

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Thursday 25 September 2008

The Speaker (The Hon. George Richard Torbay) took the chair at 10.00 a.m.

The Speaker read the Prayer and acknowledgement of country.

SUCCESSION AMENDMENT (FAMILY PROVISION) BILL 2008

Bill received from the Legislative Council and introduced.

Agreement in principle set down as an order of the day for a future day.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of Motions

General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) given.

ADOPTION AMENDMENT BILL 2008

Bill introduced on motion by Ms Linda Burney.

Agreement in Principle

Ms LINDA BURNEY (Canterbury—Minister for Community Services) [10.06 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to bring before the House the Adoption Amendment Bill 2008. The bill seeks to update the Adoption Act 2000 to ensure that its policy objectives and provisions remain relevant. The bill gives effect to the changes arising from a review of the Adoption Act 2000 undertaken by the Department of Community Services, as required by the Act. The review involved the report entitled "Review of the Adoption Act 2000", which was tabled in Parliament in late 2006 following extensive public consultation, and further advice from a ministerial advisory committee comprising experts in the area of child and family welfare law and practice.

The objects of the bill are: to streamline the adoption application process for certain adoptions by removing unnecessary procedural impediments to making an application directly to the Supreme Court; to simplify the eligibility criteria to have greater focus on parental capacity; to encourage open adoption practices by facilitating access to personal information for all parties to an adoption for future adoption; to relax publishing restrictions imposed on the parties to an adoption to strengthen the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies in the placement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children; and to ease restrictions on changing the given name of an adopted child.

The bill also updates the objectives and principles of the Act to recognise the detrimental effect on children of undue delay in the adoption process and the legitimate parental aspirations of prospective adoptive parents. The issue of adoption for same-sex couples was raised as part of the review process. The Government's policy is to eliminate discrimination in law for same-sex couples demonstrated in the Same Sex Relationships Bill 2008, recently tabled in this Parliament. The State Government is currently working with the Commonwealth and other States on a consistent approach to surrogacy law and the issue of same-sex adoption will be considered as part of that discussion.

I now turn to the details of the bill. One key purpose of the bill is to make it quicker and easier for prospective parents to adopt children, by removing procedural impediments to applications being made directly to the Supreme Court for intercountry, step-parent, relative and adult adoptions. The bill amends sections 87 and 91 of the Act to cut the unnecessary red tape of requiring the Department of Community Services to file reports and provide consent in adoption proceedings that do not arise out of child protection concerns. Given that step

parent, adult and relative adoptions are essentially "known" adoptions where the person to be adopted already has an established relationship with the prospective adoptive parents, where there are no child protection concerns, the bill dispenses with the need for the director general to consent to the application and file reports in such matters. Instead, the Supreme Court will be able to directly accept independent reports from an approved adoption service assessor or an accredited adoption service provider.

For intercountry adoptions, the Act enshrines rigorous assessment and compliance with the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in respect of Inter-country Adoption. Members of the House may be aware that the Commonwealth manages and establishes these adoption programs with other countries and ensures strict compliance with The Hague Convention. The bill will also facilitate a direct pathway for intercountry adoption applications and reports to be filed directly by the applicants with the Supreme Court, rather than the director general having to make the report and file them with the court by way of affidavit.

The bill, however, ensures that the safety and wellbeing of adoptive children remains a Department of Community Services priority. It does so by making provision in section 91 of the Act that the Supreme Court may request the director general, or Community Services may of its own accord provide a report on an adoption application where there are child protection concerns, or serious concerns about the reliability, or independence of reports filed in the Court or other exceptional circumstances. The bill facilitating prospective adoptive parents filing mandatory reports directly to the Supreme Court will, I am sure, make the adoption process speedier and easier for everyone, while maintaining assessment standards and placement processes.

As to the circumstances that must exist before the Supreme Court would make an adoption order pertaining to step-parent, relative or foster carer adoptions, the bill introduces important changes to simplify the eligibility criteria so that greater emphasis is placed on the quality rather than the duration of the relationship. The bill reduces the currently prescribed minimum length of the pre-existing child-parent relationship, for relative adoptions, from five years to two years. In step-parent adoptions, the amendment will reduce the required time for the child to be in the care of the applicant, from three years to two years. Likewise, consent to adoption of a child over the age of 12 years will require a two year relationship between the child and his or her proposed adoptive parent or parents, rather than the existing five year requirement.

To ensure consistency across the Act on the length of a relationship for eligibility to adopt, the bill also amends section 28 of the Act to reduce the period a couple must be living together from three to two years before an application for adoption can be made. Two years is considered a sufficient period of time to establish an adequate commitment to the relationship that will support an adoptive parenting capacity. The bill also simplifies the circumstances for adult adoptions, by removing the requirement of a minimum five-year parent-child relationship, which effectively meant that the adopted person had to come into the care of the adopting parents by the time he or she was 13 years old. The bill clarifies that the key prerequisite for an adult adoption is that the prospective adoptive parent has brought up the child. The intent of these amendments is to simplify the conditions that must exist before the Supreme Court can make an adoption order, legally formalising family arrangements where there is, or has been, an established, caring child and parent relationship.

In the interests of transparency, the general eligibility and assessment criteria will be published and set out in amendments to the Adoption Regulation 2003, rather than published in the *Government Gazette*. In making regulations with respect to eligibility and assessment criteria, this Government's policy is that the criteria be less prescriptive and focus more on factors that directly affect adoptive parenting capacity. For that reason, the prohibition on accepting adoption applications from those pursuing fertility treatments will be removed, in order to not exclude applicants with an overall good range of skills, qualities and support networks from being considered as prospective adoptive parents.

The Government also wants to make it easier for children in out-of-home care to become permanently part of their foster care family. Accordingly, the Government has made a commitment for foster carers to continue to receive the statutory care allowance for children and young people that have been in their care for a minimum of two years, following the making of an adoption order. The continuation of the statutory care allowance for foster carers who adopt children will be by regulations under section 201 of the Act, which is a provision that enables the director general to provide financial assistance to adoptive parents.

I turn to the important issue of access to adoption information. The Government acknowledges the historical and social context in which decisions to adopt have been made, and the very personal way this aspect of the law impacts on the lives of people. The bill preserves and ensures the continuation of the access

entitlements applying to adoptions that have occurred in the past. The bill also preserves responsibility and obligations of the Department of Community Services under the Act to maintain services relating to adoption information. These services include administering the reunion and information registers, and authorising the release of information subject to any advance notice requests and in accordance with the access to information scheme or the old contact veto scheme that applied to adoptions until 1990.

However, a significant reform introduced by this bill is the support it provides to facilitating open adoption practices for future adoptions. The bill seeks to establish equitable and open rights to access information, such as birth certificates and birth records, by inserting a new division in the Act, so that a new scheme of general access entitlements will apply to applications for adoption made after the commencement of the division. Under this new scheme, adoptive parents, adopted children, birth parents, and siblings will be more easily able to access adoption information. To enable adopted children to have an accurate picture of their identity from an early age, the new scheme allows for adoptive parents, after the adoption orders are made, to automatically be entitled to receive adoption information. They will be able to access their adopted child's original birth certificate and other prescribed information held by the adoption service provider or an information source such as a hospital, or the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages.

Birth parents of an adopted person over the age of 18 years and adopted persons over 18 years will similarly have open access entitlements to information such as birth certificates, birth records and other identifying information. To ensure adopted children under the age of 18 years have the appropriate support when accessing information, the bill makes provision for information to be accessed, with their adoptive parents' consent. In circumstances where the adoptive parents cannot be found or where other sufficient reasons apply, the director general may dispense with the adoptive parents' consent. In balancing the need for equitable entitlements to information to birth parents and the need to provide protections to an adopted child under 18 years of age, the bill gives birth parents an entitlement to information, provided the release of identifying information would not pose a risk to the safety, welfare or wellbeing of the adopted child or adoptive parents.

Under the new scheme, the Director General of the Department of Community Services will be responsible for making an assessment whether supplying the information would pose a risk to the adopted child or the adoptive parents. The director general's discretion will be exercised in accordance with guidelines prescribed by regulation. The bill also makes provision for non-adopted and adopted birth siblings to have reciprocal rights to access information. This will address the anomaly that currently exists where siblings who are in foster care and are not adopted are not entitled to information about adopted siblings, and vice versa.

I now refer to removing the restrictions on the publication of names. The bill further opens adoption practices by lifting the blanket restriction on the publication of identifying material of parties to adoption proceedings. The current wording of section 180 of the Act, if strictly interpreted and applied, can lead to an absurd result of preventing birth parents or adopted children from being able to speak publicly about their adoption experience or even publishing their memoirs. The intent of the restriction on the publishing of names is to protect the identity of parties while adoption proceedings are on foot, and the bill makes clear that the restrictions on the publication of names is to apply from the time a child is placed for adoption until an adoption order is made. However, once the court order for the adoption has been made, the amendments to section 180 of the Act will allow the publication of names of parties to an adoption where the person has given consent for such information to be released.

As to Aboriginal and Torres Strait participation in decision-making, another feature of the bill is to provide greater involvement of Aboriginal agencies in the placement of an Aboriginal child for adoption. It should be remembered that very few adoptions of Aboriginal children take place in New South Wales. Adoptions are not part of Aboriginal culture, which can be closely associated with practices of the stolen generation. For example, three Aboriginal children were adopted in 2003-04 and four Aboriginal children, including siblings, were adopted in 2005-06, including siblings. In the rare circumstances that an Aboriginal child is relinquished for adoption, the Act directs that the placement of the child must be in accordance with the Aboriginal child placement principles set out in sections 33 to 39 of the Act. Under these principles, the preferred option is to place the child with the birth parents' community. If that is not practicable, the next option is placement with members of another Aboriginal community and, finally, placement with non-Aboriginal adoptive parents.

Aboriginal groups have recommended that in applying the Aboriginal placement principles and in considering how the child's cultural heritage will be protected, greater weight should be given to consultation with Aboriginal community organisations. The Government has responded to the concerns of Aboriginal groups

by ensuring that the bill strengthens the consultation requirements in the Act with the insertion of an additional requirement. This new requirement provides that a local, community-based and relevant Aboriginal community organisation is to be consulted on the placement of the Aboriginal child for adoption and the provisions in the adoption plan for the child are to assist the child in developing and maintaining positive links with his or her Aboriginal heritage and cultural identity. To ensure that children over 12 years and under 16 years provide effective consent to their own adoption, the bill will streamline the requirements so that they do not need to see both a counsellor and a psychologist. Rather, the functions of both professionals will be combined. Further, children are to be made fully aware of the implications of their decision. The same provisions will apply to young persons consenting to the adoption of their children in appropriate cases.

I now deal with changing an adopted child's name and clarification on conditions for ascertaining effective consent by children. Further miscellaneous amendments introduced by the bill are to remove the requirement that there must be special reasons relating to the best interests of the child before the court can approve a change of name for a child and to clarify the procedural requirements for ensuring consent by children over 12 years and under 16 years to their own adoption. Currently, section 101 (5) of the Act unnecessarily limits the consideration of the best interests of the child. This section requires adoptive parents to establish special reasons to change the name of a child who is more than one year old or a non-citizen child and that the special reasons are related to the best interests of the child. The requirement for special reasons will be removed so that the court can focus on the broad consideration of the best interests of the particular child. The decision whether to change a child's name at the time the adoption order is made will be based on consideration of whether the change is in the child's best interest, taking into account the requirements of section 8, which sets out the principles that are to govern the operation of the Act. In particular, section 8 (1) (e) states:

The child's given name or names, identity, language and cultural and religious ties should, as far as possible, be identified and preserved.

The proposed change will not provide carte blanche to change the names of adopted children. Rather, it will refocus the attention of the court on the best interests of the individual child viewed through the prism of the principles set out in section 8 of the Act. Finally, I draw to the attention of the House that the bill will commence by proclamation. This will allow for the development of appropriate guidelines and regulations to support the new access to information scheme introduced by this bill. I commend the bill to the House.

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

PUBLIC HEALTH (TOBACCO) BILL 2008

Bill introduced on motion by Mr Tony Stewart.

Agreement in Principle

Mr TONY STEWART (Bankstown—Minister for Small Business, Minister for Science and Medical Research, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Cancer)) [10.28 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

As the Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Cancer), I am pleased to introduce in the House today the Public Health (Tobacco) Bill 2008. This bill has been introduced to enact a range of new provisions relating to the important issue of tobacco control. The new provisions have been designed specifically to prevent the exposure of children to environmental tobacco smoke and to prevent the uptake of smoking by young people. The New South Wales Government is committed to reducing smoking in our community. Priority S3 of the State Plan prioritises improving health through reduced obesity, smoking, illicit drug use and risk drinking. The Government target is to reduce smoking rates by 1 per cent per annum to 2010 and then by 0.5 per cent per annum to 2016. I am pleased to advise that we are on target. It is important at the outset to explain why the Government has introduced this bill.

The facts about the impact of smoking on our community are clear. One in two lifetime smokers will die from their smoking habit. A third of those deaths will occur in middle age, at the prime of people's lives. It is estimated that more than 6,500 people die of smoking-related illness in New South Wales each year. Tobacco is responsible for one in five cancer deaths in New South Wales. NSW Health spends more than \$250 million a year treating tobacco-related illness. That amount is equivalent to employing 3,000 full-time nurses. The indirect

cost to the New South Wales community is conservatively estimated at more than \$6.6 billion every year. We have all seen the social marketing campaigns that educate us about tobacco and its effects. We see the warnings on cigarette packs—tobacco causes cancer, heart disease, gangrene, stroke and other ailments.

Because the use of tobacco products leads to addiction, disease and premature death the sale, advertising and display of those products needs to be carefully regulated, as provided in this bill. It is also clear that we need to target our tobacco control efforts to prevent the uptake of smoking by young people. The overwhelming majority of smokers start smoking before the age of 20. By about age 20, 8 out of 10 smokers regret that they ever started smoking, having underestimated the horrible addictive nature of nicotine. Smoking by young people is of great concern because the earlier a person starts smoking the earlier the risk of smoking-related diseases arises. We know also that the age at which a person starts smoking is an indicator of his or her success in quitting smoking. Statistics show that the younger people are when they start to smoke the less likely it is that they will ever cease.

No parent wants to see his or her child take up smoking and live a shortened life with a high risk of serious and chronic illness. And no child should need to seek medical care because of exposure to other people's smoke. Children's exposure to other people's smoke is involuntary, and they are particularly susceptible to health damage caused by inhaling environmental tobacco smoke. Children's bronchial tubes are smaller and their immune systems are less developed, which makes them more likely than adults to suffer negative health consequences of environmental tobacco smoke. In fact, 90 per cent of the costs to the health care system of hospitalisation of people for environmental tobacco smoke relate to children's exposure to other people's smoke.

The provisions of this bill provide a strong and sensible approach to tobacco advertising. The bill represents a decisive shift in the way we allow tobacco to be presented in our community, and in particular to children. These new laws will make New South Wales the Australian leader in tobacco control measures in the retail setting. It is a distinction that we will be proud to hold and it will demonstrate to other States the steps New South Wales has taken against the horrible scourge of smoking. The bill provides for tough and responsible new measures including prohibiting the display of tobacco products, non-tobacco products and smoking accessories in shops; requiring tobacco products and non-tobacco smoking products to be sold from only one point of sale on premises; limiting the number of tobacco vending machines permitted on premises to one vending machine and making vending machines subject to display bans; making it an offence to smoke in a motor vehicle while a child under the age of 16 years is present. The changes will also make the driver liable if a passenger smokes in those circumstances.

Further provisions of the bill include prohibiting a person from engaging in tobacco retailing for specified periods when they have been guilty of repeat offences; requiring retailers to notify the Director General of Health before they commence selling tobacco products; and, importantly, substantially increasing penalties for most existing tobacco offences. The Public Health (Tobacco) Bill 2008 also incorporates and enhances the provisions of part 6 of the Public Health Act 1991 which relate to the sale, advertising and packaging of tobacco products and non-smoking tobacco products. The changes mean that key tobacco control provisions will now be contained in one piece of legislation. It also means that legislation will provide for even tougher penalties for people who do the wrong thing by our community—and there is strong community support for these proposals.

A comprehensive community consultation process has led to the development of this bill. In April 2008 the New South Wales Government released a paper entitled "Protecting Children from Tobacco—The Next Steps to Reduce Tobacco-Related Harm". The paper presented a range of reform options, and the community was invited to comment on the proposals. Almost 12,000 submissions were received from across the State—from retailers, manufacturers, public health experts and advocates, small businesses, parents and community members. The submissions made by children and young people were particularly important, referring to the smoking-related illnesses and even deaths of their parents, and how children feel when they are in a car when an adult is smoking.

The former Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Cancer), Verity Firth, MP, hosted a public forum at Parliament House where more than 60 people attended and gave their views. I commend her for her great work and acknowledge that she provided the backbone for this legislation. Special consultations were also held with young people. After considering the almost 12,000 submissions received the Government has now developed a legislative package which is strong, sensible and practical.

I will now turn to each of the important new proposals in the bill. Part 2 division 2 of the bill expands the range of existing offences relating to the display of tobacco products, non-tobacco smoking products and

tobacco accessories. For many years there has been strict regulation of cigarette and tobacco product advertising and promotion, and to good avail. As a result smoking has been reduced. However, the visual presence of cigarette products in shops has become the major focus of tobacco company marketing activities.

When children visit a retailer that sells tobacco products the tobacco product display is a highly visible feature of the store. The display is generally at the service area, for instance in Coles and Woolworths supermarkets where children can see them as they pass through, and hundreds of tobacco product packets may be displayed. The display of these products indicates to children that tobacco consumption is an ordinary part of our community life. It is not; tobacco kills. One in two smokers will die of cancer as a result of this insidious product. Displays normalise tobacco products for children, but they are not normal. In order to counteract this marketing approach clause 9 of the bill makes it an offence for the occupier of premises on which tobacco products or non-tobacco smoking products are sold to fail to ensure that members of the public cannot see any of those products, or smoking accessories, from inside or outside the premises. The offence is punishable with a fine of up to \$11,000 for individuals and up to \$55,000 for corporations.

That type of display ban has been effectively implemented in other jurisdictions including Thailand, Iceland and Canada. The results in those jurisdictions have been excellent. The Government has talked with many retailers about this provision. It is an important one for advancing public health, and will make New South Wales a leader in tobacco control activities at the point of retail sale. The Government is also conscious that retailers will need time to plan for these changes and it has agreed to phased implementation. Large retailers—those with more than 50 employees—will have six months from the commencement of the provision to comply. Smaller retailers—those with fewer than 50 employees—will have 12 months from the commencement of the provision to comply.

Specialist tobacconists will have a further three years to comply but in that period will be subject to more stringent display restrictions. The Government has agreed to these concessions for specialist tobacconists because it recognises that to not do so would be likely to drive many of them out of business. While the Government is prepared to offer this short-term concession to allow specialist tobacconists to modify their businesses, I place them on notice that after 12 months they will be subject to tighter display controls. Those controls are that their product displays may include no more than one packet facing per product line with a total tobacco display area of not more than three square metres. The display of cigarette cartons will be prohibited. After that three-year period, in other words four years after commencement of the relevant provisions in the bill, specialist tobacconists will need to comply with the total ban on tobacco product displays.

Only those persons approved by the Director-General of Health as specialist tobacconists will have this concession. In order to be so approved, a retailer must be in existence on the day on which this bill was introduced to Parliament and generate at least 80 percent of their turnover from tobacco products, non-tobacco smoking products and smoking accessories. New operators, whether they be specialist tobacconists or not, will need to comply immediately with the prohibition on display. This type of display ban has substantial public support, and is roundly supported by public health experts, who acknowledge the importance of the ban. Eighty-nine percent of people surveyed in the NSW Cancer Institute's 2007 Smoking and Health Survey supported regulation to ensure that cigarettes in shops are stored out of sight of children, and that is what we are doing. Many thousands of submissions were received in support of this proposal in the recent community consultation process. As I said, 12,000 people responded to Government surveys in relation to young children and tobacco.

Another important aspect of the bill is clause 10, which makes it an offence to sell tobacco products from more than one point of sale in each retail premises. The maximum penalty for an offence against the single point of sale will be \$11,000 for individuals or \$55,000 in any other case. Restricting the number of points at which tobacco products can be purchased to one per premises will reduce the scope for children to purchase those products in high turnover locations, such as supermarkets, which I have mentioned, by ensuring that highly trained and experienced staff can be placed at the cash register that is used for tobacco sales and can regulate properly and effectively the sale of those products to adults only. It will also reduce the exposure of recent quitters to inducements and opportunities to purchase tobacco products at a time when they will be particularly vulnerable. We all know that people trying to quit the habit are vulnerable to advertising displays that may entice them to start smoking again.

Moving tobacco products to a single point of sale will further de-normalise the purchase and consumption of tobacco products and contribute to reduced use in the community, which is what we are trying to achieve. Further restrictions on tobacco vending machines are dealt with in part 2, division 3, of the bill.

Clause 12 of the bill provides that tobacco vending machines are only allowed in certain premises in New South Wales: a bar area of a hotel, a club or a casino; or a gaming machine area. Such a venue may only have a single tobacco vending machine. The bill removes the provision that allows vending machines to be located in staff amenities areas so that no staff amenities area can have tobacco products for sale to staff after six months from the commencement of the provision.

To provide further protection to minors from the sale of tobacco products through vending machines the operation of tobacco vending machines must be controlled by staff. It will be a serious offence for a person to operate a vending machine for a child or to provide a child with the means to operate it. The maximum fine for such an offence will be \$11,000 for an individual. Tobacco vending machines are also subject to the display ban, which is required of other sales channels, so that tobacco products sold in the machine must not be in view of members of the public. To ensure maximum accountability for tobacco product vending machines, under the bill an occupier of a premises in which a vending machine is located may also be held accountable for any contravention of the provisions taking place in his or her premises.

For some time people have been able to accrue reward points in shopper loyalty programs for tobacco product purchases and to claim tobacco products with their reward points. Clause 18 of the bill prohibits shopper loyalty programs which allow people to accrue points on the basis of sales of tobacco products or non-tobacco smoking products and to receive gifts of tobacco products or non-tobacco smoking products through that program. Clause 30 of the bill provides that a person who smokes in a motor vehicle in which there is a person under the age of 16 years commits an offence, and the driver of the motor vehicle commits the same offence. The maximum penalty for this offence is \$1,100. Police officers will be empowered to enforce this provision on the spot and to deal with any offence by way of a penalty notice.

In the community consultation process more than 80 per cent of respondents supported prohibiting smoking in a car where a child is present, and the Government is now acting to introduce such a prohibition. Part 5 creates a new regime that requires persons to notify the Department of Health before commencing the retailing of tobacco products. Clause 33 provides that a person who has committed two or more offences against the same section in a three-year period is automatically prohibited from selling tobacco products for three months. If a third offence is committed within the three-year period a further 12-month ban is imposed. The Government recognises that some people may regard this penalty as severe. I make no apologies for that. Let us remember that tobacco kills 50 per cent of its long-term users and causes heart disease, cancer, gangrene, strokes and myriad other health problems. There is no such thing as a safe cigarette. Cigarettes kill, and that is the problem we face.

In order that the notification and prohibition systems are effective, significant maximum penalties will apply for non-compliance. A maximum penalty of \$11,000 will apply to any retailer who does not comply with notification requirements before selling tobacco, while those retailers who persist in selling tobacco despite being banned will face maximum penalties of up to \$110,000 for individuals and \$220,000 for corporations. As I have already noted, the bill also establishes substantially higher penalties for offences. In particular, advertising offences by corporations will now attract maximum penalties of \$660,000 for a first offence and \$1.1 million for subsequent offences. Maximum penalties for a range of other offences have been substantially increased also, particularly for corporations, with most offences now attracting maximum fines of \$55,000. This is a measure of the significance that the Government places on protecting young people from tobacco.

In this respect I also draw attention to clause 21 of the bill, which, amongst other things, deals with the sale of any confectionary or toy that resembles or is packaged to resemble a tobacco product. The maximum penalty for selling such a product has been substantially increased. The current provision in the Public Health Act sets a maximum penalty of \$2,750, while clause 21 of the bill sets maximum penalties of up to \$110,000 for individuals and \$220,000 for corporations. The sale of confectionary or toys that resemble tobacco products is a particularly despicable ploy by the tobacco industry to hook children, and the Government will not stand by and allow this to continue. I put those who deal in these products on notice that their activities will be the subject of intense additional scrutiny from this point on. We are watching.

The New South Wales Government is leading the way—in Australia and around the world—with this package of tobacco control measures. The Government has been congratulated on announcing these reforms by the Cancer Council, the Heart Foundation, the Parents and Citizens Federation, and many others. We are doing this because smoking is the single greatest cause of premature death in New South Wales. It is also the leading cause of preventable disease—disease that can be stopped in its tracks if people do not smoke. Smoking increases the risk of many cancers and, as we now know, is a major cause of heart disease. More than

55,000 hospital visits each year are directly attributable to tobacco smoking. We need to work with industry, retailers and parents to help the next generation avoid a lifetime habit that causes illness and premature death. I hear the sounds of children in the public gallery today. This quest is most important if we are to save our future generations.

While we have made significant progress over the past decade, with the percentage of people who smoke daily or occasionally dropping from 24 per cent to 18.6 per cent, there is no room for complacency when we consider the health of children and young people. They are the future of our community. We will work closely with industry in relation to the definitional aspects of the bill and the practicality of implementing the important reforms that it contains. We will provide clear guidance and direction on the bill's implementation, and ensure that key stakeholders understand what is and is not allowed in a realistic framework. I commend this most important bill to the House. It represents a strong and workable addition to tobacco control measures in this great State of New South Wales.

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

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Suspension of Standing Orders: Bills

Mr JOHN AQUILINA (Riverstone—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.54 a.m.]: I move:

That Standing Order 197 be suspended to permit the Water (Commonwealth Powers) Bill to be presented for assent notwithstanding that its cognate, the Water Management Amendment Bill, has not passed nor been returned from the Legislative Council.

Mr DARYL MAGUIRE (Wagga Wagga) [10.54 a.m.]: This is a most important motion because at the request of the member for Barwon, who led for the Opposition in the debate in this place, the Minister for Water agreed to split the Water (Commonwealth Powers) Bill 2008 and the Water Management Amendment Bill 2008, which are cognate bills, to allow for further consultation. The bills are important for New South Wales, and indeed for Australia as a whole, and we must get them right. Therefore, we require further time for consultation. I understand that Wayne O'Malley, the Mayor of Bourke shire, and Geoff Wise, the General Manager of Bourke Shire Council, are about to meet to discuss the legislation—as will many others in the days and weeks to come—and work through some difficult issues. I understand that they will discuss the purchase of Toorale Station and the restructure plan for Bourke.

Last year the Murray Darling Association conference was held in Bourke. It is a terrific community, and the people were wonderful hosts. It is good to see those office holders advocating on behalf of their community. The Opposition will not oppose the motion because it is important to get this legislation right. We acknowledge the fact that the Minister has agreed to split the bills and to work through the various issues with all stakeholders. I acknowledge also the efforts of the member for Barwon and others who have contributed to the debate.

Mr JOHN AQUILINA (Riverstone—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.56 a.m.], in reply: I thank the member for Wagga Wagga and the Opposition for understanding the situation. New South Wales must honour an agreement with the Commonwealth, so the Water (Commonwealth Powers) Bill 2008 must be passed urgently and receive assent as soon as possible. However, as the member for Wagga Wagga pointed out, further consultation is required regarding the cognate Water Management Amendment Bill 2008. I take this opportunity to acknowledge the work of the Minister for Water. As a former Minister for Land and Water Conservation some time ago I know that it is not an easy role. The Minister has had a baptism of fire in having the carriage of two very difficult bills, but he has demonstrated that he is on top of his portfolio. I know that he will be consultative and inclusive in approaching his portfolio responsibilities, which is consistent with his character. I thank the Opposition for supporting the motion, which I commend to the House.

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

Motion agreed to.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Question—That private members' statements be noted—proposed.

WORLDSKILLS AUSTRALIA NATIONAL COMPETITION 2008

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.58 a.m.]: I know that members are waiting with bated breath to find out how New South Wales fared at the WorldSkills Australia National Competition in July 2008. To recap, WorldSkills Australia was established in 1981. It is a national not-for-profit organisation that gives young Australians aged 23 years and under the opportunity to gain new skills and to compete against their peers in their chosen trade. Its goal is to encourage young people to learn skills and trades, and to showcase their talents through competitions that are held at regional, national and international levels. The opportunity to compete is open to all Australian apprentices, trainees and vocational and education training students and, if eligible, medallists can compete on the international stage in the Skills Olympics.

On 4 June I conveyed to the House the skills of Dean Simmonds, an inspiring young man in my electorate who competed in the IT software applications category. I am pleased to inform the House that Dean was a bronze medal winner. Congratulations Dean! Dean's employer, the Roads and Traffic Authority, must be thrilled with his success. Dean was not the only success story to come out of the Wallsend electorate. Justin Laidlaw, who attends Glendale TAFE campus, won a gold medal in the vehicle painting category after competing at the WorldSkills Australia National Competition in Sydney as part of the 140-strong New South Wales team. Justin showed a tremendous level of commitment and excellence. He is a marvellous ambassador for the Glendale TAFE campus. I know that Justin's success has inspired his fellow students.

I take this opportunity to congratulate and thank the dedicated staff for their hard work, not only those at the Glendale TAFE campus but also all the teachers across the State. New South Wales TAFE and school students are traditionally very strong competitors at WorldSkills competitions, and this year it topped the medal tally. Since coming to office Labor, which is committed to providing the community with more education and training options, has nearly doubled total education and training spending and more than tripled spending on maintenance. Thankfully, the students at the Glendale TAFE campus and the constituents of Wallsend have reaped the benefits of that largess.

The WorldSkills Australia National Competition is the premier event for young people in New South Wales and throughout the country to test themselves across a wide range of industries. The competition celebrates the benefits of vocational education and training and recognises the achievements of young people who are setting new standards for our future workforce. New South Wales Vocational Education and Training in Schools has also won the Vocational Education and Training Schools Shield, which is awarded to the best performing State in the competition. In addition, 18 high school students studying a vocational course as part of their Higher School Certificate helped New South Wales rank first for the third consecutive year after winning more than half of all the medals in 11 categories.

I reiterate my views of 4 June. We know there is a perception among elements of society that vocational training is not as valuable and worthwhile as academic pursuits. We must turn that attitude around and start revering our young trades and vocational skills people as we revere our young athletes. If we did so, our very important trades would be placed on the pedestal that they deserve. A nation witnessed the success of our elite athletes at the Beijing Olympics. These dedicated sportspeople have been justly recognised at many civic receptions across the country. It is only fitting that we recognise the medal winners for this great State from the WorldSkills National Competition. Mr Assistant-Speaker (Mr Wayne Merton), as a distinguished member of this House I suggest to you that we invite these young Australians from all over New South Wales, who will ensure the future wealth of our communities, to an official reception at the oldest Parliament in Australia to recognise their achievements. That we way will congratulate our achievers in the manner that they well and truly deserve.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

Ms PRU GOWARD (Goulburn) [11.03 a.m.]: Local government is by definition governance in our own backyards. Candidates who throw their hats into the ring at council election time might do so for a number of reasons—perhaps because they are passionate about a single issue or because they care about their shires and believe they have something valuable to offer. The closing words from the editorial in the *Southern Highland News* of 15 September certainly should not be ignored:

The new councillors—and some of the old—will soon discover that it is a lot easier to shout abuse from the sidelines than it is to line up on field in the front row of the scrum.

Local councillors I have known work very hard. They confront the mountains of reading with determination, they join committees, attend functions, write letters and turn up to meetings that can sometimes become loud

and heated. Going to buy a loaf of bread could easily turn into a mission of community consultation because many residents do not think twice about confronting councillors with a question, no matter where they are or what they are doing. Being a councillor does not mean just turning up to a meeting twice a month.

The Goulburn electorate overlaps four council areas: Goulburn Mulwaree, Palerang, Upper Lachlan and Wingecarribee. These councils share some concerns, such as the deterioration of country roads, access to health services and inadequate public transport, but they also have their individual issues. So it was with a great deal of interest that I followed the progress of the candidates' campaigns, which were very well documented in two local newspapers—the *Goulburn Post* and the *Southern Highland News*. For several weeks before 13 September, candidates were given the opportunity to have their say about a number of issues and there was passionate debate about issues such as planning and development, housing and employment. Letters to the editor filled many pages as residents, current councillors and candidates vented their spleen, threw down challenges and made commitments for the future. I think we were all more than ready to go to the poll on 13 September.

The Wingecarribee Shire had 70 council candidates vying for nine places. The Liberal ticket, lead by my good friend Juliet Arkwright, received a resounding vote of support with the group attracting the most votes. Happily our second candidate, David Stranger, gained the last spot yesterday. The Liberals now have two councillors, which is a first for the Wingecarribee. The Upper Lachlan Shire had 13 candidates—all Independents. John Shaw was returned to council with an amazing 27 per cent of the primary vote. He has fought hard to defend the town, most recently when it came to Crookwell losing its police sergeant, which remains an ongoing battle. He is to be congratulated on his huge vote.

Most of the 25 candidates who vied for the nine places on Goulburn Mulwaree Council went through a nerve-racking time while preferences were distributed. Once again, all were Independents. However, one candidate, Carol James, was able to sleep easily on election night having reached the 1,544 vote quota on first preference. Carol James has been a great contributor to the community through scouts and Rotary. Her huge vote is a reflection of the town's affection for her. In Palerang, first-time candidate Richard Graham led the 35-candidate field, attracting the most first preference votes and gaining 13 per cent of the total.

I congratulate the successful candidates in the four shires and wish them well for the next four years. Theirs is not an easy task; nothing is more personal than the open drain next door, the leaking sewage soaking the grass or the house built overlooking one's kitchen, the hedge that is too high or the dog that will not stop barking. These and many more are the nuts-and-bolts issues of local governance in all our backyards. The four council areas also have the challenges of development and, in particular, the tension between rural lifestyle values and economic development, particularly mining in the Southern Tablelands. This will challenge our new councillors, as it has their predecessors. People move to our area for the lifestyle and they are very disappointed when they see that being taken away from them.

For the Goulburn Mulwaree Council, the issue of most urgency is the resolution of a water management plan and a final decision on the funding of the Wingecarribee-Goulburn Pipeline, or an alternative. With time running out for spending the money, I am looking forward to council now making a speedy decision. I congratulate all on their successful election or re-election to our councils, thank them for the effort they are about to make on behalf of their communities, wish them wisdom in their deliberations and look forward to working cooperatively with them.

MOREE-ON-GWYDIR ROTARY CLUB

ST MICHAEL'S SCHOOL, DUNEDOO

TRANGIE-NARROMINE-TOMINGLEY HIGH FLYERS BUSINESS AWARDS

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES (Barwon) [11.08 a.m.]: It is with great pleasure that I acknowledge some of the activities around Barwon over recent months since our last sitting. I acknowledge Rotary and its tremendous work across the electorate and across the State. I attended a recent event held by the Rotary of Moree-on-Gwydir. I acknowledge the President, Frank O'Neill; the Secretary, Rob Matthews; the Vice President, Richard Crago; and the Treasurer, Andrew McDougall. I commend the club for its wonderful work in the area, including the beautification of the Meehi River corridor. I also congratulate the club members, and in particular Col Thomas, on their awareness of the Rural Assistance Authority and helping to make people involved in small business aware of the assistance that they can obtain during drought. Rotary has the four-way test: Is it the truth? Is it fair? Will it build goodwill and better friendship? Will it be beneficial to all concerned? These are all attributes we should live up to.

On 27 July I attended the blessing and opening of St Michael's new school buildings and refurbishment at Dunedoo in my electorate. Dunedoo is a good example of many small communities I represent around the Barwon electorate. It is fantastic to see the effort that community has made in providing exceptional education opportunities for young people. As Bishop Dougherty outlined, St Michael's School at Dunedoo is a good example of a partnership between school, home and community. Some of the special guests included Bishop Dougherty; Father Mark McGuigan, the parish priest; Mr Peter Hill from the Catholic Education Office; the Mayor, Mr Peter Shinton; Mr Rob Lennon and the Principal, Mrs Nicole Twohill-Scott. I can honestly say that Sunday was one of the only days that it snowed across my electorate. Most people who were present do a great job, and it was great to meet up with the community.

Last week I attended the Trangie-Narromine-Tomingley High Flyers Business Awards at the Narromine United Services Memorial Club. The guests included Dawn Collins, the Mayor, and Ian Rogan, the General Manager of Narromine Shire Council. While Narromine town is not in my electorate, half of the shire is. I acknowledge some of the small businesses that received awards and the business men and women whom I had the pleasure of meeting the next day. Narromine shire is a good example of small business helping itself and acknowledging the best of the best. The winner of the Home Based Business Award was Anne Louise Stonestreet, who has a home-based cosmetics program that employs a large number of young women around the area who run "panto" nights around the bush. Up to 100 people attend them.

The Retail/Personal Services Award went to The Shack, the New Business Award went to Classic Glamour, and the Tourism Attraction Award went to The Lime Grove. The Professional Services Award was won by the Macquarie Real Estate group. The Indigenous Business Award went to Narromine Community Development Employment Projects [CDEP], and the Environmental Achievement Award also went to Narromine CDEP, which runs an extensive recycling program in the shire. The Community Owned/Government Award went to Communities for Children, which is a care-based organisation operating out of Narromine. It does a fantastic job around the region. The Apprentice of the Year was April Clarke Duggan from the CDEP, and the Encouragement Award went to Narromine on Line, which is a community-based website. The Most Outstanding Business Award went to Edgerton's Nursery in the main street of Narromine. Anna Hitchcock accepted that award, and I had the opportunity to call on that business the next day. It does a fantastic job.

I acknowledge the Mayor of Bourke, Wayne O'Mally, and the General Manager, Geoff Wise, who are meeting with the Deputy Premier and others in this place today to discuss structural adjustment in Bourke, given the purchase of the large Toorale Station in the Bourke area, which will put a large dent in the community. I commend them for their efforts and I commend the Bourke community for its efforts also.

GREATER MENAI SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

Ms ALISON MEGARRITY (Menai) [11.12 a.m.]: On Wednesday 17 September 2008, I was honoured to welcome the new Minister for Education and Training, the Hon. Verity Firth, to a New South Wales school achievement awards ceremony in my electorate. The event was hosted by Tharawal Primary School and celebrated the achievements of eight great schools in the greater Menai area. Alford's Point Primary, Bangor Primary, Illawong Primary, Menai Primary, Tharawal Primary and Woronora River Primary schools, together with Menai High School and Lucas Heights Community School, form an association called the Community of Schools Between the Rivers. For the benefit of members present, the rivers referred to in the title are the Georges and Woronora rivers. I recall the launch of the association with an incredibly impressive display of local public education opportunities, jointly presented by the staff and students from these schools.

Born in the same spirit of cooperation, the innovative Enrichment Program, recognised in the award presented to each school by Minister Firth, was developed to strengthen the links between local primary and secondary schools. Even the most talented younger students can often experience difficulty in the transition from primary to secondary education. The Enrichment Program serves to put in place support systems founded on the principle of high achievement, the ability for effective problem solving, and the development of higher order thinking skills and creativity. The Enrichment Program encourages and facilitates the ability of gifted and talented years 5 and 6 students to engage with high school students. In addition to fostering personal relationships, the Enrichment Program also gives primary school students access to specialist facilities and resources in local high schools, including the use of science labs, and participation in specialist classes. For example, a forensic science class enables students to experience a range of activities, including using microscopes, testing blood and fingerprinting.

At the ceremony, Minister Firth said that undoubtedly such dynamic learning environments, created by the focus on collaboration, shared resources, and a strong sense of community and participation, play an important part in building social capital and contribute significantly to the personal and academic success of our students. Lucas Heights Community School, with students from kindergarten to year 12, was also individually recognised at the awards ceremony for the successful implementation and delivery of another innovative learning project called the REAL program, which stands for Reading for Enjoyment and Learning. The school's website advocates that " ... reading is the key to understanding the world," and the program is based upon this premise. Lucas Heights utilises its age distribution and matches senior peer mentors with primary school students. The REAL program models active learning practices and helps to strengthen personal networks across age divisions, through, for example, a focus on youth interests such as drama and a very popular book club. Allocated recreational reading time provides students the option to read quietly on their own, read to others, enjoy listening to others read, or participate in literacy activities.

Minister Firth said the initiatives like the Enrichment and REAL programs had contributed to the outstanding achievements of New South Wales students in recent literacy and numeracy tests. The national literacy and numeracy tests for years 3, 5, 7 and 9 were the first Australia-wide examinations of this kind. The results clearly demonstrated the current level and standards of education in this State. New South Wales students performed well above the national average in every subject, and at every year level tested. I have made a detailed examination of these extraordinary results and I take this opportunity to recognise the obvious capabilities of primary and secondary students throughout my electorate, and right across the State. Talented and hardworking teachers, principals and support staff assisted by caring families help students achieve their full potential and are the rock solid foundations of our State's education system.

I am sure that every member will join me in congratulating the greater Menai area recipients of the New South Wales School Achievement Awards and acknowledge the consistent efforts of local school communities in helping to achieve the significant statewide results in literacy and numeracy. I say to teachers, students, support people and families right across the State, well done and please keep up the good work. You are making a vital contribution to our State's future.

Pursuant to resolution business interrupted and matter lapsed.

WALK TO WORK DAY

Matter of Public Importance

Mr DAVID HARRIS (Wyong) [11.15 a.m.]: On Friday 3 October—Walk to Work Day—the community will have an opportunity to do something to improve its health and do something good for the environment. I encourage everyone to get behind this initiative. Put on some comfortable shoes, leave the car at home and pound the pavement. People from across Australia will be asked to avoid using their cars and, instead, use a combination of walking and public transport to get around. It is a great initiative, which is not only good for your health but also promotes a cleaner, greener environment in New South Wales. This annual event is aimed at reminding us that there are alternatives to the car and that walking can be very therapeutic and good for our mental health. I encourage all members to get behind Walk to Work Day. It is easy to get involved. Walk all or part of the way to work, use public transport, catch the bus or train and get off a few stops earlier and walk the rest of the way, or think about taking the ferry.

People who must drive to work should drive only part of the way and walk the rest. Walk to Work Day has an official website—www.walk.com.au. People can register online and put together activities to support the event, such as organising a healthy breakfast for members in the workplace. Employers are encouraged to lead by example and rally their workers to get involved. As members of Parliament we, too, should talk to our communities about this great initiative. A couple of months ago I visited my doctor and was told that my blood pressure was a little worrying. I took the initiative to employ a personal trainer and to do a lot more walking. As members of Parliament we should set an example to our communities, both for our own health and to ensure that communities understand the importance of good health. I certainly will participate and, given how easy it is, I think all members should participate.

The Ministry of Transport has confirmed its continued support, by sponsoring Walk to Work Day and the Seven Bridges Walk, which promote people leaving the car at home, walking and using public transport. For people who live in my electorate on the Central Coast, public transport is vital for getting around. The more people who can leave their vehicles at home and use a combination of public transport and walking, the better.

One of the tricks I have learned is to park the car further away from the entrance to the shopping centre and walk the extra distance. People can do little things quite easily. I encourage people on the Central Coast to not use their car and instead to walk or use public transport on 3 October 2008.

Some brief facts on the Walk to Work website tell the story. Walking has been found to lower our risk of heart disease and help maintain flexibility, coordination and a healthy weight. In 2008, 3.71 million Australians were estimated to be obese, which is 16.5 per cent of all males and 18.5 per cent of all females. The economic cost of obesity amounts to \$2,765 for every Australian on a per capita basis. According to beyondblue, regular physical activity reduces the risk of men developing depression by 17 per cent to 28 per cent. The average family car travels 15,000 kilometres per year, generating about five tonnes of greenhouse gas pollution. By 2025 a total of 4.6 million Australians, or 18.3 per cent of the population, are projected to be obese unless we change our mindset.

The Hon. Rick Colless in the other place has organised a group of parliamentarians who seek to maintain a healthy lifestyle by walking before Parliament sits each day. This is an excellent initiative, supported by a number of members from various parties. A meeting was held last night, which unfortunately I could not attend, and I understand that there will be talks on nutrition and mental wellbeing also. This wonderful initiative demonstrates that members of Parliament can lead the way for the community.

As Australians we should participate in the event and as parliamentarians we should encourage our communities to do the right thing. Promoting walking and exercise is the key to overcoming the obesity problems facing our communities and reducing our dependence on cars. I encourage everyone in New South Wales to visit the website, support the initiative, plan ahead and walk on Walk to Work Day. I am sure that on that day many people will take to the streets and tread the pavement, combining walking with public transport. People can also catch a train or bus, get off a stop early and walk the extra distance. They would be doing themselves and the environment a favour. This is a worthwhile activity. It is a matter of public importance, not just for the environment but also because we as a society must seriously address obesity. By taking these small steps we can change habits and become a healthy community. We also can save valuable money that goes towards health and treating people suffering from problems associated with obesity.

Mr GREG SMITH (Epping) [11.22 a.m.]: I do not want to trivialise the importance of Walk to Work Day but many people have to walk to work because of clogged roads and lousy public transport, particularly the residents of Ryde. Yesterday the traffic was so clogged between Top Ryde and Epping Road at the flyover—

Mr Anthony Roberts: For half an hour.

Mr GREG SMITH: It was clogged for half an hour. That is typical for Ryde and surrounding areas.

Mr Anthony Roberts: It probably was a good day.

Mr GREG SMITH: It was a good day; it was only half an hour. Sometimes it might be longer. Traffic coming down Epping Road, now that the funnel has been imposed on us by the bushranger Carr-Iemma-Rees Government, or whatever government one calls it—I do not know who will be Premier next week—has caused enormous stress on drivers travelling through the electorate of Ryde, Epping and Lane Cove because the Government established 24-hour bus lanes, despite not many buses being available to use them. Traffic traverses the electorate of Ryde from the Parramatta area into Macquarie Park. The Government has failed to provide adequate parking.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! The member for Epping does not need the encouragement of the Minister for Planning.

Mr GREG SMITH: Macquarie Park, which is a new employment area and is the third-biggest commercial area in metropolitan Sydney, has a dearth of parking. The Department of Planning has approved very few parking spots. The Government has messed up the Epping to Chatswood link going through Ryde. Despite the Ryde electorate having three railway stations, it has very little parking so people park on footpaths or across driveways. Optus sought approval for 5,000 car parking spaces but was granted permission for only 2,000. To cover the shortfall of 3,000 spaces needed for Optus workers, buses that were supposed to travel into the city now travel through suburban streets built for light traffic only. Victoria Road has suffered accordingly as a result of the commuter rebellion against all the tollways. Both the Lane Cove Tunnel and the M2 are tollways.

Mr David Harris: Point of order: My point of order relates to relevance under Standing Order 76. The motion deals with the health benefits of Walk to Work Day. The member is canvassing a wide range of issues and is not speaking in the spirit of the motion.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! While I understand the point of order taken by the member for Wyong, the motion is broad ranging. I will listen carefully to the contribution of the member for Epping. He knows that the motion relates to Walk to Work Day.

Mr GREG SMITH: The voters of Ryde and other areas will have to walk to work more often because the Government is now going to impose a tax on parking. In future, anyone who parks near a railway station will have to pay a tax, just as we pay taxes on the M2 and the Lane Cove Tunnel. We do not get the 90 per cent rebate that people in the west receive.

Mr Daryl Maguire: The footpaths will be full. The taxes will be increased.

Mr GREG SMITH: There is discrimination. People in the north-west, particularly in Ryde and surrounding areas, are being taxed enormously. Railway stations have so little parking that commuters have either to drive or walk to work. I know it is healthy, but it takes hours to walk from Ryde to the city.

Mr Anthony Roberts: And Labor has done nothing.

Mr GREG SMITH: The previous member for Ryde did nothing to defend the citizens of Ryde against the bushranger impositions on Epping Road, the clog that is Victoria Road, the clog that is Lane Cove Road, the clog that is Blaxland Road, and all those intersections—

Ms Kristina Keneally: Point of order: My point of order is relevance. While I realise that the member for Epping is very excited about the upcoming Ryde by-election, the motion is about Walk to Work Day, which is on Friday 3 October. It would be appreciated if the member for Epping could speak to the matter of public importance rather than about other matters, no matter how excited he is about them.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! As I said earlier, the motion deals with walking to work, which is a fairly wide-ranging topic. Whilst I appreciate the intention of the member who moved the motion, and the points the Minister has raised, the member for Epping is dealing with the issue of walking to work. However, he is also raising other issues that he believes reasonably flow on from that proposition.

Mr GREG SMITH: The people who live in Vimiera Road, Balaclava Road and Herring Road have to walk to work because they cannot get their cars out of their driveways. They cannot get their cars out of their driveways because the Government—with Mr Watkins, the former member for Ryde, taking no steps to stop it—has allowed cars to flock across Epping Road. The cars are held up there because of the bus lanes; they cannot go in the bus lanes. Victor Dominello is out there fighting for those who have to walk to work at the moment—

Ms Kristina Keneally: Point of order: The member for Epping is flagrantly flouting the standing orders and your ruling. The motion is about Walk to Work Day—a specific day that will occur on Friday 3 October. The member for Epping is now talking about the Liberal candidate for the seat of Ryde. If he wants to debate the issue of Epping Road, maybe he could bring some honesty into the debate and remind us that it was the Lane Cove Tunnel Action Group that called for the restrictions on Epping Road. He could also remind us that the member for Lane Cove supported that call, and that Kerry Chikarovski also backed it. If the member for Epping is going to debate Epping Road and the Ryde by-election—

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! The Minister has made her point. The member for Epping has made a wide-ranging introduction to his speech, but I ask him to bear in mind that the matter of public importance relates to Walk to Work Day.

Mr GREG SMITH: That was a deliberate interruption on the part of the Minister. The people of Ryde are sick of having to walk everywhere. They cannot get their cars out onto the road. Victor Dominello will free them.

Ms ALISON MEGARRITY (Menai) [11.29 a.m.]: Walking is easy to do and good for you, and yet most of us do not do it often enough. This year 3.71 million Australians are estimated to be obese. Projections

estimate that by 2025, 4.6 million Australians will be obese. The figures speak for themselves. Steps need to be taken—if you will pardon the pun. The community needs to be made aware of the personal health and environmental benefits of incorporating walking and public transport into their daily lives. Walking is a healthy, environmentally friendly way to get around, and it can be a key part of the community's effort to shrink its carbon footprint.

Walking is a great way for the community to combine the need to get around with the need to exercise. It is easy, and even very busy people can incorporate regular physical activity into a demanding schedule. Walking lowers our risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, and high blood cholesterol levels. Based on my observations around my electorate, walking also appears to benefit personal relationships. What could be described as "empty nester" couples are frequently out and about in the mornings and evenings. However, I will not recommit the sins of the member for Epping by diverging too far away—

Mr Greg Smith: Point of order: This discussion has nothing to do with empty nesters; it has nothing to do with people walking around in the evening. The matter of public importance is about Walk to Work Day. It is a travesty of this Parliament—

Ms ALISON MEGARRITY: To the point of order—

Mr Greg Smith: The member for Menai is wasting time by talking about empty nesters.

Ms ALISON MEGARRITY: To the point of order: As I was saying before I was rudely interrupted—

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! The comments of the member for Menai are within the leave of the matter of public importance. Whilst the Minister has specific deadlines relating to Walk to Work Day, the member for Menai is dealing with the subject generally.

Ms ALISON MEGARRITY: Obviously the member for Epping did not listen long enough to hear me say that I would not commit the sins he committed by diverging too far away from the subject.

Mr Anthony Roberts: Point of order: I ask you to direct the member for Menai to stop attacking the people of Ryde, who are facing traffic problems and having to walk to work because of the failure of this Labor Government.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! There is no point of order.

Ms ALISON MEGARRITY: On top of a myriad of health benefits, walking to work removes vehicles from the road, thereby reducing greenhouse gas emissions, cutting traffic congestion, and reducing safety risks. Walk to Work Day is the perfect opportunity to stop making excuses, and to do something positive for yourself, your community, and your environment. National Walk to Work Day is an annual event being held on Friday 3 October 2008. I am not sure that members opposite have got the message yet. This year the community is being urged to take the first step in improving the health of our nation and our environment. The event encourages individuals, businesses, organisations and even members of the Opposition to promote regular physical activity and contribute to a cleaner environment. Participating in Walk to Work Day will encourage better physical and mental health, and reduced car dependency, and result in less traffic on our roads.

Mr DAVID HARRIS (Wyang) [11.32 a.m.], in reply: I acknowledge the contribution of the member for Menai and thank her for sticking to the matter of public importance. I also acknowledge the contribution of the member for Epping, but I was disappointed that he chose a very important public health event designed to help improve the environment to endeavour to score cheap political points for an upcoming by-election. While members on this side of the House want to promote events to support a healthy lifestyle, members opposite do not seem to be interested in such matters, which is sad.

I also note that having delivered his tirade the member for Epping has now left the Chamber. That demonstrates even further that the member for Epping is not interested in the health of our citizens and in promoting good health strategies, in the way the Government and members on this side of the House are. This initiative has the support of Federal, State and local governments across the country. Unfortunately, it seems that the Opposition does not support it. It is also endorsed by the Cancer Council, the Heart Foundation, Diabetes Australia, beyondblue and Planet Ark for its health and environmental benefits. I am sure that most other members of the Opposition support this important initiative. It is a disgraceful that the member for Epping has sought to divert attention from what is a very important event.

The objectives of National Walk to Work Day are to promote regular walking as a healthy activity; to promote better physical, mental and social health; to reduce the reliance on the private motor vehicle; to promote and improve the use of public transport, thereby reducing traffic; and to improve air quality by reducing unnecessary vehicle emissions, thereby helping to reduce global warming. I encourage the public to embrace this initiative on 3 October and to consider whether walking to work is a viable option for them on a more regular basis. There are significant benefits to personal health through walking, as well as the benefits to the environment from decreased use of vehicles.

Leonie Young, the Chief Executive Officer of beyondblue, says that research shows that regular physical activity leads to a 17 to 28 per cent reduced risk of developing depression. Regular aerobic and strength exercises can also lead to a 50 per cent reduction in the symptoms of depression and anxiety, especially for women and older people. Weight loss life coach Maz Maclean, the founder of *youarewhatyoueat.com.au*, goes even further. She says, "Put simply, if you want to burn fat, walking is the most convenient and most effective exercise available. Walk to Work Day is the perfect catalyst to start forming a healthy habit." On Friday 3 October we are asking all Australians to put their best foot forward and join this very worthwhile event.

Discussion concluded.

WALLAGA LAKE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE (Bega) [11.35 a.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) notes the needs of the Wallaga Lake Aboriginal community on the Far South Coast for improved State Government services from the Department of Community Services in relation to the support and protection of children;
- (2) calls on the Premier to fund street lighting in the Aboriginal village as a matter of urgency to ensure community safety for children and adults alike; and
- (3) calls on the Premier to address the resourcing issues facing the preschool and State housing, and to address the employment crisis facing local residents.

I gave notice of this motion 12 months ago, at a time of much community debate on the Breaking the Silence report. Over the past 12 months I have had very positive meetings with the Wallaga Lake community. I put on record that there are lot of positive people in that community who are hoping to secure improvements in vital infrastructure and support services to benefit the families within that Aboriginal community. When I met with the community I noted that there were a number of issues as to commitments given by both Federal and State governments to get on with vital infrastructure projects and the delivery of important community-based services.

The basic provision of street lighting was such an issue. At that time I approached Country Energy and it responded. I was grateful for that response in securing a number of streetlights, but there are still not enough for the entire community. That is something the Premier should proactively address. The Wallaga Lake community is somewhat isolated from the other towns in the surrounding area. It is incredible that in 2008 the community does not have basic street lighting, particularly when one considers issues such as community safety and child protection. The provision of street lighting is fundamental to the safety of all in the community. I hope that the State Government sees fit to urgently address street lighting for that community. As I said, Country Energy responded to my initial approach, but it did not go far enough.

All communities evolve and change. The Wallaga Lake community is taking positive steps forward by working with a number of non-government organisations in the provision of services to support women and children. In particular, I acknowledge the strength of the women in that community who are prepared to stand up and engage with non-government organisations to provide better support services to the community. It is particularly pleasing that we are about to see the rollout of one service run by the Education Centre Against Violence called Weaving the Net. Such programs are successful only if the community engages in them. It is pleasing that that program is to run at Wallaga Lake.

A number of other issues at Wallaga Lake are also of significant concern. I again highlight that there are some excellent people working in non-government organisations to provide support to the community, but I hope we will see better coordination. There are 38 homes in Wallaga Lake, yet at one point upwards of 26 services provided community-based services to the residents. We do not want to see valuable resources

wasted on administration; we want to see the resources better targeted towards those in need of support. Ron Nye is now the chief executive officer of the Land Council. I look forward to working with Ron and the Lands Council as we move forward.

A response by the State Government is needed to a number of issues. First, there has been a push within the community for the provision of an oval. I know the Department of Sport and Recreation has been proactive in this regard, but I am keen to see the children of the community have access to an oval. Second, there is a preschool in the community. Whilst there have been some challenges in the past with the manager of that preschool, I am hopeful that the preschool will become a bigger heartbeat in the community and families can flourish as a result.

Third, Wallaga Lake is on the boundary between two local government areas. One shire is responsible for the provision of water, sewerage and the like, and the other is responsible for the provision of other local government services. That has resulted in the community being left somewhat neglected. That situation should be resolved by the proper leadership of the State Government. Cabinet has dealt with sewerage issues previously, as we have seen through documentation about the provision of sewerage to a number of communities throughout the far South Coast, such as Bodalla. If inappropriate sewerage systems exist within communities people get sick and lives are put at risk. That is something that must be addressed as quickly as possible. Wallaga Lake is on Land Council property, but there are issues surrounding housing maintenance and the age of the buildings in the community. The Government should also resource housing more proactively.

Notice of this motion was given on 25 September 2007—12 months ago today. We must get this right. The Government cannot continue to allow communities such as Wallaga Lake to not receive support. We do not want to see the children of Wallaga Lake not afforded the same opportunities as other children in the region and the State. To the best of my ability, I want to work with the community to inject more resources into infrastructure so it continues to flourish.

I remain particularly concerned about the opportunities for employment of Aboriginal people throughout the region. Some positive steps are being taken to engage Aboriginal people in the provision of community-based services, particularly in aged care. Those efforts have been driven from Moruya. Anyone who has visited the Wallaga Lake area would know the importance of its culture. I hope that greater employment opportunities are generated. There is always a need for Government leadership in the employment of Aboriginal people, particularly in government departments such as Fisheries, Forestry, Tourism, et cetera. Leadership in the community is evolving and changing. The community is hoping to move forward. It wants to ensure that Wallaga Lake becomes an increasingly stronger community.

Mr STEVE WHAN (Monaro—Parliamentary Secretary) [11.45 a.m.]: I agree that notice of this motion was given 12 months ago today, but I believe that a number of things have moved on since that time. The member for Bega has acknowledged that by referring to a number of programs that are having an impact in the area. The Government does not support the motion, but that should not be taken as a lack of interest in working with the Wallaga Lake community. The Government acknowledges that there are still significant issues in the Wallaga Lake community that need to be addressed. It will work with the community and the member for Bega to try to resolve them.

Some of those issues are long-running, and many of them are being addressed by government programs. The Government is committed to working in close partnership with Aboriginal communities in developing and implementing solutions. One way we are doing this is through the Two Ways Together program. This is a comprehensive plan that seeks to improve the wellbeing of Aboriginal people across New South Wales in key areas, including families and communities, justice, housing, education and economic development. The Wallaga Lake community is one of the 40 partnership communities identified under Two Ways Together. The creation of 20 new partnership community project officer positions in these communities is a further demonstration of the Government's commitment to addressing the needs of Aboriginal communities.

The Government has invested \$1.9 million to enable these project officers to work with the partnership communities. The project officers will work with Aboriginal communities to improve government service delivery and strengthen community resilience in each location. In partnership with the communities, these project officers will develop a local action plan to guide government service delivery so that it meets local needs. Their presence within the communities will allow the Government to more effectively target programs and resources where they are needed and they will help facilitate contact between the community, government and non-government agencies. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs has recently completed consultation with communities across the State on an engagement framework for Two Ways Together partnership communities and a tool kit to assess community resilience.

The range of issues raised in the motion—child protection, community safety, education, housing and employment—is being progressed at a whole-of-government level. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs is continuing to work closely with the community. These matters will require a close and ongoing partnership with and active involvement in the communities. The Government's approach will be one of genuine engagement and mutual respect. The Government wants to address child protection issues, particularly child sexual assault. As I said, progress is being made in these areas. An Intergovernmental Working Group is working with the community to develop strategies to address issues of concern.

The initiatives being implemented include child protection training for service workers and community members, hosted by Little Yuin Preschool—which was mentioned by the member for Bega. Further initiatives include the Education Centre against Violence, which will deliver stage two of Weaving the Net training in October 2008 and provide an opportunity for service providers and the community to come together to develop strategies to deal with violence against women and children; and the trial of a community-supported joint response initiative between Police and the Department of Community Services where there is an identified risk of harm to children. The Government is fully aware of the need to work together with the Wallaga Lake community.

As notice of this motion was given 12 months ago, some of the issues have been addressed. If I had more time, perhaps I would have moved an amendment. The motion is prescriptive about funding for street lighting and other issues. As I said, those issues are being dealt with. To support the motion would imply that nothing is happening. In fact, quite a lot is happening. The Wallaga Lake community is a very important community on the South Coast and one with which I am very familiar. When I was a Federal candidate I doorknocked and visited the community on a number of occasions. Obviously, the community has been in the area for many years—well before we came. The community has very positive aspects, such as the community centre, which provides employment for local people, and tours of nearby Aboriginal land. A couple of years ago I had the pleasure of attending the handover of Gulaga National Park. I believe the member for Bega attended as well. Some very positive things are happening for indigenous communities on the far South Coast. Incidentally, it is the only polling booth where I polled more than 90 per cent of the vote. I am very grateful to them for that.

Mrs Judy Hopwood: Then support the motion.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I note the interjection of the member for Hornsby, who has probably never been anywhere near the place. As I pointed out earlier, the Government is working closely with the local community on many issues. Child safety is being addressed through the establishment of a child protection working group. We are working together to develop strategies to ensure collaborative responses to family violence issues. The member for Bega referred to the issue of employment. The Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations is working with the community to provide access to a range of Commonwealth services and initiatives. These include employment strategies such as the establishment of meaningful traineeships that result in sustainable employment and support for the preschool through early childhood programs.

My colleague the Federal member for Eden-Monaro, Mike Kelly, has been working closely with indigenous communities on the South Coast. The Police local area command is looking at crime prevention strategies through the formation of a consultative committee of Wallaga Lake community members to engage with residents and seek input to resolve issues. As I said earlier, the Education Centre Against Violence will provide the "Weaving the Net" training at Wallaga Lake on 20 and 22 October to address community violence issues. An Aboriginal-specific resource kit and a range of therapy puppets have been purchased by Eurobodalla Families New South Wales Local Area Network to provide protective behaviour training to children at the Wallaga Lake Aboriginal community, and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs is establishing a community-based working group.

A range of positive initiatives has been implemented in the community. Community Services is continuing to maintain a positive working relationship with the preschool. The member for Bega acknowledged movement on the preschool issue since he gave notice of his motion. The educational outcomes of children attending the preschool have improved markedly, as evidenced by the increased literacy levels reported by local primary schools this year. The department is progressing the development of a Child and Family Centre by extensions to the preschool to provide improved facilities for a range of services specific to the health and wellbeing of children and families. Staff at Batemans Bay Community Services Centre are actively engaged with the Wallaga Lake community and the preschool management committee and have attended meetings to discuss child safety issues.

This indigenous community holds an important place on the South Coast. Community leaders have worked positively over the years with their Federal and State representatives. Although I no longer represent the South Coast, I represented Eden for a period. In that capacity I worked with community leaders. The Government will maintain its positive engagement with Aboriginal communities on the South Coast and looks forward to further progress in the Wallaga Lake community. There is still more work to do in the community. The Government does not consider that the motion adequately reflects the current situation. The motion could be seen as a negative, whereas positive progress has been made. I acknowledge there is a lot more to do. The Government wants to encourage further progress. To that end, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs would be more than happy to work with the member for Bega on the issues he has raised in his motion. In contrast to the low-voiced, sniping comments of the member for Hornsby, I acknowledge the importance of the Wallaga Lake Aboriginal community and indicate that the Government will continue to work towards improvements in the community.

Mr GREG APLIN (Albury) [11.55 a.m.]: I support the motion moved by the member for Bega. I express the amazement of the Opposition that the Government does not join with us in supporting the motion. If it had concerns with the motion, it could have moved an amendment. As the member for Bega and the member for Monaro have identified, notice of this motion was given 12 months ago and, since then, changes have occurred. As the Government has rejected the motion, I will reiterate the concerns expressed by the member for Bega in the motion, particularly in paragraph (1). Whilst I note that progress has been made, it is staggering that the Government will not join with us. As the member for Monaro has acknowledged, there is more work to be done.

But why is he not prepared to go through with the plans that are in place that the member for Bega seeks to conclude on behalf of his community? Point 1 notes the needs of the Wallaga Lake Aboriginal community on the far South Coast for improved services from the Department of Community Services in relation to the support and protection of children. How can the Government not possibly support the motion? That point goes to the very heart of the State Plan. I read from State Plan Priority F7, which is in relation to reduced rates of child abuse and neglect. In relation to domestic violence it acknowledges that:

Violence inside and outside the family is a major issue in New South Wales that affects women and children in particular. It has great human and economic costs. Abuse and assaults, and the fear of them, can cause family breakdown. More than a quarter of all reports to DoC's Helpline concern children at risk of harm because of domestic violence.

The Government's own publication further states:

Aboriginal children and young people are 3 times more likely than all children and young people to be reported to police that victims of domestic violence related assault and sexual assault. Aboriginal females are nearly six times more likely than are all NSW females to be recorded as victims of domestic violence.

If that is not enough—and this goes to the heart of the Government's opposition to supporting its own documents, which it put out as plans, and not support the member for Bega in trying to achieve something for his own community—the data shows that:

Two thirds of all Aboriginal people who access supported accommodation services each year are females, and the proportion is slowly growing.

So that demand is there as well. The report goes on to state:

The number of children involved in reports referred for further assessment is steadily increasing and the number of Aboriginal children involved is increasing at a faster rate than for all children. In spite of accounting for only 4% of the total population of children and young people in the NSW population, Aboriginal children and young people account for 13.7% of all reports referred for further assessment to a CSC/JIRT in 2006/07.

On many occasions we have accused the Government of dragging its feet on taking action to address child sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities. This has been in the target range since the delivery of the "Breaking the Silence" report in 2006. Eighteen months into the five-year plan to tackle the sexual abuse of indigenous children in New South Wales, the Government still had only two specialist counsellors and both were hired—as we recall from former Premier Iemma's statement back in June—as part of the commitment made in January to establish a statewide network.

Members may remember when the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs was labelled a Muppet and a blockhead. He was described as "having a case of the Iemmas" after his performance on radio 2GB when it was found that he was not aware that there was only one child sexual abuse counsellor in New South Wales to

achieve something that had been on the books for 18 months after the Breaking the Silence report—a report that showed up the inertia of the bureaucracy, the inertia of this Government and the inadequate funding. We found later that the State budget committee rejected a request for \$25 million funding in November 2006 to implement that report's recommendations. In last year's budget funding to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs was slashed by 40 per cent. So instead of the Breaking the Silence report and its terrible findings prompting urgent attention from the then Lemma Government, it has been met by denial, delay and funding cuts.

Child sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities will not end until the offenders are investigated and prosecuted. Investigators, caseworkers and community leaders are all crying out for more funding and resources, but the Government has refused to commit any. And today, speaking on behalf of the Government, the member for Monaro said that his Government cannot support this urgent call from the member for Bega for government resources to be applied to reduce sexual abuse and to support the protection of children in Wallaga Lake.

Ms LYLEA McMAHON (Shellharbour—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.00 p.m.]: Wallaga Lake Aboriginal community is a rural community within the Eurobodalla local government area on the far South Coast of New South Wales. Most services are located in the surrounding townships of Batemans Bay, Moruya and Narooma. Access to services in neighbouring towns is difficult because of poor transport infrastructure. The community itself has been poorly serviced also due to limited service accommodation and the need for safe, secure service accommodation within the community. The Department of Community Services, along with other government departments, recognises this need.

The Department of Community Services is a partner agency in the Wallaga Lake Intergovernmental Working Group, which has been meeting bi-monthly since March 2008. The Queanbeyan Indigenous Coordination Committee [ICC], in partnership with the New South Wales Department of Aboriginal Affairs, leads the group under the Two Ways Together strategy. The working group has representation from New South Wales and Commonwealth government agencies, all working together to develop collaborative approaches to support the Wallaga Lake Aboriginal community. Employment, housing, education and safety issues are being addressed through the relevant agencies represented.

To date, achievements of the Intergovernmental Working Group include the employment of a senior coordinator in May 2008 to coordinate service provision for the new multi-purpose outreach centre being developed in the Wallaga Lake community; setting up of a child protection working group, whose membership includes New South Wales police and the Department of Community Services, that has been working on a coordinated response to child protection issues such as domestic violence; the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, police local area command and Wallaga Lake community members developing initiatives to address issues of safety, skill development and unemployment; the Department of Aboriginal Affairs establishing a community-based working group to progress issues of unemployment, education and youth; the Department of Community Services working with the Little Yuin Preschool to achieve financial sustainability; and managers from the local community services centre and the preschool's management committee meeting regularly to discuss strategies to address child safety issues in the community.

The Department of Community Services continues to maintain a positive working relationship with Little Yuin Preschool. The educational outcomes for children who attend the preschool have improved markedly, as evidenced by the increased literacy levels reported by local primary schools this year. The department is also funding the construction of a child and family centre at the Little Yuin Preschool to provide improved services for the health and wellbeing of children and families. These will include a homework centre, school-age care, parenting courses, workshops and adult literacy programs. Community services staff in Batemans Bay and the Little Yuin Preschool management committee remain actively engaged in discussions around child safety issues.

A child protection working group has been established to improve child safety in the community and police and local community services staff are working together to develop strategies for a collaborative response to family and domestic violence issues. Under a shared responsibility agreement, the Commonwealth departments of families, housing, community services and indigenous affairs provided funding to the Queanbeyan Indigenous Coordination Centre to employ a senior coordinator to develop the Wallaga Lake Multipurpose Outreach Centre. The coordinator, employed since May 2008, has established relationships with Wallaga Lake Aboriginal community members, local service providers and government agencies. Wallaga Lake Multipurpose Outreach Centre will provide a venue for a broad range of outreach services including employment, training, health and family support.

Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [12.05 p.m.]: I support the motion moved by the member for Bega, and I do so from the perspective of being a metropolitan member of Parliament. Prior to being elected to this place I worked as the executive director of the Australian Podiatry Association and as such had a great deal to do with remote and regional communities, including Aboriginal communities. Therefore, I feel I have a great deal of perspective on the difficulties faced by some remote communities in accessing support services such as health services, community services, police instigation of control and improving the safety of children and adults alike.

It is beyond me why the Government cannot support this motion. Members opposite have spoken positively on the motion. All the concerns that the member for Bega has raised about the Wallaga Lake Aboriginal community have been reiterated by members opposite. I do not understand why the Government cannot agree that this is a good motion and support it. We should be working together on the very difficult issues confronting these remote communities and their unique problems. The Government should be condemned for not supporting this motion.

In my role as executive director of the Australian Podiatry Association I worked on gaining access for podiatrists to remote communities. I also had input into the training of Aboriginal health workers around the State. To this day podiatrists and Aboriginal health workers have instructed in by information that would improve the health of these remote communities. Obviously, Aboriginal health workers and others going into these communities can highlight other problems. This little community must get more help. The fact that the Government cannot support this motion is detrimental to the progress of the community.

Members opposite have highlighted the work that has been done. This motion has been on the notice paper since 25 September 2007. Why not be cooperative and work together for this little community? Why are members opposite negative in their response to a local member who is trying to improve the health and other services provided in this community? I totally support the member for Bega, and the Government should do likewise.

Mr PAUL McLEAY (Heathcote) [12.10 p.m.]: I move:

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

- (1) notes the continuing need to work with the Wallaga Lake Aboriginal community to improve support and services; and
- (2) acknowledges the important steps taken to address child safety, education and employment, and calls on the Government to continue to work with the community to improve these areas.

There is no doubt that we as a community need to work with these communities. It should not be a case of knowing that we have all the answers at the one time but not working with the community to solve the problems more effectively. There is no question that as a Government we need to show leadership. We need to work with our agencies for the good of the community, particularly those who are most vulnerable. We in our ivory towers do not have all the answers. We must go to communities and work with them and their leaders, the victims and those who know what it is that is affecting them. We need to do that properly, sensitively and sensibly. The Government has a history of working with communities. That is our strength. We involve communities rather than arrogantly put across our views. We need a form of citizen engagement whereby those who are affected are part of the process. The process needs to be pursued while we consider each person's place in the community and demonstrate leadership. I commend the amendment to the House.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE (Bega) [12.14 p.m.], in reply: I note that the amendment is out of order because there is no date, name or signature on it. I will not accept the fact that the Government has had this motion on the notice paper for 12 months and the best it can do is produce an amendment that is out of order.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order! I take the comments of the member for Bega on board. I believe the member for Heathcote has signed it.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: No, this must be done correctly.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order! The amendment is in order now; it has been signed.

Mr Daryl Maguire: Point of order: With great respect, this amendment was handed to us without a signature, without the member's name and without a date, contrary to what is required. It was given to the member moving it to sign after we had received it. This amendment was out of order and should be rejected.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order! I have ruled on the matter.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: It is extraordinary: the first Government member who spoke on this motion said that the Government would reject it. If members opposite were to read the motion on the *Notice Paper* they would recognise that I am trying to improve the services provided to and the lives of the people of Wallaga Lake. The members for Shellharbour and Monaro basically agreed with me. I thank the members for Albury and Hornsby, from this side of the House, who supported the motion. They know only too well that the State Government has not done enough for Aboriginal communities around the State. I sought to elevate some very important issues concerning the village of Wallaga Lake, and I was handed an amendment that touches on those very issues. However, it does not touch on the important issue of street lighting, which continues to be a major problem for this community.

I cannot believe that in 2008 we have a community in New South Wales that does not have street lighting, particularly given the reports that have been produced and the concerns that have been raised previously by the Government about basic community safety issues in Aboriginal communities in this State. Wallaga Lake has had some tough times, but there are good people in that community trying to do good things. They do not want to be let down by Federal, State and local governments that continue to extend all these hopeful messages about the appointment of bureaucrats who will coordinate services and who know about the problems. They want action. I do not know how many agencies are servicing Wallaga Lake; it could be 41 or 26.

Mr Steve Whan: You would think you would know.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: I do not think the Government even knows. The member for Monaro is in government. He should tell me how many agencies are currently serving the community. Last year there were 26; I understand that there are now 41. I do not want to hear platitudes about bureaucrats being appointed, million-dollar programs and all of that nonsense when the outcomes in these communities are not real. The programs in these communities are not delivering better protection for children and women.

The Government has moved to amend the motion and it will use its numbers. I know only too well, as do members opposite, about the need for bipartisanship with regard to basic requirements. The lack of street lighting says a lot about the way in which the Government views itself and how out of touch it really is. We have consistently heard from Kevin Rudd about the need to work with the Opposition at the Federal level on Aboriginal affairs. What we saw this morning in this House is a clear demonstration that the Government is not interested in working in the interests of Aboriginal people, be they in Wallaga Lake or any other community in New South Wales. Government members are interested only in protecting their political reputation in the face of their failures.

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

Amendment agreed to.

Motion as amended agreed to.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [12.19 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that the construction of the mental health intensive care unit is complete at Hornsby hospital;
- (2) notes the need for increased staff numbers to enable the facility to receive patients; and
- (3) calls on the Government to improve retention and training of mental health nurses.

Notice of this motion was given on 25 September last year, when the mental health intensive care unit had been completed but was not open for patients. It was not open for patients for 11 months following its completion. In

light of the need for an increase in acute beds and other beds for mental health patients this was a great travesty of the policies we have heard from the Government. The mental health intensive care unit was completed in March 2007, just in time for the 2007 State election. The irony of this is that the Government was wanting to show it was tangibly—in 3D—doing something for mental health by adding an intensive care unit to the mental health facilities on the campus of Hornsby hospital, but when it came to opening the doors so that care could be experienced by people in desperate need of those 12 beds—the original plan was 15 beds and it was carved down to 12—the beds were not occupied.

The main reason for that, apart from another reason I will venture into, is that there was not enough staff to open the facility. Indeed, there was not enough staff to open even four beds of the facility. That demonstrates that the Government was intent on showing that it could build this intensive care unit at a cost of \$7 million of taxpayers' funds but had not planned to staff it. It had not put in the necessary checks and balances and advertisements, and all the things required to ensure that when it opened the doors of this intensive care unit for people with a mental illness there was enough staff for the 12 beds.

Therefore, the unit stood as a white elephant, empty for 11 months. During that 11 months it was open for tours, and a number of different community groups toured the facility, including the pink ladies from the Hornsby hospital and a number of service clubs from around the area. As I am a member of a number of service clubs in my electorate, I happened to be on one of those tours. While taking the tour, being very excited that the facility was now open and thinking that it was going to be utilised imminently—this tour took place probably around July or August last year—I was shocked to find how many faults were in this brand spanking new building. It had so many faults in it that it was totally unsuitable to accommodate patients of any sort, let alone people with a serious mental illness.

Faults that were explained on the tour included numerous safety hazards: for example, the presence of fire extinguishers in patient areas where glass could be broken and the fire extinguisher removed from the cabinet. There were lovely wardrobes in the patient bedrooms, and inside the wardrobe doors were stainless-steel mirrors, but these doors could be lifted off the latches and removed very easily. There were other problems in the communal areas of the mental health intensive care unit. Approximately 10 inch by 10 inch metal plates on the walls could be easily removed, and gas mixing valves were underneath the plates. These are just some examples of problems within the patient areas.

Another great fault in this unit is that the magistrate's room is housed outside the inpatient area, meaning that patients would have to be taken across a public area into the magistrate's room. Also, the magistrate's room was not insulated, so conversations could be heard easily from the adjoining drug, alcohol and gambling facility and also from the waiting area outside the magistrate's room. I have been advised that insulation was subsequently put into the magistrate's room but because it was a fire hazard and the lighting in the magistrate's room was causing problems with the insulation it had to be removed again. This is obviously a smaller version of what has happened in Bathurst and it is inexplicable in 2007-08 why hospitals have such problems and why they are not built to meet the needs of the people seeking to occupy them.

The mental health intensive care unit stands as a symbol of the financial and social liability caused by a State government that has continually failed to plan for health needs. As far as I can ascertain, to this day the unit still has only nine beds occupied. Since February, when six patients were able to be nursed in the unit—two of those being intensive care classification and four plucked from the existing mental health unit to open up those six beds—by and large the unit has been about a quarter full. There are now nine patients there because the area health service and hospital staff have been grappling with the problem of a lack of planning for the mental health intensive care unit and the staffing needed. This is a travesty of what governments stand for.

We can talk about financial requirements and the importance of an economically stable State, but if we cannot look after some of the most vulnerable people in society, those with a mental illness, when we are depriving these people of beds that have been placed into a brand spanking new unit, we are not meeting the needs of the people of New South Wales. Many times I have spoken to relatives of sufferers who have not been admitted into hospital beds when they needed them. I have received reports that beds were set aside in the accident and emergency unit of Hornsby hospital for mental health patients. Specials have been employed to look after those patients because not enough staff were on the wards to oversee the transfer of those patients from accident and emergency to where they should be. This is totally unacceptable.

There needs to be an urgent review of the educational opportunities for mental health training in New South Wales. This Government has been in office for 13 years and it is unbelievable that it is no further forward

in increasing the number of mental health nurses. Mental health has been left way behind in its ability to attract nurses to that part of the profession. It is unacceptable that 13 years on the Government has no answers as to why mental health staffing is so scant on the ground. The staffing of mental health units with properly trained mental health nurses is an ongoing problem at Hornsby hospital and many other hospitals around New South Wales. That is unacceptable in 2008.

The Government cannot blame the former Federal Government. This Government has not addressed the way in which nurses can be encouraged to choose mental health as a career and to stay in that career. The statistics for nurses working in the mental health stream are similar to those for nurses working in the general stream, that is, only one-third of registered nurses or members of the Nurses Association are working as nurses in this State while two-thirds are not. As recently as this morning people from the Nurses and Midwives Registration Board acknowledged that nurses do not want to work in our public health system.

Mr BARRY COLLIER (Miranda—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.29 p.m.]: I am advised that the Hornsby mental health intensive care unit commenced a staged opening on 25 February 2008 with rostered staff who have specific skills in high-dependency mental health care on duty. The major consideration of this Government remains the safe operation of the unit and the provision of quality care to its patients. I am advised that the unit had sufficient numbers of trained staff to open six beds on 26 May 2008 and a further three beds on 9 June 2008—increasing bed availability to nine. Increased bed openings will be contingent upon the recruitment of appropriately trained staff and the completion of essential repairs to the building.

Ongoing recruitment strategies are in place and repairs are in hand. It is anticipated that the number of available beds will increase from 9 to 12 in November 2008. The national shortage of experienced mental health nurses has made the recruitment process for this unit difficult. The pressures on mental health nursing recruitment for the Hornsby mental health intensive care unit have been added to by the number of new units opening in the area in the last two years, including new psychiatric emergency care centres at Wyong and Hornsby hospitals and the Wyong mental health unit.

New South Wales Health is continuing its efforts to attract nursing staff to the unit. Consumers, carers and their families deserve high-quality care delivered by skilled and motivated staff who are responsive to their needs. This cannot be achieved unless training and services are designed to meet the demands of a modern New South Wales health care system. The mental health workforce is sophisticated and complex, consisting of psychiatrists, other medical practitioners, mental health nurses, psychologists, social workers, occupational therapists, support staff, and administrative and other ancillary staff.

New South Wales Health does not have a direct role in the training of mental health professionals at undergraduate level. However, New South Wales Health provides access to facilities for the clinical component of the courses and is committed to consultation with education providers and accrediting authorities to ensure appropriate input into the broader workforce planning agenda. It is also committed to building an appropriate and suitably skilled workforce to provide high-quality mental health care.

A number of significant difficulties are emerging for the mental health workforce, including the ageing of the nursing workforce, declining psychiatry trainee numbers, increasing demand as a result of increased funding and services, declining interest in long-term public health careers, and the increasing attraction of private health or non-health careers for trained health professionals. The seriousness of the health workforce shortages across Australia, including in mental health, was reinforced by the Productivity Commission's Report on Australia's Health Workforce (2005). The Council of Australian Governments [COAG] considered health workforce issues in February and July 2006, and a number of initiatives both at State and national level have been developed to expand the available workforce.

In New South Wales mental health workforce development is aligned with activities identified by, first, the National Health Workforce Strategic Framework (2004); second, the New South Wales policy and funding enhancements related to the Interagency Action Plan for Better Mental Health (2005); third, the New South Wales: A New Direction for Mental Health (2006), as the New South Wales Government's commitment under the COAG-agreed National Mental Health Strategy; and, finally, the New South Wales State Health Plan (2007). Under the New South Wales: A New Direction for Mental Health, \$23.2 million over five years was allocated to the Mental Health Workforce Program for a variety of initiatives to improve the capacity of the health workforce to deliver mental health services.

New South Wales mental health workforce development programs aim to expand the available workforce in areas of need, such as rural and remote mental health, and to ensure skills acquisition to support

emerging priorities such as older people's mental health, child and adolescent mental health, and workforce capacity in the non-government sector. The increase in nurse numbers is due not only to our investments in increased hospital capacity and our commitment to improved wages and conditions but also to our investment in targeted recruitment and retention strategies.

In 2007-08 more than \$39 million was spent on recruitment and retention strategies for nurses and midwives, including mental health nurses. This funding has generated excellent results during a period of national and international nurse shortages. I am advised by Northern Sydney Central Coast Health that it is implementing a number of effective strategies to improve and address nursing vacancies. The Rees Government is committed to delivering the mental health services that people in the Hornsby region can rely on. We will continue to build on initiatives that ensure the highest standard of care for patients using the Hornsby mental health intensive care unit.

Mr GREG APLIN (Albury) [12.36 p.m.]: I support the motion moved by the member for Hornsby and reaffirm the commitment of the New South Wales Liberal-Nationals Coalition to mental health in New South Wales. The motion clearly highlights the Government's failure to address one of the greatest problems currently plaguing the mental health system—the attraction and retention of qualified and experienced mental health nurses. Mental health problems are becoming increasingly complex in nature, with a growing level of acuity in child and adolescent presentations. Despite the Government's claims of an increase in access to mental health services, demand continues to grow for a wide range of care and support services, which is not being met. Quite understandably, the member for Hornsby was concerned about the situation at Hornsby hospital, with the new mental health intensive care unit remaining dormant for 11 months due to a lack of qualified staff. The local community has a right to know when the Government will provide the nurses needed to operate all 12 beds.

This issue at Hornsby is not an isolated incident. For 13 years the entire State has been forced to suffer the same poor coordination of mental health planning of which the Hornsby mental health intensive care unit is but one example. Staff are not being recruited efficiently but, more importantly, they are not being retained. In May this year the *Illawarra Mercury* reported that the head of the Illawarra's psychiatric services, Dr Irwin Pakula, resigned in disgust at the culture of bullying, gagging and scapegoating which is endemic to this Government. He talked of an immoral staff review system and a Sydney-centric administration. Dr Pakula was also the medical superintendent of Shellharbour Hospital's psychiatric in-patient unit at the time. This is a clear demonstration of how low staff morale within the department, as well as a lack of attention paid to concerns raised by medical professionals, will lead to a reduction in the rate of staff retention.

The *Illawarra Mercury* went on to explain that Dr Pakula's resignation was not a one-off protest against the system but the fifth of its kind in the past year. Mental health sources attributed the departures to a lack of resources and staff to meet the workload, as well as dissatisfaction with the administration system. The article described how the Illawarra mental health service is often forced to release its patients early, with staff discharging the "least unwell" due to a shortage of beds. Yet here we talk about a mental health unit in Hornsby that lay idle for almost a year, with beds that could have been utilised if only the Government could retain dedicated and experienced staff. Angela Pridham, the Illawarra mental health nurse branch delegate for the New South Wales Nurses Association, claimed in May this year that the health system is facing a crisis of confidence. She is quoted as saying, in relation to the practice of early release, "Psychiatrists and staff had to walk around the wards checking which patients were the least unwell so they could be discharged. Staff have the awful decision to make."

The key problems of overcrowding, early release, and a lack of resources are the main reasons for major staff dissatisfaction with the system. The heavy-handed, standover approach of the Government to staff has precipitated this loss of trained professionals. As the Leader of the Opposition said yesterday, there may have been a change of Premier, and there may have been a change of Minister, but we have seen this before and the problems remain. We were told in 2005 that all would change for the better, but instead we got three years of incompetence. The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported on Friday last week:

Public hospitals and community psychiatric services are relying on untrained and vulnerable volunteers—themselves recovered patients—to do the work of qualified mental health workers.

This program, which was implemented to advocate for consumer participation, has been little more than a disaster, with several workers finding the conditions extremely stressful and their roles unbelievably ambiguous. Sarah Stewart from the New South Wales Institute of Psychiatry described their employment as "exploitation" and "possibly harmful to themselves or other patients". On 5 September staff of the Southern Network Mental Health Service were informed that its director, Monica Taylor, had resigned. Her resignation became the tenth in the past year.

As at 9 September only 13 psychiatrists, mainly part-time, were left in the southern sector, which has a population of 350,000. This dramatic reduction in staff clearly demonstrates that the Government has no interest in fixing the problems, that it has no idea of how to keep staff in their jobs and allow them to provide vital services to the community. The conditions experienced in the Illawarra have been known and well documented for some time, yet the Government continues to ignore the problem, and continues with its customary belligerent approach to staff so well typified by the infamous Iguana-gate affair. It is time this Government got serious about addressing mental health in New South Wales by committing to improving conditions for professionals and reducing the chaos they are presented with on a daily basis. I support the motion moved by the member for Hornsby and call on the Government to improve the retention and training of mental health nurses.

Mr PAUL McLEAY (Heathcote) [12.41 p.m.]: I move:

That the motion be amended by leaving out paragraph (3) with a view to inserting instead:

(3) notes the Government's plan to improve retention and training of mental health nurses.

The Rees Government maintains a strong commitment to mental health in this State. Our mental health budget for the 2008-09 financial year alone is \$1.09 billion. That is a \$41 million increase on last year's budget and a massive threefold increase on the budget of 1994-95, which was \$335 million. Mental health is one of the biggest issues facing this country, and particularly in New South Wales. The Government takes the needs of our community very seriously, and as such we are taking serious steps to ensure the best quality care for mental health consumers and their families when they need it most. This includes developing initiatives to draw our best mental health staff into the public health system.

Since 2005 in New South Wales 137 nurses have been connected with mental health nursing as a profession through the Mental Health Connect Initiative. Between 2006 and 2008, 600 mental health nursing scholarships have been taken up, including 13 mental health innovations scholarships, 391 post-graduate scholarships, and 196 enrolled nurse to registered nurse scholarships. In 2007, 27 scholarship places were funded in the Studies in Mental Health (General Practitioner) Postgraduate Training, 12 places were funded in the Graduate Certificate, 10 places were funded in the Graduate Diploma, and five places were funded in the Masters course. The two general practitioners currently completing their Masters in Mental Health (General Practice) are the first to do so in Australia.

A priority of the Mental Health Program Council is the establishment of a Mental Health Workforce Development Subcommittee to develop a Mental Health Workforce Development Strategy. The New South Wales Government has committed to these initiatives because it recognises the importance of expanding the mental health network of services to ensure improved access and improved quality of care. The initiatives do not end there. The inaugural Mental Health Workforce Development Subcommittee was implemented in August 2007. The Subcommittee is overseeing workforce initiatives to support public mental health services, current service delivery requirements and emerging priorities. A work plan has been developed and focuses on the completion of a Mental Health Workforce Development Strategy, the completion of a coordinated Education, Training and Support Plan for the mental health workforce, the development of recruitment and retention strategies, the provision of a mechanism to link with other groups involved in mental health workforce development such as Aboriginal mental health and older people's mental health, and the building of linkages to broader health workforce initiatives at both the State and Commonwealth level.

With one in five Australians experiencing mental illness at some point in their lives, the need to expand New South Wales mental health services is growing. We are committed to delivering more dedicated mental health beds across the State. Indeed, in the Sutherland shire the Government is in the process of building an \$8.2 million non-acute mental health unit. There are 2,367 mental health beds across the system, with more than 300 scheduled to open in the coming four years. Altogether the number of mental health beds has increased by nearly 800 over the past decade. We are also building the capacity of large metropolitan hospitals to provide rapid, specialist mental health care 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This is being addressed through psychiatric emergency care centres [PECCs], which take pressure off hospital emergency departments by diverting people presenting with mental health problems to specialist clinicians, thereby reducing delays in accessing care and delivering better outcomes for patients. PECCs are now operational in nine of our State's busiest hospitals, including Wollongong hospital, which services my electorate.

In 2008-09 the mental health program will enhance funding for various initiatives. This includes \$6.85 million over two years to expand 24-hour community mental health emergency care through the recruitment of additional mental health professionals at more than 20 locations across the State, \$3.1 million to

recruit an additional 16 clinicians to expand the Mental Health Community Rehabilitation Program, and increased funding in many other areas. All these initiatives are providing better care for mental health patients, their carers and families. We are committed to supporting our clinicians, nurses and other mental health staff, and we will continue to provide appropriate training and assistance to help mental health staff perform at the highest standards and with the utmost confidence.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD (Wakehurst) [12.46 p.m.]: I obviously support the motion moved by the member for Hornsby. The member for Hornsby has been an advocate for improved mental health services for the Hornsby community, and indeed the broader New South Wales community, for years. Long before the former Premier announced that the Government had suddenly woken up to the needs of people with a mental illness, and long before the former Premier spoke about recognising the need for people with disabilities to get additional services, the member for Hornsby was strongly advocating for improvements in the delivery of mental health services.

I remind the House that the Liberal-Nationals Coalition has been very serious about mental health issues for as long as I have been a member of this place, which is quite a while. We well recollect that the former Leader of the Opposition, John Brogden, appointed the first shadow Minister for Mental Health. Recently I read that the Government is now trying to spin itself a new history: that it had appointed the first person specifically to look after mental health issues in the Cabinet. I remind the House and the community that members on this side of the House were serious, are serious, and will continue to be serious about mental health issues.

In response to the member for Hornsby's calls for improvements to mental health facilities in and around Hornsby, the Government finally got off its backside to construct a new mental health intensive care unit in Hornsby. However, the facility was not completed until March 2007. I remind members that this Government came into office in 1995. In other words, it took the Government 12 years to deliver those much-needed mental health services. Then what happened? As the member for Monaro said to me a little while ago across the Chamber under his breath, the Government is planning for mental health. The member for Heathcote has just moved an amendment to the motion moved by the member for Hornsby which refers to the fact that the Government plans to improve mental health services. The problem with this Government is that it spends most of its time planning and not doing anything. That is again demonstrated by what happened with the Hornsby mental health intensive care unit. It was finally completed in March 2007 but how long did it take the Government to get the place open?

Mrs Judy Hopwood: Eleven months.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: When it was opened was it full or was it half full?

Mrs Judy Hopwood: Half full.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Unfortunately that is what this Government is all about: half full, but half empty! People with a mental illness deserve a government that is fair dinkum, a government that is committed, and a government that is more interested in trying to provide services rather than looking out west for a missing black panther. The Government is away with the pixies, and looking for black panthers is a classic example of the wasted focus the Government brings to bear on the big issues. Mental health facilities are critical, mental health teams are critical, community mental health teams are critical, and support for those in the community who support people with a mental illness is critical. On Monday last week in Manly a meeting was held of various clubhouses from across the world. The original clubhouse was located—and still is—in New York. The director of that clubhouse was at the meeting. The Government has not recognised its own failings and therefore it has lacked a preparedness to support those in the community who understand best the needs of people with a mental illness.

The member for Heathcote has said only one thing today that was correct—the rest of his contribution was rubbish. He got the statistics right that no doubt some public servant provided in his prepared speech. The member for Heathcote said that one in five people—20 per cent of the population—can now expect to suffer from a mental illness at some stage during their life. That is an issue that governments, irrespective of political persuasion and irrespective of the utter incompetence of the New South Wales Labor Government, should be fired up about and ensure that we provide the necessary services. I compliment the member for Hornsby for bringing this matter to the attention of the House. Notice of the motion got the Government up and running. If the member for Hornsby had not given notice of the motion we would not have even the half-baked efforts of the Government to bring the matter to fruition. My congratulations to the member for Hornsby, but the Government should hang its head in shame.

Mrs BARBARA PERRY (Auburn—Minister for Local Government, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Mental Health)) [12.51 p.m.]: I thank all the members who have contributed to the debate. I acknowledge that the member for Hornsby moved the motion, but together we can be proud of what we have achieved in mental health in this State. I take great umbrage at the fact that the other side of the House says that the Government has not been committed to mental health. I have never seen any policies that show the Opposition's commitment to mental health nor has the Opposition outlined its policies. That is a concern for the entire community.

I acknowledge that the member for Hornsby has a background in mental health. We all know that the mental health workforce plays a significant part in helping people to deal with mental health issues. We also know—and we should not hide behind this—that a number of significant difficulties have been nationally recognised as having a bearing on the mental health workforce. Such issues include ageing of the nursing workforce, declining psychiatry trainee numbers, increases in demand as a result of increased funding and services, declining interest in long-term public health careers, and increased attraction of private health or non-health careers for trained health professionals.

It cannot be said that this Government has not had a commitment to mental health. Under the New South Wales: A New Direction for Mental Health, \$23.2 million has been allocated over five years to the mental health workforce program for a variety of initiatives to improve the capacity of the health workforce to deliver mental health services. Since 2005—and this is not about plans but about Government action from an early stage—123 nurses have been employed in the mental health workforce through the Mental Health Connect Initiative. That has brought nurses who have had other career options back to the workforce and supported them.

In 2005-06, 110 mental health nursing scholarships were taken up. That is a great tribute to the Government in getting these initiatives going. In 2006-07 a total of 294 mental health nursing scholarships were taken up: 10 mental health innovation scholarships, 192 postgraduate scholarships and 92 undergraduate scholarships. More doctors are now electing to move into psychiatry, in addition to the 204 already in training. More than 2,000 school and TAFE college counsellors, Department of Juvenile Justice and Department of Community Services workers, and mental health child and adolescent workers have received training through School-Link. Australia's first Chair of Schizophrenia Research has been established and we allocated \$1.2 million over three years to the Mental Health Coordinating Council to increase the capacity of the mental health non-government agencies sector for workforce development, policy planning and effective service delivery.

I understand the issues surrounding mental health. As a Legal Aid lawyer I have seen first hand the sufferings of people with mental health issues and their families. Great gains have been made in this State since the Labor Government has been in office and also at a national level, where the New South Wales Government has driven the mental health agenda. The State Government had to bring the former Prime Minister John Howard to the table and shame him. In my new role as Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Mental Health), during the last two weeks I have spoken both to service providers and carers of those with a mental illness and many in the sector have raised consistently with me the fact that the former Premier, Morris Iemma, put mental health on the national agenda. We should acknowledge the role that the former Premier played. In my opinion things have greatly improved. I thank the member for Hornsby for her motion, but the Opposition should not say that the Government does not care about mental health because it has shown its commitment. The Government has been committed and it will continue to be committed.

Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [12.56 p.m.], in reply: I thank the member for Albury and the member for Wakehurst on this side of the House for their support of the motion. I note the contribution of the member for Miranda, the member for Heathcote and the Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Mental Health). I cannot accept the amendment to the motion as it merely states that the Government has yet another plan. My motion points out the reality that there are not enough mental health workers and that over the last 13 years the Government's plans have not worked. This morning I was part of a committee meeting with members of the registration board, during which it was said that lack of New South Wales nurses was not in the Federal sphere of fault. The former Federal Government cannot be blamed. Dozens of current student nurses around the State and Australia will not choose to work in the public sector when they graduate. This Government is denying reality if it does not address that fact. Only one-third of nurses who graduate work in midwifery, mental health or other areas of general nursing, but not the remaining two-thirds. The Government must find out why. It is not in the Federal sphere and the State Government needs to address that.

I congratulate the member for Auburn on her appointment as the Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Mental Health). She has been in the chair for a short time. I hope her contribution to the portfolio will see a turnaround in the Government's approach to these difficult areas. I look forward to working with her in my

capacity as a local member, a board member of the Schizophrenia Fellowship and a co-covenor of the Parliamentary Friends of People with a Mental Illness. The Minister has agreed to meet with the co-convenors and to attend our next meeting. I was disappointed with the apologist speech made by the member for Miranda. He said that the mental health intensive care unit at Hornsby Hospital was a staged opening—that is a cop-out. During construction of the unit the Government did not say that the finishing date would be a staged opening. When the Government discovered that there would be insufficient staffing to enable the opening of the 12 beds, it then became a staged opening. The statement was made that the unit was half full when it was opened but, really, it was half empty.

As I have said previously, when the unit was opened two of the beds were true intensive care unit beds and four beds contained patients plucked from the existing mental health unit. Since the unit was opened in February 2008, following 11 months of being empty, generally four beds have been occupied and the unit has been mostly a quarter to half full. As late as two weeks ago, when I last checked, the unit had nine beds. Staffing has been an ongoing issue. This brand new mental health intensive care unit built in 2007 had so many faults that it was unsatisfactory for patient occupancy. It is a joke to call that work "necessary repairs". The Opposition will vote against the amendment to the motion. As I have said, I look forward to working with the new Minister in the Mental Health portfolio to address these issues. The Government cannot shy away from the fact that despite some efforts in mental health, it has not done enough in the employment of specially trained people. The Government needs to pay far more attention to this area and undertake an urgent review of the educational opportunities for mental health training in New South Wales.

Question—That the amendment be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 43

Mr Amery	Mr Greene	Mrs Paluzzano
Ms Andrews	Mr Harris	Mr Pearce
Mr Aquilina	Ms Hay	Mrs Perry
Ms Beamer	Ms Hornery	Mr Sartor
Mr Borger	Ms Judge	Mr Shearan
Ms Burney	Ms Keneally	Mr Stewart
Mr Campbell	Mr Khoshaba	Ms Tebbutt
Mr Collier	Mr Koperberg	Mr Terenzini
Mr Coombs	Mr Lynch	Mr Tripodi
Mr Corrigan	Mr McBride	Mr West
Mr Costa	Dr McDonald	Mr Whan
Mr Daley	Ms McKay	
Ms D'Amore	Mr McLeay	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Firth	Ms Megarrity	Mr Ashton
Ms Gadiel	Mr Morris	Mr Martin

Noes, 30

Mr Aplin	Mrs Hopwood	Mr Smith
Mr Baird	Mr Humphries	Mr Stokes
Mr Baumann	Mr Kerr	Mr J. H. Turner
Mr Cansdell	Mr Merton	Mr R. W. Turner
Mr Constance	Ms Moore	Mr J. D. Williams
Mr Draper	Mr O'Dea	Mr R. C. Williams
Mrs Fardell	Mr Page	
Mr Fraser	Mr Provest	
Mrs Hancock	Mr Richardson	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Hartcher	Mr Roberts	Mr George
Mr Hazzard	Mrs Skinner	Mr Maguire

Pairs

Ms Burton	Ms Hodgkinson
Mr Gibson	Mr Piccoli

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment agreed to.

Motion as amended agreed to.

COMMITTEE ON THE INDEPENDENT COMMISSION AGAINST CORRUPTION

Membership

The SPEAKER: I report the following message from the Legislative Council:

Mr SPEAKER

The Legislative Council desires to inform the Legislative Assembly that it has this day agreed to the following resolution:

That Mr Khan be appointed to the Committee on the Independent Commission Against Corruption in place of Mr Ajaka.

Legislative Council
25 September 2008

PETER PRIMROSE
President

DISABILITY SERVICES IN THE BEGA VALLEY SHIRE

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE (Bega) [1.10 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) notes the plight of parents with children affected by disabilities in the Bega electorate fighting for a centre-based respite facility in the Eurobodalla Local Government area and the establishment of a single one-stop shop facility for therapy services in the Bega Valley Shire; and
- (2) calls on the Minister to expand part of the "Stronger Together" package on the Far South Coast for these services and in so doing minimise the travel for parents to centres such as Nowra and Queanbeyan which are hundreds of kilometres away.

I move this motion because for a number of years parents have told me that they are concerned about the availability of centre-based respite in the Eurobodalla shire and therapy services in the Bega Valley. Two separate parents groups were formed basically to lobby the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care and the Government for the provision of far greater disability services in the region. The Eurobodalla shire has a population of about 35,000 people and people with a child with a disability are retiring to the area at an increasing rate. As part of their retirement process they are keen to have an occasional break from caring for that child. I hope the Minister will see fit to ensure that centre-based respite is provided in the Eurobodalla shire because, currently, parents have to travel to Nowra and other places around the State to get that valuable respite time. The Stronger Together package provides flexible respite throughout the State, but families in my area are pushing hard for the provision of centre-based respite and other issues related to supported accommodation.

Further afield, in the Bega Valley, a group of mums were concerned at having to travel more than 200 kilometres to the Australian Capital Territory to access valuable speech therapy and occupational therapy for their children. When I moved this motion 12 months ago to the day, the department was beginning to recognise these issues and plans were put in place to deal with the needs of parents. I am advised that speech therapy will commence potentially one day a week in the Bega Valley through a satellite service operating from Eurobodalla. That should address some concerns, but parents are very keen on the concept of a one-stop shop facility similar to that which exists elsewhere around the State. I believe Noah's Ark runs such a service in either Nowra or Wagga Wagga. Parents are extremely keen to see a similar approach in the Bega Valley.

The Bega region has some wonderful people who provide disability support services in the community, but the wider community and those who move into our area do not necessarily know that those services are available. I am very keen to see some Stronger Together funding going into disability services in the Bega Valley and Eurobodalla shire because in a regional setting those families who have the tyranny of distance to contend with will benefit enormously. Eighteen months ago at Eurobodalla I organised a forum for carers, parents and people with a disability, which I recollect was attended by 50 to 60 people. They were concerned that carers were not getting the rest they needed from caring for a loved one. For that reason centre-based respite was identified.

There can never be enough flexible respite, but a facility where people can receive blocks of respite would be very welcome. This side of the House is mindful, as is the Government, of issues around the blocking

of beds. To that end, supported accommodation facilities must also be addressed. I am conscious of the statistics on supported accommodation in New South Wales; it has been identified by non-government organisations and the like as an area in great need of attention from the Federal and State governments. Last year 1,596 people applied to the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care for supported accommodation and only 86 people were successful. That is of concern, particularly as 8,000 people have been identified as requiring supported accommodation in this State.

In its pre-State Budget submission, the Council of Social Service of NSW indicated that it was keen for the Government to put more focus on investment into supported accommodation. I am grateful that the new Minister for Disability Services is in the Chamber, because quite often in these debates it is easy to get backbench members to respond to motions of this type. I tell the Minister openly and publicly that my office will work constructively with his office to deal with some of those challenges faced by individual families. I think that is a given from the Minister because that was something I valued incredibly with the former Minister. Parents and families do not want politics to run the debate on disability services, but they are very keen for both sides of the House to work together to achieve appropriate results.

I raise the issues specific to the Bega electorate on behalf of those parents who have lobbied over many years for improvements to services. The issues in the Bega Valley and the Eurobodalla are not dissimilar to many areas around the State. Only two weeks ago I visited Bathurst and learned of issues there regarding centre-based respite. Again, it was acknowledged that flexible respite was available, but carers were asking for government-run centre-based respite. I am very keen to see more emphasis on regional areas. I believe that because of the hefty demands in metropolitan Sydney the focus on services requiring attention has not gone beyond the Sydney basin. The Coalition supports the Stronger Together package. It is a first step in addressing the issues.

I am very keen to see the Commonwealth State Territory Disability Agreement finalised. That will improve the State Government's ability to provide services to people with a disability and in their carers and families also receiving support. I note that that agreement still has not been signed. Again, I offer the Minister the Opposition's assistance in lobbying Canberra to expedite the delivery of that package. People desperately want to see that significant funding boost result in on-the-ground services that will make a world of difference. It is too easy to talk about billions of dollars being spent. The people who attend community forums, community meetings and meetings with their local parliamentarians want to know that services will be delivered.

I am also keen to see the establishment of a mechanism that will ensure that supported accommodation and respite are comprehensively funded in this State. I was looking forward to the agreement being signed for the 50:50 funding offer between the Howard Government and the Iemma Government. However, that did not happen. There is now an opportunity for Labor at both the State and Federal level to deliver an agreement that will deal with the challenges that people with a disability, their families and carers are facing in New South Wales.

Mr PAUL LYNCH (Liverpool—Minister for Ageing, Minister for Disability Services, and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs) [1.20 p.m.]: I will divert from the strict text of the motion and respond to a couple of comments made by the member for Bega. I am very keen to continue the relationship that the previous Minister had with the member for Bega in respect of individual cases. It does the member, me and the people involved no good to have them belted around in a political sense.

I am happy to state publicly that I have an open-door policy in that regard. I am happy to work sensibly and rationally to solve problems rather than to score points. No doubt there will be other occasions when we will be scoring points, but with regard to those sorts of cases I agree completely with what the member said. The agreement obviously attracted my attention, and I met with Bill Shorten last week. Some positive things may result from that, but that is part of the negotiation process. It is certainly well and truly on my agenda. I say gratuitously in relation to Bill Shorten that he brings to this area a degree of compassion and commitment that will help us all.

I refer now to the substance of the motion. The needs of people with a disability, their families and carers—not only in the Bega electorate but also throughout New South Wales—have long been recognised by this Government. The New South Wales Government acknowledges the significant contribution of the 750,000 people in this State who provide care to family members, friends or others in the community. More than 1 in 10 members of the New South Wales community are carers. Carers play a significant role in supporting people to live at home and participate in the community. They are usually family members who provide care and assistance to others, including children and adults with a disability, and frail, older people.

While caring for those you know and love is immensely rewarding, it also provides challenges. The New South Wales Government funds a range of services, including respite, domestic assistance, personal care, case management, therapy, post-school programs, and counselling and information services, which provide vital support to carers. These services are relied upon by carers to both support them in their caring role and to support the wellbeing and independence of the person for whom they are caring.

The Government is aware that demand for services is increasing and more needs to be done to ensure that the demand is met. It has recognised the need for change in the disability service system. In particular, change was necessary in two areas: more people with a disability live with their families in the community meaning that they and their carers need more support. There is a need to provide more services and also to find ways to provide services more efficiently. The service system needed to be more flexible and responsive to people's changing needs as they moved through their life stages. The system also needed to become more transparent and predictable with clearer entry and exit points.

In 2006, after 16 months of consultation, the Government launched Stronger Together: A New Direction for Disability Services 2006-2016. In the first two years of Stronger Together, the Government has already achieved much, including 10,000 more service places; new services being offered that respond to the individual needs of people and their families; the service system places more emphasis on strengthening families, early intervention, skill development, age-appropriate supports, and planning for the future; and new programs and services are targeting groups of people for whom access has been an issue, such as young people in residential care, people with an acquired brain injury, children with autism, Aboriginal people, and people with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

In the southern region, which includes the member for Bega's electorate, the Government has invested an estimated \$27 million extra to create new service places. This investment will continue with an additional \$70 million to be invested in the region over the next three years. New service places will be allocated in respite, therapy, accommodation, and family and children's services. I am also advised that capital investment in excess of \$2 million is planned for the Bega Valley over the next three years. This will result in more supported accommodation options and a new service centre for the area.

I am advised that families in the Eurobodalla local government area have access to a broad range of planned, short-term respite options. There is also additional respite capacity at two centres within 90 minutes drive for most of those in this area. Therapy services are also funded through government and non-government providers. I am further advised that the department is continuing to work on these issues. The member for Bega correctly and appropriately conceded that in his comments.

The New South Wales Government is delivering appropriate facilities and services so carers get the rest they need to continue caring for the ones they love. Therapy and other support services also are being provided so that people with a disability have a chance to enjoy a better quality of life. That is happening on the far South Coast and throughout the State according to the need that is identified. We recognise that demand continues to grow and that more needs to be done. The member for Bega and I agree on that point. However, improvements under Stronger Together are flowing through and the Government is getting on with the job. I move:

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

this House congratulates the Government on its recognition of the needs of people with a disability, their families and carers and its adoption of Stronger Together: A New Direction for Disability Services 2006-2016.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD (Wakehurst) [1.28 p.m.]: I was interested to hear the Minister's comments with regard to working with the shadow Minister for the good of individual families. To that extent, I congratulate the Minister on his undertaking and assure him that the shadow Minister and other Coalition members will hold him to account for that. It is through the expression of frustration by numerous individual families that members of Parliament most frequently learn about the real issues for families who are looking after people with disabilities. The plight of parents with children affected by disabilities in the Bega electorate are not new; they have existed for some years. Many of us in this place have visited the Bega electorate and have heard the frustrations of parents over a number years. As a former shadow Minister for Disability Services I visited families on the South Coast, the near South Coast, the far South Coast, the far North Coast and the far West—in fact, every part of the State.

Sadly, under this State Labor Government the situation with disability services has not dramatically improved, although I acknowledge its efforts—albeit a mishmash. The shadow Minister talked about the

Stronger Together package. The bottom line is that families looking after loved ones with disabilities know how extremely frustrating and challenging it is. Indeed, many of them are overwhelmed in their efforts to care for their loved one or loved ones with a disability. Time and again I have suffered the frustration of listening to promises made by this Government but then not having them delivered, whether it is on an individual or broader community basis.

The new Minister has just disappeared from the Chamber—briefly, I assume. In the past six or seven years we have had five different disabilities Ministers: Minister Lynch, Minister Keneally, Minister Della Bosca, Minister Tebbutt, Minister Faye Lo Po', and so on. One must ask whether this Government has a real commitment to ensuring that the person occupying that ministerial position will actually deliver. My impression is that the Government moves Ministers in and out of this portfolio to be able to avoid responsibility for their consistent failures.

The Minister for Local Government is huffing and puffing. She is a nice person and it is unfortunate that she has to work with such a bunch of low-lives who are now on the frontbench and sitting around the backbench. But she has an obligation, as we have, to get the message through to those who hold the purse strings—the more senior Ministers in the Government—who consistently fail to fund the necessary respite services. Unfortunately, the thematic view in her Government is that disability issues get the least attention; they are not at the forefront. We have heard the rhetoric: former Premier Iemma in his platform speech talked about looking after people with disabilities, people with mental illness, and housing issues. Not one came to fruition during his three-year premiership. Now we have a new Premier who seems to be more interested in hunting black panthers than delivering sound policy initiatives.

The member for Bega brought this matter before the House because in his electorate he has heard the plight of parents. I too have heard the plight of those parents. The Government must understand that respite is a critical part of caring for someone with a disability. It is the only bulwark between many of those families handing over their children to the State to look after and retain them in the loving environment that they wish to provide. The Government must get the provision of respite services right. It has to stop the bunkum and the spin and deliver the services.

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

[The Acting-Speaker (Mr Matthew Morris) left the chair at 1.30 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]

FILMING OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

The SPEAKER: I advise members that I have authorised a film crew contracted to Parliament to shoot footage before and during question time from several vantage points. The material being recorded will be used to update the parliamentary video available to schools and the public, and it will also be used by Parliament in association with our education programs.

BEN MIKIC FOUNDATION

The SPEAKER: I thank all members who have taken advantage of the relaxation of the dress code today. It is great to see so many members showing their support for the efforts of the Ben Mikic Foundation. I encourage all members to consider making a donation to the foundation to assist its programs to teach safe cycling practices and to reduce the incidence of injury and death that occurs on New South Wales roads.

QUESTION TIME

BLUE MOUNTAINS HOSPITAL MATERNITY UNIT

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: My question is directed to the Premier. In light of the Government's pledge to permanently reopen the Blue Mountains hospital maternity unit, how does he explain this leaked memo that reveals the unit is now closed, forcing women in labour to travel down the mountains to have their babies?

Mr NATHAN REES: The maternity unit at Katoomba hospital has been difficult to staff for close to a decade. There have been ongoing discussions between the area health service executive, obstetricians and

midwives. It is true that on occasions locum services have had to be used to enable the women of the Blue Mountains to continue to deliver babies at the Katoomba hospital. My advice is that the area health service is working on a plan for the medium and long term—

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order.

Mr NATHAN REES: They were working on a plan to enable the ongoing—

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order.

Mr NATHAN REES: It is no secret that there is a shortage of medical workers right across Australia.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: In some instances we have shortages in the medical workforce. That is no surprise to anyone in this Chamber.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: I will report back to the House on the plan as soon as I have the detail of it.

SELECTIVE HIGH SCHOOLS

Mr DAVID HARRIS: My question is to the Premier. What is the latest information on the Government's commitment to deliver more selective high school places, and related matters?

Mr NATHAN REES: My Government is about providing more opportunities for all students, including the most academically gifted and talented. Some 46 high schools with selective classes now operate across New South Wales. Coming into last year's election we made an election commitment to provide another 600 selective places in our high schools. Today I am delighted to inform the House that we are not just going to make that commitment, we are going to exceed it. I can inform the House that 630 new selective school places will be made available at 14 comprehensive high schools across New South Wales, from south-western Sydney to the North Coast. Our Opportunities to Specialise Plan recognises that the most academically gifted students are spread throughout Sydney and across New South Wales, and the Government is ensuring they are catered for, be they in the city or in the bush. That is why a new virtual selective class will also be established in western New South Wales and will offer 30 of the additional 630 selective school places.

That school will use new technology to allow gifted and talented students in that region to form a learning community with their city cousins. These 630 new places will boost the total number of selective places in the State's public schools to 4,152. The new selective classes will be in place and ready for year 7 students in 2010. When deciding where to allocate the extra places, the Government has spoken at length with principals, staff, parents and the community. I am pleased to announce that the locations are Parramatta High School, Blacktown Girls High School and Blacktown Boys High School, Elizabeth Macarthur High School in Camden, Bonnyrigg High School—

[Interruption]

Bonnyrigg is hardly marginal. The locations also include Prairiewood High School, Moorebank High School, Karabar High School in Queanbeyan, Gorokan High School on the Central Coast, Koorringal High School at Wagga Wagga, Grafton High School, Armidale High School, Duval High School in Armidale and Peel High School in Tamworth. We are especially excited about the new virtual selective class in western New South Wales. This will give gifted and talented students in remote and rural areas the ability to undertake a selective program in their communities whilst remaining at their local comprehensive high school. These students will benefit from access to a higher range of options in core subjects. The virtual classroom will also take advantage of the Government's Connected Classrooms Program. This morning I talked to the impressive students at Peel High School in Tamworth through their virtual classroom arrangement. I spoke to a budding environmental scientist, who had just returned from a study visit to New Zealand. I spoke to an indigenous leader, who will be an important member of her community for decades to come.

[Interruption]

If you want to talk Treasurers, let us talk about the member for Vaucluse, because the local paper reports of his desire to return to the Opposition frontbench—but enough of the asides.

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order.

Mr Wayne Merton: How many have you got who want to go back to yours?

Mr NATHAN REES: You have got a good memory.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Baulkham Hills will cease interjecting.

Mr NATHAN REES: I also literally spoke to two future rocket scientists, Thomas Bowden and Russell Hooper. These two Peel High students are off to the United States to visit NASA's Johnson Space Centre in Houston, Texas, this month. This is genuinely exciting stuff. New South Wales is leading the way in supporting gifted and talented students by offering them a wide range of programs. We have opportunity classes in primary schools, fully and partially selective high schools, and gifted and talented programs in primary and comprehensive high schools. About 10 per cent of public school students are involved in a gifted and talented program. Selective high schools are a popular choice for New South Wales parents and they contributed to New South Wales government schools, filling seven of the top 10 positions in the table after last year's Higher School Certificate.

We have received more than 13,328 enrolments in selective schools for year 7 next year. New South Wales schools and students are leading our nation. As the Minister the Education and Training informed the House yesterday, our students scored well above the Australian average in every subject and for every age group tested in the recent National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy [NAPLAN] tests. These results come on top of a separate recent OECD study ranking New South Wales 15-year-olds among the best in the world in reading, mathematics and science. These statistical measures illustrate the quality of public schools in New South Wales and these extra selective places illustrate this Government's commitment to providing equity for remote and disadvantaged communities, fostering academic excellence for all and working to boost our public schools.

M5 EAST SAFETY DETECTORS REPORT

Mr ANDREW STONER: My question is directed to the Premier. Given that this internal Roads and Traffic Authority memo shows that the State Labor Government knew in July 2008 about the unreliability of the detectors in the M5 East tunnel, which failed again this week, why did the Minister for Roads deny the existence of this document? Is this not just further evidence that the Premier and his Ministers are loose with the truth?

Mr NATHAN REES: I believe this is the third question on the M5 motorway this week. The Minister for Roads has the matter in hand. He has announced a three-point plan that apparently is working well.

Mr Andrew Stoner: What about this document?

Mr NATHAN REES: I have not sighted the document. I am sure that the Minister for Roads will give it all the attention it deserves.

PARRAMATTA ELECTORATE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Ms TANYA GADIEL: My question is to the Minister for Planning.

The SPEAKER: Order! Opposition members will cease interjecting. I call the member for Cronulla to order. I call the Leader of The Nationals to order. The member for Parramatta has the call.

Ms TANYA GADIEL: Will the Minister advise what planning decisions have been made to support economic development in Parramatta?

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: I thank the member for Parramatta for her strong and ongoing interest in planning issues in her electorate. Yesterday I approved a proposal for a motorbike motocross event at Parramatta Stadium. The Super X Australasian Supercross Championship, a family event, is a good event for Sydney, and for Parramatta in particular. The supercross championship will be held on 8 November 2008. The event promoters have told us that they expect up to 20,000 spectators.

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

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: The Parramatta Chamber of Commerce has told us that it expects the event to bring another \$1 million into the Parramatta economy. This positive economic outcome will be the result of a sensible and considered planning decision delivered by the Rees Government. The Parramatta Stadium Trust lodged an application with council seeking approval for the use of Parramatta Stadium and surrounds for additional events, including concerts, music festivals, cultural festivals, children's carnivals and the motocross event. On 8 September Parramatta City Council approved all proposed uses, except the motocross event. I am advised that this was against the advice of council staff. The applicant—that is, the Stadium trust—is a Crown authority. That is why the application was referred to me in accordance with section 116C of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979. I based my decision on advice from the Department of Planning following a mediation session that the department held with the proponent and the council.

I approved the proposal, with a number of conditions to limit the impact of the Supercross Championship on the local community. The conditions include noise monitoring and management plans, measures to control motor vehicle traffic and pedestrian flow, effective and quick rubbish collection after the event has concluded, and requiring the motocross to finish at 9.30 p.m. These measures will deliver Parramatta an event that is great for the local economy and for Western Sydney.

RAIL SERVICES

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: My question is directed to the Premier. Given that train services in the former transport Minister's electorate of Ryde are late 75 per cent of the time, what is the Premier's explanation to commuters who waste valuable work and family time while they are stranded on platforms and stuck on overcrowded trains due to the Government's 13 years of incompetence?

Mr NATHAN REES: As a frequent user of the train system, I sympathise with all people in Sydney who experience a train that is running late. The Minister for Transport and I have already had discussions on this. We will improve on-time running and reliability for the Sydney rail system and we will deliver a comprehensive plan to do that over the coming months.

ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES PROGRAM

Mr GERARD MARTIN: My question is addressed to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. Will the Minister update the House on the Government's Aboriginal Languages Program, and related matters?

Mr PAUL LYNCH: I thank the member for Bathurst for his question on this important issue. The reason it is important is that, as an Aboriginal Elder said to me, "You can't have a culture without a language." Language is an important expression of culture, and Australia's Aboriginal people have the longest living culture in the world. The development and protection of languages is central to identity, which in turn is crucial to self-esteem. The New South Wales Government supports the protection and revitalisation of Aboriginal languages to ensure we all have an opportunity to celebrate the wealth and diversity of Aboriginal languages in New South Wales.

This is particularly appropriate this year, because 2008 has been declared the United Nations International Year of Languages. Linguists suggest that before 1788 there were at least 70 Aboriginal languages in what is now New South Wales. Two years ago the census found there were only 804 Aboriginal people in New South Wales who identified as speaking an indigenous language. That, to put it mildly, is cause for concern. Strengthening Aboriginal communities is a key area of the Government's commitment to Aboriginal people. Culture and heritage is a priority area identified in Two Ways Together, in partnership with communities, and it provides the focus for this Government's support of Aboriginal languages.

As Minister for Aboriginal Affairs I have been able to see first hand the value of language to Aboriginal communities. Recently in Tamworth I had the great pleasure to hear children speaking and singing Gamilaraay. Gamilaraay is one of the world's oldest languages, and the New South Wales Government invested in one of the world's newer technologies to produce a Birrelee Gamilaraay language DVD. The DVD was developed by Daniel Creighton, in consultation with Birrelee Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Service and Gomeroi Elders. Language classes have shown the great potential that comes from helping Aboriginal people to reconnect with their culture, and from all Australians understanding and appreciating Aboriginal languages.

Since community language classes were introduced in schools, school principals have noticed an increase in school attendance among Aboriginal students. A decline in absenteeism has been evident in areas as diverse as Western Sydney and Wilcannia. In April this year I invited Aboriginal community organisations to lodge submissions for grants of between \$5,000 and \$25,000 to conduct Aboriginal language projects. In the 2008-09 financial year the New South Wales Government will provide a total of \$200,000 for its program aimed at preserving and revitalising New South Wales Aboriginal languages. The core basis of that is, as I said when I commenced my answer, you cannot have a culture without a language.

LAKE CATHIE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Mr ANDREW STONER: My question is directed to the Premier. Given the rapid growth of Lake Cathie, on the mid North Coast, with 340 primary school-age children forced to travel long distances to schools at Port Macquarie and North Haven, when will the Government finally commence planning for a new primary school at Lake Cathie?

Mr NATHAN REES: I will seek a report on the detail of the question and advise the member accordingly.

CANCER TESTING

Mr NINOS KHOSHABA: My question is addressed to the Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Cancer). Will the Minister update the House on efforts to make the community aware of the importance of regular testing for cancers?

Mr TONY STEWART: I thank the member for Smithfield for his important question and his ongoing interest in this most important issue. The terrible scourge that is cancer invariably affects either someone we know directly or someone we know through our family and friends. Not a person in this House has not been touched by this scourge. In 2005 there were over 12,500 deaths from cancer in New South Wales and, amazingly, more than 221,000 people were living and suffering with cancer.

September is Prostate Cancer Awareness Month. It provides an opportunity to encourage men, and the community, to be more aware of the disease. One out of five men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer in their lifetime. We need to ensure that men understand that there is absolutely nothing wrong with getting tested, and that a small test could save their lives. Without question, early detection is crucial for survival. Prostate-specific Antigen [PSA] testing is one way to test for prostate cancer. Men are urged to discuss prostate cancer and the use of a PSA test with their general practitioner. More information on PSA testing can be found on the Cancer Institute's website, www.cancerinstitute.org.au.

Another important cancer that is in dire need of additional public attention and focus is ovarian cancer. It is absolutely tragic that only 42 per cent of women with ovarian cancer survive beyond five years overall. It is a terrible story. However, survival from ovarian cancer is influenced by stage at presentation and the type of ovarian cancer. The Cancer Institute of New South Wales—an absolutely fabulous organisation—is full of dedicated, passionate and committed professionals. I have visited the institute on several occasions. The body was set up by this Labor Government in 2003 and is led by esteemed Professor Jim Bishop, who does a great job. Recently the institute held National Gynaecological Awareness Day, which was an opportunity to highlight an infrequently discussed cancer but one that tragically claims 284 lives in New South Wales every year.

The symptoms of ovarian cancer are often vague and can mimic those of other disorders. This can make ovarian cancer difficult to diagnose in its early stages. Contrary to public opinion, a Pap smear cannot be used to detect ovarian cancer. The best thing women can do is to be aware of the symptoms that may indicate ovarian cancer and see their general practitioner if they experience any unusual and persistent changes. The most common symptoms that may indicate ovarian cancer are abdominal bloating or feeling full, appetite loss, unexplained weight gain, constipation, heartburn, back pain, frequent urination, abdominal/pelvic pain and fatigue. In conclusion, I wish to stress the importance of regular testing for both men and women in order to detect any cancers present early so that the success rate of beating this terrible disease may be enhanced.

FORMER PREMIER IEMMA ADVISERS SALARY PACKAGES

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: My question is directed to the Premier. In light of his promise to be honest, transparent and accountable to the public, why has he refused to release the taxpayer-funded salary packages of Morris Iemma's former spin doctors Adam Walters and John Choueifate?

Mr NATHAN REES: I said on day one that my Government will be about policy and not spin, and we took action on that front in the first week. Staffing for my office has been reduced from 11 to 6, and there will be further reductions across the Government's administration in due course.

TOURISM JOBS GROWTH

Mr ROBERT COOMBS: My question is to the Minister for Tourism. Will the Minister update the House on the growth in tourism-related jobs in New South Wales and the challenges that lay ahead?

Ms JODI McKAY: I thank the member for Swansea for his question and his sincere interest in tourism in this State. Tourism delivers every single day to the New South Wales economy. It delivers \$24.2 billion per year to the State's economy and high-quality productive jobs right across the State. The tourism industry is a competitive one, both domestically and internationally, and the Government welcomes that competition and challenge. Nor is the industry immune to pressures facing our economy. The rise in the cost of living, petrol prices and interest rate hikes means family holiday budgets are stretched.

Despite what the doomsayers are saying, I can report to the House that not only is New South Wales the number one destination for domestic and international tourists in Australia but we also lead the nation in the number of tourism jobs. According to the latest atlas produced by the Tourism and Transport Forum more than 156,000 men and women are employed in the New South Wales tourism industry and it is a growing jobs market. There has been a 7 per cent increase in tourism jobs over two years: up from 145,500 in 2003-04 to 156,044 in 2006-07—an additional 10,000 jobs. That is almost 40,000 more direct tourism jobs than Queensland and 55,000 more direct tourism jobs than Victoria. Many of these tourism jobs are in regional and rural New South Wales and they are helping to sustain local economies.

Working in partnership with our tourism industry, we have new initiatives to grow domestic tourism and develop key international markets such as China and India. With Events New South Wales boosting visitor numbers, Brand Sydney presenting a global vision of our gateway to the world, and a new partnership with industry through the New South Wales tourism strategy—

Mr Donald Page: Point of order: Because of the importance of tourism will you guarantee the \$40 million package?

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

[Interruption]

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Ballina to order. He will resume his seat.

Ms JODI McKAY: I point out that it has been 11 years since he has asked a question on tourism.

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order. The Leader of the Opposition will cease interjecting. I call the member for Ballina to order for the second time. I call the member for Terrigal to order.

Ms JODI McKAY: It is amazing the reaction you get when 11 years is mentioned.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: Because you tell lies.

Ms JODI McKAY: June 1997, 11 years. With Events New South Wales boosting visitor numbers, Brand Sydney presenting a global vision—

Mr Wayne Merton: Point of order: The Minister for Tourism is critical of the member for Ballina but she has never answered a question on tourism either.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Baulkham Hills will resume his seat. I will not entertain frivolous points of order. The Minister has the call.

Ms JODI McKAY: That was an Einstein comment from the member for Baulkham Hills. The Government is serious about making reforms to drive growth in all sectors of the tourism industry.

CENTENNIAL PARK AND MOORE PARK TRUST

Ms CLOVER MOORE: I direct my question to the Premier. Given that the Centennial Park and Moore Park Trust is appointed by the State Government and is charged with the responsible stewardship of dedicated public recreational land on our behalf, will the Premier rule out any transfer of Moore Park land from the Centennial Park and Moore Park Trust to the Sydney Cricket and Sports Ground Trust for car parking, commercial or any other uses?

Mr NATHAN REES: I am advised that an arrangement has been struck between the Centennial Park and Moore Park Trust and the Sydney Cricket and Sports Ground Trust for the use of the Moore Park grounds for a period of 12 months from April this year. At the end of the 12-month period that will be assessed to see whether it has worked for both parties. In regard to the future stewardship of the area, referred to as Moore Park east, I am advised that discussions have been held between the two trusts but no agreement has been reached. I am further advised that there is no intention to alter the future use of the land in question regardless of stewardship. I am happy to talk about that further with the member for Sydney.

LOCAL SPORTING ORGANISATIONS CAPITAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO: I address my question to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. Will the Minister update the House on the support available to local sporting organisations, and related matters?

Mr KEVIN GREENE: I am pleased to answer the question of the member to Penrith. The State Government has an extensive history of support of local sporting organisations, and they are groups we should all be proud to support. Local sporting groups provide great opportunities for our young people to learn skills that they can use when they face challenges in their lives. One of the areas of Government support is through our capital assistance program. Members would be well aware that the capital assistance program supports not only councils but also not-for-profit organisations that are looking to provide updated and improved facilities for those participating in sporting activities.

I can announce today that the next round of the capital assistance program grants will open tomorrow. I ask members in the House to provide that information to sporting groups and councils within their electorates. Local members also have a very significant and important role to play in the assessment process of those grants. In addition to that information being given to the communities through local members, application forms can be found on the website at www.dsr.nsw.gov.au or interested organisations can phone 131302. I can see that Mr Speaker is making a note of that information, as a dutiful local member. Whatever facilities are provided, whether for local bowling clubs, improvements to synthetic cricket wickets, or updated netball facilities or other facilities, there is no doubt that the Government is pleased to support them, and in the last five years the Government has provided about \$18 million in grants.

MINI-BUDGET INDEPENDENT ADVICE COST

Mr MIKE BAIRD: My question is directed to the Premier. Given that it is costing almost \$3 million for the offices of Treasurer Eric Roozendaal and Finance Minister Joe Tripodi, how much extra will it cost the taxpayers of New South Wales to pay for their incompetence now that you have been forced to appoint Ian McFarlane and Bernie Fraser?

Mr NATHAN REES: Ian McFarlane and Bernie Fraser are two of the finest economic minds in this country, as former governors of the Reserve Bank. I would be reckless in my duty as Premier if I did not call on the best available advice to help the Government put together a mini-budget in some of the most trying economic circumstances that are faced not just by New South Wales but the international economy. We have heard former heads of the Reserve Bank, or its equivalent in the United States, say this week that the financial volatility that we have seen in the US markets over the last 10 days has been a 1 in 50 or 1 in 100 year incident.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: Stop trying to blame the world for your problems.

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order.

Mr NATHAN REES: When it comes to independent advice, the Leader of the Opposition might have got us out of the hole from the airport rail link if he had sought independent advice. The member for Upper Hunter might have got us out of the hole that is Luna Park if he had sought independent advice.

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

Mr Barry O'Farrell: Point of order: I refer to Standing Order 129, relevance. The only hole the State is in is the one dug by Michael Costa. We have had 12 years of Labor financial mismanagement. They are not my words; they are Michael Costa's words.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. The Premier has the call.

Mr NATHAN REES: I do not make any apology at all for calling on the best minds to address the most difficult issues. I will continue to do so, whether it is on matters of economic policy, health policy, transport policy or any other policy that matters to the people of New South Wales. We will get the best intellects that we can to deal with the problems we face and the challenges we confront. I do not make any apology for that at all. The people of New South Wales will be better served by having access to that advice.

NEWCASTLE BUS NETWORK

Mr MATTHEW MORRIS: My question is addressed to the Minister for Transport. Will the Minister update the House on improvements to the Newcastle bus network?

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: I thank the member for Charlestown for his question and for the work that he and the member for Newcastle and other members who represent Hunter electorates have done to work with their communities on the new bus network for the Hunter region. As of this Sunday information about the network will be available on the website www.newcastlebuses.info or www.131-500.info. The network will result in improved services for bus users in the Hunter region. It is planned to implement the new bus routes from 30 November, after the conclusion of the Higher School Certificate and School Certificate examinations. That was determined following consultation with the local community to ensure that students would be able to use existing timetables and routes. A great deal of community consultation and cooperation has taken place to come up with a bus service package that will well serve the Hunter community. We have seen a strong increase in patronage of Newcastle buses and public transport generally. We anticipate that strong growth in patronage will continue when the new system is rolled out at the end of November.

PREMIER REES BUDGET NIGHT PARTY INQUIRIES

Mr ANDREW FRASER: My question is directed to the Premier. As witnesses at the infamous budget night party reported inappropriate conduct, contact—

Mr Joseph Tripodi: You're never sober.

Mr ANDREW FRASER: Do you want to talk about your Democrat friend?

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the Minister for Finance to order. I call the member for Monaro to order.

Mr ANDREW FRASER: As witnesses at the infamous budget night party reported inappropriate contact between the member for Kiama and the member for Wollongong and both members have denied it, what did the Premier's dozens of phone calls reveal about the matter?

Mr NATHAN REES: I took it upon myself to independently verify different reports of the events of that evening. Once I verified the situation, I took action. It is as simple as that.

KINGS HIGHWAY UPGRADE

Mr STEVE WHAN: My question is addressed to the Minister for Roads. Will the Minister update the House on the progress of works on the Kings Highway, including those associated with the new defence facility near Queanbeyan?

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: I thank the Minister for Roads for his question and commend him and his Country Labor colleagues for showing an interest in the bush and the regions. That is more than the city-centric Nationals have done for some time. The member for Oxley is the most city-centric Leader of The Nationals that we have ever seen. He thinks he can masquerade as a country member by standing next to a fig tree in the Domain whilst giving one of his incredibly entertaining press conferences. That is about as close as he gets to the bush. As I said, I thank the member for Monaro for his interest in this matter. The Government is committed to improving road safety across the State.

The Kings Highway is a vital link between Canberra and the South Coast and we are committed to improving and maintaining it. To this end, the Roads and Traffic Authority is working in association with the Department of Defence, and the Federal Government has allocated \$16.3 million in its 2008-09 budget for work on the highway. The Roads and Traffic Authority has carried out numerous upgrades and safety work on the Kings Highway and this work will continue. Since 1995 we have overseen additional overtaking lanes, major realignment of sections of road, the installation of safety barriers, the installation of turnout bays, slope stability works and extensive road rehabilitation to improve travel conditions.

The Australian Government is constructing a new defence facility about 10 kilometres east of Queanbeyan. I understand the site is due to start operating in late 2008, before becoming fully operational in early 2009. The site will be staffed 24 hours a day, but the majority of those working on the site will operate during normal business hours. The facility is located away from urban areas and public transport, so it will have an impact on the amount of traffic on the Kings Highway. I am advised that a number of upgrades are required to provide sufficient capacity for that extra traffic and safety improvements on some sections of the road. To enable this to happen, the Federal Defence budget allocated \$16.3 million towards improvements on the highway and the New South Wales Government has agreed to provide up to \$10 million to complete the necessary road safety improvements.

I am advised that road shoulder widening work is scheduled for completion by late September 2008 between Weetaliba Drive and the Australian Capital Territory border. Improvements at the intersection of Weetaliba Drive and the Kings Highway began in late August 2008 and options are under examination for Captains Flat Road and The Ridgeway and realignment between Regent Drive and Queanbeyan. I understand that a community update display showing the proposed improvements and seeking public comment started on Monday 15 September and will run until mid-October. This is another example of the New South Wales Government working very closely with the Rudd Government to improve the safety and efficiency of our vital highway routes.

PORT MACQUARIE HOSPITAL EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: My question is directed to the Premier. Given that this leaked document warns that a failure to upgrade the emergency department at Port Macquarie Hospital will increase risks of medical error, adverse events with harm, staff burnout and retention issues, when will the Premier get on with it and fix the emergency department?

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order.

Mr NATHAN REES: This question comes from an Opposition that went to the election with a promise to provide 2,000 nurses to the hospital system over a four-year period. We have already passed that figure in 18 months.

Mrs Jillian Skinner: No, you have not.

Mr NATHAN REES: I stand corrected if that is not the case. When Coalition members were last in Government they sold Port Macquarie Hospital to the private sector, with the result that New South Wales taxpayers forked out \$144 million for a hospital that cost \$52 million to build. Have they learnt from history? No, they have not. Port Macquarie Hospital is a textbook case in failed Coalition privatisation experiments, and it has scared them for good.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: Since 2005 at Port Macquarie Hospital we have added an extra 22 acute care beds and appointed extra nursing staff and a full-time medical director to the emergency department. We have established the innovative Express Community Care Centre, which provides a relief valve at times of high demand. Twenty per cent of all emergency department patients are managed by this unit, fast-tracking patients with ongoing chronic treatment needs. We have established the Hospital in the Home program, which enables patients to be discharged and managed in the home setting, thereby freeing up acute beds. We have invested \$90 million in the Port Macquarie radiotherapy unit and \$2.4 million to upgrade the Port Macquarie mental health unit. We have also provided vital medical equipment for the intensive care unit.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: Port Macquarie Hospital also advises that at the end of June it had a zero waiting list for both the most acute category of patients and a zero long-wait list. The Government will continue to respond to growing demands on our health system, including in Port Macquarie.

GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr GERARD MARTIN: My question is directed to the Premier. Will the Premier inform the House of measures to improve the transparency and accountability of the Government?

The SPEAKER: Order! Opposition members will remain silent.

Mr NATHAN REES: I thank the member for Bathurst for his question on this most important matter. On day one of my premiership I said that I was going to rebuild people's confidence in the administration of this Government step by step. That means more accountability and more transparency. We have heard a lot from members opposite today and on previous days about demands for more scrutiny of government, and I am going to give them what they wish. This year the Parliament sits in New South Wales for a record number of days—the most we have sat in 19 years. Next year we will break that record. Next year this Parliament will sit for an additional two weeks. And we can look forward to more sterling-quality questions, such as those we have had today.

The SPEAKER: Order! Opposition members will remain silent.

Mr NATHAN REES: That means that on current projections the jurisdiction of New South Wales will have more sitting days in Parliament than any other State or Territory or the Commonwealth.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: Point of order—

The SPEAKER: Order! Government members will remain silent.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: I simply want clarification. Does that mean having question times on Friday or more bodgie sitting days?

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Coffs Harbour to order. The Premier has the call.

Mr NATHAN REES: That means an additional two weeks of sittings that will make us the most scrutinised government of any Parliament in Australia.

[Interruption]

If the member for Coffs Harbour is laughing it is a reflection on him.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: This year the Commonwealth Parliament sat for 69 days, Victoria sat for 49, Queensland sat for 43, South Australia 51—

Mr Barry O'Farrell: There is a question time every day.

Mr NATHAN REES: You will have to do a lot better if you are going to have more question times, given the paucity of questions you have had today.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: Western Australia sat for 60 days, Tasmania 46, the Northern Territory 31, the Australian Capital Territory 31. Next year New South Wales will sit for 70 days—more than any other jurisdiction in the Commonwealth and more than the Commonwealth Parliament.

STATE FINANCIAL ACCOUNTS PUBLICATION

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: My question is directed to the Premier. In light of his promise of honesty, transparency and accountability—a promise that has apparently been renewed despite the refusal of freedom of information about Mr Chouefate and Mr Walters—will he commit to publishing the full details of the State's monthly accounts no later than two weeks following the conclusion of a month?

Mr NATHAN REES: A mini-budget will be delivered on 11 November and all the relevant material—

Mr Barry O'Farrell: Point of order—

The SPEAKER: Order! The Premier has just started to answer the question. I will hear briefly the point of order of the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: It has been terrific today to have so many questions but so far this side of the House has asked nine questions and there have been no answers from the Premier. It is not just about question time, it is about the Premier answering what he is asked.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. The Premier has the call.

Mr NATHAN REES: I appreciate that interjection, as I was able to get some more up-to-date information. Monthly reports on year-to-date budget sector financial performance are released in accordance with the requirements of the Public Finance and Audit Act. Monthly financial reports continue to be released in line with these requirements and generally they are issued by the end of the following month. Consistent with the provisions of section 8 (2), reports are delayed only when they coincide with the release of more detailed and comprehensive reports such as the budget, the half yearly review and the total State sector accounts. In line with this provision and as has been the practice in previous years, the financial statement for June 2008 is delayed pending audit by the Auditor-General. I am advised it will be part of the 2007-08 audited total State sector accounts that are expected to be tabled in Parliament next month.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: I ask the Premier a supplementary question. I appreciate the Premier's response about the Act, but will he give a commitment—yes or no—to publish regularly, within two weeks of the conclusion of a month, the State's accounts?

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition restated his original question; he did not ask a supplementary question. Time for questions has expired. I have been a member of this place since 1999. Today 19 questions were answered in question time. I will not pass judgement on the content of the questions, but I believe the public would appreciate the shorter answers of the Premier and his Ministers.

Question time concluded.

INDEPENDENT COMMISSION AGAINST CORRUPTION

Reports

The Speaker announced the receipt, pursuant to section 78 of the Independent Commission Against Corruption Act 1988, of the following reports:

- (1) Investigation into bribery and fraud at RailCorp, Fifth Report, dated September 2008
- (2) Investigation into bribery and fraud at RailCorp, Sixth Report, dated September 2008

Ordered to be printed.

PUBLIC BODIES REVIEW COMMITTEE

Report

Mr Matthew Morris, as Chair, tabled report No. 1/54, entitled, "Report on an Inquiry into Web-Based Annual Reporting in the NSW Public Sector", dated September 2008.

Ordered to be printed on motion by Mr Matthew Morris.

PETITIONS

Hornsby Area Haemodialysis

Petition asking that a public haemodialysis centre be established in the Hornsby area, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

Ambulance Rescue Function

Petition opposing the recommendation of the Head Report to disband the rescue function within the Ambulance Service of New South Wales, received from **Mr Daryl Maguire**.

Tumut Renal Dialysis Service

Petition asking that the House support the establishment of a satellite renal dialysis service in Tumut, received from **Mr Daryl Maguire**.

Wymah Ferry Service

Petition requesting the continuation of the Wymah ferry service, received from **Mr Greg Aplin**.

CountryLink Pensioner Booking Fee

Petition requesting the removal of booking fees charged to pensioners on CountryLink services, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

Pensioner Excursion Bus Tickets

Petition requesting that South Coast pensioners be able to access the \$2.50 pensioner excursion ticket for bus travel, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

South Coast Rail Services

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

Hawkesbury River Railway Station Access

Petition requesting improved access to Hawkesbury River railway station, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

Bus Service 311

Petition requesting improved services on bus route 311, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Bus Service 300

Petition requesting improved services on bus route 300, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Pymont to Town Hall Bus Service

Petition requesting a 10-minute bus service between Pymont foreshore via Broadway to Town Hall, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

North Nowra Public School and Havenlee Special School Security Fencing

Petition requesting funding for security fencing at North Nowra Public School and Havenlee Special School, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

Greenwell Point and Goodnight Island Development

Petition requesting the approval of the Greenwell Point and Goodnight Island development application in its entirety, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

Barangaroo Planning Guidelines

Petition opposing the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority proposal to modify Barangaroo planning guidelines, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Queensland Fruit Fly Eradication

Petition requesting funding for local councils to conduct Queensland fruit fly eradication programs in the Albury electorate, received from **Mr Greg Aplin**.

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**.

Pet Shops

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

Shoalhaven Local Area Command

Petition requesting additional resources for the Shoalhaven Local Area Command, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

Culburra Policing

Petition requesting increased police numbers in the Culburra area, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

Shoalhaven Police Station

Petition requesting funding for the establishment of a new police station in the central Shoalhaven area, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

Broken Hill and District Hearing Resource Centre

Petition requesting a one-off grant of \$50,000 to assist the Broken Hill and District Hearing Resource Centre to improve facilities, received from **Mr John Williams**.

Shoalhaven Mental Health Services

Petition requesting funding for the establishment of a dedicated mental health service in the Shoalhaven, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

Rural School Bus Safety

Petition requesting the provision of seats and seatbelts for all students on rural school buses travelling in speed zones of 80 kilometres per hour or higher, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

Berowra Traffic Noise Abatement

Petition requesting that noise levels be reduced on the F3 Freeway at Berowra, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

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

Mr JOHN AQUILINA (Riverstone—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.07 p.m.]: I move:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to permit the moving of a motion forthwith to appoint a parliamentary committee.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai—Leader of the Opposition) [3.07 p.m.]: The Opposition opposes this motion. For the last three days this State Government has talked about the State's financial crisis—a crisis that today the Premier seeks to blame on international conditions. The Premier does not address the

concerns expressed by the outgoing Treasurer, who said that the problems confronting New South Wales financially are a direct result of a State Government that for 12 years has failed to tackle the fundamental issues underlying government in New South Wales.

This motion is about re-establishing a committee. Why is it after a period of abeyance this committee is sought to be re-established? It is being re-established as part of the sordid factional deals that always have the Labor Party spending taxpayers' dollars on looking after itself. This is a motion designed to fill the trough so that even more Labor snouts can get in there and suck it up. The reality is that two nights ago Labor members of Parliament were on the phone requiring colleagues to support the appointment of the controversial member for Wollongong to a senior Labor Party position.

In order for that to happen the member for Camden—someone who I am surprised would be part of this sort of deal—said that he would step aside from the position provided his little friend the member for Gosford was looked after and that he was found a committee appointment. That is what this grubby deal is all about. We are suspending standing orders to resurrect a committee that has not met for more than 12 months, not because it might have good work to do across the State—goodness knows, a lot of work is required across this State if we are to get it off its knees and functioning well—but simply to provide another supplementary income for another Labor member.

Premier Nathan Rees pretends that this is a new Labor administration. Labor Party New South Wales Right DNA flows through its veins. That DNA determines that if taxpayers' dollars are to be had they will be spread around the brothers and sisters, but never used to address the fundamental problems facing this State. The Government will never spend dollars on nurses and teachers or to remedy all the problems confronting New South Wales. Members opposite always spend as much as they can find on themselves.

Since this Government came to office the number of paid committee chairmanship positions and the number of people it takes to preside over this Chamber and the other Chamber has exploded, despite the fact that at least in this Chamber the number of members has decreased. We have more supervisors to supervise fewer people. That is similar to the Labor Party's administration of New South Wales. It is always about them. Yet, the bloke who pretends to be a new Premier and who says that he wants to restore confidence and faith in New South Wales says, "Trust me. I am going to do it differently." If he were serious about raising the standard of government in New South Wales we would not be seeing sordid deals where committee positions are created simply to provide another position for yet another Labor mate.

When I first arrived in this place anyone could park on level 4. Every parking space on that level now has a badge. I am not complaining about the badges, but they say "job". All of those jobs—with one exception in the upper House—are occupied by Labor members of Parliament. The State Government is running New South Wales like a family company for the benefit of itself, its mates and its cronies. It is not running the State on behalf of the public of New South Wales and it is not ensuring that scarce public resources are spent addressing the problems facing the people of this State, despite the fact that it claims we are experiencing a financial crisis.

How remarkable: a man who in his university holidays worked as a garbo does not recognise garbage. He has left Joe Tripodi on the front bench and promoted Noreen Hay, and he continues to engage in the same tactics that have caused this State so many problems over the past 13 years. That is epitomised by the member who moved the motion. He was sacked as Speaker immediately after the last election because he was not up to it and was given the job of Parliamentary Secretary and Leader of the House to manage this place. We know that he cannot manage a raffle in a chook house. This motion proves that this is the same Labor administration we have had since 1995. The only things that have grown are the number of jobs for party mates and the size of the public purse, and the only things that have reduced are the services provided to the people of this State. [*Time expired.*]

Mr JOHN AQUILINA (Riverstone—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.12 p.m.], in reply: The Leader of the Opposition can hypothesise as much as he likes; the reality is that parliaments cannot function without appropriate committees.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Mr JOHN AQUILINA: This motion is being moved to reconstitute a committee we had in the last Parliament that did valuable work. The manner in which the committee was constituted meant that it ceased to

exist at the conclusion of the last Parliament. That committee must now be reconstituted to continue the valuable work that it was doing. The Opposition has not been backward in coming forward in nominating members to participate in that committee, as it has done with every other committee. Acknowledging the fact that members opposite understand the value of committees, they have not hesitated in proposing a range of committees in another place to do the work of the Parliament. It is a reality in this Parliament—as it is in all parliaments in the Westminster system—that committees must be established so that the Parliament can function appropriately. Backbenchers must participate in those committees to ensure that the processes of democracy continue for the betterment of the community and the State. That is why I have moved this motion to reconstitute the committee. It will be a valuable committee and it will do important work that will be of relevance and benefit to the people of this State.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 45

Mr Amery	Mr Harris	Mrs Paluzzano
Ms Andrews	Ms Hay	Mr Pearce
Mr Aquilina	Mr Hickey	Mrs Perry
Ms Beamer	Ms Hornery	Mr Sartor
Mr Borger	Ms Judge	Mr Shearan
Ms Burney	Ms Keneally	Mr Stewart
Mr Campbell	Mr Khoshaba	Ms Tebbutt
Mr Collier	Mr Koperberg	Mr Terenzini
Mr Coombs	Mr Lynch	Mr Tripodi
Mr Corrigan	Mr McBride	Mr West
Mr Costa	Dr McDonald	Mr Whan
Mr Daley	Ms McKay	
Ms D'Amore	Mr McLeay	
Ms Firth	Ms McMahon	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Gadiel	Ms Megarrity	Mr Ashton
Mr Greene	Mr Morris	Mr Martin

Noes, 36

Mr Aplin	Mr Hazzard	Mr Smith
Mr Baird	Mrs Hopwood	Mr Souris
Mr Baumann	Mr Humphries	Mr Stokes
Ms Berejikian	Mr Kerr	Mr Stoner
Mr Cansdell	Mr Merton	Mr J. H. Turner
Mr Constance	Ms Moore	Mr R. W. Turner
Mr Debnam	Mr O'Dea	Mr J. D. Williams
Mr Draper	Mr O'Farrell	Mr R. C. Williams
Mrs Fardell	Mr Page	
Mr Fraser	Mr Provest	
Ms Goward	Mr Richardson	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mrs Hancock	Mr Roberts	Mr George
Mr Hartcher	Mrs Skinner	Mr Maguire

Pairs

Ms Burton	Ms Hodgkinson
Mr Gibson	Mr Piccoli

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE OFFICE OF THE VALUER-GENERAL**Establishment and Membership****Motion by Mr John Aquilina agreed to:**

That:

- (1) a Joint Standing Committee, to be known as the Joint Standing Committee on the Office of the Valuer-General, be appointed;
- (2) the committee's functions be:
 - (a) to monitor and review the exercise of the Valuer-General's functions with respect to land valuations under the Valuation of Land Act 1916 and the Land Tax Management Act 1956, and in particular:
 - (i) to monitor the methodologies employed for the purpose of conducting such valuations,
 - (ii) to monitor the arrangements under which valuation service contracts are negotiated and entered into, and
 - (iii) to monitor the standard of valuation services provided under such contracts,
 - (b) to report to both Houses of Parliament, with such comments as it thinks fit, on any matter connected with the exercise of the Valuer-General's functions referred to in paragraph (a) to which, in the opinion of the committee, the attention of Parliament should be directed,
 - (c) to report to both Houses of Parliament any change that the committee considers desirable to the Valuer-General's functions referred to in paragraph (a),
 - (d) to inquire into any question in connection with the committee's functions which is referred to it by both Houses of Parliament, and to report to both Houses on that question.
- (3) the functions of the committee do not extend to the investigation of any matter relating to or arising from a particular valuation of a specific parcel of land;
- (4) the committee consist of five members as follows:
 - (a) Three members of the Legislative Assembly of whom two must be Government members and one must be a non-Government member, and
 - (b) Two members of the Legislative Council of whom one must be a Government member and one must be a non-Government member,
- (5) Ms Andrews, Ms Megarrity and Mr Richardson be appointed to serve on such committee as the members of the Legislative Assembly.
- (6) notwithstanding anything contained in the standing orders of either House, at any meeting of the committee any three members of the committee shall constitute a quorum, provided that the committee meets as a joint committee at all times;
- (7) the committee have leave to sit during the sittings or any adjournment of either or both Houses;
- (8) the committee have leave to make visits of inspection within the State of New South Wales and other States and Territories of Australia; and
- (9) a message be sent acquainting the Legislative Council of the resolution and requesting that the Legislative Council appoint two of its members to serve with the members of the Legislative Assembly on the committee, and to fix a time and place for the first meeting.

Message sent to the Legislative Council advising it of the resolution.**MR RICHARD WEBER, PARLIAMENTARY ATTENDANT**

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai—Leader of the Opposition) [3.22 p.m.]: With the indulgence of the House, given that everyone is here—and I am sure the Leader of the House will join me in speaking—this is Mr Richard Weber's last day as an attendant in this place before he leaves to cross the great divide and work with the Legislative Council. I wish him well on behalf of the Opposition.

Mr JOHN AQUILINA (Riverstone—Leader of the House) [3.22 p.m.]: On behalf of the Government I also extend best wishes to Richard and wish him all the best in another place. We are losing a very good man. Our loss is their gain.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**Days and Hours of Sitting**

Mr JOHN AQUILINA (Riverstone—Leader of the House) [3.23 p.m.]: I move:

That unless otherwise ordered, the House at its rising on Friday 12 December 2008 adjourn until Tuesday 3 March 2009, and that the House meet during the 2009 budget and spring sittings on the following days:

Budget Sittings: March 3, 4, 5, 10, 11, 12, 13, 24, 25, 26, 27, 31; April 1, 2, 3; May 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15; June 2, 3, 4, 5, 16, 17, 18, 19, 23, 24, 25, 26.

Spring Sittings: September 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 10, 11, 22, 23, 24, 25; October 20, 21, 22, 23, 27, 28, 29, 30; November 10, 11, 12, 13, 24, 25, 26, 27; December 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD (Wakehurst) [3.24 p.m.]: The new Premier on L-plates was just telling us he will increase the number of hours and increase the number of opportunities for questions—not for answers of course. Today 19 questions were asked and not one from the Opposition received a serious answer. Now it is suggested that Parliament not sit until March next year. We have a serious failure of government. The Government does not want to be here. It does not want to answer questions. The Government is preoccupied with establishing positions for Noreen Hay, the member for Wollongong, and Joe Tripodi, and all the others who are rotten to the core. The Government is more interested in Orange Grove—

The SPEAKER: Order! Government members will cease injecting, including the member for Mulgoa and the Minister for Community Services.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The Government is far more interested in corrupt processes with its snouts in the trough—the dollars and cents it can get for itself—but where will Government members be in January and February next year, and part of March? They will be off overseas on their numerous committees. As the Leader of the Opposition said earlier, you are hard pressed to find a car space that has not been allocated to a Labor member. I would add that you are hard pressed to find a Labor member. There are no Labor members here; they are all on overseas trips.

We need a Parliament that can ask questions and allow questions to be answered. Instead, we have a group of Z-team members who have been left here after the nuclear holocaust, after the Government imploded and we saw Joe Tripodi and Eddie Obeid making sure all their people were in, but Premier Iemma was out. If they are prepared to do that to their own, what will they do to the public of New South Wales? Eddie Obeid is running the show. There is every chance that Eddie Obeid has already been consulted about the parliamentary sitting days. The committee that we just established was a deal done. Eddie was working the phones flat chat the night before last to shore up Noreen Hay—remember Wollongong, remember Joe Scimone, remember the corruption, the dollars and the "table of knowledge"? We have a stench of corruption around Noreen Hay and Wollongong.

Ms Tanya Gadiel: Point of order—

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: She is part of the corruption. That is how she—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Wakehurst will resume his seat. The House will come to order. The member for Parramatta has the call. Members will cease interjecting. All members who have previously been called to order are deemed to be on three calls to order.

Ms Tanya Gadiel: My point of order is that members should not cast aspersions on other members in this place. If the member for Wakehurst wants to cast such aspersions I suggest, in the words of Bob Debus, that he walk 10 paces out of this place and say it outside the Chamber.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Parramatta will resume her seat. I will listen further to the member for Wakehurst.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Come in spinner! The personal appointee as Deputy-Speaker, the personal appointee of Eddie Obeid—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Wakehurst will direct his comments through the Chair—and have a little rest in between them!

Mr Alan Ashton: Point of order: Now that we have another doctor in the House, can you please have a look at the member for Wakehurst?

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order. The Leader of the Opposition will not encourage the debate.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Alan, you are a nice bloke but when they send you in to defend the offal that is left in the Parliament we really have a problem. I move an amendment—

Ms Diane Beamer: Point of order: In anybody's language that was unparliamentary, and I ask the member to apologise.

The SPEAKER: Order! I will allow the member to move his amendment. The House will come to order.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I move:

That the motion be amended by inserting the words "requiring a Question Time on each sitting day" after "following days".

I apologise to some of you who are not offal; the majority, unfortunately, are.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Wakehurst made comments that were unparliamentary and they should be withdrawn. I ask the member to withdraw them.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I withdraw any comments that may have caused offence to you, Mr Speaker, or to the House.

Mr JOHN AQUILINA (Riverstone—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.29 p.m.], in reply: The Government rejects the amendment. The member for Wakehurst could have spared himself considerable anguish and angst if he had taken the time to look at the details of the sitting days. I acknowledge that the debate has been on the presumption that they were circulated. They are circulated now. As the Premier indicated earlier today, there will be an extra two weeks of sitting, comprising an additional six days of question time. That is 70 days of sitting—35 days during the budget session and 35 days during the spring session. No member has been in this Chamber longer than I have, and that number of sitting days is a record in recent times. It goes to the nub of what the Premier has said about Parliament, the Government, transparency, providing more opportunity for questioning, and ensuring that we provide as much opportunity as possible to deal with the needs of the people of this State. The Premier promised it and the Government is delivering it, and delivering it on day one. Members should acknowledge that next year the Parliament will sit a record number of sitting days, with a record number of question times and a record number of questions.

Question—That the amendment be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 35

Mr Aplin
Mr Baird
Mr Baumann
Ms Berejiklian
Mr Cansdell
Mr Constance
Mr Debnam
Mr Draper
Mrs Fardell
Mr Fraser
Ms Goward
Mrs Hancock

Mr Hartcher
Mr Hazzard
Mrs Hopwood
Mr Humphries
Mr Kerr
Mr Merton
Ms Moore
Mr O'Dea
Mr O'Farrell
Mr Page
Mr Provest
Mr Richardson

Mr Roberts
Mr Smith
Mr Souris
Mr Stokes
Mr Stoner
Mr J. H. Turner
Mr R. W. Turner
Mr J. D. Williams
Mr R. C. Williams
Tellers,
Mr George
Mr Maguire

Noes, 45

Mr Amery	Mr Harris	Mrs Paluzzano
Ms Andrews	Ms Hay	Mr Pearce
Mr Aquilina	Mr Hickey	Mrs Perry
Ms Beamer	Ms Hornery	Mr Sartor
Mr Borger	Ms Judge	Mr Shearan
Ms Burney	Ms Keneally	Mr Stewart
Mr Campbell	Mr Khoshaba	Ms Tebbutt
Mr Collier	Mr Koperberg	Mr Terenzini
Mr Coombs	Mr Lynch	Mr Tripodi
Mr Corrigan	Mr McBride	Mr West
Mr Costa	Dr McDonald	Mr Whan
Mr Daley	Ms McKay	
Ms D'Amore	Mr McLeay	
Ms Firth	Ms McMahan	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Gadiel	Ms Megarrity	Mr Ashton
Mr Greene	Mr Morris	Mr Martin

Pairs

Ms Hodgkinson	Ms Burton
Mr Piccoli	Mr Gibson

Question resolved in the negative.

Amendment negatived.

Motion agreed to.

CONSIDERATION OF MOTIONS TO BE ACCORDED PRIORITY**Drought**

Mr STEVE WHAN (Monaro—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.38 p.m.]: Although it has taken that a long time to debate motions to be accorded priority because other matters had precedence, the House now has the opportunity to once again show our support for farmers in New South Wales who continue to suffer from this appalling drought. Recently the report of August conditions was released. It revealed that the area of New South Wales in drought was 71.6 per cent, up from 66.2 per cent in the previous month. The area considered to be marginal is 17.6 per cent, down slightly on the previous month's figures. But the area of New South Wales deemed satisfactory has slipped from 15.3 per cent to just 10.8 per cent. Once again, the figures highlight the situation that farmers in New South Wales face. This motion gives the House an opportunity once again to express its support to farmers.

The last time I moved a motion to be accorded priority the Opposition opposed debating it on the basis that I had raised the issue before. That is absolutely correct. As a representative of country New South Wales, I will continue to raise the issue until the drought breaks and until there is no longer a need to raise in this place these sorts of motions expressing support for our farmers. A number of important things are happening at the moment. We must acknowledge in this place the New South Wales Government's ongoing support for farmers. We should also acknowledge that we now have a new Federal Government, which is working with the States to review drought policy. It is also important to highlight for the benefit of farmers that the State Government's existing drought relief continues while ever the drought continues. It is critical that people are aware of that.

Over the past year in this place, on a number of occasions both sides of the House have criticised elements of exceptional circumstances assistance. We now have the opportunity to work with the Federal Government over the next couple of years to ensure that exceptional circumstances assistance and the review of drought policy are undertaken in a way that benefits New South Wales farmers and our rural communities generally. We have a choice here. If the House chooses not to discuss drought today, it can then consider the motion of the Leader of the Opposition. Almost every day of the week the Leader of the Opposition puts forward a similar motion—a motion that simply whinges and whines and does not say much. Today he will pay

special attention to trying to make up for his insipid performance last night in his 65-minute speech, during which no member on his side of the House could even keep his or her eyes open, let alone be inspired enough to attempt to force a change of government.

Mr Andrew Constance: Point of order: I thought the purpose of the member for Monaro's speech was to establish priority, not to refer to debates that occurred yesterday. Also, the member for Monaro is not making reference to the drought.

The SPEAKER: Order! I have heard enough on the point of order. As I have indicated previously, I extend a little latitude to both sides in these debates. However, it is important that the member for Monaro argue why his motion should have priority.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I have spent three minutes talking about drought in New South Wales and its severe impact on farmers. It is a pity that whenever I do that the member for Bega is never listening. It might surprise people to know that the member for Bega has a lot of dairy farmers in the electorate he represents and they would like to know how he feels about drought.

[*Interruption*]

The member for Bega would not know about drought, because he is always in Sydney. We have an important choice to make today. The House can choose to discuss this important motion on drought or it can choose to discuss yet another negative, whingeing, whining motion from the Leader of the Opposition. That is something we face every day in this place: positive motions, with Government members expressing support for people, or motions put forward by an Opposition that is obsessed with negativity, that does not offer any policy alternatives. Last night we heard six hours of debate but not a single policy expressed by the Opposition—

Ms Gladys Berejiklian: Not one?

Mr STEVE WHAN: —with the exception of the member for Willoughby. I sat through the whole lot of the Opposition speeches. We heard six hours of debate without a policy being mentioned. Yet again today we have a choice: a proposal from this Government to discuss something of great importance to the people of rural New South Wales or another negative whinge from the Opposition. [*Time expired.*]

Government Administration

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai—Leader of the Opposition) [3.43 p.m.]: Judging by the old saying "What you don't know can't hurt you", the member for Monaro is practically invulnerable. My motion is important because, despite what the member for Monaro says, it goes to the heart of government. If a new Premier of an old Government says he wants to be committed to honesty, transparency and accountability, if he says in his inaugural speech that politicians should not make promises they cannot keep, and, as he did in question time again today, if he promises to restore public confidence in government, that is the bedrock upon which government and public administration should base itself—public administration that affects those who live in the cities and towns as well as those who work on farms and in fisheries. Indeed, it is critical. That is why I am surprised by the member for Monaro, who would simply dismiss the concept that merit, openness, honesty, transparency and standards ought to apply to New South Wales. That is why the member for Monaro is part of the problem that afflicts the State. That is why, if we had had an election as a result of the motion being passed last night, the career of the member for Monaro would have been curtailed.

What astounds me is the hypocrisy of the member for Monaro, who lobbied me in particular to ensure that the third point was included in my motion. He said to me, "Please ensure you raise in this debate the fact that Ministers should be appointed on merit"—that Joe Tripodi should not be on the front bench, that John Della Bosca did not deserve reappointment, that Eric Roozendaal should be nowhere near the spot. We know that the member for Monaro, sitting on the backbench with his lean and hungry look, cannot wait to make his way down. So far the only thing that seems to have stopped his advance is some semblance of moral rectitude left in him.

Mr Steve Whan: Point of order: My point of order might be to ask for an extension of time for the Leader of the Opposition. Instead, however, I simply ask you to draw him back to justifying why his motion should have priority.

The SPEAKER: Order! As I have indicated, I extend a little latitude in these debates.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The member for Monaro should not let his mind wander; it is far too small to be out on its own. This motion seeks to ensure—as the Premier refused to do in question time today—that the Government publishes on a monthly basis the State's accounts, so that not only those who are vitally interested in the State's finances but also the public generally can be assured that when it comes to the most fundamental issue in the economy, the State's finances, we are operating in an open, honest and accountable way.

It is important that my motion proceed today. If the member for Monaro believes that critical infrastructure is not as important for people in country New South Wales as it is for people in city areas, the member for Monaro is listening to different people. Regardless of whether it is highways, roads, trains, or hospitals in places like Queanbeyan, across this State the need for essential infrastructure is pressing. Time and again that essential infrastructure has been promised over the past 13½ years. I agree with the Premier, who in his inaugural speech said you should not make promises that you cannot keep. That is why it is disappointing to see those opposite threatening vital infrastructure projects, not just in Sydney, such as the north west rail, but across the State. It is important that we raise standards, but not just in this place. Perhaps within the kernel of an idea for question time, as emerged in the last couple of days, we might see some standards raised in question time. Perhaps on those 16 sitting days next year when question time will not occur because they are Fridays we might even see a return to question time.

But there will be no return to those sorts of standards without standards from those who sit on the frontbench opposite. Whether it is the appointment of Joe Tripodi to the Finance portfolio—clearly not a position based on merit but a position forced on the Premier by the factional weight that the member for Fairfield brings to his position—or whether it is the appointment of someone who a week ago the Premier sacked as Parliamentary Secretary for Health but who took up a significant job within the Australian Labor Party, this is a State Government that has no standards and that will not set the bar for itself. Therefore, the public should not have confidence in it.

This is a State Government that is the same as it has been for the past 13½ years. This is a Premier who missed an opportunity, having become leader, to exert his influence to genuinely stand up for honesty, transparency and accountability, and to genuinely stand up for standards to restore some confidence. Over the past 21 days every act the Premier has done has let the State down on each and every one of those indices. He is clearly loose with the truth, or else he is simply telling fibs.

Question—That the motion of the member for Monaro be accorded priority—put and resolved in the affirmative.

DROUGHT

Motion Accorded Priority

Mr STEVE WHAN (Monaro—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.48 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that the drought has had a devastating impact on the State's farmers for more than seven years;
- (2) congratulates the New South Wales Government on its commitment of more than \$400 million in drought assistance; and
- (3) notes that the New South Wales Government will continue to work with the Rudd Government to provide timely support until the drought breaks.

There is no question that the drought remains serious from one end of New South Wales to the other, but, unlike the Leader of the Opposition, I am not going to stand here and throw personal insulting jokes at the people on the other side. I may criticise some of their policies later, but I will not resort to the depths of the Leader of the Opposition. Despite some rainfall in parts of central and northern New South Wales in the last week, drought is a serious issue in country areas of New South Wales. Each month the Minister for Primary Industries releases the State's official drought figures and each month they continue to paint a very serious picture—especially this month's figures.

The area of New South Wales officially in drought has increased. Now, more than ever, our farmers need rain and plenty of it because yet again they are staring down the barrel of another difficult spring. There is

minimal pasture to feed livestock and the winter crop is on the brink of failure in many parts due to the dry conditions. I have said before that it is almost beyond belief to those of us who live in regional New South Wales how some of our farmers keep going; they must despair. That is of concern to all of us, and today we will express our support for farmers in New South Wales in a bipartisan way. We will let them know that although the city has received a little rain we will not forget about the lack of rain in country areas.

The August rainfall figures, which I mentioned earlier, were very poor. Ivanhoe received 12.2 millimetres, Walgett 14.6 millimetres and Wilcannia 13.9 millimetres. The September figures are a little bit better. Walgett has received 42.6 millimetres this month, but the Central West and south-west are in drastic need of more rain, as is the area I represent, which includes very important dams in the Snowy Mountains that are vital to some western irrigated industries. We hope that the snowmelt this year from a reasonable snowfall will produce good run-off. However, I have had some slightly disappointing news from the Snowy Hydro Authority: interestingly, the snow was drier this year and the run-off might not be as good. Earlier this year there was some very nice dry snow in the mountains and hopefully there will be some follow-up rain and a bit more snow before the conclusion of the ski season.

The September drought figures reporting on the August conditions reveal that 71.6 per cent of New South Wales is in drought, which is up from 66.2 per cent; 17.6 per cent of the State is considered to be marginal; and only 10.8 per cent is satisfactory. Those figures show the dire situation in many areas. This is the worst drought on record. The State Government has continued to support farmers to the tune of more than \$400 million so far. Last week I talked to some farmers around Bibbenluke and Candelo who told me of the difficult times they are facing with grazing on their properties. Interestingly, some of them also gave me their views on the provision of drought relief, which might be something the House can debate when the Federal Government has completed its studies and the discussion papers are prepared.

Transport subsidies, which are essential for our farming community and which remain in place, will be critical if we do not receive good spring rains. Livestock feed is adequate in the northern coastal areas of the State but not in the central and south-west, and fodder prices have remained very high. I know the farming community is also facing extremely high prices for fertilisers; no doubt that will be mentioned later in the debate. Lack of rain is the reason the Department of Primary Industries [DPI] is advising grain growers to carefully assess their options before making hay from moisture-stressed wheat crops. Farmers now have a window of opportunity to assess their situation before cutting crops. They are being advised that options other than hay or silage may offer better returns. That is why the DPI district agronomist at West Wyalong, Bob Thompson, recently said:

Farmers need to research the current market to work out what the demand will be for hay and how much they might expect to get for it. Graziers need to have six months worth of feed in storage, but we have indications that there's still a lot of hay left over from last season and livestock numbers are down.

The situation in the whole of the State must be taken into account. There is some feed in the north but not in the south. The advice from DPI is important, and farmers should acknowledge that. Tony Burke, the new Federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, has started a review of the national drought policy. That is something that the State Government is very keen to be positively involved with. Parts of that review include: an economic assessment by the Productivity Commission; an assessment of the social impacts of drought by an expert panel—which I note includes Sue West, a former Country Labor senator, along with a number of experts; and a climatic assessment by the Bureau of Meteorology and the CSIRO.

A number of elements in the process have been discussed already in the farming communities. Various people have had some debate about the reports of the CSIRO and the impact of climate change. It is a very important process. The State Government will continue with the measures for the current drought but in the longer term we must look at how we cope with drought and its frequency. One of the farmers I spoke to the other day near Bibbenluke was telling me how important she felt it was to shift drought support into drought preparation; she was not entirely happy with the way current drought relief measures worked. Those are the sorts of things that should be considered, but the most important thing is the continuing support of our farmers.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS (Murray-Darling) [3.55 p.m.]: Those on this side of the House recognise and support the assistance that has been given to farmers in New South Wales currently facing the drought. I remind the member for Monaro that the latest package of exceptional circumstances, the enhancements to drought relief and the interest rate subsidy, were probably put together by The Nationals—a party I know he has a great deal of respect for. Most farmers in drought-affected areas were relieved to hear that the Rudd Labor Government will continue that much-needed support. But getting the New South Wales Government to spend the \$400 million is

a bit like pulling teeth. Every year we have to beg the Government to re-employ rural counsellors. Every year we have good, qualified people hanging on a string wondering whether they will be re-employed. As a consequence of Government delays we lose very good people from that industry each year—a situation that must be resolved.

The State Government's administration of the interest rate subsidy is of concern and I know of farmers who have gone outside their farming business to make an investment. For instance, one farmer at Urana had such a poor income that he borrowed \$35,000 to open a small massage shop in Lockhart and, as a consequence, the Rural Assistance Authority decided he was no longer eligible for the interest rate subsidy on his farm debt of more than \$500,000. That is an absolute disgrace; it is administration gone mad. New South Wales needs the sort of flexibility that is shown in the other States where the program operates. The Government should look at how bureaucrats who administer the program are trying to make it tough for farmers who are under a great deal of stress.

The member for Monaro talked about transport subsidies that give farmers an opportunity to move stock around and move feed in. One of my concerns is that in a rolling 12-month period farmers probably do not draw on the amount of money allocated for freight subsidies and some money would be left in the bucket. Dairy farmers in my electorate are under the pump to truck feed in for their dairy herds and, as a consequence, their subsidy lasts for only three months or so. I have called on the Minister to show some flexibility and allow these farmers to dip into the subsidy and use some of the unspent funds. The Government should look at that issue.

Most of the farmers in my electorate are irrigation farmers. They are going into their third year without a water allocation. Their average fixed water charge is \$14,000 a year. For three years the farmers have built up that debt, but they have had zero outcome. Consequently, they have put in dry crops. They have prepared and fertilised areas of land and sown the grain. The crops failed last year and they look like failing again this year. That has further increased their debt. They are under a huge amount of pressure, and the cracks are starting to show. With the breakdown in the social fabric of communities, we are seeing people who were previously enthusiastic participants in the community withdraw and stay at home. That is of major concern to me. The Government has shown no interest in supporting these people who are under the pump because of fixed water charges. Approximately \$20 million would just about do the job.

Mr Steve Whan: That is not the case. They have a deferral.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS: A deferral does not fix the problem. These people primarily buy from Murray Irrigation Limited. For the period that their fixed water charges are unpaid, they pay interest of 10 per cent. That creates another major problem. These communities are under the pump. The Federal Government is going to these closed communities that have been developed primarily on irrigated farming to speak to farmers who are under stress and worried about their future, to buy back water from the irrigators. It is breaking them down so that they will make a decision to sell their water. It is a disgrace. That is one of the reasons the cracks are starting to show in the social fabric of these communities.

The people are under threat from the drought, and the Federal Government is hell-bent on buying back low yield water that will not put a drop of water in the river. Some people in South Australia believe that Penny Wong's actions in southern Riverina will result in a good outcome for the lower lakes. It is all a dream. We will not see any result from the buyback until the drought breaks. Then the southern Riverina will be flooded and we will have to deal with flood mitigation: all that water will have gone to the environment and there will be no take-up for the irrigators, who traditionally have been able to mitigate the floods.

Mr FRANK TERENCEZINI (Maitland) [4.02 p.m.]: The poor season this year means that the State's crop harvest is on a knife edge. The *Land*, the lexicon of the country, reported:

Ten to 40 millimetres of rain across much of the grain belt in the past week has boosted many winter crops and temporarily staved off disaster for ailing crops in western areas. But it has come too late for some.

This year's estimated harvest area has reduced by 340,000 hectares to 4.75 million hectares, and that will be reduced further if we do not get more rain. The *Land* reported:

Turbulent weather with strong winds on Monday produced dust storms across the south, with visibility at Deniliquin reported to be as low as 10 metres at one stage.

Even the Henty Machinery Field Day site further east was shrouded in brown dust and alpine snowfields turned from white to brown.

There is good news: The Liverpool Plains had some rain, and there was 39 millimetres of rain at Werris Creek, 38 millimetres at Quirindi and 34 millimetres at Gunnedah and Breeza. It rained at Gulgong and Dubbo. There were 24 millimetres at Cootamundra, 32 millimetres at Gundagai, 18 millimetres at Wagga Wagga and 23 millimetres at West Wyalong. The poor conditions have meant that farmers have had to sow late in the season. Without urgent rain, they will not get their standard yield. More rain is needed throughout the grain belt to ensure a much-needed good harvest this year, following a run of poor seasons dating back to 2002. That is six years of below par seasons. We can only imagine the difficulties faced by farming communities. I fear that one more crop failure may be the end for many growers.

Last year was the low point for New South Wales farmers and growers when they realised only a fraction of their normal crop, or none at all. For the farmers who missed out on this week's rain, every day of no rain is a day closer to their having to make the difficult decision to cut their losses or recover what they can. We cannot merely hope that better days will be ahead. Hard decisions have to be made. The latest Bureau of Meteorology forecasts do not look promising for growers who are in desperate need of rain. This week the *Land* reported that the outlook for rain in southern New South Wales, an area in desperate need of rain, is neutral and growers in the Central West may get lower than average rain. We need more rain.

Mr DARYL MAGUIRE (Wagga Wagga) [4.05 p.m.]: Rural and regional New South Wales face challenging times with the continuing drought. I do not intend to argue the contents of the motion. More importantly, I want to talk about the issues and bring to the attention of the House and those who will report to the Rudd Government our concerns about the proposals. Tony Burke is encouraging farmers to adapt to climate change and to change their farming techniques. Our farmers are the most innovative farmers in the world, but they have not had rain or good seasons for six to seven years.

At present, to the south of Lockhart right through to the Western Districts people are cutting their crops. Their crops are failing. They had a little bit of rain, as reported by the member for Maitland, but nowhere near enough to salvage the crops and produce a decent harvest. The Minister must understand that farmers have exhausted their resources and cash, and in many cases their fodder and reserves. It is difficult for them to change their farming techniques when they do not have the cash to do so. The Federal Government tells them that they must comply, but their ability to do so is limited. That is why exceptional circumstances funding is so important.

I ask the Government to consider the adoption of my proposals. In relation to the administration of the exceptional circumstances scheme by the Rural Assistance Authority, farmers have only one opportunity to lodge an appeal against a judgement of a claim. In the review, farmers should be given a second opportunity to explain face to face their particular circumstances. Many farms are constructed on a trust arrangement and young farmers who innocently get caught up in those arrangements are excluded from that funding. Fixed water charges have a detrimental effect on farmers who have not been receiving their allocations.

The Federal Government's buyback of water allocations up and down the river will decimate communities. It is called valley stripping or asset stripping. That initiative must be considered very carefully. We have seen the problems at Toorale. That will happen more often if the drought continues, as forecast. I had hoped to speak longer in this debate. I hope in the coming weeks and months we address this issue in a professional manner and reach some solutions. I urge the Government to listen to the members who represent rural communities and take their suggestions on board.

Mr KERRY HICKEY (Cessnock) [4.08 p.m.]: The Government is fully aware of the drought's impact on rural and regional New South Wales. Another important drought assistance program that the State Government continues to support is the work of the drought support worker scheme. One of the key aspects of the support and referral service the scheme provides to rural communities is coordinating the popular Farm Family Gatherings and related activities. More than 118,000 rural families and businesses have now benefited from these Farm Family Gatherings. These popular community events are very important in providing an opportunity for farming families to get off the farm, take a break and spend social time with their neighbours and friends. They are a means of helping communities cope with the drought.

I am pleased to say that more than 2,200 Farm Family Gatherings, drought concerts and workshops have been held across country New South Wales. They also provide farmers with much-needed information on assistance measures. We now have a total of 11 part-time and full-time drought support workers based around the State, who are committed to providing information and assistance to drought-affected families. By working with a range of other government, not-for-profit and industry groups, our drought support workers also ensure that a range of service providers are included in drought-related activities. The mental toll of this drought cannot be underestimated, and we remain committed to addressing the personal wellbeing of our farming community as long as necessary.

As we mentioned earlier, the New South Wales Government announced a further \$3 million in support funding for the drought transport subsidy program. This popular assistance program plays a key role in helping our State's farmers, who continue to battle one of the worst droughts on record. The transport subsidy scheme plays an important role in enabling farmers to retain their livestock, in particular their core breeding stock, by helping pay for transport, feed and water supplies in drought-affected areas. This assistance program also helps in the essential transport of livestock to and from agistment when feed supplies have run out or, alternatively, to sale and to slaughter. By subsidising these activities we are helping to ensure that the drought-weary farmers have a range of options to best manage the health, welfare and profitability of their livestock enterprises. The Government's record on this drought stands absolutely clear: We are there to help rural and regional families across New South Wales in a very positive way.

Mr STEVE WHAN (Monaro—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.11 p.m.], in reply: I thank my Country Labor colleagues, the member for Maitland and the member for Cessnock, for their very important contributions to this debate. I also thank the member for Murray-Darling and the member for Wagga Wagga. The member for Murray-Darling raised a few interesting matters in his contribution. He criticised the interest rate subsidy conditions. I am pleased, as I am sure he is, that currently the Federal Government is undertaking a review of drought support, which hopefully will deal with some of those issues in the future. He also mentioned, once again, fixed water charges. I am sure the new Minister for Water will look at that issue.

The Minister has expressed to me, as I know he has to the member for Murray-Darling, his enthusiasm about visiting some of the areas and talking to the irrigators to find out exactly how these measures are affecting them. The member for Murray-Darling also mentioned the Lower Lakes and the debate about that area. The Premier has made it clear that even with the argument that the Lower Lakes need water it is not going to come at the expense of New South Wales communities. We agree on the environmental needs, but we want to make sure that New South Wales is looked after.

The member for Maitland highlighted the dust storms that recently arose from the dry conditions. I saw the red snow in the Snowy Mountains that resulted from those dust storms—it was quite an interesting sight. The member for Cessnock talked about the very important drought support workers scheme and the Farm Family Gatherings, which have been a vital part of drought assistance. One matter that I raised not so long ago in this place, which unfortunately we have not had much time to go into, is the absolutely vital work that the Government and community groups have been doing to address the serious mental health and depression issues that this very long-term drought has caused. I know everyone in this House continues to regard that issue as very important.

The member for Wagga Wagga talked about the importance of feeding into the reports that Tony Burke and the Federal Government have underway. I assure the member for Wagga Wagga and all the farmers I know that, from talking to Tony, he is very serious about getting a system in place that addresses the drought situation and assists Australian farmers to remain viable. The member for Wagga Wagga mentioned the idea of wanting a second face-to-face appeal opportunity with the Rural Assistance Authority over administration of some of the drought assistance. That is an interesting idea and I think it has merit. I will certainly follow that up with the Minister.

I was pleased to hear a member of The Nationals make a contribution to this debate, because in the past it has been difficult to get them interested in talking about the drought. I well remember the budget reply speech of the Leader of The Nationals in which he failed to mention the drought or assistance to people suffering from the drought. That astounded me. I was pleased that the member for Murray-Darling joined in the debate today and talked from the perspective of the irrigators in the west. I commend the motion to the House.

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

Motion agreed to.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarrity): Order! The motion accorded priority have concluded, the House will now consider General Business Orders of the Day.

TAFE (FREEZING OF FEES) BILL 2007

Agreement in Principle

Debate resumed from 10 April 2008.

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA (Davidson) [4.16 p.m.]: I support the TAFE (Freezing of Fees) Bill 2007, which was introduced by the Leader of The Nationals. A freeze on TAFE fees at 2007 levels until 30 June 2011

would provide greater incentive for new students to undertake a TAFE course and provide necessary relief for current students. In turn this would improve our workforce skills base and reduce barriers to business investment in New South Wales. Although all governments are well aware of skills shortages, TAFE fees for 2008 have increased by 9 per cent. This is 6.5 per cent above the consumer price index, despite the fact that when TAFE fees were introduced the then Minister for Education and Training, Andrew Refshauge, promised that fees would be indexed to the consumer price index.

At the very time we should be encouraging people to undertake a TAFE course, the New South Wales Government is making it harder. The April 2008 SAI Global - Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry Survey of Investor Confidence revealed that the availability of suitably qualified employees remains the single most binding constraint on investment for the fifth consecutive quarter. If the New South Wales Government were serious about addressing this problem it would not have increased TAFE fees by 9 per cent. The Prime Minister's so-called education revolution will do nothing for TAFE students who cannot afford to pay their fees. The New South Wales Teachers Federation—hardly a friend of the Coalition—has been critical of Labor's fee increases. President Maree O'Halloran stated:

Labor's credentials in this area have not been helped by the decision of the NSW Labor Government to increase TAFE fees by nine per cent in the face of real cuts to the TAFE budget over many years. Federation rejects NSW Education and Training Minister John Della Bosca's "user-pays" argument. TAFE fees establish barriers to an institution which should be open and available to all.

When fees for language courses increased, hundreds of language students signed a protest letter to the State Government. One TAFE student who studies Indonesian commented in an article in the *Sun Herald* that she would never have enrolled if she had known there was going to be this increase. The New South Wales Teachers Federation multicultural officer and TAFE organiser, Mark Goudkamp, said:

We now have a Prime Minister who can speak fluent Mandarin but we have a policy that is going to put up more barriers for young people wanting to learn a foreign language.

The former Premier claimed during the last State election in regard to his "learn or earn" policy that the Government had capped fees for apprentices and trainees no matter what course they were undertaking. Given the 9 per cent increase in TAFE fees, one must ask at what level they are capped. This New South Wales Labor Government has a recent history of closing or undermining educational institutions in northern Sydney, including Seaforth TAFE, Beacon Hill High School and the Ku-ring-gai campus of the University of Technology Sydney.

In November 1998 the Carr Government gave a clear commitment not to close Seaforth TAFE and then announced its closure less than a year later. This short-sighted cost-cutting measure left one TAFE to service the northern beaches area and undermined the goals of many mature-aged Higher School Certificate students. Beacon Hill High School was closed in dubious circumstances to make way for a property developer. The New South Wales Ombudsman stated on 22 April 2004 that the Department of Education and Training "accepts that there were deficiencies in its procedures prior to the decision to close the school and that good administrative practice was not followed".

The proposed redevelopment of the Ku-ring-gai campus of the University of Technology, Sydney will further undermine education in northern Sydney. The current site is being used to educate new nurses and teachers needed for the vital areas of health and education. The loss of the university site for this educational purpose will place a further strain on health and education resources in this State at a time when there is a real shortage, as the Premier acknowledged in question time today regarding our New South Wales health system. It seems that the Government has little concern about education in northern Sydney and throughout New South Wales. New South Wales Labor even shut down the former Premier's old high school at Narwee, just as it shut down former Premier Iemma himself. I am now closely monitoring the TAFE-owned site at Belrose in my electorate of Davidson.

Mrs Karyn Paluzzano: Where is the TAFE at Belrose?

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA: On Forest Way. It is a TAFE-owned site; it is not a building. It is used for various TAFE purposes. I will be closely monitoring that site to ensure that it is not sold for budget-salvaging purposes. The freezing of TAFE fees at 2007 levels until 30 June 2011 would be a positive initiative. It would provide greater incentive for people to undertake a TAFE course and necessary relief for current students. It would also help to address the skills shortage and reduce barriers to business investment in New South Wales. This bill deserves the support of every member in this place.

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.25 p.m.]: The Government opposes the TAFE (Freezing of Fees) Bill 2007. The object of this bill is to freeze at 2007 levels fees for TAFE courses undertaken at any time between 2008 and 30 June 2011. Were this bill to be passed, TAFE would lose more than \$43 million in the period up to 30 June 2011. With consumer price index escalation of 2.7 per cent per annum, that figure would increase to almost \$57 million. Members should think about what that would mean to the people of New South Wales. TAFE would be forced to reduce the number of student places offered by more than 4,500 for each full year of the freeze. That would ultimately be a loss of almost 17,000 student places and would be the equivalent of closing a TAFE college the size of Wollongbar, Albury, Armidale, Padstow, Glendale or Petersham TAFE each year between now and 2011. I do not think that would be acceptable to the people of New South Wales.

Alternatively, we could increase the number of courses offered on a commercial-only basis. This would mean more people would be paying significantly more for their courses. Like other TAFE and training organisations around Australia, TAFE New South Wales charges fees. While the Government makes every effort to keep TAFE fees as low as possible, it needs to ensure that students have access to the most modern and up-to-date industry equipment and facilities. Fees represent less than 5 per cent of the overall cost of providing courses. In 2008 the annual fees for mainstream TAFE New South Wales courses ranged from around \$394 to around \$1,400, depending on the course. However, the 2008 fee increase for a certificate III course, which is the most popular qualification, is less than \$2 a week. Even after this fee increase, New South Wales TAFE fees are significantly lower than the fees charged by most other private training providers. TAFE is continuing to support apprentices. As was the case previously, apprentices are paying significantly less than students enrolling in the standard certificate III courses.

The New South Wales Government has introduced a fee refund as an incentive to help TAFE students complete the Higher School Certificate or its equivalent, the Tertiary Preparation Certificate. The refund, which is worth \$2 million a year, also applies to specific preparatory courses that provide pathways into these certificate courses. The refunds commenced in 2008, saving TAFE students who complete their Higher School Certificate \$645 and Tertiary Preparation Certificate graduates \$890. The fees are payable on completion. These courses have been targeted because they are often done by students seeking a second chance at education through New South Wales' great TAFE system. Does the Leader of The Nationals not want the Government to provide more of these refunds? That would be the result if we went back to the 2007 fee structure.

Giving everyone a fair chance to get a TAFE qualification has been and will remain an important part of the New South Wales Government's approach to education and training. The new fee structure ensures that those people who are the most needy pay the least. In 2008 this Government is continuing to support the most financially disadvantaged groups in New South Wales by maintaining full-fee exemptions for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and for all students enrolled in special access courses in reading, writing and employment readiness, as well as entry level courses for speakers of other languages, signed English, preparation for work and studies and courses for volunteers.

The Government has also introduced a \$50 concession fee for Centrelink benefit card holders, who can claim a rebate from their Job Network provider. TAFE institute directors will continue to be able to waive TAFE New South Wales fees in cases of severe financial hardship. In 2008 it is anticipated that approximately 97,000 students will be exempt from paying TAFE fees, and about 53,000 will pay the \$50 concession fee. Enrolment to date this year has increased over last year. Institutes have told the Government that many people were very happy when they were informed that they could pay a concession fee of \$50 for as many courses as they wanted to do in a year. Previously they were entitled to only one fee-free course a year and they had to pay the full fee for any additional courses they wished to undertake. The New South Wales government is investing a record \$1.81 billion in TAFE this year to ensure that it can continue to offer high-quality, career-focused qualifications for the people of New South Wales. The Government opposes the bill, which would result in the loss of millions of dollars from the TAFE budget and thousands of places for students in our TAFE institutes.

Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [4.29 p.m.]: I support the TAFE (Freezing of Fees) Bill 2007. It is a bill for an Act to impose a freeze until 2011 on TAFE course fees. The object of the bill is to freeze, at 2007 levels, fees for TAFE courses undertaken at any time between 2008 and 30 June 2011. My electorate of Hornsby has a TAFE with which I work very closely and which I hold in the greatest esteem because of the educational opportunities offered to its students. Quite a lot of questions have been posed over recent months, and there have been concerns about increases in TAFE fees. For example, the member for Dubbo asked the former Minister for Education and Training the following question on notice:

Why have TAFE fees increased when in his election announcement this year the Premier said "we have capped fees for apprentices and trainees at around \$380 per year, no matter what the course"?

Will the Minister for Education cap all TAFE fees for all courses?

Referring to the 2007-08 budget, the answer was that there had been record spending on TAFE New South Wales of \$1.7 billion. The answer went on:

However just like all other TAFEs and training organisations around Australia, NSW TAFE charges students fees. These fees represent a small proportion of the cost of providing courses by TAFE NSW—less than five per cent of the overall cost.

While the ... Government makes every effort to keep TAFE fees as low as possible, it is reasonable for students to contribute to the cost of their education.

The matter was also raised in the other place by the Hon. Charlie Lynn and the answer was in a similar vein, indicating that TAFE fees for 2008 had increased by about 9 per cent—that is, 6.5 per cent above the consumer price index. It is generally felt by TAFE teachers and others associated with TAFE that this is not satisfactory. One of the three concerns of the New South Wales Teachers Federation is TAFE fees. The Teachers Federation issued a parliamentary brief on 8 May 2008, headed "TAFE matters still not resolved!" It stated:

TAFE students fees were increased by 9% in 2008, and between 2002 and 2006, they grew by 51%, double the national average. NSW students in receipt of government benefits have, for the first time, also paid a fee of \$50 per course. Despite assurances, nothing has been done to assist the students to recoup this fee from Job Network Providers.

The NSW Teachers Federation commissioned research on the "A Comparative Analysis of TAFE Fees". This research shows that TAFE NSW fees are higher than fees in most other states and territories for most qualification levels. This is particularly true for higher-level courses and longer courses. The research shows that costs for students studying 200 hours per year are often two, three and even four times what they would be paying if they enrolled across the borders.

One of the recommendations from the research supports the Federation's view that there should be proportional fees for students studying part time. We are also seeking a cap on future increases so that in future only CPI increases would apply.

The Leader of The Nationals' legislation goes further than that and addresses the concerns raised by the Teachers Federation. It seeks to give relief to students to encourage students to choose TAFE and to meet the needs of the types of courses that TAFE teaches, and that is in the vocational areas. In the Hornsby electorate there are some wonderful experiences of education but I have also received a number of expressions of concern from students about the amount of money they are paying to attend TAFE. One aspect of TAFE I would like to inform the House about is the World Skills Competition. My electorate has a number of successes, particularly in IT categories.

Just recently I hosted a morning tea where I invited the participants in the World Skills National Competition 2008, as well as the teachers who had mentored those students, other staff members associated with them, and Audette Benson, the director of Hornsby College, New South Wales TAFE. I also invited members of the Rotary community in recognition of their support for World Skills. I would like to report on some of the results. In the IT software applications category, Nick Davies won the gold medal, Amanda Allen the silver medal, and Ashley Gregory was also a participant. In the web design category, the gold medal went to Daniel Jones; in the IT programming category, the gold medal went to Richard Rachowski. Also participating were Ben Howse, Colin Friend, Mitchell Hudson and David Saunders.

It was reported that Richard Rachowski did an exceptional job in the competition to win the gold medal. The task for the competition required the competitors to develop a system, both the database back end and the user interface front end, for automating the management of lending marketing equipment, things such as promotional banners, smart boards, posters, et cetera. The competition was held over a three-day period, so completion of the task was in itself a remarkable achievement. The development of such a system would normally take a software house weeks, if not months, to complete.

A number of the teachers made small speeches to the students about the excellence of their work, and the participation and the enthusiasm was palpable among the students. I also should mention Michael Kirkwood Smith, a 2007 member of the Australian team in software applications, and Matthew Ryan, a 2007 Australian team member in web design, who were also invited to the morning tea and who had a big role to play with the students. It is important that knowledge of the world skills competition increases in our community because not many people know what world skills are. Kevin Harris, the director of the Northern Sydney Institute of TAFE, wrote me a note saying:

You will be pleased to know that Northern Sydney Institute competitors won more medals at the Nationals than any other Institute in Australia. This result simply reflects the talent within the Northern Sydney Region communities and the extraordinary capability and commitment of the Institute's staff.

I pay tribute and send congratulations to Audette Benson at Hornsby TAFE, but also to all of the Northern Sydney Institute TAFE colleges. It is fantastic having a TAFE college within my electorate, and I love to learn

about what they achieve and the programs they set out. They are very forward thinking, particularly my Hornsby college. Audette Benson is doing a fantastic job. As I said, I support the TAFE (Freezing of Fees) Bill 2007. It is obvious the more support one can give to TAFE the more achievements we will see from TAFE into the future.

Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO (Penrith—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.39 p.m.]: I speak against the TAFE (Freezing of Fees) Bill 2007. As stated earlier, the resultant loss of money to TAFE if this bill were passed would be more than \$57 million, and that is totally unacceptable. The passing of this bill would also require TAFE to spend taxpayers' hard-earned dollars on administrative costs to refund fees to current students. That would be a total waste of money; it would have no benefit. TAFE is supposed to be about training for the people of New South Wales, which is vital in this time of skills shortage.

If TAFE fees were frozen at the 2007 levels, by 2011 we would be at risk of having a system that did not meet the training needs of industry and the community. The member for Hornsby outlined the importance of TAFE to communities, which would be put at risk under this bill. She referred to the students who participated in the world skills project, an admirable project. I commend those students who reached high levels of achievement and all those who participated. I commend also the constituents in the electorate of the member for Walsend, who also highlighted the program to me. I remind the member for Hornsby that the research she quoted also showed that TAFE fees were lower in a number of courses than elsewhere in Australia and TAFE New South Wales is one of only two TAFEs nationally that offer free places for some students.

If this bill were passed the skills crisis would be even more severe. Under the bill only the more prosperous people would be able to afford some TAFE courses because they could only be offered on a commercial basis to make up for the income forgone. I believe the Leader of The Nationals has not fully grasped another significant feature of the 2008 fee structure. His literacy abilities may have prevented his fully grasping the 2008 fee structure. He spent valuable time in debate yesterday misleading the House about the Government not supporting students in the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy [NAPLAN] when it was the first part of the motion accorded priority. This is evidence that perhaps his literacy skills should be questioned.

Under the 2007 fee structure, fees for a statement of attainment were lower than for a certificate II. However, in 2008 fees are the same for statements of attainment and certificates I and II. This is to encourage students to enrol in higher level, nationally recognised qualifications. To put that in perspective locally, O-I Glass in Penrith has operated a glass factory since the 1970s. It runs 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Any glass container that has the initials O-I on the bottom comes from the factory in Penrith. Employees work out the back of the factory making the moulds, in the furnace—or hot—area or on the cold line where the containers are prepared for transportation to the places where they will be filled with beverage or other product. The company has communicated with the local TAFE and constructed statements of attainment and certificates I and II for its workers.

I commend Mr Doug Decean at O-I Glass for working with the local TAFE to put these courses together and organising the statements of attainment and certificates. When employees leave the company they have an attainment or certificate they can transfer to other employment. If the company had not undertaken the arrangement with the local TAFE those workers would not have those qualifications, so I commend the company.

Enrolments to date in 2008 in certificate II and diploma courses have increased. Since we know that participants in these courses have better employment outcomes, this is a very worthwhile result, yet the Leader of The Nationals seeks to reverse this trend. As a TAFE graduate I find this shocking. My first qualification was an associate diploma in medical diagnostic radiography from the Dunbar Building in Harris Street, which is no longer there. Allowing people the opportunity to go through TAFE courses to attain certificates I, II and beyond results in better employment outcomes.

If we remain with the 2007 fee structure we risk not being what an independent report has called the complete package. In 2006 the Allen Consulting Group tabled "The Complete Package—The value of TAFE NSW". It found that TAFE New South Wales will contribute \$196 billion to the New South Wales economy over the next 20 years. Every dollar invested in TAFE New South Wales generates benefits worth \$6.40; that is, for every \$1 we get \$6.40 or a 640 per cent return on investment over 20 years. That is a valuable return on investment. The Allen Consulting Group called TAFE the complete package because TAFE New South Wales is the only training provider with the resources, systems, record and reputation, efficiency and breadth of capability to meet the diverse requirements of individuals, employers, communities and regions.

We know that the Leader of The Nationals supported the Howard Government's policy of Australian technical colleges on the run. That failed policy was unfair. It raised expectations in local communities. Whether it was a decision of the former Howard Government to try to privatise TAFE we will never know, but it was a failed policy on the run. We know from the 2006 report that TAFE is the complete package. A promise was made that an Australian technical college would be located in the Federal seat of Lindsay but that never eventuated. Many Liberal supporters were very disappointed with the failure to secure that college but luckily the Western Sydney Institute of TAFE is operating well with its resources, systems, record, reputation, efficiency, breadth of capacity and excellent staff.

The report found that TAFE New South Wales is critical to regional economies, something that the Leader of The Nationals should understand. Many of these communities are reliant on TAFE. Compared with the financial service based economy of metropolitan Sydney, productivity in regions such as the Hunter, the Illawarra and the Riverina would decline more dramatically without the support of TAFE New South Wales. Under this bill TAFE would have fewer places to offer, the equivalent of closing a reasonable-size college. In country areas such as Port Macquarie or Dubbo that would be quite devastating. Is that what the Leader of The Nationals really wants? Is he considering how vital TAFE is to regional infrastructure? Perhaps when The Nationals hold their next conference in Kirribilli they might discuss the impacts of this bill on regional infrastructure.

A 2007 employers survey by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research found that over 82 per cent of employers of apprentices and trainees who use TAFE New South Wales are satisfied or very satisfied with the training. That is almost 5 per cent above the national average. All this good work might be put at risk if TAFE fees stayed at the 2007 level. Another important statistic is that in 2007 TAFE New South Wales recorded a higher proportion of government-funded enrolments from many equity groups compared with other vocational education and training providers in New South Wales and in other jurisdictions. That means TAFE New South Wales is the leader in the provision for women, students from non-speaking backgrounds and students with a disability.

First, I will deal with women. I have employed a graduate of TAFE who undertook a free course at Penrith TAFE college and topped the course. At interview she showed that her teachers had provided her with the skills necessary for her to work in my electorate office. If she had not been offered the free course at her local TAFE college she would not have been able to be gainfully employed. Over the four years she has worked in my office she has been an absolutely outstanding member of staff. Well done to TAFE New South Wales for being the national leader.

I will now deal with students with a disability. I have a brother with a physical disability who has had long-term unemployment and has recently been offered a TAFE placement to do a welding course. Not only has it been a gain for him personally; it has also been a gain for him socially. He has been able to mix with others, gain a qualification, and look forward to doing further study. It is a wonderful thing that New South Wales TAFE has done for students with a disability. As we know, the disability sector is growing and ageing. An important aspect of being a national leader is to ensure that those equity groups are provided for. The bill would put that at risk.

From 2002 to 2007 there has been an improvement in module and course completion rates for other equity groups—Aboriginal students, students from remote areas, 15- to 24-year-olds, as well as students from non-English speaking backgrounds. The fact that TAFE New South Wales attracts and retains students from equity groups can be attributed to its focus on social inclusion—something the Leader of The Nationals obviously does not value. The Opposition's fees policy has always reflected this, with exemptions or concessions for members of particular equity groups that are amongst the most generous in the country. The Opposition's bill would see the loss of millions of dollars from the TAFE budget, the loss of thousands of places for students in our TAFE colleges, and the inability to offer a continued focus on social inclusion. The Government therefore opposes the bill.

Mr GEOFF PROVEST (Tweed) [4.52 p.m.]: Once again I am 100 per cent for the Tweed. I speak in support of the TAFE (Freezing of Fees) Bill 2007, which was introduced by my colleague the Leader of The Nationals, the Hon. Andrew Stoner. As the title suggests, the bill seeks to freeze TAFE course fees at the 2007 levels so that students enrolling in courses in New South Wales TAFE campuses at any time between 2008 and 30 June 2011 will be charged at that fixed rate and will not be subject to any price increases. It is extremely important that we fund adequately our current level of education because our children are our future. I support the bill, primarily because of the benefits it will bring to students from the Tweed electorate studying at the local TAFE facility. It is a fine facility, staffed by many great people. In the Tweed we have only one TAFE facility, at the Kingscliff campus, which has offers a wide range of courses and has healthy enrolment numbers.

The biggest challenge that Kingscliff TAFE college faces is its location. The facility is situated just south of the Queensland border, and consequently faces strong competition for its enrolments from Queensland's Gold Coast TAFE facility, located only minutes north of the border. The implications of not acting on New South Wales' out-of-control TAFE fees are clear: if fees are not kept competitive the New South Wales education system will lose students to the Queensland system. This not only equates to a brain drain of sorts to other States' education systems, it also represents a major loss of revenue to the New South Wales Government through the loss of course fees, textbook purchases, and other incidental fees associated with undertaking tertiary education. Today's *Business Review Weekly* released its Young Rich List top 100. Interestingly, a large majority of the people on the list are from Queensland. I will return to that list later.

A quick search of the New South Wales TAFE and Queensland TAFE websites highlights the importance of price competitiveness to these education facilities. I will give members an idea of the current price discrepancies experienced by Tweed students by comparing the course costs of two popular courses offered by both the Kingscliff and the Gold Coast TAFE colleges. Currently the cost of enrolment in a diploma of event management course at the Gold Coast TAFE college is the concession fee of \$1,008.79. The cost of enrolment in the same course at Kingscliff TAFE college is the 2008 full-year fee rate for diplomas, which is \$1,184, plus a campus-specific charge for that diploma of \$475. In total it would cost \$1,659 to study for a diploma of event management at Kingscliff TAFE college—some \$650 more than it would cost for a Tweed resident to simply drive 10 minutes over the border and take the same course at the Gold Coast TAFE college.

The cost of enrolling in a diploma of hospitality management course at the Gold Coast TAFE college is the concession fee of \$1,058.88. The same course at Kingscliff TAFE is currently calculated at the 2008 full-year fee rate for diplomas of \$1,184, plus the \$700 campus-specific charge, which means the total cost of studying this course at Kingscliff TAFE college is \$1,884. This represents a huge price difference of over \$800 for Tweed students who choose to study at their local TAFE college rather than travel the short distance over the border to the Gold Coast TAFE college. Many young people in my electorate are struggling to improve their education. Many families in the area have a fairly low socioeconomic position and they find it difficult to pay such a large amount of money. I am sure members understand the point I am making about the extraordinary pricing differential between the two TAFE colleges. Members must also understand that if these price differentials continue to increase, Tweed students will simply abandon Kingscliff TAFE college and head north in search of a more affordable alternative. I am sure that the New South Wales Government does not want this to happen.

As I have said before, the children of the Tweed are our future and they should be supported. Indeed, increased budgets should be provided for all TAFE colleges. For these reasons I support the bill. If we are to keep New South Wales students in New South Wales TAFE facilities we must freeze the current TAFE fees at 2007 levels to ensure they remain competitive with the prices offered by TAFE facilities in other States. Kingscliff TAFE college is a wonderful facility and I do not want it to lose students from its enrolment because of a lethargic government response to pricing differentials.

This morning I attended a briefing by the Teachers Federation at its TAFE division. The federation clearly pointed out a number of scenarios. Currently there are close to 18,000 part-time and full-time TAFE teachers. The scenario the federation put forward is that over the last five years the Government has made a direct effort to overprice TAFE courses and cut back vital funding required for the efficient operation of our TAFE colleges. Federation representatives came to The Nationals party room seeking our support and assistance. Putting forward motions such as this shows that we have an understanding of how the TAFE system works; we see the pain and suffering. When the Government increases TAFE fees, the price differential, particularly in the Tweed, becomes enormous. It is amazing that just over the border in Queensland there is a Labor Government that is prepared to invest in education, and therefore is prepared to invest in our future.

Mrs Karyn Paluzzano: You haven't read the budget papers.

Mr GEOFF PROVEST: The member for Penrith might ridicule what I have said. The Queensland Labor Government built four kilometres of road in New South Wales. Why? Because New South Wales could not afford it. The Queensland Government is now investing in education in our State. The Queensland Government will now take youth from New South Wales and educate them, and it will be a great loss to the future of New South Wales. Once again I am 100 per cent for the Tweed.

Mrs DAWN FARDELL (Dubbo) [5.00 p.m.]: I support the TAFE (Freezing of Fees) Bill 2007. For financial reasons TAFE colleges in the areas that I represent are struggling to get the numbers for courses. There

is a shortfall of enrolled students in the TAFE colleges in Dubbo, Forbes and Parkes as it is very expensive for both the young and not so young who wish to improve their lot in life to educate themselves. For instance, an apprentice from Readford's Motorcycle Centre earns about \$275 per week and is required to travel once a month to Bathurst to complete part of the TAFE course. Accommodation for five days is required and the cheapest accommodation available in Bathurst is about \$80 a night. The cost of fuel must also be added. So the situation for the people of my electorate is difficult. The apprentice finds it difficult to get accommodation in Bathurst when the car races are on at Mount Panorama.

One hears about skills shortages all the time. The problem will never be resolved unless we educate our children. I will give some examples of why we need to have a temporary freezing of fees to support our young people in achieving an education. I acknowledge that movements in the consumer price index also need to be considered. Mr Ted Rootes of Dubbo wrote to me regarding his 17-year-old grandson, who is a first-year apprentice fitter and joiner. Every three weeks he has to attend TAFE at Bathurst for three days. He has to pay his own transport and accommodation costs for two nights in a hotel. He can receive a reduction in the cost of public transport but if he caught the XPT to Bathurst he would have to leave the day before attending TAFE and come home the day after, which would add two more nights' accommodation. It is a 2½-hour trip from Dubbo to Bathurst.

Mr Rootes is concerned that his grandson has to meet these costs on the low apprentice wage he receives and that local TAFE's should be able to provide the basic trade courses as they did years ago. His grandson has an old car that he uses to travel to Bathurst. First-year and second-year apprentices can receive a \$100 rebate but they have to pay upfront first and then send the form away to be reimbursed. That all adds to the expenses. A lady from my electorate heard me speak on radio about TAFE colleges and contacted me. She enrolled in a welfare course in 2007, with flexible delivery in Parkes, Forbes and Cowra. I quote from her email:

Parkes being 30 kilometres from my home in Goonumbla, [with] Forbes approximately 55 kilometres and Cowra approximately 140 kilometres. The course consisted of 20 x 1 day workshops and home study. Only one day was held in Parkes, most in Cowra and some in Forbes.

This year to continue my study in this course I travelled to Orange, which is a 260 kilometre round trip. The course this year consists of 10 x 2 day workshops and home study. That means I travel 520 kilometres each weekend [for the] workshop. So if my calculations are correct I will have travelled 5,200 kilometres this year to further my education. Which is a considerable amount of money on fuel and wear and tear on my car.

To complete my study in this course I will need to do the same next year (2009).

I am grateful that these opportunities are available to study [and] without weekend workshops I would be unable to work and study, however it can be a costly exercise.

In the city people can hop on a train or a bus. A man who lives in Forbes sent this email:

My son, Danny, is a first year apprentice. His apprenticeship is with a small business in Parkes, so he travels roughly 70 kilometres each day without an allowance for that travel. His wage is (after tax) \$230.00 a week, take out the cost of the petrol to travel each day, he has little to live off, let alone say for necessities such as registration of his car.

As part of his apprenticeship, Danny travels from Forbes to Bathurst (approximately 180 kilometres one way), each month for a week's block, to TAFE. His TAFE fees including books are \$645.00. He is entitled to 12 cents per kilometre travel allowance.

I am ashamed to say that members of this House who travel outside their electorate receive an average of 75¢ per kilometre yet all we are prepared to pay to TAFE students is 12¢ a kilometre. The email continues:

He is entitled to accommodation allowance of \$28 a night. The cheapest accommodation we could find was at the caravan park at \$65.00 per night.

He is entitled to \$500.00 to cover the cost of the TAFE fees, which is paid back to him after he has paid his fees.

He knows of one apprentice who put in a claim for fees of \$500 and had to wait over a month for payment. His son's TAFE teacher told him that the \$500 would not be reimbursed until the completion of the year. He was not sure about that information but he was going to look into it. The email continued:

Danny does not earn enough to cover all of these costs and I am myself, a single parent working part-time, are struggling to help out with the costs.

My son's mate is in the same position as Danny. He travels from Forbes to Dubbo each month for his TAFE course.

I have correspondence from Darren Cowan Mobile Welding and Fabrication Pty Ltd in Forbes raising similar concerns. The situation is appalling. I must also give a serve to the former Federal Coalition Government.

A couple of years ago the Dubbo TAFE and other organisations put in a very successful tender for an Australian technical college when it was announced. They were unsuccessful because the TAFE teachers would not sign workplace agreements. The contract was then given to the Western Community College, which now relies on our TAFE to provide facilities and services. It meets regularly with our TAFE people on how to deliver those services. I have written to Julia Gillard about this and I have received a reply from her. I have asked her to keep an eye on the Australian technical college. One of the board members said that I had upset two board members. I am unable to repeat in the Chamber exactly what I said but the first one was "tough" and the second word started with "t" and ended with "s".

I am very concerned about the Australian Technical College. I understand that to date only about 15 students or apprentices have been taken on: \$15.3 million has been given to the Australian Technical College, with only 15 students. That is \$1 million per student at this stage. That was money that the former Federal Government should have put in to the TAFE system in New South Wales. We had a perfectly good system and now some of the people who took part in the tender process are helping the Australian technical college people deliver. I am now going to take advantage of my parliamentary privilege. The first thing the people from the college did was to buy four brightly coloured cars—before any students were even looked at. Local motor vehicle dealers do not send apprentices to the Australian technical college because the purchase of the cars did not go out to public tender; Federal money went straight to the Holden dealer in town, who I now understand was at that time on the board of the Australian technical college and had a 25 per cent ownership in the Holden business.

That is a matter worthy of referral to the Independent Commission Against Corruption. Those people will have to defend their actions. There are decent people on the board of the Australian technical college, but some have been set up by mates and people who are not in a position to deliver education in my area. They have not yet produced anything down in the Parkes area. They visited at my insistence. They are two years into the contract, which must be running out soon. That \$15.3 million has not been used to educate young people. TAFE fees should be frozen for a while. A recently completed education survey showed that 60 per cent of people had concerns about TAFE. I will speak further about that in the House.

Mr ROB STOKES (Pittwater) [5.07 p.m.]: I support the TAFE (Freezing of Fees) Bill 2007 on the basis that it will provide some certainty and relief to TAFE students in increasingly uncertain times. I am fond of a quotation by the second president of the United States, John Adams: "The liberal education of youth is so wise and useful that no expense for this purpose should be thought extravagant." I could not agree more with that as a general principle of governance. Education is the key to solving so many of society's problems. With better levels of education we can address all sorts of issues of concern in our community. That said, it is of concern that a 9 per cent increase in fees is projected for next year's TAFE advanced diploma courses, diploma courses, certificate courses and some short courses.

It is a matter of concern because there is no direct link between the 9 per cent fee increase and extra services for TAFE students or the hardworking TAFE teachers, lecturers and facilitators. In my community on the northern beaches, as TAFE fees have increased, the access to TAFE institutes has reduced. An obvious example is Seaforth TAFE, which the Government is intent on flogging off for medium-density or high-density housing. As the member for Manly and the Leader of The Nationals have argued—and it is the Opposition's policy—this site should be retained for educational purposes. Students on the northern beaches are forced to travel to Meadowbank—even though there are no direct public transport routes—to access courses that should be available to them locally.

A recent Productivity Commission report showed an average increase of 300 per cent per student in funding for vocational education in New South Wales from 2002 to 2006. At the same time, a number of commercial courses run by TAFE are generating increased revenue. TAFE students are not in a position to absorb big increases in fees. As Dr Peter Kell made clear in the TAFE Futures inquiry, many TAFE students struggle to meet basic living expenses, such as, childcare, housing and public transport, and the last thing they need is a substantial increase in fees of 9 per cent. Given the present financial crisis and the impact it is likely to have on employment in New South Wales, it is time to peg fees. The Government has shown it is prepared to peg fees and rates for other services. Strangely, the Government is not prepared to peg fees for education, which would provide certainty and relief for our hardworking TAFE students.

Mr ANDREW STONER (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [5.14 p.m.], in reply: I congratulate the member for Parramatta on her appointment as Deputy-Speaker. I thank the members who spoke to the bill, including the members for Wagga Wagga, Baulkham Hills, Davidson, Wallsend, Hornsby, Penrith, Tweed,

Dubbo and Pittwater. It has taken 10 months to conclude debate on this bill because of the Government's schedule to debate these matters. The TAFE (Freezing of Fees) Bill was introduced on 6 December 2007, prior to the introduction of an increase of 9 per cent in TAFE fees in January 2008. The bill was introduced because of promises made by the Government to cap TAFE fees and not increase them above the consumer price index. An increase of 9 per cent was well and truly above the consumer price index and beyond the means of many students, particularly those from lower income areas.

The Nationals and Liberal Party members who spoke on the bill acknowledged the great importance of TAFE, particularly in country areas where there is generally a lack of technical and further education services and private sector providers. The Government's decision to substantially increase TAFE fees had a major impact on those communities. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, my electorate of Oxley is the lowest income electorate in New South Wales. So I am well aware of the impact of this decision. As I said, this matter has been on the *Business Paper* for 12 months—since I introduced the bill. Over that entire time the TAFE Teachers Association has pursued the issue. I acknowledge the efforts of Linda Simon, who heads the organisation, to get the Government to honour its promise to cap TAFE fees. This simple bill is all about freezing TAFE fees at the 2007 level, which is in line with the promise made by the Government.

The Coalition members who spoke to the bill are not the only ones who are concerned about this unfair fee hike. As part of a community campaign an online petition was launched in opposition to this outrageous increase in fees. About 545 people have signed up to the online petition on the Freeze TAFE Fees website. They come from around country New South Wales and metropolitan areas. It seems that communities right across New South Wales support the role of TAFE and the affordability of fees to attend that institution. I note that Professor Grant Willat from Clapham South, United Kingdom, has signed the petition, as has another professor who is resident in New South Wales. Academics realise the importance of TAFE, particularly to people from lower income groups. Even before the fee hike, the TAFE Futures report found that many TAFE students were struggling with fee payments and many were living below the poverty line.

We have had feedback that this fee increase has added pressure to the cost of living for those students. There is no doubt that the cost of living is a huge issue right across our community in New South Wales. But for TAFE students who usually work part-time and study at TAFE struggling with the normal cost of living—increased grocery prices, fuel prices and in some cases interest rates—it is a very difficult time and the Government has not helped by increasing these fees by some 9 per cent, which is well and truly above the consumer price index.

The impact of the increase in fees has been that enrolments in TAFE are falling, and that is a real shame because TAFE has been a great success story in this State, especially at a time when we have a skills shortage. In 2002 total student enrolments for TAFE New South Wales were 525,865. According to the latest statistics, by 2007 that number had declined to a total enrolment of 497,747—a reduction of more than 28,000 in student numbers at a time when industry demands more trained young people with appropriate qualifications. There has even been a noticeable drop in student numbers between 2006 and 2007. The 2007 enrolments were down 3,000 on the previous year. The 2008 enrolment figures are not available yet, but we are waiting with bated breath to see what the impact of this fee increase has been on enrolments this year.

Moreover, student graduate numbers have fallen significantly in recent times. In 2003, 251,674 people graduated from TAFE NSW. In 2007 the figure had dropped to just 209,342. In other words, 2007 graduate numbers were down by some 18,000 from 2006—a huge difference. What has the Government done in response to this drain on enrolment and graduation numbers? It has increased fees by 9 per cent. It simply does not make any sense.

I must declare an interest. I was formerly a part-time TAFE teacher. My daughter Gemma is doing her Higher School Certificate at TAFE in Port Macquarie. She is doing exceptionally well in her studies. She seems to appreciate the different learning environment that TAFE offers from the normal school environment. I know that many young people do their Higher School Certificate at TAFE. There has been what has been perceived to be a rather sustained attack on TAFE by the Labor Government. This morning I met with Phil Bradley from the TAFE Teachers Association. Phil raised a number of issues with me parallel to this fee increase and issues that I believe have contributed to this decrease in enrolments and a decline in graduations. Those issues relate to TAFE teacher qualifications and standards. When one puts it all together it does look like an attack on TAFE.

Now that TAFE is in a competitive environment it does not need to be attacked by the State Government. Anyone who has an understanding of education knows that the quality of teaching is the number

one determinant of the results achieved by the students. It is far more important than the technology, the books, the desks, and even, to some extent, the curriculum. The teacher is the most important thing. And what is this Government doing to TAFE teachers? It is downgrading, or dumbing down, the level of qualification required for a TAFE teacher from a Bachelor of Education to a certificate 4. TAFE teachers tell me that as far as full-time teachers go in the TAFE system that is simply not good enough.

Whilst people who have attained a certificate 4—which takes as little as 70 hours of training—might be well versed in their field of expertise and industry knowledge, they are not necessarily going to be well skilled at transferring that knowledge and motivating students in helping them to absorb the material and understand it, and become almost inspired to learn a particular subject. I mentioned my daughter who is studying her Higher School Certificate at TAFE. Under this Government's plans she might be studying under a teacher who has a certificate 4, yet in the school system the Government insists on a teacher having a Bachelor of Education. That is a huge anomaly and one of the issues currently facing TAFE.

Funding was raised with me and the TAFE Teachers Association showed me some figures that indicated in real terms—factoring in, of course, the consumer price index, as well as increases in enrolments over the period since 1997—a cut in real funding to TAFE of some 30 per cent. From 1997 to 2008 TAFE funding has been cut by some 30 per cent. That equates to a funding shortfall of \$450 million per annum. It is no wonder that people in the TAFE system—the teachers who love TAFE—perceive that there has been an ongoing attack on the institution by this Labor Government.

Another issue raised with me was the current restructure, which is all about cost-cutting. The restructure will result in a loss of educational positions, in particular access of equity positions, including outreach programs, women's programs and education in correctional institutions. Again, when we talk about people from disadvantaged backgrounds, these are the ones who stand to suffer most as a result of this restructure. Looking at the total of the Government's policies in relation to TAFE there have been significant cutbacks in funding; there has been a downgrading of qualifications for teachers, which will affect educational results, and in a competitive environment that is a dreadful thing; there has also been a cost-cutting restructure; and there has been, the subject of this bill, an increase in fees.

Mr Daryl Maguire: Rural communities will be hit hard.

Mr ANDREW STONER: The member for Wagga Wagga says rural communities in particular will be hit hard. They have already been hit hard by rationalisation and so on. Many people are very dissatisfied with what has been happening to TAFE under this Government. The principle of the bill is very simple and I hope that some of the Government members will support it, although the contributions of the only two members of the Labor Party who spoke on it—the member for Wallsend and the member for Penrith—have indicated that members will toe the party line to vote against what substantially is the Government's promise, which is a real breaking of the faith, but moreover a shame for the ongoing success of TAFE. I suspect that if the Government continues to oppose the bill and it is defeated, enrolment numbers and graduate numbers will continue to decline and, overall, TAFE will struggle in the years ahead. We urge all members to support a bill that is simply about freezing TAFE fees at the 2007 level until 2011. I urge all members to consider the online petition that shows a very large level of support within the broader community.

Mr Steve Whan: What is the website address?

Mr ANDREW STONER: The address for the petition is www.tafefees.com.au. I take that indulgence to advertise the website. Some misinformation has been spread by the Government about the cost of the fee freeze. Contrary to that misinformation, we will provide the equivalent of the revenue lost as a result of the fee freeze from the State budget surplus, which the Treasurer has told us will be between \$300 million and \$400 million for one year. It is clear that it is not only TAFE teachers who are concerned; TAFE students and communities more broadly are also concerned. TAFE is at the heart of many communities in New South Wales and it plays an essential part in them. I have spoken about regional and rural communities and—

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

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Question—That private members' statements be noted—proposed.

F3 SEAHAMPTON TO BRANXTON LINK ROAD

Mr KERRY HICKEY (Cessnock) [5.30 p.m.]: The F3 link road is a long overdue piece of infrastructure in the Hunter Valley. The Federal member and I have been supporting its construction since 1988. This is a major issue. We need the extension of the F3 from Seahampton to Branxton to allow for future development across the Lower Hunter and places like Huntley, and to provide for better management of traffic flow throughout the area. The project would have an effect on the electorates of Maitland, Cessnock and many others. We continually hear about the need for infrastructure throughout the Sydney metropolitan area, but this piece of infrastructure will be important to any part of the State that members might wish to name. People in the north-west who grow wheat, cotton and other crops need better access to the ports of Newcastle and Sydney, and we must ensure that they get it. If we were to do so, it would benefit the entire north-west of the State.

Future development of the Hunter region was, and is, dependent upon the F3 extension. The Huntley development will enable another 28,000 families to relocate to what I consider is the centre of the universe—that is, the Cessnock electorate—close to the most visited area in the Hunter. It is second only to Sydney in terms of visitor numbers in this State. This piece of infrastructure has been supported by many and progress is being watched closely by local communities. The allocation of funding for the project is long overdue and the Federal Government is now considering not funding it. At a recent meeting, the Federal member for the Hunter stated that the F3 link was not supported by the State Government and attributed that statement to former Treasurer Michael Costa. However, the former Treasurer said at the infamous meeting of all the branches of the Australian Labor Party that if the Federal Government stumped up its portion of funding for the project, the State would be obliged to do the same. The buck-passing continues and the project is being hampered as a result.

The project team has bought many properties across the road alignment for the F3 extension, it has been designed and the plan has been approved. Everything has been done, and all we need is the funding. Funding for the project is complicated and it is getting more complicated by the day. Thus far, 29 traffic flow studies have been undertaken in Maitland. It is ludicrous that the Federal Government has funded another study that will cost \$1 million, given the 29 studies that have already been done. To say after 20 years that the people who have supported this project are wrong is absurd. The people of Cessnock, Maitland, Newcastle and beyond are clear in their expectations about this project. They expect the project to be built, and if it is it will be a major problem in the area. A small group has become obsessed, or dominated, by the F3 link road project. They are working very hard to make it a reality, or they will die trying.

Mr Fred Brown is constantly fighting to have the funding allocated. He is assisted in that fight by Mr Toby Thomas, Mr Allan Gray and other members of the Link or Sink group, who are working tirelessly to overcome the politics to ensure our community's needs are met. The elected members should take note of that. They should understand that this issue will not go away. We cannot support something for 20 years and walk away thinking that our community's expectations have been met. We must do more than simply talk about things. The Pacific Highway works in areas such as Ballina or the bypasses that have been built in Queensland and Victoria, which have very low cost benefit ratios. We must be honest with the public about those figures. This project is important when one looks at the broader issue of infrastructure, ports and so on. If that were done, people would acknowledge that the cost benefit ratio of this project is much higher.

EASY CARE GARDENING

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA (Davidson) [5.35 p.m.]: Gardens bring such joy to all who experience them but, as Rudyard Kipling so eloquently put it, "Gardens are not made by singing 'Oh, how beautiful,' and sitting in the shade." That is why I wish to speak about those who dedicate their time to preserving this natural wonder for those who are no longer able. Easy Care Gardening volunteers prune, weed, mulch and mow the gardens of frail aged people and younger people with disabilities and their carers within the Hornsby, Ku-ring-gai, Ryde and Hunters Hill areas. This service has allowed many people to stay in their own homes rather than being forced unnecessarily or prematurely to move to group homes by ensuring that their garden areas are safe and enjoyable.

Easy Care Gardening recently celebrated its twentieth anniversary at a breakfast function, which I attended along with the members for Ku-ring-gai and Hornsby, and many volunteers. We attended at the invitation of President Brian Self, Manager Bruce Taylor and their team. All three members were pleased to note how the service has grown from a small to now substantial operation, just as a seed grows into a tree. From the humble beginnings of three volunteers—Anne Shires, Kathleen Ciemiega and the late Henry Llewellyn—a grant of just \$1,500 from Ku-ring-gai Council and a six-month pilot scheme, Easy Care Gardening has become a godsend to many in need.

Easy Care Gardening epitomises the best of what the community and individuals, working together, can achieve. As the Leader of the Opposition indicated in speaking at the twentieth anniversary celebration, while the Government cannot do everything, it can provide an environment for such organisations to thrive. Over 20 years the services of Easy Care Gardening have grown exponentially and expanded from the Ku-ring-gai Council area to the Hornsby, Ryde and Hunters Hill districts. Last year, Easy Care Gardening had 889 clients, serviced by 284 volunteers and completed a total of 18,910 gardening hours of work. As well as providing direct services to community members, Easy Care Gardening now also has a greater emphasis on creating low-maintenance gardens more quickly, with the gardening volunteers working in teams under the guidance of a leader. This empowers and assists the frail, the aged and people with disabilities to manage and tend to their own gardens while helping them to maintain their independence and the freedom that comes from controlling their own lives.

Easy Care Gardening has become a model for other likeminded groups, which have been established in other parts of Sydney. These areas include Manly-Warringah-Pittwater, Baulkham Hills, Canterbury-Leichhardt-Marrickville, Engadine-Jannali-Menai, lower North Shore, outer western Blue Mountains, St George-Rockdale and south-east Sydney areas. There is clearly a need for this important community service. I cannot praise the work of these volunteers enough. Helen Malcher is emblematic of the dedication of Easy Care Gardening's volunteers. She stands out with over 600 hours work completed since 2002 and was recognised for services to the aged at the 2008 Lions Club of Ku-ring-gai Community Service Awards. Her team leader described her in the following terms:

... an enthusiastic gardener and willing worker, who is always the first to volunteer to act as team leader if the team leader is away for any reason. She is particularly sensitive to the homeowner's wants and needs and ensures that any reasonable request is met. She shows initiative in everything she does.

I commend Easy Care Gardening for its work. It is an inspiration to us all for allowing those who might not otherwise be able, to continue to enjoy nature's beauty and live in their own homes. Let us hope that others will continue to be stirred by their example and heed the call to serve.

GUGLIELMO MARCONI: NOBEL PRIZE 100TH ANNIVERSARY

Ms ANGELA D'AMORE (Drummoyne) [5.40 p.m.]: This evening I pay tribute to Guglielmo Marconi and acknowledge the exhibition dedicated to Marconi on the 100th anniversary of his Nobel Prize that was displayed in New South Wales Parliament from 9 to 12 September 2008. The exhibition was named "Guglielmo Marconi, The Wireless Pioneer". As the host to the event, it was my great pleasure to welcome Marconi's daughter, Princess Elettra Marconi, and his grandson, Guglielmo Marconi Giovannelli. It was a true honour to be in their presence and hear Princess Marconi's reflections on her father. I extend my thanks to the Director of the Italian Institute of Culture, Annamaria Lelli, for coordinating the exhibition at New South Wales Parliament, the Italian Consul General, Dr Benedetto Latteri, and the Italian Trade Commissioner, Claudio Pascualucci.

The exhibition was enhanced by the presence of the Italian delegation from the Emilia Romagna region that included Silvia Bartolini, President of the Council of the Emiliano-Romagnoli in the World; Mario Mazzotti, Head of the Delegation Councillor of the region Emilia Romagna; Alberto Vecchi, Councillor of the region Emilia Romagna; Daniela Costa Tuffanelli, Member of the General Council of Italians Aboard; and Professor Angelo Varni, writer and Director of the School for Journalism of Bologna University. Also present was Gabriele Falciaecca, President of the Guglielmo Marconi Foundation in Italy. The foundation promotes research in the field of telecommunications and carries out activities devoted to the knowledge and diffusion of Guglielmo Marconi's scientific activity. The foundation is managed by a board of directors appointed by the Ministry for Cultural Heritage. Professional training and teaching play a major role in the activities the foundation coordinates. Of particular note is the Master in Radio Communication Engineering established in 1995, which organises courses and seminars every year. I acknowledge Bruno Buttini, the President of the Association of the Emiliani-Romagnoli of Sydney and Wollongong, and the tireless work the association undertakes on behalf of the community.

Marconi began to conduct experiments, building much of his own equipment in the attic of his home at the Villa Griffone in Pontecchio, Italy. His goal was to use radio waves to create a practical system of "wireless telegraphy"—the transmission of telegraph messages without connecting wires as used by the electric telegraph. Whilst this was not a new idea—numerous inventors had been exploring wireless telegraph technologies for over 50 years—none had proven commercially successful. It is said by some that when Marconi announced that he had discovered a principle through which he could send messages through air, his friends had him taken into custody and examined in a hospital.

Guglielmo Marconi, an Italian inventor, proved the feasibility of radio communication. He sent and received his first radio signal in Italy in 1895. By 1899 he flashed the first wireless signal across the English Channel and two years later received the letter "S", telegraphed from England to Newfoundland. This was the first successful transatlantic radiotelegraph message, in 1902. In 1909 he won the Nobel Prize in physics, shared with Karl Ferdinand Braun, whose modifications to Marconi's transmitters significantly increased their range and usefulness. He later worked on the development of shortwave wireless communication, which constitutes the basis of nearly all modern long-distance radio.

In 1914 Marconi was made a Senator in the Italian Senate and appointed Honorary Knight Grand Cross of the Royal Victorian Order in the United Kingdom. During World War I, Italy joined the Allied side of the conflict, and Marconi was placed in charge of the Italian military's radio service. In 1924 he was made a marchese by King Victor Emmanuel III. The Italian Australian community in Sydney has always celebrated the achievements of Marconi. The Marconi Stallions, a football club in Western Sydney, is named after Guglielmo Marconi, as is the Marconi Club at Bossley Park.

Marconi died in Rome in 1937 at age 63 following a series of heart attacks, and Italy held a State funeral for him. As a tribute, all radio stations throughout the world observed two minutes of silence. Never again was the world to know such a total radio silence, as it paid its respects to Guglielmo Marconi, the man whose determination had made it all possible. His remains are housed in the Villa Griffone at Sasso Marconi, Emilia-Romagna, which assumed that name in his honour in 1938. Marconi was responsible for changing the way the world communicated. It is only fitting that we acknowledge his contribution in this House.

NORTH COAST BREAST CANCER TREATMENT

Mr ANDREW STONER (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [5.45 p.m.]: I raise an issue of utmost concern to the women of the Nambucca Valley on the beautiful mid North Coast. It is an area with a strong population growth particularly amongst the 50 to 69 year age bracket, which increased in the Nambucca by 27 per cent between 1996 and 2006. In 2006, 28 per cent of the Nambucca district's population were women aged 50 to 59. Breast cancer is the leading cancer in women aged 35 and over, with 50 per cent of cases appearing in the 50 to 69 age group. We also know that the incidence of breast cancer in New South Wales has increased from around 70 cases per 100,000 women in 1985 to around 300 cases per 100,000 women in 2004. Of course, the earlier breast cancer is detected the better the outcome. That is why women between 50 and 69 years should attend mammographic screening at least every two years.

Given all this data, it simply beggars belief that the State Labor Government could axe the mobile breast screening van that serviced to the Nambucca Valley. From May this year Nambucca women have been told to travel to Coffs Harbour to undergo breast screening. This was despite a promise made by the then health Minister, the Hon. Morris Iemma, on 6 December 2004. He said in a letter that the mobile breast screen van that visits Bowraville and Macksville would continue to do so, even at the completion of a permanent site at Coffs Harbour in 2006. In black and white the then Minister for Health said the mobile van would continue to visit the area. Fast forward to 2008 and that service has been axed, contrary to that promise.

It means many women will not have regular screening, and death rates will rise. The trip from, say, Scotts Head, Macksville, Taylors Arm or Bowraville is an arduous one of more than an hour's drive on the most dangerous section of the deadly Pacific Highway. Other than a once-daily XPT service, which more often than not will not suit appointment times, there is no public transport. The older women do not have drivers licences and many of them are living alone. Whilst there is some transport assistance from the health transport unit, it is extremely difficult to access, with criteria including that the person has no family or friends who can provide transport, that there is no public transport, and that the person is not eligible for other transport assistance. There is also a six-week wait at the Coffs Harbour breast screening clinic, which makes coordinating the trip to Coffs Harbour even more problematic. So, despite the two-yearly letters sent out to remind women of the need for breast screening, I have no doubt that many women in the Nambucca will decide it is just too hard and put it to the back of their minds.

Without any question, that will result in more deaths from breast cancer in this part of the State and a widening of the gap between survival rates for city-based women compared to women from this district. It is a disgrace. We should be about one State, one standard, and making services accessible to all the citizens of New South Wales regardless of where they live. This decision has meant a real decline in the accessibility of that service. Therefore, I implore the new Minister for Health, the Hon. John Della Bosca, to urgently review the matter. He should immediately reinstate the mobile BreastScreen van, which not only is the most accessible

form of screening but also is a very effective visible reminder to women. The alternative is to dramatically improve transport assistance for Nambucca Valley women. In my view, the mobile service is likely to be the more cost-effective option, given that it is a visible reminder to women to undergo breast screening. I urge the Minister not to listen the bureaucrats and not to put saving a few pennies above saving the lives of Nambucca women.

EAST MAITLAND PUBLIC SCHOOL 150TH ANNIVERSARY

Mr FRANK TERENCE (Maitland) [5.50 p.m.]: On 31 March 2008 and 19 September 2008 I attended the Maitland East Public School's ongoing celebrations for its 150th anniversary, a remarkable achievement. The present site at William Street, East Maitland, was established in 1881 and opened by none other than the famous Sir Henry Parkes. The fame does not end there: In 1906 one of the students who attended the school for some time was the infamous Dr Herbert V. Evatt, who later became a Federal Minister in the Chifley Government. Maitland East Public School continued to grow over the ensuing decades and in 1957 had 720 pupils, consisting of 60 pupils in each class. In those days class numbers were much higher. These numbers peaked in 2005, with 780 students. The opening of Ashtonfield Public School in 2007 took away some students and today the school has 530 students, with 20 stage-based classes.

Over the two days both old and young students attended. A former member for Maitland, Milton Morris, and Mayor Peter Blackmore attended, and I represented the Minister, the Hon. John Della Bosca, in the ceremonial duties. A time capsule was unlocked after 50 years, and some very interesting items were removed from that capsule. Another time capsule was also sealed. I am happy to say that along with other material placed into that time capsule were information packages from the Parliament. That time capsule will remain sealed for 50 years. Maitland East Public School provides excellent education. It is known for its Life Skills Program, which teaches students the basic skills they need in everyday life. It ensures that they can deal with debt, money and everyday problems. It is an enormous package and the school is well renowned for how well it is doing with its program.

The school has a very proud history. It has a touch with fame with Sir Henry Parkes and Dr Evatt, but also present on the day was a former Australian Senator, Cheryl Kernot, who told students about her days at Maitland East Public School. She was school captain in 1960 and, although that was some time ago, it was good of her to attend and relay her experiences of how things were back in those days. This is a remarkable achievement for one of our great schools in the Maitland area, teaching our young students many things, including the Life Skills Program, how to deal with normal, everyday problems and preparing our children for high school. I congratulate the principal of the school, Ms Cheree O'Neill, on her enormous commitment, and the teachers and staff. I congratulate also the school captains, Jack Stoneman and Elizabeth Dorn, who were great ambassadors for the school and ensured that everything ran properly. All the teachers and students went to enormous effort to appear in period costume in keeping with the spirit of the celebrations. I pay tribute to everyone who organised the event. I look forward to a long association with the school. It performs a very important role in our community as an educational institution and again I congratulate all concerned.

Mr STEVE WHAN (Monaro—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.55 p.m.]: On behalf of the Government I congratulate the Maitland East Public School on its 150th anniversary. I commend the local member for doing such a great job in representing the school in this place and attending the celebrations with great gusto. The 530 students and Principal Cheree O'Neill did a fantastic job. It was nice to hear that one of the school's famous former students was Dr Evatt, who went from that school to being the leader of the forerunner to the United Nations after the Second World War. He was an extremely prominent former student. I pay tribute to Maitland East Public School.

LARGE BLACK CAT SIGHTINGS

Mr RAY WILLIAMS (Hawkesbury) [5.56 p.m.]: Recently I received a phone call from my friend Greg Illingworth at Maraylya. Greg has been a long-time resident of the Hawkesbury area and lives in a pretty bushland setting on 25 acres of land. His home is surrounded by untouched natural bushland, which is dense in natural vegetation with rugged steep terrain. Greg had phoned me to tell me of an incident the day before that he was still having trouble coming to terms with. Greg had been working around his property pushing a wheelbarrow at the rear of his house when he encountered a large black cat. He said the cat was black in colour, larger than a Labrador, with a tail at least a metre long and at least 50 to 60 kilos in weight.

His voice trembled as he recounted this sighting, telling me of the stealth-like nature of this animal—its stare, and green emerald eyes sending a cold shiver up his spine, given that the cat was less than 15 metres from

him. After what seemed an eternity, the animal disappeared into the surrounding bush, but not before leaving a lasting impression on Greg and a thorough sense of fear of what he had just encountered. Greg had actually been one of the 350 other residents of the Hawkesbury to come into contact with what is now known as the infamous black panther. It should be noted that Greg Illingworth is no shrinking violet, being some 6'2" tall and of a strong build, and used to doing a hard day's work around his rural property.

A week later two small children holidaying in Wisemans Ferry with their parents also had similar experience. These two children, who were playing in a rural area in close proximity to rugged bushland, were petrified at witnessing a large black cat, which had a bloodied chook or duck in its mouth. Last week Cheryl Gilbert of Glenorie watched in amazement from her kitchen window as a large black cat roamed around her backyard, which backs onto the Maroota State Forest. All sightings have confirmed an animal black in colour, larger than a Labrador and with a tail almost a metre long.

It is hard to simply ignore these sightings as merely an urban myth, especially when the stories are so similar and recounted by people I have known for many years. For many years Chris and Paul Coffey have undertaken the task of documenting the sightings of this animal. They were promised by this State Government that this register would be taken over prior to the last election, something that has never happened. The Coffeys have continued to collate this information because they have a real fear of this animal coming into contact and harming a child. We have unfortunately come to a point in time when these animals are becoming much more brazen and are venturing into areas where there exists a greater and easier food supply. This is most probably due to the long drought where pickings are slim and many animals are seeking food supplies on the edge of rural residential farming land. Animals such as rabbits, foxes and wild deer, who are seeking food, are probably themselves the diet of these cats and so it is likely one follows the other.

These animals leave several calling cards in their travels, such as scat, fur and small animal kills, which have been confirmed by scientists and animal experts. Mark Gilbert has even taken a cast imprint of the footprint left by the cat that his wife witnessed last week at Glenorie, which is huge. Several residents have discovered the skeletal remains of animals such as wild deer high up in the fork of trees, which is consistent with the very hunting nature of these animals. Something that is also typical of their hunting nature is that they instinctively only prey on animals less than half their own weight and size. A few weeks ago Chris and Paul Coffey invited the Mayor of Hawkesbury, Bart Bassett, and me to visit the old Bullens Animal World at Wallacia, where there still exists a large privately owned zoo full of jaguars, lions and leopards. The Coffeys also brought along their granddaughter, who is three years old, to show how these large cats react when brought into close contact with something that is half their own body weight.

The animals paid little attention to the adults. However, when a small child was brought into the presence of these cats they became very aroused, never allowing the child out of their sight, moving around the cage precariously and in a manner that was both threatening and alarming to all who were present. I do not believe that we need to spend millions of dollars of taxpayers' money going out and hunting these creatures down. The stealth-like nature of these creatures will restrict the possibility of them even being located in this hostile environment.

However, we must take the responsible action of alerting all residents who live in close proximity to this unique and largely uninhabited area of the potential risk not only to animals the size of a normal family dog—the usual size of the prey of such animals—but also children. Many people will discount what I have raised and remain sceptical of the presence of such an animal, but it should be remembered that I am talking about an area in the Hawkesbury of some 3,000 square kilometres that accommodates seven large national parks, is very remote, and remains largely wild and uninhabited. Wild deer and foxes are found in the area. Neither poses a threat to humans, of course, but both species are hardly ever sighted. I suggest it is far better to err on the side of caution in this case and simply advise people of the possible risks they face when living in or visiting the remote areas of Hawkesbury.

DAPTO LEARNING COMMUNITY LAUNCH

Ms LYLEA McMAHON (Shellharbour—Parliamentary Secretary) [6.01 p.m.]: On 31 July this year I was lucky enough to participate in the launch of the Dapto Learning Community at Dapto Leagues Club. The Dapto Learning Community launch was well attended and included distinguished guests Phil Hurst and Graeme Kennedy, as well as local school principals, deputy principals, teachers and students, past and present from Hayes Park, Koonawarra, Lakelands, Mount Brown, Dapto and Kanahooka schools. The event began at the front door of the club where guests were greeted and escorted to the function room by student representatives from the local primary and secondary schools.

In the function room we were greeted by colourful photographs of the schools and lots of warm smiles from many local student representative councillors. The formal welcome message was given by the master of ceremonies for the evening, Miss Delfina Dimoski, the recently elected school captain of Kanahooka High School. The evening went from strength to strength with the Dapto Learning Community's combined school choir belting out a lovely rendition of our country's national anthem. Guests were then treated to a slideshow of collective student memorabilia that had been purposely collected during the past 18 months, and were entertained by another performance from the choir of the powerful and uplifting melody *Dare to Dream*.

Towards the end of the launch Marina Brown, a past student of Kanahooka High School, interviewed successful past students Marc Wilkinson, who is now at the University of Wollongong, Jodie Brocklehurst, who is now a teacher, and Dr Tony Moore, who is a well-promoted author. All the students reflected well on their public education and said that it had assisted them in their achievements. They thanked their teachers and staff and highlighted the choices available to those who were educated in the public system. The Dapto Learning Community works together to provide our young people with ideal learning environments that promote strong social values and provide them with the opportunity to develop into articulate, responsible adults.

In the primary years our focus is predominantly to develop excellent literacy and numeracy foundations. In the secondary years the Dapto Learning Community offers unsurpassed subject choice and career development programs. The New South Wales Labor Government aims to ensure that both teachers and students benefit from the latest technologies and resources as well as support programs to ensure a successful learning opportunity for all. The Government further seeks to ensure that our education system also encompasses a disciplined environment within its core structure, with strong pastoral care and mentoring programs to ensure that students feel safe, cared for, valued and included. That is all provided at the Dapto Learning Community.

The close cooperative links between schools assists kindergarten and high school transition whilst fostering a strong community spirit. The schools of our learning community are accountable and responsible to the parents and their children. Dapto TAFE has been an integral part of the local community for 30 years and is part of the Dapto Learning Community. Many Dapto residents have benefited already from the quality of vocational education and training provided by TAFE. Both Dapto High School and Kanahooka High School enjoy a growing partnership with the Illawarra TAFE institute in particular, with more than 50 per cent of senior students participating in vocational training. It is important to recognise that TAFE-delivered Vocational Education and Training, known as TVET, is an important component of the high school education process. The access to resources and information at Dapto TAFE is steadily helping local students to broaden and strengthen their levels of communication across the wider community. Work-Ready and Adult Literacy courses are also available and are promoted to parents and students who are finding the Higher School Certificate courses unsuitable or difficult.

In the electorate of Shellharbour, programs are currently being introduced into the curriculum that assist primary school students to gradually make the transition to the secondary school environment with a focus on the middle years. An example of this is the Gifted and Talented Program, which provides 10 gifted and/or talented students in year 5 with an opportunity to spend time and interact with prefects from secondary schools across the Dapto Learning Community. This program also gives them an insight into the year 7 curriculum by allowing them to participate in some year 7 subjects, and encourages them to talk openly about their feelings towards this program, thus easing the transition.

Another example is a program run between Dapto High School and Kanahooka High School called the HSC Subject Sharing Program, which is designed to allow students from the two high schools to attend relevant classes at both schools alternately. I acknowledge the assistance of Talitha Stevens, the immediate past president of the student council at Kanahooka High School, who spent yesterday with me at Parliament House to assist me in the preparation of my notes. I thank her for that assistance; she has done an excellent job.

BEGA ELECTORATE SCHOOL PEDESTRIAN CROSSINGS

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE (Bega) [6.06 p.m.]: I raise two issues relating to the Princes Highway and nearby schools in the Bega electorate. In June this year I was contacted by Kurt Jackson, a year 11 student at Eden Marine High School who undertook a research project on the dangers faced by Eden Marine High School students and community members while crossing the Princes Highway in Eden near Wirringa Street. In his initial research, Kurt consulted with and gathered data from the Roads and Traffic Authority and surveyed

students about the number of crossings of the highway undertaken each year. His aim was to convince the Government to provide a pedestrian crossing on the Princes Highway to make crossings safer for students and the community. In a letter to me he wrote:

If a pedestrian crossing cannot be granted for the Princes Highway, why is Eden Marine HS the only high school in the region without a pedestrian crossing outside the school! Surely this is an "Occupational Health and Safety" issue which must be rectified.

Kurt's survey of students established that up to 153 students cross the Princes Highway to get to and from school five days a week, for the 202 school days each year. That amounts to 309,060 crossings per annum. Kurt indicated that 78.2 per cent of Eden Marine High School students, or 241,685 students, would feel safer if a pedestrian crossing were put across the Princes Highway. Therein lies his point. I acknowledge Kurt's efforts in this project in not only surveying his fellow students but also proactively engaging the Roads and Traffic Authority, local police, local politicians, the school parents and citizens association and the Bega Valley Shire Council. He undertook the research and he has lobbied hard. I hope that the Minister for Roads sees fit to act on this matter and ensures that a pedestrian crossing is provided near Wirringa Street. Obviously this is an issue of utmost concern for the school. Kurt has done an enormous amount of work on this matter, and for that he should be acknowledged in this place.

Another concern relates to Mogo Public School, a matter I raised in this House in June 2007. Given that the school car park is in the clear zone of the Princes Highway as one heads south out of Mogo, it will be only a matter of time before a child is either seriously injured or killed at that school. Parents are trying to get some sense out of the responsible government agencies about this unsatisfactory situation. I acknowledge that it is probably a matter for the Department of Education and Training to decide about building a car park for the school. However, I suggest that the Minister for Roads should be involved in the process, given the potential risk to pedestrians. The matter must be resolved. An area to the south of the school could be used for a car park, if the State Government were to acquire that land. It might even be Crown land.

I am concerned that a major accident will occur before something is done. It is a dangerous section of the highway, and it is made even more dangerous by the fact that the school car park is in the clear zone. On top of that, the school does not have a staff car park. The distance between the car park and the roadway is literally just one metre. I have received many letters about this matter from parents of students at the school. I understand that the parents have also circulated petitions to ensure that the issue is addressed. I call on the Minister for Education and Training and the Minister for Roads to investigate the issue as a matter of priority so we can at least start to get the work undertaken to ensure the safety of students. Again I call for a pedestrian crossing near Eden Marine High School and a car park in Mogo Public School. Hopefully that will alleviate major challenges for both of these school communities.

Mr STEVE WHAN (Monaro—Parliamentary Secretary) [6.11 p.m.]: I thank the member for Bega for bringing these issues to the attention of the House. I congratulate Kurt from Eden Marine High School on the research he has done. I hope that either Kurt or the member for Bega will forward his research material to the council's traffic committee; perhaps they have already done so. Recommendations from the traffic committee will obviously influence the Roads and Traffic Authority's decision about a pedestrian crossing proposal near Eden Marine High School.

I also note the concerns of the member for Bega about car parking facilities at Mogo Public School; I will pass them on to the Minister for consideration. I have driven past the school on a number of occasions and I am aware of just how small the distance is between the road and the school. It is an historic school and, unfortunately, in the days when vehicles were not very fast schools were built close to roads. So there are some challenges there.

LICENSED PREMISES SMOKING AREAS

Mr FRANK SARTOR (Rockdale) [6.13 p.m.]: I bring to the attention of the House an issue raised with me by a number of my constituents relating to the failure of some pubs and clubs in my electorate to adhere to the no-smoking rules. The issue is topical because on 19 September Mr Justice McClellan in the Supreme Court found that Dubbo RSL Club was in breach of its obligations under the Smoke-free Environment Act. In raising this matter I remind members of the continually growing body of evidence about environmental tobacco smoke. When this House considered the legislation on smoking bans in pubs and clubs a couple of years ago—

those bans came into force in July 2007—there was a substantial body of evidence about the dangers of environmental tobacco smoke. An example of such evidence came from the small town of Helena, in Montana, which introduced smoking bans in 2002 but was forced to lift the bans six months later because of a judicial ruling. A United States study found that during the period of the bans the number of heart attacks dropped by some 40 per cent, but that subsequently the number of heart attacks increased.

A more recent study in Scotland is even more compelling. From March 2006 smoking was banned in all public spaces in Scotland. The study involved nine Scottish hospitals for 10 months before and 10 months after the bans were introduced. The study came up with a striking result: admissions for acute coronary syndrome dropped by 17 per cent after the bans were introduced, from 3,235 cases to 2,684 cases. The evidence simply keeps mounting. There was also significant evidence in France, where some 5,000 people are said to die annually as a result of environmental tobacco smoke. In New South Wales, smoking alone kills 6,500 people each year.

The case determined by Justice McClellan is very important. Dubbo RSL Club sought to have a smoking area erected at the rear of the club that was meant to be substantially unenclosed under the definition of the Act. It also sought to have tacked onto that area an outdoor courtyard, or effectively a backyard. The club contended that the area was all one room and therefore it met the stipulation that 25 per cent of the walls and ceiling must be open to the atmosphere. Justice McClellan found that for the purposes of the Act it was not all one room, and that the enclosed area was a separate area. He found that the area did not comply with the Act, and therefore that the club should be ordered to comply with the Act. That is a very important decision. I am disappointed that some pubs and clubs are trying to fudge the rules. To tack on an outdoor area and say it is part of an existing room to try to meet the 25 per cent rule, in my view amounts to serious fudging of the rule. I am disappointed that that is the case. We came up with the 25 per cent rule as a compromise, in an effort to get a commitment from pubs and clubs to not build indoor smoking rooms. Indoor smoking rooms are not allowed. Rooms in which smoking is allowed must be substantially exposed to the atmosphere, to ensure there is no collection of harmful tobacco smoke.

Our proposal to introduce a 35 per cent rule was brought back to 25 per cent as part of a resolution of this intractable issue. The court decision is hardly radical. It does not create uncertainty. On the contrary, it removes what I regard as a try-on by the Dubbo RSL Club. The essential test is that the space is sufficiently unenclosed and it does not accumulate environmental tobacco smoke. This is to protect the health of staff and patrons. No doubt some clubs are struggling financially at the moment. A factor in this may be the smoking bans, but the current economic situation is also a factor, with people spending less on gambling. Others have improved their financial position since the bans were introduced. But it is unthinkable that some pubs and clubs would disregard the potential threat to human health caused by environmental tobacco smoke. If government ran pubs and clubs, such an attitude to public health would warrant calls for a royal commission.

As a person who strongly supported and introduced in this House the smoking bans, as well as legislation establishing the State Cancer Institute, I am disappointed that pubs and clubs have not played by the rules and are still trying to reinterpret them to suit themselves. Smoking areas are meant to be outdoor areas and not indoor areas. Indeed, in Queensland the onus is quite different. Pubs and clubs cannot have any entertainment, gaming or food service in such spaces, which in that State are called "substantially unenclosed". In France and other countries the rules are a lot tougher. The few pubs and clubs that want to fudge the rules should be a bit more realistic about human health. As far as the pubs and clubs in my electorate are concerned, I know that most of them are doing the right thing. I only hope they all start to do the right thing.

TUMBULGUM PUBLIC SCHOOL FIRE DAMAGE

Mr GEOFF PROVEST (Tweed) [6.16 p.m.]: I wish to raise members' awareness of a fire that ravaged through Tumbulgum Public School on the Friday before the Queen's Birthday long weekend. Tumbulgum Public School is a very important and much-loved part of the Tweed community. I understand that the fire destroyed the entry to the school's A Block, leading to that section of the school being barricaded off and closed for teaching. I am told that although valuable school resources, articles of uniform and personal possessions were lost in the fire, the students are most upset about the loss of their work, which they had put a lot of time and effort into producing. We are very fortunate that two teachers—Judy Parker and Brendan Quinn—were working late that night, as I have no doubt that their actions in putting out the fire with extinguishers prevented further destruction of the buildings at Tumbulgum school. Indeed, if it were not for the presence of these teachers, it is highly likely that not much of Tumbulgum Public School would be left standing.

Firefighters from the Murwillumbah branch of the New South Wales Fire Brigade were quickly on the scene, but when they arrived the blaze had already been put out. Fire Captain Greg Hayes told the media that he estimates approximately \$100,000 worth of damage to Tumbulgum Public School as a result of the fire, and that many other classrooms are smoke damaged. His exact words regarding this incident were, "Another couple of minutes and it would have been gone." With this in mind, we are extremely lucky that Judy Parker and Brendan Quinn prevented the total loss of Tumbulgum school. An investigation into the fire is currently underway, although early reports indicate that the culprit was an air-blowing machine that was used to dry carpet during the renovation of classrooms.

If there is any comfort to be taken by the Tumbulgum school community, it is that the fire occurred very close to the school holidays. For the remainder of the term junior students will have their classes taught at the nearby Rangers Club, which is a great soccer club, and the rest of the students will be taught in their normal rooms. A demountable building is to be erected to cater for students during the rebuilding period. The loss of resources at the school is probably the biggest casualty from the fire; the library and home reader system was completely destroyed. However, I am advised that these facilities are currently being replaced. All curtains were burnt and replacement curtains must be individually sewn to fit the windows. All the school's musical instruments were located in the fire-damaged room and were destroyed.

This is an extremely difficult period for the staff and students of Tumbulgum Public School and for the wider community. I commend Judy Parker and Brendan Quinn for their quick thinking and brave actions in fighting the fire and preventing further loss of vital resources, and I wish the Tumbulgum community all the best in rebuilding its beloved school. Tumbulgum is a very special place. It has a population of a few hundred, and is an idyllic location with a great view of Mount Warning. It is a very tight-knit community, and I participate in many local activities. Residents are quick to protect their area and anxious to retain its magic. It has been pleasing to witness the community's efforts to rebuild the school. Local businesses, community leaders and organisations such as the Lions and Rotary clubs have offered to ensure that the children's education does not suffer as a result of the fire. I fully endorse their actions.

The member for Lismore and I recently attended the Far North Coast Southern Cross education awards at which several schools from our electorates were successful. I am pleased to inform the House that the teachers and other staff at Tumbulgum Public School received an award from Ron Hankin, the local director of public education, for their actions not only in fighting the fire but also in ensuring that the children's education is not put at risk. We often see teachers and staff working at the school on weekends. I also commend those public schools in my electorate and in the great electorate of Lismore who have donated books and other resources to Tumbulgum school. Once again, I am 100 per cent committed to the Tweed.

MONARO ELECTORATE COUNCIL ELECTIONS

Mr STEVE WHAN (Monaro—Parliamentary Secretary) [6.21 p.m.]: I congratulate and thank all candidates in the recent local government elections in the seven shires that I represent as the member for Monaro. As members will know, local government service can be a fairly thankless task. But I assure all candidates that the community appreciates their commitment and the time and energy they devoted to their election campaigns. I congratulate all those who were elected. I would like to acknowledge and thank the mayors of Palerang, Snowy River and Queanbeyan who retired at the election. Jim Maclachlan, the outgoing Mayor of Palerang, faced many challenges. The council has financial issues that Jim addressed most positively. I felt a little trepidation when Jim was first elected because he had expressed his misgivings to me about the amalgamation that created the council. However, he was terrific to work with. Jim showed great concern for, and loyalty to, his staff, and he showed his personal commitment through sponsoring the Palerang art prize.

Richard Wallace, who retired as Mayor of Snowy River, was a great advocate for his area. He probably never considered himself to be a traditional Labor supporter, but he certainly worked very closely with me during his time as mayor, and I certainly appreciated that positive relationship. He was most hospitable, and was always extremely welcoming when I attended local functions. Frank Pangallo retired as Mayor of Queanbeyan after 17 years. That will be a big change for the city, which has grown significantly during that time. Frank has certainly left his mark on Queanbeyan, and will be missed. He stood down in order to contest a seat in the Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly. I am not sure why he wants to do that, but I wish him luck. I worked closely with Frank during his time as mayor.

I am pleased to say that I enjoy a positive relationship with the seven shires in the Monaro electorate, and I look forward to working with the newly elected mayors and councillors. The outcomes of several mayoral elections are still to be determined, and it is disappointing that the count has taken so long. I acknowledge that the vote in Palerang is complicated, but the process has been too lengthy. I offer my congratulations to three new mayors. Tim Overall was elected Mayor of Queanbeyan in a popular vote, and he won handsomely. I wish him luck and look forward to working with him. I also congratulate the Labor team in Queanbeyan, especially Tom Mavec, who was our mayoral candidate, Sue Whelan and Brian Brown. They worked extremely hard and maintained the Labor vote in Queanbeyan. John Cahill was elected Mayor of Snowy River. He will be the last mayor elected by the council as it was decided by referendum to choose future mayors by popular vote. Vin Good was elected Mayor of Cooma-Monaro. He is a long-term councillor and takes over from Roger Norton, whom I worked with well. I wish him luck in the future. A number of other councils are yet to elect mayors. In my past five years in this place, I have always—

Mr Daryl Maguire: A long time.

Mr STEVE WHAN: It is not nearly long enough. I have always had a positive working relationship with the local shires and councillors, which is the best way to achieve results. I look forward to continuing that relationship with the newly elected councillors. There have been some fascinating goings-on in Yass shire. I refer particularly to letters to the editor of the *Yass Tribune*, which I am sure I will get the chance to discuss in this place soon. The member for Burrinjuck was the subject of letters from Alby Schultz and others, but I will not go into that issue today. All the shires have a lot of work ahead of them but have very good councillors and staff to do it. I congratulate them and wish them well.

SOUTH COAST ELECTORATE CRIME

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK (South Coast) [6.26 p.m.]: I began this week by presenting a petition to Parliament that, to date, has been signed by 1,735 residents of Sanctuary Point, St Georges Basin, Basin View, Hyams Beach, Vincentia, Worrowing Heights, Woollamia, Erowal Bay, Old Erowal Bay, Wandanian, Tomerong, Sussex Inlet and Nowra. Those residents request that the Government commit to funding the establishment of a new police station in the central Shoalhaven area that will be fully manned and operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The majority of the residents live in the Sanctuary Point area, and their preference—and mine—is for the police station to be located in the vicinity of the village of Sanctuary Point.

The number of signatures on this petition, which is still circulating in the abovementioned villages, is evidence of the growing concern among residents that the incidence of crime—fairly serious crime in some instances—and antisocial behaviour is growing at an alarming rate in the area and that the police, despite their best efforts, are unable to respond effectively due to the fact that the police station in Nowra is some 30 to 40 minutes away. The central Shoalhaven area has grown significantly over the past decade, and continues to do so. It is an attractive part of the Shoalhaven, with magnificent waterways, good schools, an effective community resources centre, successful businesses and a pristine environment. It is home to a number of retired people and young families, who enjoy their life in this part of the world but who have had enough of the unacceptable level of crime occurring in the area.

Despite calls in the past for increased police resources and despite representations from two successive Shoalhaven area commanders over a five-year period to establish a new police station in the central Shoalhaven area, successive police Ministers—Mr Scully, the member for Keira and the member for Kiama—have ignored the plight of residents and labelled the situation a beat-up. Former Minister Campbell even stated falsely that he had not received representations about the matter. For those who doubt the problems are real, I will quote from just a few of the hundreds of letters that I have received about this issue. A resident of Sanctuary Point who moved to the area from Wahrenga six years ago writes:

We have had two burglaries (one of which found me waking to an intruder in the bedroom) and our son had his car stolen from our driveway. Of greatest concern is the anti social behaviour on the waterfront reserve including drunkenness, car burnouts, cars being burnt, dangerous driving and loutish behaviour ...

This resident, together with some 300 others, attended a public meeting earlier this month at which the shadow Minister for Police, the Hon. Mike Gallacher, was also present. Mr Dick Mainwaring from the country club at Sanctuary Point facilitated the meeting, which was organised by my staff and me. All voted unanimously in favour of a new police station in the Sanctuary Point area. Another resident wrote that many victims of crime in the area do not report crimes against them for fear of retaliation, so the statistics so often cited do not reflect the true situation at Sanctuary Point.

Another elderly resident wrote about her fear of going out even into her front yard after dark and asked for our urgent help in this matter. This is the most disturbing plea of all and it is repeated many times in the correspondence I have received. Elderly residents should not fear going outside their homes at night but indeed they do. Other residents wrote about inadequate police numbers, drug deals, drunken street parties, vandalism and serious damage to shops, damage to street furniture and intimidation of residents visiting businesses during daylight hours.

I have received hundreds of letters of support from the community for organising the public meeting and for inviting the shadow Minister for Police to attend the area on two occasions. The shadow Minister for Police, Mike Gallagher, actually lives quite some distance from the area but he has visited my electorate twice to talk to businesses and attend the public meeting. The letters were also very critical of former Minister Campbell for stating that the concerns of the residents had been a beat up. I now call on the new police Minister in the other place, Tony Kelly, to listen to this community. I have respect for Tony Kelly, as do many other members. I ask him to visit the area to speak with the residents who have been hitherto ignored by a distracted State Labor Government. It is now time for the Government to prove that it is serious about the problems of this State and get on with governing rather than factional fighting.

[Business interrupted.]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Suspension of Standing Orders: Private Members' Statements

Motion, by leave, by Mr John Aquilina agreed to:

That the sitting be extended to permit the conclusion of private members' statements.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

[Business resumed.]

BLUE MOUNTAINS MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr PHIL KOPERBERG (Blue Mountains—Parliamentary Secretary) [6.32 p.m.]: Mental Health Week 2008 will be celebrated from 5 October to 11 October and it is appropriate that I acknowledge some of the wonderful work that goes on in my electorate in this regard. The level of misunderstanding about mental health issues in the general community contributes to the stigma and discrimination experienced by people suffering mental illnesses. What is refreshing in the Blue Mountains is the focus on health rather than illness, the desire to improve the lives of people experiencing mental health problems, and the celebration of creativity by those with an illness.

I take this opportunity to speak briefly about some of the services and projects in my electorate. The Vale Street Social and Recreational Centre is a project of the Katoomba Neighbourhood Centre. It offers support and referrals for a variety of people with or recovering from illness. As the majority of participants attending Vale Street live alone this centre provides a vital link to social opportunities and the potential for restoring confidence and a sense of wellbeing. Vale Street is a sanctuary of hope for many and a hive of positive activity. The Katoomba Neighbourhood Centre would like to be able to continue its current service provision and have the centre remain open three days a week. The nature of this facility is of such critical importance that it behoves the Government to provide recurrent funding.

Up until December last year the Mountains Community Resource Network managed the Mental Health Community Cultural Development Project. The network has been active on mental health issues since the year 2000, well before it became recognised as a mainstream social justice issue. Some of the many vibrant activities coordinated through this project include the Blue Fringe Arts and Literature festivals, mental health first aid training for the community, and supporting children of parents with mental illnesses to name a few. One of the key achievements and highlights of the project continues to resonate in our community: the pilot RAMHI, which stands for raising awareness of mental health issues. RAHMI brought together an array of interested parties, which planned and completed various schemes to enrich their local community.

I also briefly mention the Social Inclusion Report 2007 of the Mental Health Coordinating Council of New South Wales, which talks about the community being the site of recovery rather than the hospital. Its

research shows that staying well occurs when there is increased involvement in society, engagement in meaningful activities, secure and stable housing, close and mutual relationships, access to mental health services and freedom from fear of stigma. This has been the philosophy of the mental health services in the Blue Mountains. They understand and bring about the benefits of preventative measures. The projects I have spoken of today have resourced hundreds of people recovering from mental illness and their families.

Many individuals and community organisations in my electorate have requested that I include a selection of their worthy suggestions to the State Government as we approach Mental Health Week 2008. I will represent those views to the relevant Minister at the appropriate time. I appreciate the concerns and suggestions of my constituents to seek more government support for mental health initiatives in the community and I am supportive of the call on behalf of my electorate.

The New South Wales Government is committed to building on mental health services and initiatives. The 2008 budget invested \$1.1 billion to upgrade mental health infrastructure and services throughout New South Wales. I commend the Government for its commitment to mental health issues and I am pleased to report on activities in the Blue Mountains activities. There is always more to be done in the area of mental health—of that I am very aware. I have recently invited the Hon Barbara Perry, Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Mental Health), to my electorate so she might see first hand a best practice model in operation.

In conclusion, I acknowledge some of the wonderful people and organisations that have contributed to helping so many people in my electorate. They include: Dianne Jacobus and the Katoomba Neighbourhood Centre; the staff and consumers of the Vale Street Social and Recreational Centre; Mary Waterford, Miriam Bevis and Julianne Abood; Kylie Clark and her ground-breaking work with the children of parents with a mental illness; Maurice Brady at Blue Mountains City Council; and Colin and Pat Jennings, who are tireless workers in bringing comfort, relief, hope and creativity to those with or recovering from mental illnesses.

DRIVER LICENCE DEMERIT POINTS: ROADS AND TRAFFIC AUTHORITY POWERS

Mr DONALD PAGE (Ballina) [6.37 p.m.]: I bring to the attention of the House problems with road safety legislation as it affects my constituents who appear before the courts. Several of my constituents have complained that in some cases the current legislation gives the Roads and Traffic Authority more powers than our courts. This occurs when it comes to the loss of drivers licences as a result of the accumulation of demerit points. Whilst I strongly encourage good driver behaviour, and believe in the need to enforce road rules for the safety of the community, there are some instances where inconsistencies in the law cause hardship for drivers, particularly those in country areas—I refer to traffic infringements and the incurrance of demerit points.

Drivers who accumulate a maximum of 12 demerit points have their licence suspended. Drivers currently have a right of appeal through the court system regarding the offence, but there is no avenue for appeal to remove demerit points through the Roads and Traffic Authority. Drivers who dispute a traffic offence have the right to take the matter to court. A magistrate will look at the offence and the driver's record, take into account the circumstances surrounding the offence and the driving history of the motorist, as well as the work and personal commitments important to the driver. Even if a magistrate decides to dismiss proceedings, or finds an offence proved but does not convict or impose a penalty, there is no way for drivers to have the demerit points removed from their licence by the Roads and Traffic Authority. In many cases the accumulation of demerit points means the loss of their drivers licence. There is no right of appeal for people on open licences.

Motorists with long driving histories are often faced with an automatic suspension of their drivers licence. The legislation as it currently stands means that the automatic accrual of demerit points cannot be revoked, regardless of the outcome of court proceedings. In other words, even if the magistrate says no penalty by way of a fine should occur, the demerit points remain. This often leads to the loss of a drivers licence. This causes serious hardship in country areas, where public transport is virtually non-existent. People, who are often the sole income earners in their family, struggle to get to work. Our courts give offenders the chance to explain their situations but for the Roads and Traffic Authority it is black and white. There is no room to examine the individual circumstances surrounding an offence.

I reiterate that I am very concerned about road safety as my electorate takes in the dangerous Pacific Highway. During my time in Parliament too many deaths and tragedies have occurred on that road and others in the Far North Coast. I am a strong advocate for road safety. I believe that we need a system of fines and demerit points to encourage drivers to obey road rules. However, I accept that sometimes there are mitigating circumstances surrounding some offences and the punishment in the legislation can create extreme hardship and stress to drivers who may otherwise have exceptional driving records.

As I said, the legislation as it stands gives the Roads and Traffic Authority more power than the courts. The Hon. Jeff Linden, the magistrate officiating in some courts on the Far North Coast, wrote to me and pointed out that the anomalies and the contradictions in the legislation cause hardship and, in some cases, catastrophic results for some drivers, particularly those in the country. Magistrate Linden said that he is not an apologist for people who breach traffic laws, but on a daily basis average people in his court are being severely punished in a manner that does not befit the traffic breach. Of course we need laws that discourage people from speeding and driving dangerously, but we also need a fair system.

Our courts provide people with a right of appeal. Our court system enables a magistrate to examine the circumstances surrounding an offence. Our court system enables a magistrate to look closely at the impact of that offence on an individual or a family, and to decide whether or not the punishment fits the crime. Currently, the Roads and Traffic Authority has the power to override the court system. Regardless of the decision of a magistrate, once the Roads and Traffic Authority has allocated demerit points to a driver, they cannot be removed even if the magistrate rules that there will be no penalty by way of fine. That is not a fair or equitable system.

I ask the Minister to conduct a review into the legislation with a view to implementing changes that focus on road safety while restoring equity to the legal system by taking away from the Roads and Traffic Authority the power to overrule the courts. If a magistrate, having considered all the circumstances surrounding a particular offence, decides that there should be no penalty, that should be the end of it. As the law stands, even though the magistrate says that there is no penalty, the Roads and Traffic Authority still adds the relevant demerit points. In my view, that is totally inappropriate if the principles of natural justice—and justice in general—are to be served.

GUNNEDAH RURAL MUSEUM

Mr PETER DRAPER (Tamworth) [6.42 p.m.]: Recently I was delight to present a New South Wales Government cheque for \$3,000 to Gunnedah Rural Museum. It will assist the organisation to upgrade its security system. Gunnedah Rural Museum is the custodian of many valuable items of local history but, sadly, in recent years a number of irreplaceable items were stolen. This funding will help the museum to protect this incredibly valuable collection for future generations.

The museum, which is located adjacent to the Oxley Highway on the western side of Gunnedah, houses one of Australia's largest collections of early agricultural and transport memorabilia in a massive area of 15,000 square metres, and it is already one of the largest museums of its type in Australia. It consists of a growing display of over 1,600 exhibits, including tractors, steam engines, stationary engines, antique farm machinery, horse-drawn and motorised vehicles, household items, communications equipment, a gun collection, a working foundry and a timber workshop.

Volunteers with the museum are dedicated to preserving and restoring old farm equipment and household items of yesteryear. Following the closure of Gunnedah RSL Club, the Gunnedah Rural Museum took custodianship of the local RSL club's collection of memorabilia. It now provides a safe home for the honour rolls and other materials that pay tribute to local service men and women who served their country in the armed forces. Another major attraction at the museum is the Grosser collection—a collection so large that it is housed in its own display hall. Ron Grosser from the property "Fassifern" in the Milroy district near Gunnedah has kindly placed his family treasure trove on permanent loan. It is a collection of vehicles, machinery and household effects, from horse-drawn to mechanised, all used over several generations since his family first settled in the district.

The collection of nearly 300 items showcases the incredible development of farm machinery and the way rural families have lived for over 100 years. From the wagon wheel of the vehicle that originally brought the family to the Gunnedah district to the first mechanical harvesters and then their successors, almost every new generation of machinery is on display. The collection paints an amazing picture of the evolution of rural life in the Gunnedah district. Additionally, many other historical items have either been donated or are on loan to the museum from community members who realise their value to future generations. I congratulate the rural museum's president, Ian Guest, and his wonderful team of 50 volunteers on maintaining the facility, both for its historical importance and as a local tourist attraction.

On my recent visit, volunteers Brian Sampson, Eddie Swan, Terry Egan, Jack Macpherson and Kevin Gardner were on duty working on the collection and guiding visitors around the complex. The museum

complements many other local attractions in town, including the Dorothea Mackellar Memorial, Waterways Wildlife Park, Creative Arts Centre, the Red Chief Memorial and Water Town Museum that all combine to make Australia's koala capital, Gunnedah, a fascinating place to visit. I point out how important funding such as the \$3,000 grant is to organisations such as the Gunnedah Rural Museum. It enables volunteers to expand their operations and safeguard their valuable collections, while at the same time delivering many positive outcomes for the local economy.

Ian Guest raised a serious problem being faced by the museum—a problem that also challenges other volunteer organisations that rely on older people to maintain their operations. Ian pointed out that the museum now finds it impossible to obtain insurance for volunteers aged over 70. As many of these people are retired and/or over the age of 70 they no longer qualify for volunteer insurance. In fact, the museum can only get insurance for people who work, not for people who are receiving benefits. The museum is forced to make these people sign indemnity forms to protect the organisation in the unlikely event of an accident. It is well-documented that our volunteers are ageing and that the much busier lifestyles of younger people in today's society often result in the need for both partners in many family units to work, which is significantly affecting the volunteer pool. That problem will only worsen in coming years.

Considering the huge financial contribution that volunteers make to our economy and, in particular, to small rural communities, it is essential that steps be taken to remove disincentives, including the inability to provide insurance coverage for these people. That is important for an organisation such as Gunnedah Rural Museum, as older volunteers not only have the time but also, importantly, possess many skills that are invaluable when restoring aged items. A failure to act on this issue now may well cost us dearly in the future. I encourage anyone who has some free time to visit the Gunnedah Rural Museum. It provides a fascinating insight into the development of the Gunnedah region and farming technology over more than 100 years, and it makes one realise the advances that have been made over those years.

Looking at the old horse-drawn harvesters and their early mechanical replacements one would have to wonder what the old timers who used them would think if they could see today's modern air-conditioned units. I ask the Government to look carefully at the issue of volunteer insurance because it would be a sad day indeed if we lost our volunteers who work to maintain the region's history simply because of red tape and silly regulations.

WILLOUGHBY ELECTORATE BUS ROUTE 263

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN (Willoughby) [6.46 p.m.]: I have mentioned on many occasions in this place that people in the Willoughby electorate are fortunate to live so close to the central business district of Sydney. However, a downside to that is the traffic volume in the Willoughby electorate. Clearly, public transport is an important issue. Over the past few weeks I undertook to raise the concerns of residents in north Cremorne about proposed changes to bus route 263, which is causing enormous angst for residents in that area. Residents have put together a petition, they have made various representations to the State Transit Authority [STA], and they have brought their concerns to my attention.

Tonight I shall place their concerns on the record. I state at the outset that they are concerned about proposed changes to bus route 263, which they argue are dangerous and impact on residential amenity. They are also concerned about the lack of public consultation, notwithstanding that the STA claims to have sent a survey to residents. A couple of residents said that they doorknocked about 150 people in the affected area and of that number only one person claimed to have received the STA survey, which the authority regarded as public consultation. I will now place some of those residents' concerns on the record. In her email to me one resident said:

We are concerned about proposed changes to STA bus route 263 which would result in buses going up and down the complete length of Benelong Road. Parking is currently a problem at the top end and the establishment of further bus stops will not help, especially in front of our building. Results will be increased fumes and pollution, noise, traffic, less parking for residents and associated problems. The change in the route after many years is not necessary.

We were only advised of these proposed changes last week—

the week preceding 26 August—

and any concerns are supposed to be submitted by this Friday 29th August.

Any action you may be able to take to avoid these changes would be appreciated.

Another resident states:

The proposed changes are downright dangerous. To have a bus travel down Benelong Road from Gerard Street is putting the community at risk. There are already two high crash zones on Benelong Road from adjoining Brightmore Road. We do not need to add to the mix a bus travelling down a very steep hill when it is not necessary.

This proposed change offers absolutely no benefit to the community. The current route has been in operation as is for decades, why the change now?

We find it crazy that this proposed change is suggested with absolutely no justification or consideration to current residents of the street. Not only do they propose to now have a bus travelling down the very steep hill of Benelong Road (which should brakes fail would send a bus out of control) we also have the noise of a bus trying to get up the hill on Benelong Road to go into the city. The residents do not need this sort of noise pollution when there are no benefits to be gained.

We also lose street parking which given the highly populated area is unacceptable.

Another resident writes:

The current 263 routes/bus stops work well and have for many years. I am very concerned that the proposed change will create major safety hazards for residents and children, reduce parking and create new and additional traffic issues in Benelong Rd, which is already suffering from increasing vehicles and speeding drivers.

In addition, the intersection at Gerard St/Benelong Rd is already busy with increasing traffic. It is:

*extremely narrow for any buses to safely turn left from Gerard St ...

*frequently queued with traffic turning right and left on their way to local schools, Northern Beaches or the city ...

*has elderly and young families/pedestrians regularly crossing at the lights on their way to Military Rd and Neutral Bay

*suffers from cars turning right illegally from Gerard St ...

Again, I have placed on record the concerns of residents. When I received their concerns I immediately contacted the State Transit Authority and indicated that residents were upset at not being consulted on these issues, and that the decision may be a fait accompli. However, I was relieved to hear from the relevant State Transit Authority officials that they are considering the concerns raised by residents, that they have received the petition and letters of complaint, and that they will carefully consider the issue. I have asked them to honour that commitment and to ensure that the concerns of residents are adequately taken into consideration. None of the residents proposed or support any of the routes changes. In fact, two sets of residents who object to the proposal on different grounds have made their views clear. I undertook to raise these issues in Parliament on their behalf. I urge the State Transit Authority to take their concerns into consideration. Public transport continues to be a high need particularly for that part of the electorate, given the crossroads to the city and to Military Road. I urge the State Transit Authority to take the residents' concerns on board and leave route 263 as it is.

EVIE LOGAN-CLARKE: INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Mr RICHARD TORBAY (Northern Tablelands—Speaker) [6.51 p.m.]: This week I met a remarkable 12-year-old who, like her peers, is graduating from primary school to secondary school at the end of the year. Evie Logan-Clarke's journey, however, has been much more difficult than most. She suffers from Rett syndrome, a fairly rare neurological disorder that affects about 300 girls and women in Australia. As a result of the disorder Evie cannot speak or use her hands and at times finds it difficult to walk. Despite her profound disabilities, she has spent the last seven years within mainstream classes at Armidale City Public School. Her parents, and teachers and students at the school believe her attendance has been of benefit not only to Evie but also to the school community.

The New South Wales education system gets a lot of knocks for its failings, but many times it deserves bouquets. On this occasion I commend it for opening doors for Evie Logan-Clarke and other children with disabilities. Evie's mother, Vicki, told me that one of the worst things that can happen to children and adults with disabilities is to be segregated and isolated from the mainstream of society. If it happens to people with disabilities when they are children, it almost inevitably follows when they are adults. When they were researching the best options for Evie, her parents weighed up the relative benefits of special and inclusive education. They found a new trend in disability education was emerging and that inclusive education was possible in New South Wales. When they approached Armidale City Public School, they were encouraged to go ahead with the inclusive option. They were successful with their application to have a teacher's aide allocated to assist Evie through her school experience. About 25,000 children with disabilities are now included in mainstream classes around New South Wales, 350 of them at schools in the New England area.

Evie is at the high end of the disability spectrum, except for her behaviour, which has been assessed as excellent. She listens carefully, she can communicate and she participates when she can. Her behaviour has worked well for her and has won her respect and affection at the school. She has learned to use a computer by way of a special switch. She sits and listens carefully in class and pays attention. Each day she has a break for a rest, but otherwise she participates in all class activities. Since Evie started at school she has taught herself to sit from standing and to jump on a trampoline. In kindergarten she won rapturous applause from the whole school when she participated in the 50 metre races on sports day—it is just like the Paralympics. She loves going to school and is positive about the experience. Her peer group has accepted her and she has made many friends. Her teachers report that Evie has taught them many things and her presence has had a positive effect on the school community. She has changed the dynamics in the classroom where other children have learnt to accept her as different but also much the same as themselves. They appreciate her qualities, her courage and her efforts to succeed and belong. They also learn not to take their own capacities for granted.

Next year Evie has been accepted to Armidale High School where she will join mainstream classes and participate to the best of her ability. She has a group of friends who probably will stay with her for life. Her mother, Vicki, wrote to me about the positive experience Evie has had at Armidale City Public School over the past seven years. She says Evie's experience at Armidale City Public School has demonstrated the success of inclusive education for children with disabilities. They particularly want to thank teacher's aide Sue Wilson for her support. I know Sue personally and she is a tremendously dedicated person. The family also wants to acknowledge the wonderful work of the staff of the Department of Education and Training both at the school and in the district office, who have done their jobs successfully, willingly, cheerfully and outstandingly. Vicki Logan has asked me to pass on the family's thanks to the Minister for Education and Training, and to congratulate her and her staff on providing a successful, positive and outstanding inclusive education for Evie over the past seven years. I will go one better by putting this testimonial on the public record because we often forget about the high standard of our public education system, the dedication of our teachers and their willingness to go the extra mile to help students reach their potential regardless of their level of ability.

PEAK OIL

Ms CLOVER MOORE (Sydney) [6.56 p.m.]: Tonight I speak about a serious concern of my constituents about the consequences of peak oil, which will have grave local and global impacts. The term "peak oil" refers to the stage when global oil production peaks and future oil production begins to decline. With the global demand for oil increasing rapidly, production declines are predicted to result in severe petrol price increases as buyers compete for supplies. Given the dependence on oil, including for energy, food, travel and consumer products, disastrous impacts on the global economy are expected. While some say peak oil has already hit and others say it will occur in 2030, it is essential that we prepare. New South Wales and Sydney's over-reliance on petrol makes us extremely vulnerable to impacts, and we must protect current and future generations. Given the consequences of peak oil and the serious threat of global warming leading to climate change, governments have a responsibility to urgently reduce our dependence on fossil fuels.

Petrol price hikes have resulted in a depressing reaction in Federal Parliament, with each party trying to score short-term political points to outdo each other on the lowest petrol price. Cuts to the GST on excise and the FuelWatch Scheme will do little to protect consumers. Concessions will never match the increases expected as petrol prices continue to rise from the effects of peak oil. I was very disappointed to learn that the Federal Government's proposed Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme involves sheltering the transport sector from petrol price increases. We need to urgently reverse our reliance on the private motor vehicle, which burns massive amounts of greenhouse gas-polluting petrol. Revenue raised from the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme should be invested in green, reliable and fast mass transit that provides a real alternative to the private motor vehicle. Wasting funds to compensate the industry and motorists while petrol is still affordable is a missed opportunity, and Australia's ability to prepare for serious peak oil will be compromised.

It is estimated that human and freight transport uses more than 60 per cent of all the oil consumed in the world. Transport provides some of the greatest opportunities to cut back on oil consumption. All transport should come under the responsibility of one ministry and one authority charged with coordinating roads, public transport, cycling and pedestrian movements as part of a planned and integrated network so that decisions address overall long-term public interest and plan around the need to reduce oil reliance. I have long supported inner-city light rail for Sydney, with heavy rail and buses to outer suburbs. Fast train services are needed to the Central Coast, the Illawarra, Newcastle and the Blue Mountains. The State Government also needs to develop a freight movement plan for the Sydney metropolitan area and the wider State that reinvigorates the use of rail.

The shift in port operations from Sydney Harbour to Botany Bay, Port Kembla and Newcastle was not accompanied by a new freight transport network and resulted in the dumping of more truck movements on the

existing road system. While petrol is still affordable we should invest in major infrastructure transport changes, with construction commencing immediately, so that we are prepared to respond to a world of declining oil affordability. Now is not the time to shelve major transport infrastructure to poorly served areas. Responsible governments borrow for nation-building infrastructure investments that benefit future generations.

In August, the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported a Griffith University study that revealed 41 per cent of Sydney suburbs had increased vulnerability to rising oil prices. Researchers say that vulnerability has spread inward from the city fringes. The study notes that while public transport use in Sydney steadily declined between 2000 and 2005, sharp increases in the cost of petrol between 2005 and 2007 increased train journeys by 11 million. Where public transport is available, people will use it if petrol prices are high and particularly if the transport is convenient and efficient.

The City of Sydney's Sustainable Sydney 2030 aims to deliver a fully integrated transport system for the city centre. We would like to see an 80 per cent increase in public transport use by city workers and we will provide public space for people rather than vehicles. The strong focus will be on pedestrian and cycle networks, and our Cycle Strategy and Action Plan aims to increase cycle trips in the city area from 2 per cent in 2006 to 10 per cent in 2016, with cycling accounting for 20 per cent of journeys between 2 and 20 kilometres. We also need to reduce our use of oil in other non-essential capacities, such as packaging, where depleting resources are used for single-use packaging and then diverted to landfill.

But the Government has opposed mandatory extended producer responsibility schemes, which could drastically reduce packaging and increase recycling rates. Another thing that needs to be considered by government is organic farming techniques. They should also be promoted. I call on the Government, the new Premier and his team to develop a plan to transfer our economy away from oil dependence, thus reducing our vulnerability to the impacts of peak oil.

Question—That private members' statements be noted—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Private members' statements noted.

ASSENT TO BILLS

Assent to the following bills reported:

Mining Amendment (Improvements on Land) Bill 2008
Water (Commonwealth Powers) Bill 2008

CRIMES AMENDMENT (COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT—SEXUAL OFFENCES) BILL 2008

Bill received from the Legislative Council and introduced.

Agreement in principle set down as an order of the day for a future day.

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE OFFICE OF THE VALUER-GENERAL

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): I report the receipt of the following message from the Legislative Council:

MR SPEAKER

The Legislative Council desires to inform the Legislative Assembly that it has this day agreed to the following resolution:

- (1) that this House agrees to the resolution in the Legislative Assembly's message of Thursday 25 September 2008 relating to the appointment of a Joint Standing Committee on the Office of the Valuer-General;
- (2) that the representatives of the Legislative Council on the Joint Standing Committee on the Office of the Valuer-General be Ms Griffin and Mr Mason-Cox.
- (3) that members be notified in writing by the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly of the time and place for the first meeting of the committee.

Legislative Council
25 September 2008

PETER PRIMROSE
President

The House adjourned at 7.02 p.m. until Tuesday 21 October 2008 at 1.00 p.m.
