about a crime that was committed in the Haymarket back in 2002. It has taken until now for the House to get round to debating it.

In case the Government believes it is only the honourable member for Vacluse who has concerns, let me quote from a letter from the former Culcairn Shire Council, which the Government amalgamated out of existence only last year. Let me talk about problems that people have in regional areas, problems that echo the concerns of the honourable member for Vacluse in the city area. Recently the general manager of the council wrote to the local area commander in the Albury electorate expressing concern at the recent vandalism of road signage and the general lack of police presence in the shire. A copy of the correspondence was attached for my information.

Council had been extremely disappointed that there had been no communication from the local area commander and sought my assistance to arrange a meeting, which I duly arranged. We met with the local area commander and discussed this particular issue, the number of road signs vandalised. Acts of this nature not only place an unnecessary additional financial burden on council's operations but also pose a significant risk to human safety. Further, council was aware that this sort of activity had been happening for some time in and around the Walla Walla township, as well as at Culcairn, without any apparent police action. Now, these are not my words; these are the words of the council, which represents the people.

The general manager of the council went on to say that this is most unacceptable and seems to stem from the appropriateness of the clustering system, which clearly does not provide the level of policing expected by our communities. He further stated that it was of even greater concern that council had become aware that a number of officers stationed within Culcairn shire council area will be increasingly deployed for duties outside the shire and predominantly in Albury. He stated that this most unsatisfactory arrangement would seem to be further exacerbated by the fact that the second officer at Culcairn works only part-time. This problem is not isolated to Albury; it is occurring across the State. A lack of police officers is clearly the problem we are facing. It was good enough back in March of 2003, just prior to the election, to have record police numbers—to take

our example, 156 in the Albury electorate—but since that time what has happened? A gradual attrition of police numbers to the extent that we now have only 149 in the Albury electorate and that number is to be downsized by nine to the scheduled target of 140.

This is the problem: we have the community saying, "We are not being policed effectively. We have no police presence in our areas." The Coalition's policy prior to the 1999 election was to increase police numbers. The Government said it was impossible; not possible to do. Yet as soon as Labor won government it adopted the Coalition's policy, as so often happens, and increased police numbers. However, in our regional area the Government now has a target of reducing numbers. As so often happens, the spin is greater than the reality. The ideal might be there because it makes a good story, but the facts on the ground mean that we do not get the result. This is what the people are saying over and over again. We have the ridiculous situation of the Government allowing police officers to be taxi drivers. How ridiculous it is that the Government first trains these people to be such experts in their field and then puts them in the position where they have to act as taxi drivers and transport juveniles from a detention centre at Wagga Wagga to the courts at Albury. Why does the Government not take up the idea of using juvenile detention officers and getting them onto the real work?

**Mr Tony Stewart:** Why don't you support your police? Why don't you support your police and actually say they are doing a good job? You should be helping to support them.

**Mr GREG APLIN:** I know about the police because I have been a policeman. I know far more than the honourable member sitting opposite. Local communities are suffering from the effects of ongoing crime and antisocial behaviour because there are not enough police available for beat policing. That is the case.

**Mr Tony Stewart:** Record numbers.

**Mr GREG APLIN:** In case the honourable member did not hear, I have just proved that record numbers have been deducted from the Albury electorate because the Government plays the spin, plays "prime the elections" and takes away the police. What happens then to the administration staff? The Government reduces the numbers because it is so fond of centralisation. What happens then? It takes the administration staff out and puts the police, who should be on the beat, back in administrative capacities. The general manager of the administrative staff is so stressed by the situation that he goes on leave. What happens then? The police commander gets sick. The Government is causing the problems in the local areas because of the stress it is putting on police. We support the police. We help them do their work. We get out there with the people. Only this week we had the same problem, a lack of response to break-ins, a lack of communication by the police assistance line with the local area. This is the problem that police are facing: a lack of support from the administration and a lack of support from the Government. The people want a better service out of this Government.

**Mr ALAN ASHTON** (East Hills) [12.02 p.m.]: I have been present in this Chamber on a number of occasions in the past couple of months when the honourable member has spoken about this issue. The honourable member alleged that 50 per cent of crimes are unreported. I would point out to him that that is not possible. It is not possible to have 50 per cent of crime not being reported. In my electorate of Bankstown the Government has just opened a new police station, a state-of-the-art command, the biggest command in New South Wales, and the Premier and the Minister for Police attended the opening. Crime rates are down throughout the Bankstown area and yet we are catching more criminals and putting more of them in gaol, and we have more gaols. On the sheer facts, with more police, more gaols and the imposition of longer sentences we cannot be doing too much that is wrong.

There are a couple of things worth mentioning. For the benefit of honourable members who know what I am referring to, the Okhrana has found some new figures for me since the budget was introduced on Tuesday. After 25 years the police have a new police helicopter. Last Tuesday's budget also provides for six additional police stations. Are they just in Bankstown, Liverpool or Fairfield? No, there are new police stations in Campsie, Dubbo, Fairfield, Lismore and Wagga Wagga. This Government governs for all of New South Wales and will put police where they are needed. The honourable member for Albury gave the most passionate speech I have heard him deliver in this House in more than two years.

**Mr Anthony Roberts:** Which it was.

**Mr ALAN ASHTON:** It was, in that he actually showed a bit of passion for once rather than just speaking with a plummy voice, but his figures were wrong and his facts were wrong. However, that does not get

in the way of an argument. I think we all appreciate that. There are 3,000 more police in New South Wales now than when the Coalition was in office. Those figures are incontrovertible, uncontested and obviously correct. The honourable member for Vacluse, after he spoke the words "Ken Moroney, Police Commissioner", said, "I won't make any further comment about that." Members on this side of the House know that the Opposition has been conducting a campaign to besmirch the leadership of the New South Wales Police Service, from the top to the bottom—from Police Commissioner Moroney to the most junior constable on the beat somewhere in Bankstown or out in the country.

The honourable member for Vacluse failed to back up police. It is ironic that a conservative Opposition, instead of advocating for extended police powers, refuses to support New South Wales police. The Opposition has stated that it is not happy with Ken Moroney, does not like the other blokes, and does not like the women in the Police Service, and that police are not doing their job, failed in Macquarie Fields, failed at Redfern, and are a pack of very ordinary performers. The Opposition has said, "Let us get rid of them. Let us clean them all up." That is the attitude of the radical leftists, not of conservative people from Vacluse, Lane Cove and Albury.

The honourable member for Albury said he had been a policeman. I do not know where he did his policing because he did not exhibit much knowledge about the New South Wales Police Service. He might know something about a foreign police service. I do not know what his task was in that force, but we are doing a great job here. During the next few months, 147 scene-of-crime investigators will be appointed to the Police Service to join the 345 forensic officers currently employed; and \$3.5 million will be allocated to maintain existing forensic equipment, plus \$500,000 for the chemical drugs intelligence unit.

Revesby police station in my electorate will be upgraded. In the last few weeks I have attended three police functions in my electorate. Padstow Rotary, a great organisation, presented a "Police Person of the Year" award to one of five wonderful nominees, people who have saved lives, gone those extra yards and put their own lives at risk. In turn they received recognition for their efforts. The mayor, numerous local people and representatives from the Senior Executive of the Police Service attended the ceremony. Mick Plotecki is doing a great job in the Bankstown Local Command. I also attended the Bankstown Police Awards, where officers with 10, 15 and 20 years service received their commendations and badges. They are doing a great job in my area and in the Bankstown electorate as well. The Premier, the Minister for Police, the Commissioner of Police, the local area commander, Superintendent Mick Plotecki, and others were also present at the official opening of the Bankstown Police Station. The Bankstown Police Station was formerly a five-part station—all over the place. It is now one you-beaut centralised police station.

**Mr Anthony Roberts:** Empty.

**Mr ALAN ASHTON:** Empty? There were 268 police officers at the last count. It is the biggest command in New South Wales. We are very proud of what our police are doing. The honourable member for Lane Cove is not. He is a disgrace!

**Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS** (Lane Cove) [12.07 p.m.]: It obvious that this investigation has suffered due to a lack of police resources and funding. The honourable member for Vacluse, the honourable member for North Shore, I and my colleagues in the Coalition, including the honourable member for Orange, support the men and women at the coalface in the Police Service. It is easy to see why their nickname for the succession of Labor police Ministers is Ghurkha. They are called Ghurkhas because they will not allow the police to take prisoners! There is a total lack of resourcing for police at the coalface. Instead, we have a large amount of media and spin. In fact, these days the Police Service has more spin cycles than a Whirlpool washing machine.

I wish to note on the public record the litany of failure on the part of the Government with respect to police numbers. Everyone, including the residents of my electorate of Lane Cove and those in the Ryde electorate, knows when a State election is imminent. About a week beforehand, suddenly police are on the beat; the Government manages to squeeze out the resources to get them out on the beat for three or four days. Then, the day after the election, they are nowhere to be seen.

I will continue with the Government's litany of failure and cite the reduction in police numbers at the various local area commands since the policing level high in 2003. In the greater metropolitan region, Blacktown Local Area Command is down 13 police officers, Blue Mountains is down 11 police officers, Cabramatta is down 4, Camden is down 9, Campbelltown is down 12, Eastwood is down 13, Fairfield is down 3, Flemington is down 10, Gladesville is down 2, Greater Metropolitan is down 2, Green Valley is down 12,

Liverpool is down 10, Macquarie Fields is down 5, Parramatta is down 6, Quakers Hill is down 7, Rosehill is down 4, St Marys is down 21, and The Hills is down 6. In the greater metropolitan region, compared with the policing level high in 2003 there are now 138 fewer police officers.

In the inner metropolitan region, Botany Bay local area command is down 34 police officers, Burwood is down 19, Campsie is down 20, City Central is down 59, Harbourside is down 18, Hurstville is down 23, Leichhardt is down 15, Manly is down 22, Marrickville is down 14, Miranda is down 19, Newtown is down 8, North Shore is down 11, Northern Beaches is down 9, Surry Hills is down 15, and Sutherland is down 2. Compared with the 2003 policing level high, there are now 202 fewer police officers in the inner metropolitan region. Clearly, there are inadequate resources to address crime.

In the northern region, Brisbane Water is down 22 police officers, Coffs-Clarence is down 7, Hunter Valley is down 6, Lake Macquarie is down 6, Manning-Great Lakes is down 7, Newcastle is down 16, Richmond is down 9, and Tuggerah Lakes is down 7. Compared with the policing level high in 2003, there are now 78 fewer police officers in the northern region. In the southern region, Albury is down 6, Cootamundra is down 6, far South Coast is down 2, Goulburn is down 12, Griffith is down 13, Lake Illawarra is down 28, Monaro is down 2, Wagga Wagga is down 6, and Wollongong is down 17. Compared with the 2003 policing level high, there are now 92 fewer police officers in the southern region. In the western region, Barrier is down 5, Barwon is down 7, Canobolas is down 22, Chifley is down 13, Darling River is down 8, Lachlan is down 3, Mudgee is down 4, New England is down 20, Orana is down 15, and Oxley is down 22. Compared with the 2003 policing level high, there are now 116 fewer police officers in the western region.

As is typical of the Government, as part of the spin cycle—we are getting to the rinse cycle at this stage—since the 2003 policing level high, it has forced out the wonderful sergeants, the middle management appointed through various government policies, by failing to follow up and stand by police officers on the front line. The Government refused to support them, not only with resources but also with responsible legislation, which only comes from a Coalition government. The Government is now moving to the rinse cycle, as we head into a new election period. It is simply scattering a few more people here and there, saying, "Police numbers are up from last year." However, the fact remains that since the 2003 policing level high, the Government ditched a huge number of police officers and it is now trying to sprinkle some back. [*Time expired.*]

**Mr BRYCE GAUDRY** (Newcastle—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.12 p.m.]: I always find it of great interest when members opposite continue their attack on police officers. As the Parliamentary Secretary the honourable member for Bankstown said, members opposite denigrate the actions of police officers from the Commissioner down. They denigrate their wonderful record in this State of driving down the number of crimes committed in virtually every electorate, which is an excellent activity on the part of our police. There is no doubt about our record Police budgets and record authorised police strength. The Opposition spokesperson on policing continually attacks our police by referring to a fictitious Police budget crisis. According to the honourable member for Lane Cove, the colonel—

**Mr Anthony Roberts:** The general.

**Mr BRYCE GAUDRY:** The general, I apologise. The general of the pen attacks our police time and again. With record numbers of police graduating, police in many local area commands have been above our authorised strength. Currently, our authorised strength stands at a record high, 14,454, with 113 more recruits having come on board in December last year, and more will graduate this month. It is incontrovertible that the authorised strength of NSW Police stands at a record high.

Members opposite have denigrated police equipment. As a former Parliamentary Secretary, I can confidently state that the large rollout of equipment to police during the office of the current Minister for Police and the two previous Ministers has boosted police resources to assist them in their efforts to drive down crime. I refer, for example, to Glock pistols, extendable batons, information technology equipment in police vehicles, capsicum spray, armoured vests, forensic investigation equipment, and DNA technology. A range of measures have been introduced to assist police in their efforts to carry out crime investigation.

A review of detectives was conducted in 2003, and a number of initiatives have already been introduced in response to that review. For example, with regard to training, a new Detectives Education Program [DEP] has been introduced. The program takes one year instead of two to complete, and it is no longer a prerequisite that a trainee have prior plain-clothes experience. Successful completion of the course earns graduates an advanced diploma. A DEP class comprising 275 students finished in December 2004. The next

class of 150 students is due to finish on 30 June 2005, and a further class will begin in July 2005, with an estimated 400 to 500 students.

A senior detectives course has been established to develop the skills needed to manage teams investigating serious crime. Two courses were run in 2003, completed by 41 students, and a further two courses were held in 2004. The detective training unit developed the crime managers course, with the first intake occurring in September 2004. Together, the three detective courses—the initial detective course, the senior detective course, and the crime managers course—are designed to create incentives for the continuation of detective work as a career stream. So the appointments are there, the technology is there, the training is there, the record authorised strength is there, and the record Police budgets are there. Yet, the Opposition continues to use the old shibboleth that we have declining numbers of police across the entire community. Opposition members even attack police being out on the street. They say that the Government establishes operations such as Operation Vikings simply to put on a glitzy performance. The Opposition should look at the number of crimes that have been driven down by the use of such operations— [*Time expired.*]

**Mr PETER DEBNAM** (Vaucluse) [12.17 p.m.], in reply: I thank the honourable member for Albury and the honourable member for Lane Cove for their contributions to the debate. Once again they have demonstrated the Opposition's determination to bring community concerns to the attention of the House. I acknowledge the contributions of honourable members representing the electorates of Bankstown, East Hills and Newcastle, who, again, are the Thursday apologists for the Carr Government. I feel sorry for them that they have to be wheeled out to try to apologise for the poor performance of the Government, especially when we take such an absolute thrashing from the honourable member for East Hills who comes in here time after time and just lays into us.

The only thing I have not seen today from the honourable member for East Hills is his handler, the honourable member for Bathurst. Normally he brings him in on a leash and unleashes his ferret to attack us. It is one of the things that really delights me on Thursdays, that this little, soft, furry animal is unleashed by the honourable member for Bathurst, who says, "Go 'em!" I thank the members for their contributions but really they are just apologists for the Carr Government. That is the reality, and we all know it. The three Government members here today used the word "record" 53 times. That may well be a new record in this House in a short debate. Those members mentioned 53 times record budgets, record this, record that. That is exactly the problem. The Government has no idea what value for money is all about and it has no idea of what management of resources is about.

**Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills):** Order! There are too many interjections.

**Mr PETER DEBNAM:** This issue is about lack of resources and it is about an investigation that the Government gave up on. As the *Daily Telegraph* said on its front-page story on day two, "The Carr Government gave up on this investigation. They simply did not have the resources." That is what it is all about, but Government members persist with a mantra of "record" police numbers. As the Coalition members said, record police numbers came about because prior to the 1999 election we announced an election policy of adding more than 2,000 police to the New South Wales police force; the Government wheeled out its police commissioner at the time and its police Minister and said, before the election, that it was not possible. The Government was forced by the community to adopt a Coalition policy to increase police numbers by 2,000. The Government then ran police numbers up and said it was "a record in an election year".

There were about 15,164 police in 2003 but, as we have said to the people of New South Wales time and again, the Premier will only produce those resources in an election year. What did he do after 2003? He ran the numbers down. We are currently almost 700 police officers down. That is what this debate is all about today: police resources. The police did not have the resources, the detectives did not have the resources, they had minimal leads in this particular investigation and because they had so few resources they had to give it away. And that was a government policy decision.

The Government has sent member after member into this House to talk in defence about the current levels of crime. I have said in the House a number of times and I will say it again: every Labor member who stands up here and says, "We have reduced crime in this category by this much" is defending the current level of crime in the community, which is sending the community insane. The Government members are betraying their own constituents. That is why Labor's constituents are coming to us. That is certainly why, in relation to my police portfolio, I was spending a lot of time visiting Labor electorates, because Labor members have given up on representing their communities, and those communities are calling for help.

I am frequently in Bankstown and I am frequently in Revesby. It is the Labor electorates that are asking us to go out there and talk to them and deal with the problems—problems in Labor electorates that half the time we are raising in these Thursday debates, when we get the chance. We also gave the Government an opportunity, I think last month, to vote on a bill that would have resulted in an increase in crime reporting. The honourable member for East Hills had an education at the time as to what reporting of crime is all about and what the statistics of the Australian Bureau of Statistics are all about, but Government members voted against it. The Government did not want more crime reported. Government members voted against any measure that would have helped the police. We were trying to help the police and in this matter we are again trying to highlight the lack of resources. If Government members are going to vote on behalf of their communities, vote with us. [*Time expired.*]

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

**The House divided.**

**Ayes, 31**

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

**Noes, 46**

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

**Pair**

Mr Merton

Mrs Perry

**Question resolved in the negative.**

**Motion negatived.**

**SCHOOLS SAFETY**

**Mr ALAN ASHTON** (East Hills) [12.32 p.m.]: I move:

That this House congratulates the Government on the steps it has taken to make schools safer, including the school fencing program, the establishment of the Safety and Security Directorate and the program of crime prevention workshops.

The Government has implemented its detailed plan for the personal safety of school students and staff and the security of school buildings and property. The Government's Safer Schools Program was launched in 2003 and

is taking effect in our public education system in New South Wales. For example, during the recent school holidays, trespassing in government schools was down by 47 per cent on the previous year, the incidence of fires was down by 33 per cent and illegal entry was down by over 12 per cent. We are always working to support our schools and we are working with staff to make the workplace as safe as possible for them and, most important, for our students.

In 2002 two community parents and police forums were held to develop plans to make all our schools safer. Through co-operation between local communities and NSW Police, we will achieve our goals in relation to protecting personal safety and physical security in schools, as well as the security of buildings and infrastructure. The special Safety and Security Directorate of the Department of Education and Training provides advice and support to schools in the management of serious incidents involving violence and weapons. One of the key players in that Safety and Security Directorate is Mr Ike Ellis, former local area commander and senior police officer at Bankstown. He is a good bloke who is well respected in the area, and he is doing an excellent job. Recently he told me he would be happy to visit any schools at any time to talk to them about their security problems and fencing needs and then try to prioritise those matters. Three schools in my area are keen to have security fencing upgrades and I will take up Mr Ellis's offer.

The directorate includes a schools safety and response unit, which provides serious incident assistance advice and support to schools. The phone hotline, which is 1300 363 778, has been established to ensure that schools receive expert advice and support 24 hours a day seven days a week. The school security unit protects the education system's physical assets, which are valued at more than \$15 billion. The unit manages the Government's security fencing program, monitors alarms and deploys contract security guards who physically patrol schools. Many schools in my electorate and the electorate at Bankstown already have security fences, alarm systems and security systems where necessary. For example, dedicated security guards operate in high-risk schools over weekends and during school vacations. That has clearly resulted in fewer security breaches, vandalism and major fires.

The visible presence of security guards deters people from inappropriately entering school facilities and causing damage. Many schools have benefited from the you-beaut green Diplomat fences, but the downside is that schools without the fencing then make representations to have it. Funding is allocated on priority and need, but as local members we have a responsibility to represent every school that seeks our assistance. The incidence of vandalism and violence over holidays and weekends has declined incredibly as a result of these measures. People might argue about statistics in a range of matters in politics, but the Diplomat fences have been the most successful measure in protecting our most important asset. Of course, the kids in our schools, the parent community and teachers are most precious, but without good buildings and proper protection taxpayers' money will be wasted on vandalism repair, which distresses teachers, students and parents alike.

During school hours principals can also invoke the provisions of the Enclosed Lands Protection Act 1901 to restrict persons from entering onto departmental premises. The Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Amendment Act 2002 has increased penalties for assault, harassment, stalking or intimidation of students and staff when they are on or while they are leaving school grounds. These are important amendments. I was formerly a teacher, as was the honourable member for Bankstown. Indeed, many members of Parliament have the privilege of having a teaching background. That widens one's experience as a member of Parliament, and I am sure former teachers would acknowledge these important initiatives.

Although security and fences are important, a strict regime is needed for dealing with those who threaten the good behaviour, manners and physical safety of our students at school. From the beginning of this year new procedures for the suspension and expulsion of school students have been implemented in our schools. In line with those procedures, principals may impose a short suspension of up to four days, a long suspension of up to 20 days, expel a student from school—and that is vital because that discretion now rests with the principal, not merely the Minister—or recommend to the Minister that a student who has been expelled not be allowed to re-enrol in any government school.

Principals are expected to suspend immediately any student who is violent, threatens violence or possesses a prohibited weapon or suspected illegal substance. Some years ago principals were not confident that they would be supported if they chose to suspend a student for any length of time. A recent media article stated that many parents feel they have the right to metaphorically bash a principal by claiming that their child only did terrible things because he or she was being picked on. If a student is violent at school, threatens violence or possesses a prohibited weapon or suspected illegal substance that student should be suspended immediately by the principal. I hope that that point is picked up because it is not good enough for a principal to say, "We don't



want the bad publicity". The publicity is good publicity when students are expelled for doing these things in government schools. That will let the community know that government schools are safe and getting safer.

Another initiative is the crime prevention workshops and joint curriculum initiatives of the Department of Education and Training and NSW Police, which were implemented in schools by specialist youth police and classroom teachers. The crime prevention workshop program has recently been updated for students in years 7 and 8, and a new program is being developed for students in years 5 and 6. The secondary program has been externally evaluated, and I am informed that the results show that the program is successful in improving students' understanding of the consequences of crime, changing their self-reported behaviour and avoiding crime involvement.

When we teach students about crime prevention we lessen the chances that they will fall victim to crime. We also hope that we encourage them to recognise that they should not become part of a criminal pattern of behaviour. Criminal and bad behaviour at school can be corrected. If such behaviour is not corrected through schools, parents, the juvenile justice system, cautions and warnings, the people involved often go on to commit major felonies later and they end up in the big house, as we might say, paying a much bigger penalty. Unfortunately, they had not paid attention to what happens in gaols.

A range of other safety and security measures has been undertaken in our schools to eliminate or to manage serious incidents involving violence and weapons, in conjunction with local area commanders. We have an excellent relationship with Superintendent Mike Plotecki at the Bankstown Local Area Command. He has provided the honourable member for Bankstown, the honourable member for Menai, the Minister for Housing, the honourable member for Auburn and me with only good reports. Bankstown Local Area Command looks after areas in at least six electorates.

We also have the aim of reducing fires in schools. A co-ordinated approach is being implemented in conjunction with New South Wales Fire Brigades, and a senior fire officer is being seconded to the Safety and Security Directorate to support this initiative. A memorandum of understanding between schools and NSW Police to share relevant information about the prevention of crime and reducing the risk of crime, and increased co-operation between schools and police, has also been undertaken. I will say a little more in my reply to the debate. The Government has a proud record of recognising that we can make our schools safer. We can improve fencing, and we are doing that. We can give greater powers to teachers and police to act on school premises when necessary. We also have an excellent record of establishing alarms and other security systems in government schools.

**Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER** (North Shore) [12.42 p.m.]: It is interesting to note that notice of this motion, which congratulates the Government on its activity to make schools safer, was given by the honourable member for East Hills in May 2003. The New South Wales crime statistics for 2003, which were released by the New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research [BOCSAR], show that in 1998 there were 883 reports of assault in public secondary and primary schools. In contrast, there were 1,290 in 2003. In relation to sexual assaults, there were 11 reports in 1998; there were 17 in 2003. That shows that the situation has worsened dramatically. The union's response to the figures released by the department is interesting. The honourable member for East Hills would have a high regard for members of the Teachers Federation and the union as he is a former teacher. An article in the *Sun-Herald* of 3 August 2003, with the headline "School violence figures 'manipulated'", stated:

Only incidents that disrupt an entire school—not just one class—are being counted by the Education Department in figures of school violence, say teachers.

From tomorrow, teachers across NSW will begin a meticulous tally of incidents because they believe the department is manipulating its data to show a fall in classroom violence.

**Mr Alan Ashton:** That's a false accusation.

**Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER:** That is what the Teachers Federation said. The federation then embarked on an audit of teachers throughout New South Wales schools to find out what was happening in classrooms. Before I report on the outcome of that audit I refer to the President of the New South Wales Teachers Federation, Maree O'Halloran, who, at the time that statement was made, said that the department had redefined a "violent incident" to one that disrupted an entire school rather than a single class. She said:

They are trying to under-report the instances of violence... This goes against all the evidence that we have from our members, who believe the problems are much greater.

From tomorrow, and for the rest of August, the federation will ask teachers to log every example of violence—including threatening verbal outbursts—and lodge a report with the department and the school's union representative.

The BOCSAR report is fascinating. Recently I contacted BOCSAR and asked for the next round of recorded statistics relating to crime in schools. However, the bureau is no longer keeping those figures. Why? Because the Government wants to hide the incidents of violence in schools.

**Mr Tony Stewart:** We don't want more principals criticising you.

**Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER:** The Parliamentary Secretary is trying to overcome his embarrassment by talking over the top of me. I am happy to defend teachers who submit reports of violence, because the matter is serious. On 22 February 2005 the *Daily Telegraph* ran a story on page 4 with the headline "Secret horror: teacher assaults". The story contained information about a violence audit conducted by the Teachers Federation, to which I referred earlier. Schools that took part in the audit faxed the audit forms directly to the Department of Education and Training and the Teachers Federation. The federation's web site has this report:

It was the proper course of action for the employer to be notified of all problems so that they could be addressed. The Federation conducted the audit to gauge the level of violence against teachers. The Federation believed that the figures published by Department of Education and Training greatly understated the problem. Hence the Department could avoid its Occupational Health and Safety responsibilities as an employer. The audit provided clear evidence that this was the case.

The *Daily Telegraph* article, which appears on the federation's web site, stated:

The results of an audit of violence against teachers in schools are so shocking that they have been marked "never for public release".

It is understood several thousand violent incidents—at least—have been recorded in the private survey conducted by the NSW Teachers Federation.

But senior federation officials have decided to keep the audit results secret because they fear the release will bring public education into disrepute.

Federation President Maree O'Halloran yesterday said that a decision had been taken to withhold the data which seriously taints the image of government schools.

Yet the Carr Government and the federation maintain a public stance that the state's 2230 public schools are "safe" places.

Ms O'Halloran confirmed the federation had conducted a major survey of its members on violence but refused to reveal details, saying only that the results were "very, very serious".

But the *Daily Telegraph* has learned that many of the assaults were in "special education schools", including those for the worst behaved students.

Evidence of classroom violence formed part of the teachers' pay case argued out in the IRC last year.

The *Daily Telegraph* article also refers to the WorkCover statistics that I obtained under freedom of information legislation. Those statistics show that as at January this year the Government had paid \$135.6 million in WorkCover claims for employees in schools and TAFE over the past two years. Some \$56.2 million was paid to Department of Education and Training employees in 2003-04. A total of 160,969 weeks of work were lost over two years because of those illnesses and injuries. I do not know how any honourable member can claim that is acceptable.

There was also an increase in claims the previous year. Teachers were by far the largest group of claimants in 2003-04: 2,075 secondary school teachers and 1,615 primary school teachers. Mental disorders were reported by 944 schoolteachers—17.4 per cent of all claims—and by 82 TAFE teachers, 12.3 per cent of all claims. It is beyond me how the Government can seriously expect this House to vote in favour of a motion congratulating it on making schools safer places, against the background of those figures showing how many union members are being forced to take injuries to WorkCover for compensation.

Some of the initiatives the Government has taken to address increased violence in schools—apart from the fact that it is trying to hide the extent of the incidents—include patrols over the school holidays. Over the past Easter holiday I received a call from the president of the parents and citizens association at Athelstane Public School, which had been broken into once again and had graffiti sprayed on walls and windows smashed. The Government had turned a blind eye to providing adequate security at the school. The school had been promised security fencing but it still has not been provided.

The fact that the words "There's a bomb inside" were spray-painted on the door of the special education classroom was disturbing. I stood there nearly all day so we could not be accused by Government members of being opportunistic. We called the police and they turned up. The police were so concerned about it that they cordoned off the building and called in a sniffer dog. Neighbours, the local shopkeeper and kids riding their bikes in the vicinity said the graffiti had been there for some time and the security patrol had totally ignored it. What a farce!

The Government then announced a security CD—a misleading and ineffective stunt—supposedly showing the theft of a school computer. What a wasteful stunt to divert attention from the war the Government was waging on teachers at that time! It should have been getting serious, admitting there are increasing problems of violence in schools and doing something about it. The Minister then came out with another stunt: police training for principals. Recently I visited a special school where increased numbers of students and teachers had been hospitalised because of injuries caused by students with serious behaviour problems. Shame on the Government for trying to congratulate itself! [*Time expired.*]

**Mr PETER DRAPER** (Tamworth) [12.52 p.m.]: I welcome this opportunity to contribute to the debate on the Government's attempts to make schools safer through the Department of Education and Training's Safer Schools Program and, in particular, the school fencing program. I understand that the Safer Schools Program was introduced in February 2003 as a method of addressing security breaches such as break and enters and vandalism to school property. Unfortunately, due to their size, exposure and hours of operation, school premises are vulnerable to criminal activity and there is little dispute that the safety and security of students is a primary concern for the Government. One of the solutions is to prevent criminals and trespassers from entering school grounds. The Government appears to be addressing that, albeit slowly, through the school fencing program, a project that has been in place for several years. However, as part of the Safer Schools Program, which was introduced two years ago, the Premier also announced the installation of 200 new security fences for schools in New South Wales by the year 2007.

The list specified government schools that were prioritised on the school fencing program. Among those were Peel High School, Tamworth High School and Westdale Public School, all of which are in my electorate. Peel High School has had its fence erected and today, with the exception of the building facade, the school is protected from intruders. Tamworth High and Westdale Public schools remain on the list and it is anticipated that fences will be erected as promised before the end of this parliamentary term. According to the Tamworth High School Principal, Mr Garry Raftery, the school is in need of a fence for both security and aesthetic reasons. Due to its location in South Tamworth between a shopping centre, licensed clubs and residential suburbs the school is subject to a high level of thoroughfare pedestrian traffic. The school provides a secluded area and people wander through and inevitably facilities are vandalised. The school would like to be able to stop these trespassers with a physical barrier.

The current fence is also very old, easy to climb over and expensive to maintain. Having waited two years, the school hopes that a new fence that circumnavigates the entire boundary will be erected in the not-too-distant future. According to the former principal for Westdale Public School, Mrs Ruythe Dufty, Westdale was placed on the priority list after experiencing a series of break and enters. The department provided the school with increased security measures, and with police help the main culprits were arrested. While the spate of offences has abated the school is still in need of a security fence due to the ever-present reality that school grounds are attractive to opportunistic criminals. As I have explained, the school fencing program continues to have relevance for schools in Tamworth, and I look forward to the department honouring its commitment given in 2003 that security fences will be erected by 2007.

In general, it seems the department's Safety and Security Directorate, which was established in April 2002 has been helpful to schools in my electorate. The directorate was established to oversee school security and it is my understanding that within the directorate's school security unit there were, until recently, nine security program officers responsible for the 43 school education areas in New South Wales. I believe these officers are allocated schools in both metropolitan and country districts, giving individual schools a point of contact within the department with whom they can discuss security and safety issues. These officers make themselves available to travel into the regions and conduct security risk assessments of the schools, predominantly upon request. The officers are also able to monitor the security situation at schools through an online reporting system. That database keeps track of any security breaches the schools report, providing the schools are vigilant in maintaining and updating this reporting system.

I was concerned when informed that due to maternity leave and transfers the group of nine security program officers had been reduced to six in recent months, with the officer responsible for the Tamworth

education area being one of those to vacate the role. It is my understanding that the responsibility of safety and security issues at schools in the Tamworth area was being shared among the remaining officers until such time that numbers are restored to full strength. I only hope the recruitment process has been expedited to ensure the Tamworth education area is provided with the services of its own dedicated security program officer. It is a good step to have people who are obviously interested in balancing the needs of country and city school communities. Our school communities have a right to expect the provision of the highest level of safety and security for students as possible, and I look forward to seeing the results of the Government's ongoing security programs within the electorate of Tamworth.

**Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Greg Aplin.**

*[Mr Acting-Speaker (Mr John Mills) left the chair at 12.57 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]*

**MINISTRY**

**Mr BOB CARR:** I was going to say that, in the absence of the Minister for Gaming and Racing, and Minister for the Central Coast, the Minister for Community Services will answer questions on his behalf. But, with my great traditional interest in those matters, I will answer questions on his behalf. Caution be damned!

**DEATH OF FATHER TED KENNEDY**

**Ministerial Statement**

**Dr ANDREW REFSHAUGE** (Marrickville—Deputy Premier, Treasurer, Minister for State Development, and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs) [2.22 p.m.]: Father Ted Kennedy died last week. For more than three decades he was parish priest at St Vincent's Catholic Church in Redfern. Ted Kennedy's conscience was a goad to the mighty and a balm to the needy. It led him to where, before him, many would not go. It made him a landmark and a local hero. It drove him long miles to funerals in far-off homelands of what we might call his constituents. It made him beloved. It made him contentious. It put him at odds with the police. It stirred him to anger and mercy, sorrow and great forgiveness, and long nights of the soul.

If in these first heady days of Pope Benedict XVI there is a fast track to sainthood, Father Ted Kennedy should be on it. It was said of Ted at his funeral that he was a holy man, a living treasure, a pebble in the comfortable boot of the establishment, an untidy prophet and an enemy of cruel blindness and petty pomp who ended his life with empty pockets and dirty hands, his life poured out for all. Those eloquent words are never stirred in remarkable disciples like Pat Dodson, Marcia Langton, Sol Bellear, and Sir William Deane without cause. Such eloquence is never stirred by mediocrity, by a man of empty gestures and no substance.

This was no cardboard cut-out saint. He loved poetry, food and wine, theatre, particularly Irish theatre and John Shaw Neilson, and the conversation that comes with these immense ingredients of civilisation. But the grim reality of his calling was never far away. He lived it in the streets, in the police cells and in the broken down houses. He was no mere armchair priest or theologian. What others might have called liberation theology was for him simple Christianity. He lived, you might say, the cliché of all the Spencer Tracy movies: the ministering angel with dirty fingernails, the good priest of the slums.

Today we acknowledge Sorry Day, the national day of healing. On this day it is worth remembering that Ted Kennedy was one of those who lived out reconciliation before it was spelt with a capital "R". This humble priest was loved by knights of the realm, street alcoholics, and everyone in between. By them he will be remembered and sorely missed. In a place that seemed reserved for a particular despair Ted Kennedy was a friend of the oppressed, the deprived and the rejected. I share with his big adopted family the sorrow of his too early loss and commend his memory to the House.

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD** (Wakehurst) [2.25 p.m.]: The Coalition joins with the Government in reflecting upon the wonderful contribution made by Father Ted Kennedy to the Aboriginal communities of Redfern and throughout New South Wales. It is appropriate that we reflect on Father Kennedy's contribution on this the national day of healing. Father Kennedy worked, as others before him had, with great vigour and enthusiasm for the betterment of Aboriginal people. We witnessed the sad passing recently of Bob Bellear, and a few years ago we lost Mum Shirl. Many of the heroes of the Aboriginal people have passed away in recent years, and to the people of Redfern Father Ted was, if you like, the equivalent of Mother Teresa.

Sadly, the disadvantage that he worked so hard to address continues today. One of the greatest reflections upon Father Ted's contribution would be if the Government of New South Wales now did more to address the Aboriginal disadvantage that unfortunately continues. I remind the Government, without being unduly pointed, that there is much more to do. As Father Kennedy well knew, issues such as Aboriginal literacy, Aboriginal people being incarcerated at 15 times the rate of non-Aboriginal people, Aboriginal women dying in childbirth at two to three times the rate of other women, and Aboriginal children leaving school at 11, 12, 13 or 14 without having attained their Higher School Certificate are still to be addressed.

In memory of Father Ted Kennedy, Mum Shirl, and others who fought so hard for the betterment of the Aboriginal people, the Government should start to deliver more for Aboriginal people rather than merely talk about doing so, and ensure that the lot of those people is improved dramatically. The Coalition reflects on Father Ted's life and hopes that his work will be continued by those who come after him. However, it should not be forgotten that this Government has done very little in the past 10 years to address some of these important issues. We look forward to the Opposition and the Government working together to achieve some real changes for Aboriginal people.

### **DISTINGUISHED VISITORS**

**Mr SPEAKER:** I welcome to the gallery members of the New Zealand Justice and Electoral Select Committee led by Mr Timothy Barnett, MP.

### **PETITIONS**

#### **Alstonville Bypass**

Petition requesting that the Alstonville Bypass be completed by the end of 2006, received from **Mr Donald Page**.

#### **Land Tax Threshold and Vendor Duty**

Petition requesting the reintroduction of an indexed land tax threshold and the removal of the vendor duty, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

#### **Gaming Machine Tax**

Petitions opposing the decision to increase poker machine tax, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood** and **Mr Andrew Tink**.

#### **Somersby Fields Sandmining**

Petition opposing the proposal for the Somersby Fields sandmining project, received from **Ms Marie Andrews**.

#### **Kurnell Sandmining**

Petition opposing sandmining on the Kurnell Peninsula, received from **Mr Barry Collier**.

#### **Lake Macquarie Clean-up Funding**

Petition requesting funding for continuation of the clean-up of Lake Macquarie, received from **Mr John Mills**.

#### **Anti-Discrimination (Religious Tolerance) Legislation**

Petitions opposing the proposed anti-discrimination (religious tolerance) legislation, received from **Mr Peter Draper**, **Mrs Dawn Fardell**, **Mrs Shelley Hancock** and **Mr Anthony Roberts**.

#### **Jervis Bay Marine Park Fishing Competitions**

Petition requesting amendment of the zoning policy to preclude fishing competitions, by both spear and line, in the Jervis Bay Marine Park, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

**Cremorne Community Mental Health Centre**

Petition opposing the proposed relocation of health services provided by the Cremorne Community Mental Health Centre, received from **Ms Gladys Berejiklian**.

**Coffs Harbour Aeromedical Rescue Helicopter Service**

Petition requesting that plans for the placement of an aeromedical rescue helicopter service based in Coffs Harbour be fast-tracked, received from **Mr Andrew Fraser**.

**Yass District Hospital**

Petition opposing the downgrading of existing services at Yass District Hospital, received from **Ms Katrina Hodgkinson**.

**F6 Corridor Community Use**

Petition noting the decision of the Minister for Roads, gazetted in February 2003, to abandon the construction of any freeway or motorway in the F6 corridor, and requesting preservation of the corridor for open space, community use and public transport, received from **Mr Barry Collier**.

**Westdale Traffic Arrangements**

Petition requesting an overtaking lane at the corner of Gunnedah Road and Flinders Street, Westdale, received from **Mr Peter Draper**.

**Topdale Road Upgrade**

Petition requesting the upgrading and sealing of Topdale Road, received from **Mr Peter Draper**.

**Barton Highway Dual Carriageway Funding**

Petition requesting that the Minister for Roads change the Roads and Traffic Authority's priority for Federal AusLink funding for the Barton Highway, received from **Ms Katrina Hodgkinson**.

**Young Drivers Night Curfew**

Petition opposing the introduction of a night curfew for young drivers, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

**Pacific Highway Overpass**

Petition requesting the construction of an overpass for the Pacific Highway at the Tea Gardens-Hawks Nest intersection, received from **Mr John Turner**.

**Forster-Tuncurry Cycleways**

Petition requesting the building of cycleways in the Forster-Tuncurry area, received from **Mr John Turner**.

**Armidale and Moree Rail Services**

Petition requesting continuation of CountryLink rail services from Sydney to Armidale and to Moree, received from **Mr Peter Draper**.

**Newcastle Rail Services**

Petitions requesting the retention and improvement of Newcastle rail services, and implementation of an integrated public transport plan for the Lower Hunter, received from **Mr Bryce Gaudry, Mr Jeff Hunter, Mr John Mills, Mr Matthew Morris and Mr Milton Orkopoulos**.

### **South Coast Rail Services**

Petition opposing any reduction in rail services on the South Coast, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

### **School Bus Seat Belts**

Petition requesting financial incentives for bus operators to install seat belts on school buses, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

### **Southern Tablelands Rail Services**

Petition opposing any reduction in rail services on the Southern Tablelands line, received from **Ms Katrina Hodgkinson**.

### **Sydney to Newcastle Light Rail Service**

Petition requesting the provision of a light rail service between Sydney and Newcastle using the existing rail corridor, received from **Mr Jeff Hunter**.

### **CountryLink Cronulla Booking Office**

Petition opposing the closure of the CountryLink Cronulla booking office, received from **Mr Malcolm Kerr**.

### **Murwillumbah to Casino Rail Service**

Petitions requesting the retention of the CountryLink rail service from Murwillumbah to Casino, received from **Mr Neville Newell** and **Mr Donald Page**.

### **Milton-Ulladulla Public School Infrastructure**

Petition requesting community consultation in the planning, funding and building of appropriate public school infrastructure in the Milton-Ulladulla area and surrounding districts, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

### **St George and Sutherland Community College Funding**

Petition requesting the restoration of funding to the St George and Sutherland Community College, received from **Mr Paul McLeay**.

### **Shoalhaven River Water Extraction**

Petition opposing the extraction of water from the Shoalhaven River to support Sydney's water supply, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

### **Shoalhaven City Council Rate Structure**

Petition opposing a 27 per cent rate increase proposed by Shoalhaven City Council, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

### **Illawarra and South Coast Emergency Rescue Helicopter Service**

Petition requesting that an emergency rescue helicopter service be provided for the Illawarra and South Coast, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

### **Crown Land Leases**

Petition requesting the withdrawal of changes to the rental structure of Crown land leases, particularly enclosed road permits, received from **Ms Katrina Hodgkinson**.

**Collector Bushrangers Reserve Motorcycle Track**

Petition requesting approval for the construction of a motorcycle track at Collector Bushrangers Reserve, received from **Ms Katrina Hodgkinson**.

**Water-Access-Only Property Policy**

Petition requesting a review of the water-access-only property policy, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

**Burwood Colliery Bowling Club Crown Land Site**

Petition opposing the sale of the Burwood Colliery Bowling Club crown land site to the club for the purpose of a joint venture development, received from **Mr Matthew Morris**.

**Great Lakes Council Rate Structure**

Petition opposing a 30 per cent rate increase proposed by Great Lakes Council, received from **Mr John Turner**.

**COMMITTEE ON THE HEALTH CARE COMPLAINTS COMMISSION****Report**

**Mr Jeff Hunter**, as Chairman, tabled report No. 8/53 entitled "10th Meeting on the Annual Report of the Health Care Complaints Commission" dated June 2005.

**Ordered to be printed.**

**QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE**  

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**POLICE AND NURSES WAGE INCREASES**

**Mr JOHN BROGDEN:** My question without notice is directed to the Treasurer. Given that the Treasurer has failed to budget for larger than expected wage increases for police and nurses in this year's budget, which taxes will he increase and which expenditure will he cut to deliver the pay rises?

**Dr ANDREW REFSHAUGE:** It is very important to recognise how well the budget has been received by the business community. We have just received the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics figures about business investment for the March 2005 quarter, which showed that business investment in New South Wales is almost double that of the rest of Australia. Business is investing in New South Wales. Today the Commonwealth Bank, on economic outlook, has said that the New South Wales budget maintains a prudent approach to fiscal policy, continuing to build on operating services while increasing infrastructure spending. The low debt levels from a financial position reinforce New South Wales' strong triple-A credit rating. The Australian Council for Infrastructure Development has said that it welcomes the New South Wales Government's increased infrastructure investment announced in the 2005 budget.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The honourable member for Southern Highlands will come to order.

**Dr ANDREW REFSHAUGE:** So not only is business investing more here, the Commonwealth Bank is thanking us, and so is the Australian Council for Infrastructure Development. In regards to the wages, we have a policy of a 3 per cent per annum rise for public servants. Of course, there is also the Treasurer's Advance to enable us to cope with things that are excessive. There is always that capacity.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The Leader of the Opposition will stop calling out.

**Dr ANDREW REFSHAUGE:** The pay increases are budgeted for.

**FEDERAL GOVERNMENT INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS POLICY**

**Ms NOREEN HAY:** My question without notice is directed to the Premier. What is the Government's response to community concerns about the impact of the Federal Government's proposed industrial relations changes on New South Wales families?



**Mr BOB CARR:** What the Prime Minister said only a short time ago confirms all the fears that the labour movement and families in New South Wales have been alerted to about the impact of a Federal takeover of State industrial relations. The Prime Minister talks about workplace reform, but the fact is that the agenda he has unveiled today is to rope in more workers under a failed, conflict-ridden Federal system. The attempt to expand that system and rope in more workers, especially when it comes to unfair dismissals, will mean more conflict, more drawn-out legal actions and diminished working conditions.

The fact is that the New South Wales system can boast fewer days lost to strikes and far fewer lockouts than the Federal system, which is in place in Victoria. We have produced in this State—and the employers know it—a harmonious industrial relations climate, which gives this State a competitive advantage. For example, the construction industry in New South Wales accounted for 1.3 per cent of the nation's working days lost in the December quarter. By comparison, in Victoria, which is under the Federal award system, the figure is 33 per cent. New South Wales has only 1.3 per cent of the working days lost in strikes under our State award while Victoria has 33 per cent. When it comes to lockouts, 91 per cent of employer lockouts in Australia occur under Federal awards.

But the Prime Minister wants to use the corporation's power to rope in more workers, a larger slice of the work force, under the Federal system. I give this warning: it is going to make life tougher for working families, already struggling with the high cost of child care, petrol and rising interest rates as a result of Federal Government decisions. With respect to unfair dismissal, the Prime Minister's proposals will strip 60 per cent of the work force in this State out of the State-based unfair dismissal protection, a system that resolves 80 per cent of unfair dismissal matters within 21 days. They are expeditiously resolved, with a minimum of fuss, to employers and employees under the New South Wales system, but now that has got to go. That way of resolving them, without technicalities, without lawyers, without drawn-out battles in the courts, will go. They will be shifted under the Federal system.

I think everyone would agree that under the Federal system unfair dismissal cases are far more legalistic and much more likely to end up before the Federal Court. The proposal is not only unfair for workers, it can be plain bad for business. Sacked workers will now be looking to the common law courts to seek redress—denied access to an industrial system that settles these things fairly and expeditiously. They will have lawyers moving around saying, "Listen, I can get this resolved under the common law. We will find some old common law rights that can be invoked and we will work up a whole system of common law. It will take time, it will take money and it will pin down employers to have these matters resolved in this way." Our system, through the statutory provisions—

*[Interruption]*

I think the honourable member for Wakehurst voted with us. He voted with us when I shamed him on the matter. What part of our reforms did he oppose? Oh, he ended up voting for them.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The honourable member for Wakehurst will cease interjecting. This is question time; it is not a debate.

*[Interruption]*

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The honourable member for Wakehurst will resume his seat. I call him to order.

**Mr BOB CARR:** The honourable member for Wakehurst is referring to that occasion when he came to the table with a bottle that purported to be drinkable water that could have come from literally anywhere. We are all well disposed to the honourable member but who would drink something offered by him under those circumstances? Where were the consumer guarantees?

**Mr Brad Hazzard:** Point of order: There is no greater guarantee than the Liberal Party of New South Wales telling the Premier that that water came from Singapore. If you had done so, you would have enjoyed it. Most of your backbench wanted you to drink it. They actually wanted you to show some leadership.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The honourable member for Wakehurst will resume his seat. The honourable member for Bathurst will come to order.

[Interruption]

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

**Mr BOB CARR:** Everybody is entitled to his or her 15 minutes of fame and the honourable member for Wakehurst has just had his. The real danger here is a bonanza for common law lawyers and a growth in American-style employment litigation that will cost workers and business tens of thousands of dollars for each claim and add to the cost of doing business in Australia. The worst of these so-called reforms, however, will be that they target the lowest paid—workers like cleaners and sales assistants, who live on, say, \$467 a week, \$12.30 an hour. The Prime Minister proposes to deal with them through a new body with the somewhat Orwellian title of Fair Pay Commission. In all her submissions on the minimum wage, Minister Andrews proposed that low paid workers are already remunerated \$70 a week more than they should be, so I can imagine what a so-called Fair Pay Commission is going to do.

At present low paid workers rely on the annual increases awarded by the Industrial Relations Commission to keep minimum wage levels at a liveable standard. That is the very body that the Prime Minister plans to do away with. The Fair Pay Commission, by contrast, will not be required to grant wage rises annually. Instead, movements in the minimum wage will now be only "periodic". Does that mean every two years? Does it mean every five years? More workers will be roped into the conflict-ridden Federal system and more award conditions stripped away.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The honourable member for Wollongong will come to order. The honourable member for Strathfield will come to order.

**Mr BOB CARR:** For example, the nurses award presently contains a provision for "reasonable work loads"—a protection against a coalition government running down the nurses numbers and overloading staff.

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

**Mr BOB CARR:** Similarly, the New South Wales teachers award sets out limits on the amount of time teachers spend in front of the classroom, balancing that with time for lesson preparation. Both are sound, practical measures—both will be stripped away because they will fall outside the Commonwealth's so-called allowable matters. The Federal system is anything but simple. We will have a tangle of Federal bodies, the IRC, the Building and Construction Commission, the Employment Advocate—another Orwellian construct—and the proposed new Fair Pay Commission, tripping over each other and fighting to protect their patch.

The reforms announced today threaten hundreds of thousands of New South Wales workers who enjoy the protection of a co-operative, fair, simple, State-based system—a system that works, a system that delivers half the level of disputes we see in Victoria, which relies wholly on the Federal system. The Prime Minister has not made an adequate case for a unitary national system. It is a model based on ideological preoccupations and unsubstantiated assertions, and we will be taking these arguments to the New South Wales work force to ensure that they fully understand that.

## WATER SUPPLIES

**Mr ANDREW STONER:** My question is directed to the Treasurer. With Sydney households and businesses about to cop tougher water restrictions as a result of dam levels falling below 40 per cent, and much lower dam levels and tougher restrictions elsewhere in the State, why has the Government failed to plan in its budget for new water supply solutions such as new dams and large-scale recycling of waste water and stormwater?

**Dr ANDREW REFSHAUGE:** It has, and we have announced it.

## SEX OFFENDERS ELECTRICAL MONITORING

### DILLWYNIA CORRECTIONAL CENTRE PIZZA DELIVERY

**Ms TANYA GADIEL:** My question without notice is directed to the Premier. What is the Government's response to community concerns about the monitoring of convicted sex offenders and recent matters involving Dillwynia women's correctional centre?

**Mr BOB CARR:** This morning I joined the Minister for Justice to announce a global positioning tracking system to monitor serial sex offenders. The Department of Corrective Services will have the capacity to pinpoint an offender within five metres. The tracking system will be used only after the offender has been convicted and has served the non-parole part of the sentence in gaol. The new system uses state-of-the-art satellite technology, electronic bracelets and centralised, 24-hour monitoring, allowing corrective services officers to closely track their movements. It is a tough measure but we do not resile from it.

Talking about corrections, honourable members would remember the Opposition's bungled stunt during question time on 5 May when the Leader of the Opposition put it to me that Rodney Adler had received special treatment, a soft cop, in Silverwater prison. That claim evaporated; by the end of question time we were able to point out that the allegation was completely false and that Rodney Adler was being treated like any common street pickpocket. The fact is that there was no special treatment.

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

**Mr BOB CARR:** In this case the Government was able to report that Rodney Adler was forced to work in the bakery making good prison white bread. We will be happy to share the bread with the honourable member for Wakehurst any time he wants to vary his bread and water diet. This research revealed that a staffer from office of the Leader of the Opposition called a Silverwater prison officer desperately searching for evidence to back this outrageous claim. The Minister exposed the lie in the Parliament. The staffer rang the prison and said, "Is there any information on the following?" Let me read the report, which is an officer report form from Silverwater on 12 May. It spells out the desperation.

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

**Mr BOB CARR:** I am quoting the prison officer. The report states in part:

At approximately 11.55 am I was contacted by a woman from the Opposition Leader John Brogden's office and asked if I could spread the word—

**Mr Brad Hazzard:** Point of order: The standing orders require that a Minister or member of Parliament must identify a document to which he is referring. I ask the Premier to identify and table the document so that we can see exactly what he is talking about.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! There is no point of order. The honourable member for Wakehurst will resume his seat. The Premier has clearly identified the document.

**Mr BOB CARR:** I think the honourable member for Wakehurst has been drinking that funny water. The report continued:

... that they are looking for information about two inmates we have in our custody at the Metropolitan Remand Centre. The inmates are ADLER RODNEY and WILLIAMS RAY.

... I have never been in contact with this office before and do not know how they got my telephone number.

Talk about subtlety! While they are doing this, they are not doing any research on budgets or policy, because we have seen no policy, no plans and no ideas. I want to share with honourable members something that they have been up to which shows that they are serious operatives. At the women's correctional centre at South Windsor, the matter is documented in a report dated 18 May by the general manager of that facility. It seems that someone has been ringing around purporting to be a Minister of the Crown—a serious matter and practically criminal.

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

**Mr BOB CARR:** However, the people they have been ringing are nothing but the best. They have been ringing every pizza shop in the region. Some bright spark, a mystery figure from the Opposition, has been calling all the pizza shops near Dillwynia, and they were not after a large ham and pineapple. They were trying to find out if there had been any pizza deliveries to the prison. Members opposite are not putting their effort into policy research, plans or ideas. They got terribly excited by the notion that a woman inmate might have been sending out for pizzas, rather like Kerry Chikarovski and the incident with all the beautiful Lebanese cuisine at Silverwater. She went to the prison banquet. Remember when that was revealed!

So somewhere in the Parliament there is a mystery figure with the *Yellow Pages* on his or her knee phoning every pizza shop in this area of Sydney falsely claiming to be a New South Wales Government

Minister and seeking information on pizza deliveries. The first shop said that it did not know anything about it but referred the mystery detective to Domino's Pizza. It turns out that one of the pizza stores—

**Mr Andrew Tink:** Point of order: My point of order is relevance. The Premier seems to be fixated on menus and eating. I would like to know what he had to eat when he was with Danny DeVito yesterday. I know what they discussed—other people's money. Meet Larry the liquidator!

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! There is no point of order. The honourable member for Epping will resume his seat.

*[Interruption]*

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! I place the honourable member for Epping on three calls to order. I warn him that for the remainder of question time I will not be as tolerant as I have been this week.

**Mr BOB CARR:** Yes, it was about money, it is about a \$50 million film being made in Sydney. It is about jobs for people in Sydney. Members of the Opposition are not interested in that. They are interested in pizzas at South Windsor. The contact purporting to be a Minister left his first name and telephone number at one of the pizza stores. The most popular first name in this Parliament happens to be Andrew. There are more Andrews in this Parliament—as the honourable member for Epping has just confirmed—than there are others. The first part of the numeral was "9230" which, to a practised detective, means Parliament House. A quick flick through the parliamentary telephone directory unmasked the culprit.

Could it be the honourable member for Bega? Apparently there is a member for Bega in the Parliament and apparently his name is Andrew Constance. I have never heard of him. Could it be Prince Mishkin, the Leader of The Nationals? It could be the honourable member for Coffs Harbour. It could be the honourable member for Epping. That is highly possible, because they all want to be Ministers, and impersonating one is as close as they will get. But, we have to exonerate them because none of their phone numbers matches the number left at the pizza shop. I can reveal to the House the number of this Perry Mason, this Sherlock Holmes, is 9230 3462. I can reveal that the man who rang the pizza shop purporting to be a Minister of the Crown inquiring about pizza delivery to the prison is none other than—you probably guessed it—the honourable member for Davidson. Who would now allege that members on that side do not do any research? No wonder they do not have policies, plans or ideas, because all their research capacity is directed at the ordering of pizzas at South Windsor.

### GROSS STATE PRODUCT

**Ms PETA SEATON:** My question without notice is to the Treasurer. How can he be trusted to run the State's economy when he does not know that gross State product growth was 2 per cent last year, having told Alan Jones yesterday, "It grew about 7 per cent last year—that's a pretty big growth to our economy"?

**Dr ANDREW REFSHAUGE:** I accept the backing of the Commonwealth Bank and Standard and Poors that this is still a triple-A credit rating budget.

### CAR REBIRTHING

**Mr TONY STEWART:** My question is to the Minister for Police. What is the Government's response to community concerns about car rebirthing in New South Wales?

**Mr CARL SCULLY:** That is a good question. Organised theft and car rebirthing cost of the order of \$150 million per annum. NSW Police has proved that rebirthing cost about \$100 million last year alone. The State Crime Command Property Squad has a major focus on motor vehicle rebirthing, which it believes may now account for as much as one-fifth of all motor vehicle theft. That command has 40 detectives and analysts working on this, engaged in joint investigations with local area command detectives dealing with what is regarded as organised car rebirthing.

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

**Mr CARL SCULLY:** A strike force has been in place for some time to deal with this issue around the Illawarra area—extending to Nowra, Goulburn, Wagga Wagga and Sydney. This strike force has arrested and

charged 11 people with 92 offences. Again, that is a big tick for the police from this side of the House. At least we believe they are deserving of a pay rise, unlike those characters opposite. Someone should tell the cops that these characters do not believe they should get a pay rise, that Brogden is opposed to them getting a decent pay rise.

Between 10 and 13 May the four principal targets of this investigation pleaded guilty in Wollongong District Court to 45 combined offences and were sentenced to terms of imprisonment ranging from three years to 7½ years. I congratulate the police on a terrific job. Thirteen cars, eight motorcycles, three trailers and four engines, all valued at more than a quarter of a million dollars—all rebirthed or stolen—were seized by police involved in the investigation.

Car rebirthing has a lot of consequences, not just for the insurance industry—which makes us pay higher premiums—and not just for innocent purchasers. One should bear in mind that many people innocently purchase these vehicles, pay good money for them and have them taken from them when they are identified as stolen vehicles. That can be financially quite painful. There is also a broader cost to the community of car rebirthing. Most of these syndicates are involved in other crimes—money-laundering, identity fraud, drug dealing and often firearms offences. As well as that cost there is often human tragedy. A lot of these reconstructed vehicles are unsafe to be on the road and when they are involved in accidents, more often than not they break up.

Car rebirthing takes a number of forms. We would all be reasonably familiar with the traditional illegal altering of number plates and attempts to register them through the Roads and Traffic Authority. Some people involved in this industry, so to speak, have been looking at more novel ways to rebirth vehicles. The Property Squad believes criminals involved in rebirthing are now using more sophisticated measures, and more frequently. Some of the more complex and ingenious practices emerging are difficult to prosecute under existing legislation.

Neat stripping is a new ingenious method of rebirthing vehicles. It involves, firstly, stealing the vehicle, stripping the components and dumping the chassis, which is then recovered by police. These people then purchase the chassis at an insurance auction, and the parts they have stolen from the vehicle originally are put on the chassis, which they have legally purchased at auction. Not surprisingly, they then register the vehicle legally and sell the car on the market. The police are finding it difficult to prosecute with what is called neat stripping rebirthed vehicles.

We need to do something about this. The police have indicated that they believe the law needs to be changed to reflect the activities of these criminals who are pursuing ingenious and novel ways of rebirthing vehicles—stealing from the public—for their personal gain. Honourable members may be surprised to learn that organised syndicates are less often involved; more often there is a loose involvement of individuals at different stages through the rebirthing process. This makes it difficult for the police to accuse them of particular elements of the crime. People can be involved in spray-painting a vehicle, even though they know only too well that they are involved in a chain of rebirthing.

NSW Police has recommended to me, and I have accepted the recommendation, that we need to change the law. We will introduce legislation next session of Parliament to provide for a new offence, with a maximum penalty of up to 14 years imprisonment, if a person is involved at any stage in the chain of rebirthing a vehicle, that is, the theft of a vehicle, the theft of parts, tampering with identifying plates, attempting to register a vehicle, neat stripping or spray painting. Undertaking any element in that chain will cause a person to be charged with this new offence. It will send a very strong message to the community that we will not tolerate this sort of activity anymore.

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

### STAMP DUTY REVENUE PREDICTIONS

**Mr STEVEN PRINGLE:** My question without notice is addressed to the Treasurer. Given that the Real Estate Institute released data yesterday showing a 29 per cent collapse in property turnover, does the Treasurer stand by his budget predictions for stamp duty revenue or is his budget falling apart just two days after he delivered it?

**Dr ANDREW REFSHAUGE:** I do stand by the budget predictions because they are based on a number of factors: very good historical work by State Treasury and the Federal Treasury. The Federal Treasurer says the same and so does the Reserve Bank. I would back their judgment ahead of the honourable member for Hawkesbury's judgment.

## GROUND WATER STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT PACKAGE

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning, and Minister for Natural Resources. What is the latest information on water management issues in New South Wales?

**Mr CRAIG KNOWLES:** Since June last year we have been waiting for John Anderson to honour a commitment he gave to irrigators in this State to match the \$55 million we put on the table at the last Council of Australian Governments [COAG] meeting. Almost 12 months ago we went to Canberra, put \$55 million on the table with one condition only, that it be matched by the Commonwealth to help us make structural adjustments for groundwater irrigators in this State. The honourable member for Mount Druitt told me to be careful of John Anderson. He told me not to believe a word he said, that he would make all the promises under the sun. I did not believe the honourable member. I am sorry I did not because 12 months later we are still waiting for the cheque to arrive.

It is not unreasonable for us to condition our \$55 million on the Federal Government matching the amount. Why? Because John Anderson initiated the conversation. On 20 October 2003 at the Deputy Prime Minister's request we all trundled off to his electorate in the Namoi Valley and met at the kitchen table of Gae Swain, the mayor of Gunnedah. John Anderson called the meeting and we attended. He brought irrigators from around the region. We sat down at the table and had a terrific meeting. We left with an enormous hope that we could work co-operatively in ensuring that we address the problems of the irrigation community, which is now more akin to Country Labor than The Nationals.

The Nationals are losing faith with their communities because John Anderson is not fronting up with the money that they know he committed at the last COAG meeting almost a year ago. At that meeting, at his request, we all invested time, effort and money to build up a model that saw the Premier of New South Wales able to go to COAG, October through to June, and put \$55 million on the table. That money was supposed to be matched by the Federal Government. We are still waiting for it. It seems to me that the Deputy Prime Minister is good at calling meetings, big-noting, calling press conferences, and very little else.

A few weeks ago we were yet again summoned by the Deputy Prime Minister—who was Acting Prime Minister at the time because the Prime Minister was out of the country—to his Phillip Street offices. He brought irrigators from around the State, not just the Namoi Valley this time, and the head of the Irrigators Council. We all sat around the big boardroom table in Phillip Street. John Anderson said that he was very hopeful that when the National Water Commission—the body he and John Howard set up at the last Federal election—met to consider the request to match the \$55 million for the New South Wales proposal, it would give a big tick the following Wednesday. The "following Wednesday" was three Wednesdays ago.

We know through back channels and informal discussions between Canberra and Sydney that the National Water Commission has given that proposal the tick. There are no excuses left. All we are waiting for now is for John Anderson and John Howard to stick to the proposal and send the cheque. The Nationals are always asking us what we are doing for the drought-stricken farmers. Instead of talking to the farmers in Manly, as we discovered yesterday, the Leader of The Nationals should do what the honourable member for Lismore did. He should pick up the phone, call John Anderson and ask for the matching money. As the honourable member for Lachlan would know—because he represents an electorate that is going through the toughest times in the State—the Government has just waived, to the tune of \$4 million, at the request of the honourable member for Murray-Darling, the licence fees of irrigators in that area because they are on zero allocation.

Here is an opportunity for The Nationals to do something. They all know that their big boss in Canberra is sitting on a \$55 million cheque. What do we get from them? Absolutely nothing. The pattern is becoming monotonous. We go to Gunnedah for a meeting at Gae Swain's house—promises, promises. We go to Phillip Street for a statewide meeting—promises, promises. John Anderson said, "Next Wednesday, trust me, it will be fine. Tick, tick." We are still waiting. And now it is happening again. Next Tuesday we have all been summoned to Canberra, this time because the Deputy Prime Minister is really concerned about the problems with Goulburn water. He is bringing all the players together to make sure that we all do something about it. We are a little bit suspicious this time because his track record has not been very good thus far.

I know of many people who do not want to waste a day of their lives going down to Canberra just to read John Anderson's press release, watch him on the television that night in a press conference and then see him leave the work to us. This is very much a situation of in for a penny in for a pound. We will send an

advance notice to the meeting on Tuesday that if he wants to big-note himself and call the meeting, then he should match the money that we have already put in. Already we are spending \$700,000 in drought assistance for emergency water supply works, \$6.5 million in funding on the Sooley Dam upgrade and another \$5.4 million on Goulburn's sewerage schemes. That is a real commitment, money on the table. If John Anderson is fair dinkum, next Tuesday he will meet us at the door of Parliament House with a chequebook open ready to go. You can be in this game if you write the cheque.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The honourable member for Murrumbidgee will come to order.

**Mr CRAIG KNOWLES:** The Nationals who have groundwater irrigators in their electorate will soon have to explain to them why John Anderson has withheld \$55 million during the worst drought in this State for more than 100 years. The Nationals are the party of the farmers and the irrigators. Yet their leader John Anderson makes all the promises in the world to them and delivers absolutely nothing. John Anderson does not live in Manly. The Leader of The Nationals should pick up the phone, give him a bell and make sure he delivers the cheque.

**Mr Andrew Stoner:** Point of order: My point of order is relevance. The Minister for Natural Resources talks about promises to country people. He was up in the Pilliga, promised them everything and then he sold them out. He sold out the people in the Pilliga, the timber industry and the entire community. He should go to Gunnedah and explain that to them.

#### NORTH COAST INFRASTRUCTURE CAPITAL WORKS BUDGET

**Mr ROBERT OAKESHOTT:** My question is directed to the Premier. From this year's budget can he confirm for the benefit of the House the expenditure on infrastructure capital works for the North Coast region, combining the electorates of Myall Lakes, Port Macquarie, Oxley, Coffs Harbour, Clarence, Lismore, Ballina and Tweed? Also, can he confirm this as a percentage of overall infrastructure expenditure in New South Wales?

**Mr BOB CARR:** Yes, I can! Always at your fingertips! I thank the honourable member for his question because Port Macquarie would have no stronger advocate for improved infrastructure than the honourable member. The mid-North Coast was—I hate to use clichés—a big winner in this year's budget with an infrastructure windfall of \$628 million. The headline in the Port Macquarie *News* say it all, "Purse opened" and in the Coffs Harbour *Advocate*, "Budget for the future"—that feisty independent media of the region getting it right once again. Why would they not say that? Port Macquarie has scored no less than \$85 million, including \$6 million for radiotherapy services that I know the honourable member worked hard for; \$1.35 billion for the Port Macquarie Ambulance Station.

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

**Mr BOB CARR:** He can smell carbohydrates somewhere. He's off to get a bit of sour dough bread or something because he is a bit peckish. There is \$12 million for major road projects on the Pacific Highway, including the Coopernook deviation, and new bridges over the Lansdowne River, and \$415,000 to plan for the Oxley Highway upgrades. Do not forget the money we put in to buy back the hospital after the botched privatisation! That is the mob that thinks it can run infrastructure; they could not build a hospital in Port Macquarie without paying for it, in the words of the Auditor-General, three times over. I might add that the honourable member for Port Macquarie, a strong supporter of surf lifesaving, would welcome the fact that Surf Life Saving New South Wales has won an \$8 million capital works boost from this year's budget.

I have mentioned Port Macquarie, but there are other seats on the mid-North Coast and I should deal with the position of the seat represented by Prince Mishkin. I come now to the electorate of Oxley. Oxley will get \$37 million, including \$6 million for Pacific Highway projects, \$100,000 for court upgrades, \$575,000 for the South West Rocks Community Health Centre and \$310,000 for a new fire engine. All this activity drove the Leader of The Nationals not only out of the electorate but out of the State. I read in the Tweed *Sun* about him he and Jenny Gardiner, and there was a picture of them visiting the region to campaign, but they overshot the mark and ended up in Coolangatta. They are pictured in Coolangatta campaigning for the next election. Naturally, the Tweed *Sun* asked a question about why they do not have any policies, only criticisms. He was just trying to get his mind in order and was bound to take the statutory seven minutes, so Jenny Gardiner leapt in and said, "Oh, it's simple, we don't want to wear anyone out before going to the polls."

Isn't that helpful? Why did she take him on any trips? "We don't want to wear anyone out." What she means is, "least of all ourselves before going to the polls." It would have been simpler to ring up a pizza store and try to do a bit of research on whether any female detainees were having a nosh up. That is easier. Do not develop any policies because it might wear you out! We have been waiting for 10 years to see all the pent-up energy but it never spills out. Coffs Harbour cannot complain. Indeed, knowing this was coming, the local member has fled the Chamber. Coffs Harbour got \$1.5 million for a 20-bed mental health unit, \$50,000 for videoconferencing in courts, a continuation of our \$7 million radiotherapy expansion and \$6 million for local roads. The honourable member will not even attend the Chamber to criticise the Government. In the Clarence there is \$6.1 million for the New Italy to Woodburn Pacific Highway upgrades and \$800,000 for new workshops and classrooms at Grafton TAFE. I am not sure whether there is anything for boxing.

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

**Mr BOB CARR:** I will endeavour to check that out, but helmets ought to be issued to anyone partaking in that manly pursuit. In the electorate of my good friend the honourable member for Lismore—and he is embarrassed; he has fled the Chamber as well.

He might be ordering a pizza, yes! Lismore got \$2 million for a child and adolescent health unit, \$1.6 million for Lismore police Station, \$50,000 for videoconferencing in courts and \$10.4 million for the Richmond Clinic at Lismore Base Hospital. By the way, it was well covered in the *Northern Star*, the Lismore-based newspaper, which said, "Land tax cuts to benefit 400,000". That is how the newspaper announced that to the electorate of Lismore. As I said, the honourable member does not want to hang around when criticism of the Government may be voiced. He is delighted with the way the region was treated. One is driven to the conclusion that the mid-North Coast is always looked after by Labor governments and Labor budgets.

**Mr Donald Page:** Point of order: My point of order is that if the Premier has done so much for the North Coast, why doesn't he honour his promise on the Alstonville Bypass, to complete it by 2006? The budget shows it has blown out to 2008. Why don't you build the Ballina Bypass, and why don't you put our train back on from Casino to Murwillumbah?

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The honourable member for Ballina will resume his seat. The Premier has the call.

**Mr BOB CARR:** I think he is a candidate for the leadership over there. That is the only conclusion one can draw from that quite uncharacteristic burst of energy. Labor has always looked after the mid-North Coast and this year's budget is, of course, no exception but rather a ringing confirmation—purse open, budget for the future, \$628 million being poured into infrastructure in the region. It is appropriate that of all the honourable members that have been referred to, the honourable member for Port Macquarie asked me about this. His hard work in the electorate, of course, scored him an 83 per cent vote in the last State election. What a standing rebuke that is to The Nationals in New South Wales, that it cannot win these seats—as was the result that I tabled on Tuesday in the electorate of Dubbo. Remember that traditional National Party people such as Gerry Peacocke held that seat with a firm grip. It is a natural conservative seat, but, faced with a challenge in November The Nationals could not prevent our hard-working local from snatching it off them. That is a terrible rebuke.

**Mr Craig Knowles:** That is what a leader of The Nationals does.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The Minister for Infrastructure and Planning, and Minister for Natural Resources will come to order.

**Mr BOB CARR:** I thank the Minister for that observation. None of us bears ill will to the honourable member for Lachlan, who made a creditable Leader of The Nationals in this place until he was rudely dispatched by the honourable member for Upper Hunter, who, in his turn, was rudely dispatched by Prince Mishkin. I thank the honourable member for his well-crafted and very timely question.

#### SPORT AND RECREATION BUDGET

**Mr NEVILLE NEWELL:** My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Tourism and Sport and Recreation. What is the latest information on government investment in and support for sport and recreation in New South Wales?



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

**Ms SANDRA NORI:** The budget delivered very well to the Sport and Recreation portfolio. Of particular interest to the honourable member and of great significance to the State is the announcement of \$8 million to Surf Life Saving New South Wales. The funding, which will be allocated in a tranche of \$2 million a year over the next four years, is additional to the \$1.7 million allocation provided to surf life saving annually. Given the total aggregate funding, by 2009 the Government will have provided \$27.3 million to surf life saving.

The funding will be used to make the work of our 45,000 surf life saving volunteers more effective. The Government will set up a committee to work with Surf Life Saving to ensure that the allocation, which is for capital works only, is used as effectively as possible. The Government will also compile a priority list of capital works. The funding will be used for capital works such as the establishment of ambulance access for surf life saving clubs that do not already have such access, secure storage areas, and training rooms so that surf life savers and members of the community can learn CPR and so on. I look forward to the roll-out of this important initiative.

**Questions without notice concluded.**

### **SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT**

**Motion by Mr Carl Scully agreed to:**

That the House at its rising this day do adjourn until Friday 27 May 2005 at 10.00 a.m.

### **CONSIDERATION OF URGENT MOTIONS**

#### **Drought Assistance**

**Mr PETER BLACK** (Murray-Darling) [3.41 p.m.]: My motion is urgent because as recently as 14 April, at a meeting of all State Ministers for Primary Industries at Darwin in the Northern Territory, Warren Truss, representing the Commonwealth Government, stated that he did not want to discuss the present drought, he only wanted to discuss the next drought. Following that meeting, meetings were held in the bush with various farming groups. One such meeting was held at Nyngan. Mal Peters, the President of our great New South Wales Farmers, informed me that he has never seen so many farmers expressing their anger about Federal exceptional circumstances assistance. He also informed me that he has never seen so many angry farmers wanting John Cobb's head on a plate. I will return to be subject of John Cobb.

Following those meetings in the bush, a summit was held in Parkes that was attended by 1,000 people. The summit was held in Parkes mainly because the great Mayor of Parkes, Robert Wilson, who has held the position of mayor for about 19 years, had put forward at a meeting held in Dubbo a very good case for farmers in the Parkes-Tullamore district who had lost three crops. I might add that since that time those farmers have also lost their canola crop. The summit led to the Prime Minister's urgent visit to West Wyalong and Wentworth. I had intended visiting Wentworth last Friday in any event. Indeed, I had notified the people of the area, by way of advertisement, that I would be in Wentworth on that day. During my visit, expectations were building that an announcement would be made, after a Cabinet meeting to be held on Monday 23 May, about changes to Federal exceptional circumstances assistance. However, as at the commencement of question time today no such announcement has been made by the Commonwealth Government.

My motion is urgent because we want to get assistance for drought-stricken farmers. We have said that we will extend all State drought assistance measures. I want that to be clearly understood. We will extend all our drought assistance measures, notwithstanding the absolute nonsense from members opposite, who claim that we will abolish stock-to-slaughter transport subsidies. On Tuesday this week members heard the Treasurer say it is an open chequebook. We are extending our subsidies to drought-stricken communities and families, and we are doing that with an open chequebook. We have this incredible hype from the Commonwealth Government that it will provide exceptional circumstances assistance, including income support. The Cabinet meeting was held last Monday, but as at today we have heard absolutely nothing from the Commonwealth Government.

The Minister for Infrastructure and Planning, and Minister for Natural Resources has reminded me about John Anderson. John Anderson did not attend the meeting in Wentworth. He demonstrated once again that the title he earned in Bourke, Been-and-gone John, is more than appropriate. He was not at the meeting in

Wentworth. He did not want to be confronted by drought-stricken families who have been hit badly. As I said, the summit at Parkes last Tuesday week, which was convened by New South Wales Farmers, was attended by 1,000 people, who expressed outrage about the lack of support they are receiving from people like John Cobb and John Anderson. I presume The Nationals will debate exceptional circumstances assistance this afternoon. My motion is of fundamental urgency because now is the time for the Commonwealth to fix its income support measures and look at providing real assistance to communities and families drastically affected by the drought.

### State Budget

**Ms PETA SEATON** (Southern Highlands) [3.46 p.m.]: My motion is urgent because the New South Wales budget is only two days old and it is already dead in the water. It is urgent because at least four times this week the Treasurer has shown that he does not understand the fundamentals of the State's finances or the State's economy. It is important that the House debates this issue today because a very dangerous situation is developing in New South Wales with Dr No Idea at the controls. We have precarious revenues threatened by high taxes and a debt binge for catch-up capital works. We also have a \$40.6 billion budget in the hands of an avowed leftie socialist who is blundering day after day. Bungle No. 1: The Treasurer's budget simply does not stack up—and now we know why.

This week the Treasurer told Alan Jones on 2GB that the New South Wales economy "grew at about 7 per cent last year—that's a very big growth." Wrong! New South Wales gross State product [GSP], the value of total State output, is stagnant at 2 per cent, and has been for two years. The budget papers show that the GSP outcome in 2003-04 was 2 per cent, as it was in 2004-05. In fact, the 2 per cent outcome for the last budget year has fallen against the Government's own forecast for 2004-05, which was 3.25 per cent. But what is a 5 per cent blunder between friends? Only \$13.5 billion! That is the sum of the Health budget and most of the Police budget. Someone needs to explain to the Treasurer the difference between the New South Wales economy and the New South Wales budget.

The Treasurer did not stop at his 7 per cent blunder. Bungle No. 2: On 11 April 2005 the Treasurer went into print claiming credit for running the "\$38 billion NSW economy". Perhaps he knows more about the truth of the perilous budget situation than he is prepared to tell us! How does Labor run a \$38 billion economy? It starts with a \$270 billion economy, then adds vendor tax and land tax, then hikes insurance taxes, then removes the cap on mortgage refinance, and it ends up with a much smaller economy! Someone should quietly take the Treasurer aside and tell him the difference between the New South Wales economy and the New South Wales budget.

But that is not the end of the Treasurer's blunders. It is urgent that we look at bungle No. 3. Today the Treasurer spoke about his advance. He claimed that the Treasurer's Advance is the answer to all his unfunded wage problems. According to the budget papers, the Treasurer's Advance is \$175 million. A 1 per cent increase in public sector wages will consume the Treasurer's Advance in one fell swoop. He will need the Treasurer's Advances from South Australia, Western Australia, Queensland, New South Wales, and every other State and Territory to fund his unbudgeted wage increases.

It is urgent we debate this motion today because bungle No. 4 is the Treasurer's performance yesterday when he was asked why he had rejected the Premier's call for the HIH recommendations to be implemented without delay, including recommendation 55, which says State and local governments ought to abolish stamp duty on general insurance products. The HIH commissioner said that tax on insurance will cause people to drop out of insurance. People simply will not be able to afford to buy insurance policies so when they suffer bushfires or natural disasters in places like Monaro they will not be able to afford to be covered by insurance. The Treasurer said that he had answered that question yesterday. Wrong! He did no such thing, and that is because he simply does not know the answer. It is urgent that we look at bungle No. 5. The Treasurer's desperation for cash to cover the looming disaster in his budget has made him overturn his predecessor's promise in the April mini-budget. Michael Egan said:

We are determined not to reverse or claw back the billion dollars per year we previously cut from insurance stamp duty.

Wrong again! This Treasurer has hiked the tax. I never thought I would say this, "Come back, Michael Egan!" We did not think it could get worse. Bungle No. 6: The Treasurer said yesterday that house prices in New South Wales are more affordable. Wrong! The Real Estate Institute announced yesterday that the median house price in Sydney is \$511,000. Bungle No. 7: The Treasurer said yesterday that vendor duty makes no difference to the flattening of our economy. Wrong! The Treasurer should look at the Access Economics report which shows that if we abolish vendor tax today we would claw back between \$140 million and \$280 million in revenues that are

otherwise forgone because of a flattening of economic activity as a result of the vendor tax. It is urgent we debate this motion today.

**Question—That the motion for urgent consideration of the honourable member for Murray-Darling be proceeded with—agreed to.**

## **DROUGHT ASSISTANCE**

### **Urgent Motion**

**Mr PETER BLACK** (Murray-Darling) [3.51 p.m.]: I move:

That this House notes the State Government's ongoing support for drought-affected farmers.

There is no doubt that western communities in our great State are tough and resilient. They stand up even in these very bad times. I mentioned earlier the subject of John Cobb—and he really is a subject—the Federal member for Parkes. In the Federal Parliament today the Hon. Kelvin Thomson, the shadow Minister for Regional Development and Roads, reported a speech given by the member for Parkes. The House should remember that in a time of drought John Cobb said:

In some parts of my electorate there is no leadership. Broken Hill has no leadership in its council and a negative mentality in all 20,000 people who have a handout mentality. The mines have always been there to provide them with parks, to provide them with swimming pools. Now when they want something they come to us.

What an incredible attitude from a man who should be standing up for communities and families affected by a drought! It is a slight on the people of Broken Hill. Incidentally, I might well agree with him on the subject of the city council, but his remarks are a slight on the community of Broken Hill that it should not have to endure. I notice that the honourable member for Murrumbidgee is not in the Chamber. The Opposition normally chuck him into debates of this sort, but he is not here because he is not standing up for drought-affected communities either. He is not going to go to John Anderson and tell him what to do. I notice that the great intending member for Manly is here. I think twice in this House he has said he is going to stand for Manly. He would not hesitate to go to John Anderson; he would not hesitate to tell Warren Truss what he should be thinking. But we have not got the honourable member for Murrumbidgee. I am led to believe that there is a consensus emerging in this place that he has a glass jaw and cannot take criticism. Perhaps that is the reason why he is not here at the present time. He calls himself a ruosexual.

**Mr Andrew Stoner:** Point of order: The point is in relation to relevance. The motion of the honourable member for Murray-Darling concerns the State Government's measures for drought-affected farmers. The member has not said one word about the State Government's assistance for drought-affected farmers. He might care to explain why there is only \$16 million in this budget and why there are no new drought support measures for farmers whatsoever.

**Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills):** Order! There is no point of order.

**Mr PETER BLACK:** I compare the Treasurer with the current leader of the once great Country Party that used to be the National Party and is now the notional party. Look at the difference between the two of them! The Treasurer stood here on Tuesday and said there was an open chequebook. We will provide our drought measures as long as it takes. We have essentially informed New South Wales farmers that that amount of money is an initial amount of money we have put in. I suggest that the leader of the notional party go and have a look at the correspondence that has been sent to NSW Farmers about this matter. It points out that the funding we are giving them is open-ended.

I return to the fact that the honourable member for Murrumbidgee, who calls himself a ruosexual, whatever that may be, is not here. What a disgrace it was last night! He has been chucked out of here for his bad manners, but now he is unAustralian. Fancy calling a division when New South Wales was scoring two tries! The honourable member for Lachlan would never do that, because we like our football; we appreciate our football. I have got to scratch my head as to what the hell the Prime Minister is up to lifting up all the expectations in Wentworth. I was in Wentworth last Friday morning, as I informed the House a few moments ago. Wentworth is a great portion of that great seat of Murray-Darling. I do not want to upset the honourable member for Lachlan but I think Murray-Darling is a great seat, and he has said so on our local ABC. He has recognised that.

[*Interruption*]

Yes, I am supporting him for Manly. You have got a good farmer there who I am led to believe raises fairy penguins. Last Friday I went to West Wyalong initially, but the Prime Minister went to Wentworth fact-finding on what the drought was all about. He visited Bunnerungie, which is 70 kilometres north of Wentworth and, incidentally, a long way south of the worst-affected areas in the west Darling, as the honourable member for Lachlan would well know. There is a great newspaper distributed in the Wentworth shire called the *Sunraysia Daily*, which is printed in Mildura. There is a great reporter down there by the name of Peter Lamb and I think the honourable member for Lachlan would recall him with clarity. He nods his head. This is how the newspaper article reads:

Australian Prime Minister John Howard visited South West New South Wales to get a taste of the country ... and he did, quite literally.

After touching down in Mildura at 5.36pm on Thursday—

And, I might add, in a huge RAAF jet. The intention was he should go to either Ivanhoe or Balranald, but my friends from The Nationals—and I have a few—inform me that the jet was too big or the runways were too short at both those places.

**Mr Ian Armstrong:** What are you doing about it?

**Mr PETER BLACK:** Hang on! I do not want the Prime Minister out there too often! The article reads:

Mr Howard and his entourage travelled directly to the Wentworth Grande Resort in Darling Street where much of the visiting media scrum were also staying overnight.

Member for Farrar Sussan Ley was among a small group to join Mr Howard on his 30-minute walk along the Silver City Highway before returning to the Grande Resort for a breakfast of cereal, toast and Curlwaa Fresh orange juice.

The media contingent headed towards Bunnerungie, about 70 kilometres north of Wentworth, for the property of Phil and Chris Larwood where Mr Howard was to get a first-hand look at life on the land in south west New South Wales.

By the time the last of the media vehicles arrived on the property, the 4WD transporting the PM was also at the farm gate and the media pack closed in—

I understand that the owners of the property referred to the media pack as a plague of locusts—

Mr Howard was introduced to the Larwoods and son Greg and attempted to get a closer look at some nearby sheep feeding on the lines of grain that had been left for them—

This is called a flock—

The plan, as much for media cameramen than to check the condition of the animals, was never going to work.

As the PM and the Larwoods walked towards the sheep, the media ran ahead and the sheep bolted.

Eventually the media got the gist and patiently waited as the trio walked alone, and the cameramen nodded their appreciation of the images before them.

They then visited a neighbour, then children at Wentworth Public School, and finally got to the airport at Mildura. The article continued:

The media clambered about for their "grabs" of the PM and locals chatting, double checking the spelling of names and struggling to come to terms with the titles of farming properties such as "Glen-Esk", "Coleraine" and "Nindethana".

With a flight out of Mildura pre-booked and more than an hour's drive back to the Mildura Airport, the national contingent of media left on a hired bus together in a cloud of dust, leaving the Prime Minister, a few local media and some farmers at the homestead.

The Prime Minister flew out of Mildura, after allowing the media to ask a few questions. I put to this House that what we are doing for the drought is a lot more than what the Prime Minister is doing. He must come up with some decent answers. [*Time expired.*]

**Mr IAN ARMSTRONG** (Lachlan) [4.01 p.m.]: I found it difficult to refrain from interjecting when the honourable member for Murray-Darling gave his rather turgid diatribe. Unfortunately, it did little to redress the problems that people affected by the drought are experiencing. Therefore, I move the following amendment:

That the motion be amended by leaving out all words after "Government's" with a view to inserting instead "lack of ongoing support for drought-affected farmers and businesses."

In speaking to the amendment, I point out that only 48 hours ago the New South Wales Government, not the Federal Government, cut the capital expenditure budget of the Department of Primary Industries by 50 per cent. It is a major blow to New South Wales farmers that the New South Wales Government has only allocated \$16.2 million in ongoing grant assistance for the coming year while the Federal Government has committed more than \$300 million since 2002. The Labor Party has failed to reinstate a budget cut to the Department of Primary Industries, announced in last year's mini-budget, of \$149 million over three years.

After selling off various parts of the merged authorities responsible for agriculture, fisheries, forestry and mineral resources, more than \$10.5 million has been slashed from the budget of the Department of Primary Industries, a department responsible for providing vital front-line services to our primary producers. In addition, the Carr Government has cut—and it has done it now, of all times—the number of staff within the Rural Assistance Authority. It has cut funding for the Country Towns Water And Sewerage Supply Program to \$32.2 million. Under this Government the time lag for that program is now more than 13 years.

I now turn to those affected by the drought. The drought is affecting intensive industries such as the chicken industry, egg layers, the pig industry, the feedlot industry and those who rely on supplies from agriculture. I refer to the meat industry—lamb, beef, and beef sellers—the restaurant trade and the race horing industry. It is a great employer that contributes more than \$100 million a year to the New South Wales economy because of the fodder it uses. The drought affects all of the service people who participate in the harvesting, processing, distribution and financing of products from agriculture. It affects itinerant workers and shearing contractors. Roger Fletcher, the proprietor of Dubbo abattoir, one of the most respected figures in this nation, and probably in the world, claims that our national flock numbers have dropped from 180 million to under 70 million in the past eight years. I would not dispute that figure for one minute.

The ratio of meat sheep to wool sheep has reversed. Traditionally, the ratio has been 60 per cent wool sheep and 40 per cent meat sheep. That ratio has now switched because of the sale of meat-sheep rams. We now have 60 per cent meat flock and 40 per cent wool. Where will our future breeders for the meat industry come? Today the hardest thing to buy in the west of the State is merino ewe joined to merino ram. That is the foundation of our meat sheep and wool industries. The dynamics of agriculture are changing dramatically and the drought is accelerating that change at a frightening pace. Chemical contractors, who spray the crops, mulesing contractors and shearing contractors must now leave country towns to earn an income. When families leave town the numbers in local schools are affected and, as demonstrated recently in Trundle, the ratio of teachers in schools is also affected. The changes trickle down to police numbers as the population dynamics change in country towns. History has demonstrated, particularly after the 1981-82 drought, that it takes a long time for those populations to return to country towns and for things to return to normal.

I turn now to a factor that has been ignored by the Government, that is, mounting secondary debt. The banks and hire purchase companies, which last year and the previous year financed record sales contractors across Australia, are aware of that debt, but the vendor money remaining from the original owners when farms have been sold is unknown. We do not know the debt from private money organised by solicitors and accountants between vendors and purchasers. It is a hidden debt.

**Mr Peter Black:** The shops carry them.

**Mr IAN ARMSTRONG:** I have been reliably informed that in many cases secondary debt involves significant loans on 50 per cent equity. We do not know the number of people in major difficulty. We know about bank and credit company debt. I take the point of the honourable member for Murray-Darling that the shops carry that debt. The Combined Rural Traders Association, for whom I have enormous respect because it is one of the best retailer associations in this nation today, has told me that a number of its shopkeepers fall into that category. They probably have the best part of \$1 million worth of fertiliser, seed sprays and points for combines and sowing machinery. They are waiting for the rain because farmers will then expect to have those products delivered instantly.

If it does not rain in the next month, most of the people carrying up to \$1 million worth of stock will have to wait until this time next year to sell it. Those same people may well have \$500,000 or even \$750,000 of mounting bad debt, that is, debt that has not been paid for 90 days. It is tough for a shopkeeper to ring a farmer whom he knows very well and who is a reliable client to say, "Look, I am in trouble. You owe me X amount of dollars. It is now 90 days overdue. Can you let me have some payment?" The farmer then breaks down on the

phone. Retailers whom I know well have asked me, "What do you do when a farmer is breaking down on the phone because he cannot pay?" Where does that leave them with their banks?

The Government is trumpeting the announcement in Parkes last week. Incidentally, about 1,500 people attended Parkes from all over the State. Why was there only one announcement, that is, the \$4 million wiping this year of the charges for water in the Lachlan River? Those who lobbied for that concession for many years appreciate that announcement. On 23 March Dennis Moxey and Mary Ewing from the Lachlan Catchment Management Authority and I visited the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning, Craig Knowles. I agree that the honourable member for Murray-Darling has also lobbied him. The wonderful member for Murrumbidgee has lobbied hard for it as well.

To put it simply, that was the only financial commitment made. The rhetoric was that the Government will continue with its existing assistance programs for farmers. Let me make it clear: Not one farmer in inland New South Wales thinks the State Government has done anything like address the severity of the drought and its effect on him, his family, his community, or indeed the industry. Farmers do not know what assistance the Government has given them because it is so small. The Government has not implemented a crop replanting scheme. We had such a scheme in 1994; it cost \$16 million and gave enormous relief to farmers because it assisted with fuel and seed, et cetera, to plant crops. There has been no assistance for small businesses in Trundle, Tullamore, Wilcannia, Forbes, Orange and so forth. The cash registers of shopkeepers in those towns are full of dust this afternoon.

Yet this Government is too darn mean and insensitive. Indeed, it does not understand the effects of a drought. It has a responsibility to assist the whole community. If the Government were serious about representing country New South Wales it would talk to the people who matter. It would understand the character of the drought and it would open its cheque book wide to assist the broader community. It would tell farmers, "We will help you pay for your seed, superphosphate, fertiliser, and tractor fuel to get your crop in." The Government would also assist shopkeepers to keep their doors open, to employ apprentices, and to keep kids in jobs and teachers in schools.

Next, it would assist businesses to supply their products to customers—butchers, bakers, chicken producers, cattle producers and the export industry—because that is where the real pain of this drought is being felt. The pain is being felt everywhere; it is not isolated to the narrow areas being addressed by the Government. The Government is condemned because of its failure to understand the ramifications of the worst drought in our history. [*Time expired.*]

**Mr STEVE WHAN** (Monaro) [4.11 p.m.]: This motion is important. I am pleased that the Opposition put up its only credible spokesperson on this issue. What a pity his seat is being abolished at the next election! I note that the honourable member for Lachlan spoke before the Leader of The Nationals in this debate. The motion is important because the drought is ongoing. I had the experience of attending the Drought Summit—albeit for a much shorter time than I wanted to—and hearing what the farmers had to say. At the outset it is important to highlight that the Leader of The Nationals continues to repeat a lie about what is in the budget. Today he again said that the budget provided only \$16.2 million. In his speech and in the budget papers, the Treasurer made it clear that additional drought assistance funding would be provided, depending on the course of the drought. He made it clear that the bucket would be kept full for as long as necessary and for as long as the drought continues.

**Mr Ian Armstrong:** Point of order: The motion is clear. It is about the drought, not about the 2005 budget. I ask the honourable member for Monaro to at least have the courtesy and decency to address the drought, instead of trying to argue for the budget in a political fashion.

**Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills):** Order! The honourable member for Monaro is entitled to rebut the remarks made by the honourable member for Lachlan.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** It always amazes me that members opposite are keen to stop me from speaking. They are so disorganised they cannot decide which party will stand candidates against me at the next election. I note that recently members opposite have been trying to recruit Peter Cochran back into the fold, which is a sign of desperation.

**Mr Ian Armstrong:** Point of order: The honourable member for Monaro still does not understand. The debate is about the drought, not about his future as a politician. Talk about the drought!

**Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills):** Order! There is no point of order.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** This debate about the drought is important. The honourable member for Lachlan referred to his colleague the honourable member for Murrumbidgee, who recently moved a motion about the drought and spent 10 minutes talking about everything but the drought. The Government has introduced a number of important measures to help people in the bush. Many measures were announced at the Drought Summit, such as waiving the Lachlan Valley fees for irrigators, reinstating the transport subsidy for livestock to slaughter, and the continuation of drought support workers.

**Mr Ian Armstrong:** Point of order: I am reluctant to draw attention to this, but it is 4.15 p.m., time for private members' statements.

**Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills):** Order! The Chair is responsible for the conduct of the business of the House, not the honourable member for Lachlan.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** It is not quite 4.15 p.m. but the honourable member for Lachlan is determined that I should not highlight the Government's important drought measures, such as extending the criteria for the Drought Household Relief Program to areas which the Federal Government has failed to roll over for exceptional circumstances. The Leader of The Nationals is in disarray. This week the *Sydney Morning Herald* made fun of his ridiculous comments on matters such as daylight saving. The Nationals are in chaos. The Opposition is in chaos. The Leader of The Nationals cannot make an adequate contribution to this debate on the drought. That is why he has not spoken in it.

**Ms Katrina Hodgkinson:** Point of order: The honourable member for Monaro failed to mention the Goulburn pipeline and the lack of funding.

**Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills):** Order! There is no point of order.

**Pursuant to sessional orders business interrupted and motion lapsed.**

#### **PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS**

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#### **BEGA VALLEY SHIRE COUNCILLORS PECUNIARY INTERESTS**

**Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE** (Bega) [4.15 p.m.]: This afternoon I raise a pecuniary interest matter that is of public concern and has been extensively reported on in recent weeks in Bega. The matter involves a joint pecuniary interest of Mayor David Hede and Deputy Mayor Bill Taylor of Bega Valley shire and the purchase of the Bank Hotel in Church Street, Bega. I make it clear that because of information provided to me as a result of the actions of these councillors, I am required—in fact, I am duty bound—to have the matter referred to relevant State authorities, including the Director-General of the Department of Local Government, who may then refer it to the Local Government Pecuniary Interest and Disciplinary Tribunal. The Bank Hotel, which is in the heart of Bega's business precinct, was purchased on 5 November 2004, three months before the release of the shire's commercial strategy for public comment. I must indicate that the councillors lodged a voluntary supplementary pecuniary interest declaration, albeit five months after the purchase of the hotel.

The concern raised with me is that the mayor and the deputy mayor should set an example for all councillors, and that in council documentation the Church Street site is being considered for a large-scale retail development. On 2 February 2005 the shire released the draft commercial strategy for public comment, in which a map of Bega's commercial precinct shows that the Church Street site, which the hotel adjoins, is earmarked as a possible redevelopment site for large floor space retail. In a statement to ABC radio two weeks ago the mayor said that the information in the draft plan was made available to the public before he and councillor Taylor purchased the hotel. He said:

I was unaware of the information contained in the commercial strategy until it came to Council in late January or early February. A lot of that information I understand was made available, although at an August public meeting.

I was provided with a copy of the presentation to the community at the August public meeting. Titled "Towards a Commercial Land Strategy", this council document also has a map. In this case the Church Street site is earmarked with the aim of conserving a heritage-based streetscape. There is no suggestion whatsoever of the

Church Street site being considered for large-space retail. It has been put to me that the mayor needs to explain why these maps changed over a five-month period, given the purchase of the property in November and his statement on ABC Radio in relation to his "contribution" to the council's commercial strategy. I find it remarkable that the mayor was "unaware" of what is in these documents, given that he purchased a property in the middle of the affected area. It lacks credibility for him to plead ignorance on ABC radio and say he has no idea of what was going on either in the immediate vicinity of his property or what the council is releasing for public comment.

I have also been given information that a meeting took place late in the morning of 9 February between the mayor, the general manager, and the director of planning of the shire, a Merimbula developer, and two major retail outlet representatives to discuss large-scale retail development in Bega. The mayor should not have attended that meeting, and the full minutes of it should be disclosed. I have been advised also that the developer in attendance at the meeting had approached the deputy mayor at the Bank Hotel in relation to development. Deputy Mayor Taylor has advised me that he avoided discussion about the site due to the potential conflict of interest. However, my concern is why this developer was at the site and why he knew about its owners well in advance of the community, other developers, councillors and council staff? That is something that Mayor Hede is accountable for.

It has been put to me that Mayor Hede also needs to account for his statement on ABC radio and the council record that he had not met with developers, when this was not the case. This information was provided to me by two separate sources. The mayor and deputy mayor, because of this joint purchase, have drawn criticism for their inability to undertake the duties of office. Some councillors expressed concern directly to me about this purchase, and one has expressed his concern that at some point in the future he will be expected to vote on a development application associated with a large-scale retail development in the shire and will be compromised as a result of the investment of the mayor and the deputy-mayor.

The point has been made to me by a number of people in Bega that this purchase will result in the mayor and the deputy mayor not being able to participate in council debate, discussion, or voting on large-scale retail development in the shire. It has been pointed out to me also that their duties and responsibilities have been compromised by this purchase. The shire needs to move ahead with development for the sake of local jobs. We can ill afford for this to be compromised as a result of the actions of the mayor and the deputy-mayor. On the face of it, their investment might seem straightforward, but it is complex and raises serious ethical issues.

#### **STRATHFIELD ONE-STOP-SHOP CHILD CARE SERVICE PREMISES EXPANSION**

**Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE** (Strathfield) [4.20 p.m.]: Today I inform the House that on Wednesday 16 March 2005 I had the privilege of attending the opening of an extension to the state-of-the-art childcare centre at Fraser Street, Homebush West, within my electorate of Strathfield. This was formerly a bowling club. I recall that when I was on Strathfield council it was only through the tremendous efforts of mums and dads, who asked me to fight to ensure that that facility remains within the community, that we stopped the council, which was on the verge of leasing out this community facility to a commercial enterprise. This was another huge win for people power.

Strathfield One-Stop-Shop Child Care Service [SOCCS] has expanded its premises to take in the former Strathfield family care site next door. This facility has provided a valuable and extremely dedicated service to many families throughout the local area. In fact, in more ways than one, SOCCS has become a household name in the Strathfield electorate. Staff and parents have worked hard and, cumulatively, have put in many thousands of hours of selfless service to create and maintain a safe and caring environment for the hundreds of children who have passed through its welcoming doors.

I have had a long association with SOCCS, and each year I am asked to chair its annual general meeting, which is a huge honour. I truly appreciate the hard work and efforts that have been made by the director, Amanda Goff, with the help of her family, president Suzie Laundry, other committee members, the fantastic and hardworking staff, and all the parents to achieve this magnificent state-of-the-art facility. As the House knows only too well, standards keep lifting and expectations become higher and higher. This process makes society a better place, but resources are necessary to make it happen. Amanda Goff and the parents' committee, particularly the president, Suzie Laundry, realised this and have put in place a train of events to ensure that SOCCS continues to be in a position to provide quality childcare services well into the future.

The first milestone was the establishment of formal standards for SOCCS and the attainment of accreditation for its operations from the Minister for Community Services in October 2004. The second



milestone was the acquisition of additional premises and their conversion to a state-of-the-art child care centre. The third milestone was that SOCCS is now licensed for 85 children as opposed to 60 children last year. This is a victory for working families requiring childcare in the seat of Strathfield. I am delighted that the Minister for Community Services approved the licence for additional places at SOCCS.

A family barbeque was held to celebrate the opening of the new SOCCS facilities. It was well attended by special guests, including the Regional Director of the Department of Community Services, Skevi Pananyi; the Director of SOCCS, Amanda Goff; staff members, and the parent committee, including president Suzie Laundry, vice-president Vicki Bellerio, social co-ordinator Shanthi Senathi, and secretary Cathy Tripolone.

Most importantly, about 30 families and 15 children were in attendance. This was really wonderful as the barbeque was planned as a welcome to the new families in the area. It was a fantastic evening and the rain did not arrive until after the barbeque was finished. Today the need for good quality child care services is more evident than ever in the seat of Strathfield, where many parents have a desperate need for childcare. I have represented the electorate of Strathfield for two years and this has given me a real understanding of the needs of families and, in particular, the support they require to help them cope with the pressures of day-to-day life.

Support must include providing an environment that is open and inclusive of families. It must recognise that there is a strong link between effective family support programs, such as child care, and the contribution the parents are able to make in the work force. If parents are to make the maximum contribution to their jobs, they must be confident that their children are being cared for in high-quality facilities that meet their specific requirements while they are at work. We are very fortunate that SOCCS is such an organisation and provides fully accredited child care services. There are more than 4,000 children aged four years and under in my electorate and many of their parents are seeking child care places for them. This places pressure not only on families but also on local services.

If the Federal Government is serious about supporting working families and ensuring equal opportunity for women in the workplace, the provision of affordable child care should be a priority. It is the role of the Federal Government to provide eligible families with a subsidy called the child care benefit to assist in reducing the cost of child care; to assist families use accredited services by implementing a national accreditation system for long day care, family day care and outside-school-hours care services; and to provide funding to some children's services to assist children with additional needs. It is the Federal Government's responsibility to fund places for children in the nought to two years age group. This is an area of great concern to me and many of my constituents.

The Federal Government falls way short of fulfilling these responsibilities to babies and their parents. It is not only those who live in the seat of Strathfield that know this, the Federal Government knows it as well but has done very little about it. Following a survey of child-care centres in my electorate, I understand the desperate need for child care, particularly for very young children, in my community. [*Time expired.*]

### **MANILDRA PRESCHOOL FIRE**

**Mr RUSSELL TURNER** (Orange) [4.25 p.m.]: Today I convey to the House the devastating news that on Sunday 15 May the Manildra Preschool and everything inside the building was totally destroyed by fire. The preschool had been in existence for 40-odd years and until last Sunday had operated out of a local church hall. The cause of the fire is not yet known but is suspected to be electrical, and there is no indication that it was anything other than an accident. The preschool has lost all its craft material, including paints, paper, textas, scissors and glue, as well as all its music equipment, including a piano and other instruments and music sheets. Indoor play equipment, puzzles, and items such as a fridge, a microwave, a computer, a digital camera, staff desks and chairs, and an extensive book library were also destroyed. One can understand how those associated with the preschool were devastated.

The staff of the preschool made urgent inquiries about how they might find alternative accommodation and how to get the preschool under way again, given that at the moment Manildra, like many other country towns, is going through a devastating drought. There is not a lot of money around as it is only a small community. The preschool has asked the Department of Community Services to look favourably upon a "special needs" request and provide the preschool with a one-off grant of \$20,000. I have spoken to the Minister and her staff and they are looking to see what they can do. Initially they thought they might be able to use an empty building at the primary school, but preschools have to meet certain conditions such as fencing, and so on, and these would prove difficult to comply with. The best option at this stage appears to be to use the scout hall.

For the preschool to re-establish, it has to work within the regulations. For example, it has to re-enrol the children because the enrolment forms have gone, get new permission notes to allow the children to walk from the scout hall to the public school, because the permission notes have gone, develop policy guidelines for the use of that building, and undertake a risk assessment. The Department of Community Services has indicated that it will look very favourably at the preschool expediently re-establishing on a temporary basis until some permanent arrangement can be worked out, whether permanently at the scout hall or somewhere else.

As I said, they need temporary fencing across the front of the scout hall, child safety catches on the front gate, fencing to restrict access to the rear of the hall, repairs to the kitchen and toilet, checking of electricity circuitry, inspection of structural soundness of the building, phone connections, heating, thorough cleaning of premises, painting of inside walls, storage equipment, internal floor coverings, new signage, and any other additional costs and contingencies associated with the relocation. Whilst it might appear overwhelming, the committee, under the guidance of President Christine Crisp, is adamant that the preschool will continue to operate and that the 16 children currently enrolled will be able to go to the preschool on a temporary basis.

The committee is confident it will be able to raise some funds within the community. It is important that the children have continuity of attendance at the preschool because many of the parents, both mothers and fathers, work at the mill. For many families the preschool is the only outlet where their children can be safely and adequately looked after. The coming school holidays will give temporary respite, but it is hoped that the preschool will be up and running prior to the end of the holidays. Although I have had a positive response from the Minister for Community Services, I again call on her department to give every assistance possible to Manildra Preschool. [*Time expired.*]

#### **C4 PROPOSAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

**Mr NEVILLE NEWELL** (Tweed—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.30 p.m.]: I draw to the attention of the House a proposal by Queensland Main Roads [QMR] to build a C4 route west of Coolangatta Airport utilising New South Wales land. In the past the road has been known as the Tugun bypass, but I will refer to it as the C4 proposal. The C4 proposal and the QMR environmental impact study [EIS] have a number of shortcomings. I wish to inform the House of the shortcomings in the EIS, as well as the actions of QMR, which amount to nothing short of despicable. It has completely thumbed its nose at New South Wales regulations.

The EIS on the C4 proposal was exhibited from December last year to March this year. Part of the EIS is an assessment of hydrology and soil types along the corridor. At present no licence has been issued by New South Wales for any drilling that would be required to undertake such an assessment. There are a number of statements in the EIS that relate to the hydrology and the acid sulphate soils that are to be found along that route. Some time last year a number of test bores were put in place. I inform the House that the location of one of the test bores is no longer shown on the EIS. I believe that is for good reason because that test bore has corroded away from the acid sulphate nature of the soil and the water. Consequently, because it does not suit QMR's purposes, that test bore is not shown on the EIS.

Just last week the QMR, in its haste to push this project through, completely overlooked and disregarded any conditions or requirements with regard to moving onto New South Wales land. The land is recognised as containing endangered habitat and ecosystem and has threatened flora and fauna species. In its haste and ignorance and pure disregard for New South Wales requirements, QMR proponents moved in and started clearing for test drills without New South Wales licences. In doing so, they were out of order and showed complete disregard for New South Wales requirements. This unauthorised entry was known to QMR.

When the people clearing the New South Wales land for the test bores were challenged about the licences Mr David Marks, a QMR principal test officer, geotechnical, said they did have test licences. Obviously QMR is acting under the direction of the Queensland Government and its Minister in this unholy alliance and showing complete disregard for New South Wales regulations. A meeting was held on the site yesterday to discuss the matter. I do not know whether QMR will show any contrition for what it has done. I suspect not, from what I have seen so far of its actions and its preparedness to act as a cowboy in this sorry episode. No doubt QMR will go through the proper processes and obtain the licences before any more work is undertaken.

However, concern has also been raised about the EIS, part of which obviously required an Aboriginal, cultural and historical study of the land. The EIS shortcomings in this regard have been pointed out to QMR. To obtain details of the Aboriginal history of the New South Wales land QMR simply gathered some information from Southport library. It ignored records that are available in New South Wales repositories—particularly in

the Tweed library, where many records are held on this subject—and inserted a cursory chapter into the EIS. If I had time I would refer to other shortcomings on this aspect.

As to its flora and fauna study, particularly of bird populations, the survey sites do not show any such findings along the New South Wales corridor. I point out that the New South Wales land is an area approved under the Ramsar Convention. I call upon the Queensland Government to be more thorough in its work in the future. [*Time expired.*]

### DEATH OF MRS LOLA WELCH

**Mr BARRY O'FARRELL** (Ku-ring-gai—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [4.35 p.m.]: I again want to raise matters relating to the death in June 2001 of Lola Welch, a 70-year-old St Ives resident. I do so following last week's decision to fine the builder responsible for the death \$85,000. At the outset I want to place on record my utter contempt for the fine imposed. The maximum penalty available was \$605,000, yet the presiding judge put the value of Mrs Welch's life at less than 15 per cent of that maximum. My main purpose is to pursue matters that are not only of great concern to Alan Welch and those who know the details of this case but also of concern generally because of their implications for others. I also pay tribute to Alan. No-one—certainly not someone who has lost a spouse in such horrendous circumstances—should have to endure what Mr Welch did in trying to get someone in Government to take seriously the matters involved in his wife's death.

Only through Mr Welch's efforts has any progress been made, although I acknowledge the support of his friends and the continuing interest in the case shown by the *North Shore Times*. On 5 May Alan Welch wrote to the Premier seeking a public inquiry into the circumstances that led to his wife's death, the clear breach of legislative and regulatory provisions, and the failure of appropriate bodies to act to enforce rules and, when breaches occurred, to take appropriate action. I want to briefly run through some of those matters. The development in question was outside the scope of the relevant planning instrument—the notorious State environmental planning policy 5. It only proceeded because the former Chief Justice of the Land and Environment Court found in favour of the developer.

During a site inspection the Chief Justice and her officials parked in a side street and walked to the development site on Mona Vale Road. When asked by a resident why they had not parked outside the development she is recorded to have replied, "The traffic is too heavy and it is too dangerous." It is a conclusion that regrettably was not incorporated in the court's decision on this development, yet it is at the centre of the circumstance leading to Lola Welch's death.

The main point is made clearly, yet tragically, that once again the Land and Environment Court's circumvention of local and State planning instruments has wreaked havoc on a community. Mr Welch is also concerned at the omission of Ku-ring-gai Council and, in particular, the claims by former mayor Councillor Laura Bennett to the effect that once approved by the Land and Environment Court the council had "no further involvement" in the development. But, of course, the council did have a role—an important role—to ensure that the conditions of consent were enforced.

The conditions were deficient in not requiring a traffic management plan for the period when spoil was being removed from the site, even though one was required at another stage of the development when the original houses were being demolished. Days before Lola Welch's death an adjacent resident telephoned the council and reported serious traffic issues from the site, but the council did nothing. Due to Mr Welch's efforts, improvements have now been made at Ku-ring-gai Council, but the wider public needs to know that similar changes have been effected across the State. Mr Welch also noted that despite repeated calls to police in the weeks leading up to Mrs Welch's death about major traffic issues relating to the site no response was ever forthcoming.

A subsequent report by police was proved to be inaccurate or false, and statements made by at least one officer seemed to deliberately try to make a case that only the most complex safety measures could have prevented Mrs Welch's death. What concerns Mr Welch and me is a belief that police simply regarded Mrs Welch's death as that of an old lady who had foolishly walked in front of a truck. They saw it as a distraction, not a serious matter to be investigated. If police had been more pro-active at the time, criminal charges could have been laid earlier. It would not have taken almost three years. Mr Welch can recount what can only be described as incompetence with WorkCover, the State's industrial safety regulator. Its incompetence covered everything from an inspector originally visiting the wrong development site through to false statements provided to the Coroner.

Of course, as I have said here previously, the role of the Coroner in this whole affair has also been less than exemplary. Despite a clear case for a coronial inquiry to be held into Mrs Welch's death the Coroner's office originally decided not to do so. Only subsequent persistence by Alan Welch achieved that inquiry which, of course, also uncovered—as he had always argued it would—the serious negligence that led to Mrs Welch's death. What stinks in this whole affair is that the truth has only been revealed because of Mr Welch's extraordinary determination and efforts. Why should a grieving spouse have to be put to such lengths and why should a private individual have to foot the major cost of subsequent litigation when it was clear the State and local authorities had been at fault? Or, indeed, have I just answered my own question?

To get to the bottom of all these matters, not for Lola Welch who is no longer with us, but for all the other potential victims of incidents like the one that killed Lola, is why a public inquiry is required. There are two final matters I briefly want to raise. Firstly, as I said at the outset, I regard the penalty imposed on those responsible for Mrs Welch's death to be inadequate. The State Government should seek to have the decision appealed and recast at the maximum penalty. Secondly, I urge the Premier to make an ex gratia payment to Mr Welch to cover his costs in having this matter investigated and for uncovering the lessons that must be learned to prevent similar incidents in future. I want to make clear I have not spoken to Mr Welch about this second point. I do it because I think it is required. Fairness and decency dictate that Mr Welch should not have to suffer a \$300,000 loss simply because of the failings of State and local authorities to do their jobs properly.

The appalling irony in my call is that the driver whose truck ran down Lola Welch received taxpayer-funded payments from WorkCover after the accident, but the victim's family have received nothing. All I am asking for is cost recovery of the moneys spent by Mr Welch in getting agencies to investigate a death and then prosecute those responsible. No amount of money can make up for Lola Welch's death; her death has cost Alan Welch far more than money can ever buy. It is long overdue for him to be able to start to put this terrible affair behind him, but once again it will take Government action for that to occur. I urge the Government, even at the last stages of this affair, to do what should have been done years ago; to be proactive, to do the right thing by Alan Welch and to allow him and his friends to put this matter behind them.

#### **BERKELEY VALE PUBLIC ACCESS WAY SALE**

**Mr PAUL CRITTENDEN** (Wyong) [4.40 p.m.]: On 12 November 2004 I advised the House of the proposed sale of the public access way at Berkeley Vale, between Nos 355 and 357 Lakedge Avenue. The matter progressed and at a council meeting on 11 May the majority of councillors voted to reclassify the land as operational land. That, as those of us in State politics certainly know, is code for land to be sold off. Fortunately, the community rallied around again—I had alerted the community last year—and we were able to activate a very strong grassroots campaign. Luckily, one of the councillors from that riding was forced into lodging a rescission motion. I am pleased to report to the House that last night at Wyong Council Chambers the overwhelming majority of councillors decided that in fact they had made a mistake the first time around, on 11 May. They decided that the public access way to the bike track and to Tuggerah Lakes should remain in public ownership.

It was a victory for commonsense. It was also a victory for those people who are not involved in politics, perhaps work in Sydney and are trying to pay off a mortgage and raise their children. They do not often become involved in these issues, but they certainly became involved in this one. In fact, last Sunday afternoon at the park just up from the access way in question, more than 100 people, including children, gathered. Honourable members will be aware that people do not often attend meetings these days, but to get at least 88 adults and about a dozen children to attend a meeting at two o'clock on a Sunday afternoon was testimony to community action at its very best.

I congratulate Kim Vouros on advertising the meeting. She took the initiative. I would have preferred it if she had called the meeting a little later because it interrupted a sporting commitment that I had, but I certainly made sure that I was in attendance. The meeting commenced at about five minutes past two. Kim and I spoke briefly and answered questions and the formal meeting was all over by 20 minutes to three. Some people stayed on the bike track with the children while others decided to stick around for a barbecue. It was a great coming together of the community.

It is unfortunate that some councillors had not read the community mood in regard to this matter. I know that Councillor Kath Foster lives in Berkeley Vale and it is unfortunate that she did not realise the degree of community feeling in her own area. Luckily she did the right thing last night. Even more bizarre were the comments by a former member of this Chamber, the former member for The Entrance, Bob Graham, who

accused me of stirring the pot on this issue. Poor old Bob has been in more parties than Billy Hughes! He has been in the Liberal Party and The Nationals, and stood as an Independent. He is spending a lot of time with a former Wyong councillor called Tony Sheridan. In fact, some of the things he is coming out with now are reminiscent of the tactics that Tony employed.

What I will say is that I make no apologies for my intervention in regard to this issue. I think the truth is very important and people deserve to know what the truth is. Conversion of land to operational use is code for land to be sold off. It is regrettable that this saga and negotiations with one of the parties adjacent to this access way—in which there was partial fencing and trees planted, so that for all intents and purposes it looked like private property—had continued for three years. It is even more worrying that councillors were told before 11 May that there were joint police and ranger operations in the area. These operations were so covert that police knew nothing about it!

### **CROWN LAND BUILDINGS PRESERVATION**

**Mr IAN ARMSTRONG** (Lachlan) [4.45 p.m.]: I want to talk today about some government property in country areas, that is, buildings on Crown lands used for recreational purposes in country towns. Most country towns have sporting fields, many have a showground, while others have golf courses, all of which are Crown land that belongs to the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources, managed by a trust. Cootamundra, in the electorate of Lachlan, has a racecourse that is managed by a trust. On the course is a superb English-style grandstand, built probably in the 1920s. It is classic architecture but it has deteriorated to the stage where the steps that lead up to the seating have subsided because the guttering on the grandstand was allowed to deteriorate. Although the building has not been condemned at this stage, that is probably imminent.

The grandstand at the Grenfell Showground has been condemned effectively, in that the public have been unable to use it for some years. The same applies to the grandstand at West Wyalong and the grandstand at Young needs immediate upgrading. Cowra is in the electorate of the honourable member for Orange, but I live there because it is only 13 kilometres outside my electorate. Cowra showground has a very large grandstand and the area is used for trotting, racing and the show, special dog shows and a number of other events during the year. The refreshment rooms underneath and the seating in the stand have been out of bounds for some time. Structurally, the building is in pretty good order, but it would cost probably \$400,000 to bring it up to scratch.

For the past 12 to 18 months I have attempted to get assistance from the Government in order to repair and preserve these buildings, in many instances heritage items, that this Government owns. I have had a consistent response from the Heritage Office to the effect that it is the responsibility of the trustees to maintain these facilities on behalf of the community. It is nice rhetoric, but the bottom line is that neither the trustees nor the community have the capacity to raise the necessary revenue to repair and maintain, let alone restore, these government-owned facilities. It must be borne in mind that government facilities are owned by the people of New South Wales.

The grandstands I have referred to are part of our heritage; they are unique. They will never be built again, in any form, if they are allowed to collapse or if they are ultimately condemned for whatever reason. I ask the Government to include its property, the grandstands I have referred to, and other facilities throughout the State, particularly those in inland areas, as part of its trust. Whilst there may be a trust managed by local trustees, the people of New South Wales expect the Government to maintain public assets. These are public assets on the public register.

I urge the Government to put much more thought into the preservation of useful facilities such as grandstands, sheep pavilions and cattle pavilions. I particularly urge it to ensure the urgent preservation of grandstands such as those at Cootamundra Racecourse, Cowra Showground, Young Showground and West Wyalong Showground, to name but a few. The preservation of such facilities will encourage public usage, ensure the maintenance of our State's heritage, and provide a demonstration of the architecture that has been part of the evolution and development of inland New South Wales over the past 150 years. At various times people serving weekend detention have been used to paint buildings located on public grounds in Cowra. That has worked very well, but it is necessary that someone supervise and take charge of these people. Various proposals have been put forward regarding the preservation of such facilities whereby the Government may be able to cut costs. However, it is critical that the Government be focused and serious about preserving these facilities, and that it works with the community in doing so.

## LAKE MACQUARIE ELECTORATE EDUCATION WEEK ACTIVITIES

**Mr JEFF HUNTER** (Lake Macquarie) [4.50 p.m.]: Last week, Education Week, I was very pleased to attend a number of official functions held in the Lake Macquarie electorate and to attend a number of schools. To start Education Week, I attended the ecumenical service at Newcastle's Christchurch Cathedral. The cathedral was filled to capacity and it was a fantastic service. I compliment the very reverend Father Graeme Lawrence on the service, and representatives of the other churches in the Hunter region.

Following the service, after a short break most of the people in attendance proceeded to the Newcastle Regional Art Gallery for the official launch of Education Week. I was very pleased to attend the launch, together with other members of Parliament representing electorates in the Hunter region, to recognise the great work that is being undertaken in public schools in the Hunter. I had the honour of presenting certificates of achievement to local school students for their good work over the past 12 months. In particular, it was good to have the opportunity to spend time with the other people assembled there and walk around the art gallery reception area to look at the exhibition within an exhibition, where students were able to highlight the many and varied activities they had been undertaking in their schools and their achievements.

On Wednesday morning I attended Fennell Bay School's Education Week assembly, together with my Federal parliamentary colleague the Hon. Kelly Hoare. The school's principal, Nielsine Oxenford, was very pleased to welcome both State and Federal members of Parliament to the school. I would like to compliment Fennell Bay Public School on its great work. I also compliment the school choir on the great performances it put on that morning. There were certainly some extremely proud parents in the audience. I then travelled to Booragul Public School, where I was welcomed by principal Wendy Cheek and the staff of the school, and attended the school's Education Week ceremony. I congratulate the students of Booragul Public School, their parents and the local community. The school is working very closely with the local community and putting in place some innovative education programs.

Later that day I travelled to Speers Point Public School and was welcomed by the principal, Judy Harrison. I met with a number of parents. It was an open day at the school, where parents were invited to participate in class activities with their children. Many of the parents commented to me how impressed they were with the school's teaching staff, as well as the great programs in place at school. On Thursday morning I travelled to Teralba Public School for its Education Week assembly and was welcomed by the principal, Diana Bassett. It was a fantastic ceremony. Early in the week it had been quite wet in the Hunter region, but on Thursday it was a beautiful sunny day, and we spent about 1½ hours watching performances by the students. Teralba Public School is a relatively small school, but I think the students demonstrated to all those in attendance the great talents of the Teralba area. I compliment the school on its fantastic teaching staff.

For me, Education Week concluded with an official function at Warners Bay High School. I was very pleased to be welcomed by school directors for the Lake Macquarie area, Liz Rushton and Kerri Leigh-Gordon. In the school assembly hall, many of those assembled from schools in the Lake Macquarie area were able to witness first-hand the extremely talented students we have in our public education system. I particularly compliment the students from the Lake Macquarie schools who performed on the day. It was an excellent ceremony and was certainly well enjoyed by everyone in attendance.

When I had an opportunity to speak about Education Week at the schools I visited, I reminded them of this year's Education Week theme, "Leading the way". I also reminded them of the excellent literacy and numeracy results that have been achieved in public schools in the Hunter, and about the values being taught in public schools by our good teachers and staff—the core values of respect, excellence, responsibility, co-operation, participation, care, fairness and democracy. Congratulations to all the teachers and staff of the public schools in the Lake Macquarie electorate, and congratulations also to the students. Well done on your achievements.

## EPPING RAILWAY STATION UPGRADE

**Mr ANDREW TINK** (Epping) [4.55 p.m.]: A couple of years ago when the Government, in its wisdom, decided to cut the Chatswood to Parramatta rail link in half, it left what has become a bit of an open planning wound at Epping. As a result, the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources carried out a reassessment of the project, and in April 2004 the director-general issued a report, which reads:

### Pedestrian Access to the Western Side of Epping Station

The main pedestrian connection to Epping Railway Station from the western side (Beecroft Road side) is via a pedestrian bridge. The bridge is owned and maintained by the RTA and does not have any cover from bad weather and does not allow for wheelchair access due to the steep grades of approach ramps.

TIDC has stated that as the pedestrian bridge is a responsibility of the RTA bridge, it does not form part of TIDC works. TIDC has indicated that a new bridge would cost approximately \$3 million (although it is noted that the net cost is \$2.4 million without the connecting ramp). The \$3 million capital cost includes two lifts on either side of Beecroft Rd estimated to be \$1 million each.

Concern that the pedestrian bridge over Beecroft Rd would not be replaced as part of the modification was raised in 19 representations including those from the local State member Mr Andrew Tink MP and those from Parramatta and Hornsby Council and from the Physical Disability Council of NSW.

The issue of uncovered walkway connections and an uncovered pedestrian bridge was also raised in 6 representations.

Based on its assessment, the Department believes that there is a clear need and justification to provide a new pedestrian bridge to better connect to the upgraded Epping Station as part of the modification. The Department therefore recommends modifications to Condition of Approval No. 235 to require the Proponent to lead an co-ordinate arrangements with the RTA, Parramatta City Council and other relevant stakeholders, to secure funding for the construction of a new pedestrian bridge over Beecroft Road which will reduce pedestrian travel times, reduce pedestrian congestion, meet disability access requirements and provide weather protection.

Condition of approval No. 235 was then imposed. It reads:

The Proponent shall lead and co-ordinate arrangements with RTA, Parramatta City Council and other relevant stakeholders for the purpose of securing joint funding of a new pedestrian bridge connecting the aerial concourse of Epping Station to the western side of Beecroft Road.

Following identification of appropriate funding, the new bridge shall be designed in consultation with the RTA, Parramatta City Council, Hornsby Shire Council and other relevant stakeholders, and shall be constructed prior to completion of the Epping to Chatswood section of the Project.

The Proponent shall undertake an appropriate assessment of environmental and traffic management impacts during design of the new bridge.

The project proceeds apace. The major uprights are now in place over Epping railway station to allow the concourse to be relocated to the north a number of metres. However, no plan is in place to relocate the pedestrian bridge forward to meet flush with the concourse, thereby obviating the need for pedestrians to walk a dogleg, as they would be forced to do if the present bridge remained and were attached to new concourse now under construction. The recently retired Lord Mayor of Parramatta, Councillor Julia Finn, wrote to me on 30 March indicating that:

Following approaches from TIDC, the RTA have not committed to engaging in this venture, and TIDC are continuing to pursue this at a ministerial level.

I have since made representations to Michael Costa, the Minister for Roads, in a letter dated 11 April, asking him, on behalf of myself and Parramatta Council in particular, to please accept his responsibilities and provide some funding for the relocation and rebuilding of this bridge. I have not yet had a reply to that letter. There is no indication in any of the budget papers that I have seen in the past few days that the Roads and Traffic Authority has set aside any money to fund the relocation of this bridge, even though it would appear projects of a similar size have been specifically provided for at places like Yagoona, Wiley Park and Canterbury; my point being, if money had been set aside for Epping it would appear in the same list.

When he was Minister for Transport, Mr Costa, in his wisdom, decided to cut the project in half and leave a mess at Epping. The least he can do is to abide by that decision and determination of his ministerial colleague, the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning, and provide what the Department of Planning and that Minister have mandated him to require, which is proper funding, in partnership with Parramatta Council, to provide a new pedestrian overbridge in the right place, not some dogleg configuration which requires older people, people with disabilities and mothers with very young children, in particular, to have to walk upwards of 200 or 300 metres extra to get to the same location. Mr Costa should follow up, get his act together and provide the funding as the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning has recommended.

### **DADS IN DISTRESS**

**Ms MARIANNE SALIBA** (Illawarra) [5.00 p.m.]: Today I speak about a forgotten portion of my community but nonetheless a very needy group, and that is non-custodial fathers. A group was set up in the Illawarra recently called Dads in Distress, and I know that this group is in other areas of New South Wales and perhaps across Australia. A gentleman by the name of Alan Hovey came to visit me recently and he alerted me to some of the alarming statistics. Dads in Distress [DiDs] is a dedicated support group for men whose immediate concern is to stem the present trend of male suicide due to the trauma of divorce or separation.

Dads in Distress provides a safe forum for men to express their grief with other men in similar circumstances and to work on outcomes for a positive future. Current statistics indicate many men will take their own lives in preference to facing family, friends and, importantly, their own children with the failure of the relationship. DiDs aims to support men both in and out of group confines, and to nurture, validate and stabilise men going through the trauma of divorce, separation or relationship breakdown. DiDs believes there are inequalities in the current family law and child support systems in Australia.

Three fathers per day are driven to suicide; thousands are driven into unemployment; thousands are bankrupted and their children made fatherless. The divorce rate is 50 per cent and one million children live with a single parent. Children are being denied access to the non-resident parent and the non-resident parent is expected to pay well in excess of the cost of children. A protest march is to be held on 20 June at 9.00 a.m. in Canberra to highlight the concerns of men suffering under the current laws. I know that there are a number of other groups in the Illawarra electorate, for example, Fairness in Child Support, of which I am a patron, and also the Fatherhood Foundation, which supports fathers both inside the family and those who find themselves as non-custodial parents.

The march to be held in June is a human rights campaign. It is about a child's right to have meaningful contact with both parents. It is about achieving equitable outcomes for the child and both parents. It is about removing biases from the current system. Both parents should be financially responsible, not one; both should be accountable. The campaign is about improving the life of the children and saving the lives of their loved ones.

Dads in Distress is a support network available statewide. The following information was provided to me by that organisation. In Australia child support is calculated as follows: child support for one child is 18 per cent of the gross wage before tax; for two children it is 27 per cent of the gross wage; for three children it is 32 per cent of the gross wage, and for four children it is 36 per cent of the gross wage; 91.5 per cent of child support payers are men; there is no accountability on the ex for how this money is spent. Nobody knows whether the children actually see that money. The child Support Agency spends \$5.58 for every dollar it collects. A dad paying child support for three children is left with only 19.5 per cent of his gross income to live on: to provide a home for his children when they visit; to get to work to earn money to pay child support; and to feed and clothe himself. He has no government assistance because he is not claiming Centrelink parenting payments or receiving a family tax benefit. If he takes a drop in pay, the Child Support Agency still chases him for support based on his previous higher salary.

In the United Kingdom child support is calculated as follows: for one child it is 15 per cent of after-tax wage, for two children it is 20 per cent of after-tax wage, and for three children it is 25 per cent of after-tax wage. We have to think whether this is about whingeing divorced dads or about men wanting a fair go. I certainly have been convinced that there are inadequacies in the system and we need to look at this issue appropriately and make sure that neither the children nor their parents are disadvantaged in any way. We need to recognise that it is about keeping families together and providing appropriate support for their children.

### **GREATER SOUTHERN AREA HEALTH SERVICE FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS**

**Mr DARYL MAGUIRE** (Wagga Wagga) [5.05 p.m.]: Today I raise concerns about the Greater Southern Area Health Service since its amalgamation and I bring to the attention of the House and the Minister concerns about the non-payment of accounts for services rendered to the Greater Southern Area Health Service. The Greater Southern Area Health Service has been subject to several newspaper articles, and they are not flattering. The first article appeared on Thursday 12 May, on the front page, and it reads:

#### **PAY UP**

Businesses owed thousands by financially ailing health body

The article goes on to state:

One supplier, who did not want to be named for commercial reasons, told *The Daily Advertiser* he had been informed by bureaucrats at the health service's new headquarters at Queanbeyan that he would have to wait until June to be paid for work done last December. In that case the supplier is owed more than \$12,000.

In another case, the supplier, who also declined to be named for commercial reasons, said he was owed more than \$12,000 with dozens of outstanding invoices that had not been paid by the ailing health body.



I am told that Associate Professor Stuart Schneider, the chief executive officer of the Greater Southern Area Health Service, responded as follows:

Part of the solution is a crack team of financial experts.

He went on to say:

However, I have recruited to the area health service an experienced senior executive team that will provide strong leadership and innovation in the provision of financially accountable health services in southern NSW.

I would ask our trade creditors that should they have any concerns to contact the GSAHS' accounts payable inquiry line ...

Creditors should not and will not be penalised for raising their concerns with us.

Then there was a following article on Friday 13 May—black Friday. Another local business claimed that it was owed \$100,000 by the Greater Southern Area Health Service. The media contacted me and said, "Do you know about these outstanding amounts?" I responded, "I am quite often approached by constituents wanting to have their accounts paid by the Greater Southern Area Health Service."

The department is required to pay their creditors and they should not exceed 45 days. A constituent has supplied me with health service invoices that are unpaid since October last year. He has provided me with invoices from July 2004. The statement showing an overdue amount of \$12,000 is dated 8 April 2005. Clearly, there is a problem with the accounting system that appears to have occurred since the area health service was amalgamated. Indeed, one of our greatest fears was that the wheels would fall off health services. Wagga Wagga is a major referral centre and patients travel from throughout the Riverina area for treatment. Unfortunately, the administration of payment of these accounts is now located elsewhere.

I took the time to send that account to the Queanbeyan payment centre. Traditionally, when the accounts payable section was in Wagga Wagga I could fax the account through and the cheque would be paid instantly. As at 26 April we are still awaiting payment of this account. That is just not good enough. Business is tough and these people need to pay for their goods and services and should not be expected to subsidise the Government, which has clearly demonstrated its incompetence and inability to come to grips with the size of the service. One concerned constituent wrote to me in the following terms:

Just a short note voicing my concern about payments or rather non payments by Greater Southern Area Health Service.

As the associated paper work shows the last time we received a payment was the 6/12/04 ...

The total amount outstanding at the moment is \$12,141.74.

I rang the accounts department in Queanbeyan and spoke to a Philip Langford who told me the next cheque run would be 3/6/05.

I hope you can help me in regards to being paid on a more regular basis as several new purchase orders cannot be finalized due to the outstanding account.

This is just one example of the many suppliers who have been done over by the area health service. The Government and the Minister need to take action to fix these accounts.

### KIRRAWEE BRICK PIT SITE

**Mr BARRY COLLIER** (Miranda) [5.10 p.m.]: The Kirrawee Living Centre project got under way in June 2001. Kirrawee was jointly nominated for the Carr Government's Living Centres Program by Sutherland Shire Council and State Planning following the recommendation of Mr John Woodward. The former commissioner made the recommendation after extensive community consultation as the first step in the preparation of the council's new million-dollar local environmental plan [LEP]. The Kirrawee Living Centre project aimed at developing a sustainable and economically viable plan for the future of the suburb, the shopping centre, the railway station and the old brick pit site, as well as the surrounding residential and industrial areas. The project's clear objectives included the revitalisation of the town centre, which had lost its only bank, improving public transport, supporting employment opportunities, providing quality open space, as well as better designed and more diverse housing types.

This 20-month project was a partnership between the shire council, the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources [DIPNR], the owner of the old brick pit site—Sydney Water—and the shire community. The partnership was supplemented by regular discussion with the Roads and Traffic Authority, the

State Rail Authority and the chamber of commerce. The project started with a clean sheet and involved extensive community consultation with residents and local business owners from the very beginning. For the first time in the shire this was planning from the grassroots up.

The project produced a Kirrawee master plan, which incorporated a detailed proposal for the rezoning of the old brick pit site on the edge of the shopping centre. The proposal was for a mix of residential and employment uses, plus the dedication of 20 per cent of the 4.5 hectare site as a public park. The master plan looked to the future, taking into account major State projects, such as the easy access upgrade of Kirrawee railway station as part of the Cronulla line duplication. The master plan, which included the brick pit proposal, went out for public exhibition twice as part of the people's LEP. In his letter of 2 June 2004 to Sutherland council, DIPNR's Director of Metropolitan Land and Resource Planning, Gary Prattley, said:

... I am keen to ensure the plan delivers on the implementation of the Kirrawee master plan which has been a significant exercise involving extensive community consultation and demonstrating successful partnership of local and State Government.

What has happened to the Kirrawee master plan? On 11 April 2005 newly elected shire councillor and former Rockdale mayor, Kent Johns, rammed through council 45 amendments to the people's LEP. The Kirrawee master plan and the old brick pit site were among his targets. With the help of the Liberal majority on the council, Councillor Johns moved that the brick pit site should be rezoned "employment" along the Princes Highway frontage and the remainder of the site be zoned "special uses", that is, leaving the status quo. He noted specifically:

... educational establishments are a permissible use in both zones.

He moved also that further reports be prepared and the opportunity for community consultation occur. Councillor Johns also moved that all buildings on the site be limited to a maximum of two storeys in height. Councillors well know that the brick pit site is a crucial part of the Kirrawee master plan and their motion effectively destroys the entire Kirrawee Living Centre project. But these sudden changes also raise some very significant questions which I want answered. Why does the present council want to waste \$500,000 of taxpayers' money already spent by the State Government, thousands of council hours in professional staff time and tens of thousands of dollars of ratepayers' funds spent by the council on developing the Kirrawee master plan?

Why is the council now ignoring the 20 months of extensive community consultation with residents of all ages and business firms that went into developing the master plan? Why is the council ignoring information gathered at 22 community events, workshops, business forums, reference group meetings, as well as from the Kirrawee Living Centre shopfront, established and maintained by the State Government in the main street of the shopping precinct? Why is the council ignoring feedback on the plan, gathered from five newsletters distributed to over 3,000 Kirrawee households throughout the course of the project? Why is council ignoring expert consultant reports on the brick pit, including everything from environmental, flora and fauna, landscaping, open space, traffic and transport to archaeological and Aboriginal heritage considerations? Why call for more reports when council already has access to these?

Why does the council suddenly want the area rezoned when, in fact, the rezoning has been subject to extensive community consultation, public exhibition and tacit approval by the State Government? In particular, why does Councillor Johns suddenly and specifically request it be noted that "educational establishments" are a permissible use of the brick pit site when these were never included as part of the plan? Given that the area has State primary and secondary schools, Catholic colleges and a TAFE facility nearby, what kind of educational establishments does Councillor Johns and the new council have in mind? Have Councillor Johns and members of the new council majority had discussions with other bodies seeking to establish educational facilities on the old brick pit site? If so, with which institutions or bodies did that consultation take place? Why does the council not want 20 per cent of the brick pit site set aside as a public park, when there is a shortage of open space in the area? These are just some of the questions that must be asked and must be answered by the present council. As a majority stakeholder in the Kirrawee Living Centre project, I call on the Minister, the Hon. Craig Knowles, to find out the answers for my community as a matter of urgency. As I have said, these questions must be asked of this council and they must be answered and I call on the Minister to get Sutherland council to do so.

## ROTARACT CLUBS

**Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD** (Hornsby) [5.15 p.m.]: This evening I speak about two Rotaract clubs that have a great deal to do with my electorate, that is, the St Ives Rotaract Club and the Crosslands Rotaract Club.

The President of the St Ives Rotaract Club is Evan Burrell, who is also a past district Rotaract representative for 2003-04. The St Ives Rotaract Club is sponsored by Waitara Rotary Club. Alix Cameron is President of the Crosslands Rotaract Club, which is sponsored by Berowra Rotary Club, and is celebrating its first anniversary. I asked the President of the St Ives Rotaract Club, which has been going for 36 years with a strong membership, to outline some of the club's major achievements. He informed me that the club supports the Australian Red Cross and provides volunteers to collect for the Salvation Army's Red Shield Appeal.

The club also helps with the book fair that is held by the local Lifeline. It also helps financially with counselling services. The St Ives Rotaract Club undertakes the role of Santa in the Terrey Hills community by visiting nursing homes on Christmas Eve, giving Christmas cheer and collecting money. This has enabled the club to donate the sum of \$3,000 towards cancer research at the Children's Hospital. Members of the club also undertake volunteer work at the Deaf and Blind Society at North Rocks. They also take part in many of the Rotary-based charities. I once more congratulate Rotary on its centenary and note the fantastic work undertaken for the celebrations by the district governor, Bruce Allen, and his wife, Dita. Everybody who has been part of district 9680 has had a great time occupied with many worthwhile projects.

The Crosslands Rotaract Club is responsible for raising funds to bring two young East Timorese students to Australia to share in the Rotary Youth Leadership Awards [RYLA]. They travelled thousands of kilometres from home, and were among 66 young people undertaking district 9680's 2005 RYLA course at Vision Valley in Arcadia in January. Evita Abrantes and Damaso Pereira, both aged 21, came to Sydney for the course through the efforts of the newly formed Crosslands Rotaract Club. Most of the club's members had met at RYLA courses and chose as their first major project the task of raising more than \$6,000 to bring the two young East Timorese to the RYLA course.

They received major help in finding the students from Kirsty Gusmao, the Australian wife of Timor Leste President Xanana Gusmao. Evita and Damaso are both Roman Catholics and study at the Dili Institute of Technology. Both are active in Kesa, the students' organisation there. Damaso is studying civil and construction engineering, and Evita is studying to be a travel agent. It was wonderful to meet these two young people and to attend the dinner that is held during the week of the RYLA course. The director of the course, David Harvie of the Crows Nest Rotary Club, said:

We gave them the tools here so they could go out in the real world at home and carry out our theme *Be The Inspiration*. They have helped us build a RYLA that we can take out anywhere in the world.

Such a positive result is fantastic. It is wonderful to be part of the two Rotaract clubs. Recently I hosted club members in the Parliament. They appreciated watching two Australian films in the theatre and a dinner in the Strangers Dining Room. One of the Crosslands Rotaract Club members, Catherine Barnes, said:

As Rotary International celebrates its centenary, it is a thrill for Crosslands Rotaract Club to be marking our one-year anniversary in a few days time. There have been several exciting developments in the club this year.

I wish both the Crosslands Rotaract Club and the St Ives Rotaract Club every success for the future.

## LAKE MACQUARIE CITY COUNCIL DEVELOPMENT APPLICATION NOTIFICATIONS

**Mr MATTHEW MORRIS** (Charlestown) [5.20 p.m.]: Today I raise the issue of development application notifications in the Lake Macquarie City Council area. For many years the council has had a process of advising adjoining neighbours of development applications lodged for properties either adjoining their own or in close proximity to them. That practice is now under review by council, which has a clear desire that the practice cease and that only those applications over eight metres in height or proposals greater than a two-storey dwelling be notified publicly. The council's view is that the notification process is stalling application processing times and causing long delays. In fairness, the council receives a significant number of applications on an annual basis—in fact, more than 2,500—and there is constant pressure on both the staff and the elected council to ensure that these are processed in a reasonable time frame.

In recent years the State Government has established planning policies known as "complying" and "exempt" developments specifically to assist councils with processing times and to make life simpler for the community when people consider lodging a development application. "Complying development" could include a single-storey dwelling as long as certain criteria have been met. That type of application also offers a seven-day turnaround from council, yet there appears to be a minimal take-up of this method of development application. "Exempt development" is exactly that—exempt. Again, criteria must be met for an application to be

classified as exempt. The State Government is also in the process of developing further reforms in the processing of applications to streamline the assessment, allowing councils to process these much more quickly.

The direction Lake Macquarie City Council is set to take will abolish the requirement to notify adjoining neighbours, which would be a very exclusive practice. The communities in Lake Macquarie are accustomed to receiving notification of adjoining development proposals, and that practice should continue. The development sector is also aware of the process and accepts it as a natural part of the assessment. Council has taken the view that the practice of notification is delaying the assessment of applications. I challenge that view and say that there are more important issues surrounding the assessment process that should be examined, rather than excluding the public from the process, particularly when there is a real risk of significant impacts on adjoining neighbours even with a two-storey dwelling.

During my time on council it was often the smaller development proposals that had the greater risk of affecting adjoining neighbours. Issues such as overshadowing, privacy, access, and bulk and scale were often brought to light through the notification process. Certainly, small proposals such as pergolas and barbecues would not warrant notification. However, a two-storey dwelling is a different proposition. I believe the adjoining neighbours have a right to be aware of development proposals and how they may impact on their home and environment. The mayor has been quoted as saying, "It is clear that only a few people object or comment on these applications". If there is little comment, then that is good and would ensure a quicker processing of the applications, but it is certainly not a message not to notify.

I regard this proposal as being a way of excluding the community, and it will bring even more issues and delays for council when adjoining neighbours become aware of the development after approval is given. Council has been struggling to refine its development application processing times, and has made some significant improvements to the process. There is more work to be done to quicken the process. However, these are more internal issues rather than community issues. Council has offered many excuses for processing delays, including a shortage of staff, the new computer system and even State regulations. These issues are not new to council and should have been addressed by now, considering the time that the issue has been before the council.

We have even seen a councillor attack the council staff over processing times, which I think is inappropriate but certainly reflects the councillor's pro-development attitude. Perhaps this councillor should join Tweed Shire Council. The council staff deserve credit for recognising the issue and taking up the challenge to refine their internal processes. However, they need the support of the elected council to deliver additional resources. Whilst I support the need for council to further improve development application processing times, the elimination of notifications is not the best or an appropriate way to achieve this. This issue is too important to the community. People deserve the opportunity to be aware of development proposals and to make a contribution to the assessment. Council should respect the rights of all property owners and leave the notification process as it is.

## **LIGHT RAIL**

**Mr PETER DEBNAM** (Vaucluse) [5.25 p.m.]: Tonight I want to talk about light rail and the impact it could have, not only on my electorate but on a number of other electorates in the city and eastern suburbs, as well as in the inner west. I acknowledge that light rail is something the Labor Party has found impossible to embrace over the years. I appreciate that it probably has a union problem, in that the Labor Government is very much beholden to the rail unions and, as a result, there is an inbuilt bias in the Carr Government and a reluctance to take light rail seriously. Again, I put on the record a plea to the Premier to allow light rail to be evaluated fully with a positive mindset before the opportunities are lost again. The next opportunity is the opening of the cross-city tunnel. For years we have made the point to the Carr Government that when the cross-city tunnel opens on 12 June, mid June or whenever, there will presumably be a traffic vacuum in the city for some time.

For many years it has been widely acknowledged that that would always be the best opportunity not only to evaluate seriously but to put in place a light rail system in the central business district [CBD]. If that is to occur in the traffic vacuum, obviously the planning will have to be done, the expressions of interest called and the contracts awarded. The Carr Government has simply lost that opportunity, but it is not too late. Typically, with any tollway that the Carr Government builds there is a traffic vacuum for a period of 12 to 18 months. So there is an opportunity for a rushed program of evaluation, calls for expressions of interest and a chance to get on with the project that could see light rail extended to the CBD. That light rail system would provide the anchor that is much needed to underpin the viability of the current light rail system to the inner west. It would allow

serious extension of that light rail system further west but also look to the eastern suburbs, where we have the highest density populations along transport routes. That population density has always made those routes prime candidates for light rail proposals.

Light rail will not only impact on my electorate, it could impact on the electorates of Bligh, Coogee, Heffron and Maroubra, and it makes a lot of sense to embrace the technology. Unfortunately, the Labor Party and its union masters have refused to allow the Government to take it seriously. I say again to the Carr Government: One of the implications of the cross-city tunnel is not only a lost opportunity for light rail but also traffic chaos for many suburbs and streets in feeder areas, the inner west and inner east. For 10 years we have called on the Government to fund regional traffic planning by the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA].

The Government has always put in local traffic plans, basically providing funds to local councils to do their own traffic planning. That is completely inadequate when one is talking about tollways in the inner city. I call on the Government again not only to pursue the light rail option seriously but to demand that the RTA finally undertake the regional traffic plan that was a precondition of the opening of the Eastern Distributor. Honourable members who were here at the time will realise that we raised that in the other House and made it a precondition to the signing of that contract. The Government did not do that, and traffic chaos continues in many suburbs. The result may well be the same with the cross-city tunnel; we are unsure what the impact will be on various streets and suburbs. My main concern today is that the Government is losing another opportunity to embrace new technology, to embrace a service that makes a real difference in public transport. I call on the Premier again to put the union interest to one side and seriously ask the Department of Transport to make a full and urgent evaluation of light rail with and to consider an implementation plan that would make use of that traffic vacuum in the city. [*Time expired.*]

#### **MOUNT DRUITT STATE EMERGENCY SERVICE AWARDS**

**Mr ALLAN SHEARAN** (Londonderry) [5.30 p.m.]: I am pleased to report to the House the delight I experienced earlier this month when I attended the Mount Druitt State Emergency Service [SES] awards ceremony. It was one of those few moments when I had the privilege of participating in an acknowledgement of the invaluable efforts of the dedicated, hardworking members of the unit. The Mount Druitt SES unit commander, Peter Lalor, hosted the ceremony and the master of ceremonies was the deputy unit controller, Sean Byrne. I first met Peter not long after being elected as a councillor on Blacktown City Council. Since that time it has never ceased to amaze me how committed he is to ensuring that his unit is performing at peak efficiency. His deputy, Sean Byrne, was formerly a colleague of mine in the New South Wales Police Service. Although he has a young family he continues to dedicate a significant amount of his time to the SES.

Members of the SES cannot continue to contribute their time to this organisation without the support of their families, and I am forever grateful for that support. Amongst the official guests in attendance at the ceremony were Councillor Charlie Lowles, the deputy mayor of Blacktown City, a long-time supporter of the Mount Druitt SES unit, and Mr Peter Cinque, OAM, Controller of the Sydney Western Division of the SES. Sometimes the community tends to take the need for a committed group of people such as members of the SES for granted. However, I am sure that members of this House readily acknowledge that it is the members of the SES to whom many people turn for assistance in times of disaster. The presence of these dedicated people during such times not only helps the community to survive the ordeals that nature can throw at us but also provides a degree of comfort to those who are suffering.

When attending the awards ceremony I was struck by the extent of the activities in which the State Emergency Service is involved. We are all aware that the SES is available to provide, as is mentioned in its guarantee of service mission statement, "immediate assistance to the community in times of natural or man-made incidents or emergencies." However, many supporters of the SES may not be aware of the variety of activities that enable this voluntary organisation to fulfil its mission. For instance, while we are generally aware that the SES responds to floods, storms or man-made disasters, little would be known of what it takes to continuously train and prepare for the worst of disasters. These men and women contribute many hours of training after work and on weekends. They ensure that their equipment is up to standard and that they are familiar with the use of that equipment.

Some of the awards presented during the ceremony give an indication of the different tasks SES members may face. Nine statement of attainment certificates were presented, acknowledging an ability to operate communications equipment. There were seven recipients of first aid awards and five recipients for work in an emergency operations centre. There were four awards for general rescue, one for land search operations,

two for chainsaw crosscutting and limbing, three for training small groups, five for certificate II public safety, eight for SES induction, and three for trainer endorsements. In addition to these certificates there were a number of long service awards. I would like to mention those recipients. Ten years long service awards were presented to David Gray, Colin Kelson, Cheryl Laughton and Gordon Blair. A 15-years service award was presented to Michael Morgan, a 20-years award to Sean Byrne, and a 35-year award to Peter Lalor. This is a magnificent, dedicated group of people.

These wonderfully dedicated volunteers prepare suitable plans to minimise the impact of disasters. I am forever conscious that as surely as night follows day, at some time in the not-too-distant future the current drought will be over and it is inevitable that some flooding will occur. Many areas of the Londonderry electorate are flood prone and the SES is always attempting to alert the public about evacuation plans for those whose properties may be affected by flooding. With such responsibilities it is hard to believe that the SES generally remains a voluntary organisation. The organisation had its origins only 50 years ago but it has many proud traditions. We can all relate stories about times when SES services were needed. A couple of years ago I rang Peter Lalor in response to a call from a constituent whose huge gum tree snapped in two during a severe storm, bounced off his car and finally came to rest on his wife's car, at the same bringing down the street's electricity cables. Although many others were seeking urgent assistance, the SES promptly made the street safe and later returned to clear up the fallen tree.

In commenting about the SES I have continually used the word "dedication". That is the most apt word to describe the SES and that was again confirmed recently. Travelling back from the New South Wales Police College, I was flicking around the dial and I caught a report of hailstorm damage south of Wollongong. During the report, an SES spokesperson stated that many members who were called out to give assistance had learnt that some of their own properties had been damaged but their priority was to attend to other community members. That is true dedication. It is a commitment to duty which I am sure reflects the attitude of all the members of the Mount Druitt SES and, indeed, members of the SES throughout the State. It is important to remember that members of the SES could not function so effectively without the backing of their spouses, partners, families, and friends. While I have recognised the dedication of members of the Mount Druitt SES unit, I again express my appreciation to all of those who support these dedicated men and women. Congratulations to the award recipients, congratulations to all SES members, and congratulations to their supporters.

**Ms ALISON MEGARRITY** (Menai—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.35 p.m.]: I thank the honourable member for Londonderry for advising the House about the Mount Druitt State Emergency Service unit and the awards recently bestowed upon some of its members. The honourable member mentioned the words "dedication" and "commitment" a number of times. The good men and women of the SES could certainly be called men and women for all seasons. They work through rain, hail and wind, and in the sunshine they undertake the training they need to respond to emergencies and provide comfort and relief to those who need it. The award winners were named by the honourable member, and I am sure they were well-deserved acknowledgements of the time and effort put in by those recipients. On behalf of the House, I congratulate all those who received awards and everyone who gives their time and makes a commitment to this important, mostly voluntary service. Again I thank the honourable member for advising the House of the awards.

#### **BILLABONG CLUBHOUSE, TAMWORTH**

**Mr PETER DRAPER** (Tamworth) [5.37 p.m.]: I highlight today the exemplary way in which Tamworth's Billabong Clubhouse is helping people with mental illness in the north-west of the State find their way back to meaningful participation in community life. Established in 1998, Billabong Clubhouse is based on an international clubhouse model of psychosocial rehabilitation for people with mental illness. More than 400 clubhouses are now operating in 30 countries, with Finland using the model as a basis for its entire community mental health service. There are 13 clubhouses in Australia. Billabong is one of three in New South Wales and the only rural clubhouse in the State. A clubhouse is a place where people who have experienced mental illness go to rebuild their lives. The participants are called members, not patients, and the focus is on their strengths rather than their illness, with the program providing an holistic approach to recovery. Work in the clubhouse—whether it be clerical duties, meal preparation or supporting fellow members—provides the core healing process. Of equal importance to achieving a work-ordered day is the establishment of personal relationships. Every opportunity provided is the result of members and staff working together in a unique partnership.

One of the most important steps members take toward greater independence is transitional employment, where they undertake normal work in the community. The Clubhouse program helps members

develop work habits and skills, and when they are ready they are given the opportunity to participate in entry-level jobs with full support from the Clubhouse. Members also receive help to secure housing, advance their education, obtain good psychiatric and medical care, and maintain government benefits. Membership is for life, so people have all the time they need to secure their new life in the community.

Participation in the Clubhouse is voluntary and at Billabong members feel wanted and needed in its day-to-day running. Since its opening, Billabong has orientated over 180 members. As at March 2005 it has 34 active members regularly using the Clubhouse, with an average of 14 visiting each day. Billabong has helped 15 people through its employment program during 2004-05, and currently it has 14 members studying various courses at either TAFE or University. A significant proportion of the 180 members have moved on through the daily program into either work or a lifestyle where the support of the Clubhouse is no longer their priority.

Membership is expected to grow, given statistics that each year one in five Australian adults experiences a mental illness. In the age group of 18 to 24 years, it is closer to one in four adults. The role Billabong plays in the provision of mental health services in the Tamworth electorate is invaluable. It is the only centre for psychosocial rehabilitation in the region, and people with mental illness are travelling up to two hours to attend. Billabong Clubhouse was bequeathed \$100,000 in 2001, and it has been used to set up accommodation for remote members. The establishment of the accommodation has only been possible through tens of thousands of hours of voluntary community work and fundraising.

Just recently, a family fun day to benefit the Clubhouse was held at Tamworth's Tangaratta Vineyards, where more than \$6,000 was raised for the accommodation program, which provides an affordable stay in Tamworth for regional members and their carers to attend the Clubhouse program or medical appointments. The provision of mental health services in rural areas is becoming increasingly important in my electorate. Grey Power, a seniors' lobby group in Gunnedah, has told me it is concerned about the growing incidence of mental health problems among members' families and the lack of appropriate services in the Gunnedah area to support them.

I therefore welcome the Government's allocation in the 2005-06 budget of \$854 million to cover a range of mental health services, which I hope will translate into better service provision in the north-west region. Securing adequate funding that is also timely in its arrival has been a constant and significant challenge for the Billabong Clubhouse. Thanks to the efforts of its management board, recurrent State funding has been secured for three years. Every year the board applies for funding through the New South Wales Health Department and the area health service Non-government Organisation Grant Program.

In the past the board has had to juggle finances, sometimes borrowing money to pay wages as it waits for the funding to arrive. Last financial year the funding, which was due in June 2003, did not arrive until March 2004. This year the situation was similar, with the funding arriving 10 months late. The board has some breathing space but is already planning ahead to when the three-year funding expires. In the interim, the Clubhouse will endeavour to continue its excellent support of people with mental illness.

I know that the honourable member for Menai, the Parliamentary Secretary at the table, has an interest in this issue. I urge her to take a strong message to the Government that Billabong provides a service that we value highly in our community. It will need ongoing government assistance and support. I ask the honourable member to inform the Minister that it is critical that the funding arrives in a timely fashion so that staff are not demoralised. With this support we will ensure that the service is ongoing and viable well into the future.

*[Private members' statements interrupted.]*

## **COAL ACQUISITION AMENDMENT (FAIR COMPENSATION) BILL**

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

### **PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS**

*[Private members' statements resumed.]*

### **DUBBO ELECTORATE SKIN CANCER SPECIALIST**

**Mrs DAWN FARDELL** (Dubbo) [5.43 p.m.]: I wish to draw to the attention of members the plight of the Dubbo electorate in trying to secure full-time skin cancer specialists to treat a growing list of sufferers requiring treatment. Without doubt, the number of country residents afflicted by skin cancer far outstrips the number in the city. Recent figures suggest that country patients face a death rate 40 per cent above our city

cousins, yet there is still no full-time skin cancer specialist based in Dubbo. The condition is not an old person's disease. In fact, many more young people are being diagnosed with it. It is the result of Australia's obsession with the sun, despite successful campaigns like Slip Slop Slap. If cancer is undetected, it is fatal.

Currently, general practitioners [GPs] are able to provide a cursory examination of any patient who is worried about the colour change of moles or sunspots on their skin. But general practitioners in the Dubbo and rural and regional areas are stretched to provide the service, so we look for more specialists to assist. Many GPs are well versed and knowledgeable about what to do and look out for. But the already stretched specialist care needs to be bolstered. Awareness of the condition is growing, and appeals to regularly check the size, shape and colour of any spots are gaining widespread acceptance. The work of the Cancer Council over recent years has been tremendous, and an increase in the availability of protective clothing and sunscreens helps to spread the message that overexposure to the sun is a danger. The work being done in this area is commendable.

A lack of specialists and facilities in which they can operate is condemning too many people to a long, painful and serious illness. Success stories come from those where early detection has led to the removal of a malignant melanoma and the patient has been able to continue with a normal life. Other cases, however, leave deep physical and mental scars, such as when lymph nodes are removed to counter the spread of the cancer. There have been documented cases where skin problems have been missed or diagnosed too late, and that has led to patients developing far more serious conditions. For that reason, as well as the already high demand for treatment and follow-up services from those already diagnosed, a full-time skin cancer specialist is a must.

Currently, a specialist flies in from Sydney only twice a fortnight to serve Dubbo. That is not nearly enough time to consult with a long list of patients who are in need of attention or those who have survived surgery and continue to have vital regular checks to make sure the cancer is truly defeated. Growing public support via a recent petition in Dubbo is evidence that the subject is not only of concern to health professionals. More than 400 Dubbo residents are pleading for the city's only skin cancer centre to be given "area of need" status so that a full-time specialist can be appointed. The lack of adequate treatment and diagnostic services is also being compounded by the present severe doctor shortage in my electorate and in many other areas in country New South Wales.

I understand that steps are being taken to remedy this situation. But it does not help those already on the waiting list who are desperate for help. The experience at Dubbo is mirrored in many other communities in western New South Wales. Patients are forced to travel hundreds of kilometres to seek treatment. They are left out of pocket and, in some cases when a particularly aggressive case requires attention, out of time. Skin cancer is occurring in epidemic proportions in Australia. Country communities bear the brunt of this because of the very nature of an outdoor lifestyle or work environment.

Skin cancer presents a major, documented public health problem, the cost of which runs to many millions of dollars every year. Yet we are not given access to the same services enjoyed by major metropolitan areas. I therefore ask that consideration be given to these suggestions: the appointment of a full-time skin cancer specialist for Dubbo, not just a visiting specialist twice a fortnight; the expansion of public awareness campaigns for country areas; and a pledge to concentrate efforts to recruit the health experts so desperately needed to head off this crisis. Many people travel hundreds of kilometres from Bourke, Brewarrina, Broken Hill and Walgett to come to Dubbo. Our facilities are expected to service 40,000 people in Dubbo, but we also have to meet a much larger need. It is totally unsatisfactory for a specialist to come only twice a fortnight.

**Private members' statements noted.**

**The House adjourned at 5.48 p.m. until Friday 27 May 2005 at 10.00 a.m.**

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