

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Thursday 30 October 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.

PINK RIBBON DAY

The SPEAKER: I remind members that the Pink Ribbon Day barbecue is currently in operation in the Strangers Lounge and members and staff are encouraged to participate and make a contribution to a most worthy cause. I thank Mark Swinson and Greg Kelly for offering their cooking skills. I acknowledge also the very generous donation of sausages from the Meat Boutique at Ryde.

INDEPENDENT COMMISSION AGAINST CORRUPTION

Report

The Speaker tabled, in accordance with section 78 of the Independent Commission Against Corruption Act 1988, the annual report for the year ended 30 June 2008.

Ordered to be printed.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of Motions

General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) given.

THOROUGHBRED RACING FURTHER AMENDMENT BILL 2008

Bill introduced on motion by Mr Kevin Greene.

Agreement in Principle

Mr KEVIN GREENE (Oatley—Minister for Gaming and Racing, and Minister for Sport and Recreation) [10.10 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

The main purpose of the Thoroughbred Racing Further Amendment Bill is to amend the Thoroughbred Racing Act 1996 to replace the former Appointments Panel provisions with an independent selection panel process for members of Racing New South Wales. The other purposes of the bill are to provide for the procedure to be followed by the independent selection panel and for the Minister to undertake a review of the appointment process for membership of Racing New South Wales within three years of the commencement of the proposed amendments.

Before going into the detail of the proposed amendments, it would be appropriate to clarify some matters that have been the subject of speculation. I wish to thank the members of the Appointments Panel and its chair, Mr Ross Smyth Kirk, for agreeing to participate in an honorary capacity on the panel. I acknowledge that they have the interests of the industry at heart, and that the task of selecting an independent board is not a simple matter in an environment of competing interests. Nevertheless, I found it necessary to intervene as the process had stalled and only Government was in a position of resolving the matter.

At this time it is, in my view, unnecessary to engage in a deconstruction of the reasons for intervention other than to say that the probity adviser advised that he was not able to give probity assurance in relation to the

process, which had been in train since August 2008. I wish to emphasise that there was considerable industry consultation during the development of the legislation, and bipartisan support for the provisions when they were debated on 19 June 2008. My immediate goal, therefore, is to put the process back on track and have a new board appointed as soon as possible. Most of all, I want to assure the industry that the Government is doing everything possible to ensure that the new Racing New South Wales Board—which will oversee the growth and sustainable economic development of the thoroughbred racing industry—is established in a way which will provide confidence in future leadership and governance.

I turn to the proposed amendments. The Appointments Panel provisions are to be repealed, including the setting aside of any of its nominations or purported decisions. In its place, the proposed amendments will provide for an independent selection panel to be constituted by the Minister. The independent selection panel is to recommend five persons for appointment as members of Racing New South Wales. The panel may also recommend terms of up to four years. The Minister is to give effect to those recommendations. That means this panel of three eminent people will make the decisions and I will support and endorse those decisions.

The independent selection panel is to make recommendations for appointments based on merit in accordance with the skills based criteria prescribed by the Act. A probity adviser will assist the independent selection panel. The independent selection panel will be announced in due course. I will be writing to the 57 candidates who expressed an interest in the advertisements for membership of Racing New South Wales. I will do so as a matter of courtesy, and also to advise them of developments and to invite them to resubmit, if they wish, their applications for the revised process.

The bill also provides that the independent selection panel process will be followed by a review of the appointments process in the Act within three years of the commencement of the amendments. The purpose of that review is for Government, in consultation with the industry, to identify the possible options for an appointment process for members of Racing New South Wales. The review recommendations, as appropriate, could then be reduced to legislative form. The measures I am introducing today are intended as an interim measure designed to solve the current untenable position. The Government acknowledges that the racing industry gives a very high value to its independence. It is clear from recent circumstances, and the response provided by this bill, that intervention was required in the manner proposed pending the identification of a longer-term appointments process.

The statutory requirement is for the Minister to undertake a review of appointment processes with extensive industry consultation and within three years of the commencement of these amendments. I believe this arrangement addresses any concerns of Government interference in a substantive or ongoing way in the affairs of the racing industry. The Government's only objective is that the New South Wales thoroughbred racing industry must have the best possible Racing New South Wales Board to provide future leadership and sustainable economic development. The bill also deals with savings and transitional matters, as appropriate to the circumstances. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Ms Gladys Berejiklian and set down as an order of the day for a future day.

SECURITY INDUSTRY AMENDMENT BILL 2008

Bill introduced on motion by Ms Angela D'Amore, on behalf of Ms Kristina Keneally.

Agreement in Principle

Ms ANGELA D'AMORE (Drummoyne—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.15 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

The Security Industry Amendment Bill seeks to make three specific amendments to current legislation governing the New South Wales security industry that are designed to align our law with national standards agreed to through the Council of Australian Governments [COAG] process. This will allow us to benefit in future from mutual recognition provisions. The bill also introduces new requirements for the dog handling sector of the security industry, which are aimed at ensuring that holders of provisional subclass 1D licences receive necessary training through accredited employers.

I turn first to the three changes proposed through this bill that will align New South Wales with the national standards agreed to through the COAG process. In short these are: To provide for visitor permits for the

purpose of providing security activities for special events; exclude the application of section 12 of the Criminal Records Act 1991 in relation to applications for security licences to allow the Commissioner of Police to take any spent conviction into account in determining whether a person should be granted a licence; and amend the Security Industry Regulation 2007 to exclude from obtaining a security licence those persons who have received a fine of \$500 or more, a term of imprisonment, or both, for drug offences under the Drug Misuse and Trafficking Act 1985 or prescribed restricted substances under the Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Regulation 2008.

It is pleasing to note that only minimal change was required in order for New South Wales to meet the national minimum standards agreed to by COAG. This is because we already had strong and effective legislative controls in place and, for the most part, other jurisdictions were following our lead. Through the passing of this bill we further enhance our effective regulation of the security industry and cut some unnecessary red tape.

The introduction of visitor permits for security licence holders from other States wishing to work on special events in New South Wales represents the Government responding to a need demonstrated by the industry. Currently, interstate firms wishing to work on special events in New South Wales, such as the Byron Bay Blues Festival or Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation [APEC], must formally apply for a New South Wales security licence first. This requires full background checks to be undertaken, as well as photo ID to be produced, all of which takes time and resources and, often, licensees in such circumstances do not even bother collecting their plastic licences, instead just relying on a confirmation letter from the Security Industry Registry as proof of their licensed status. The new powers sought through this bill will streamline this process, enabling us to provide a special permit for firms operating within New South Wales for only a specific event or time.

The bill also contains a provision aimed at excluding the application of section 12 of the Criminal Records Act 1991 in relation to applications for security licences. Security licensees often operate in high-risk, high security environments. The community has a right to expect that these people will be thoroughly vetted during the licensing process. To do this the commissioner should have access to a person's entire criminal history, including spent convictions. Until now, the commissioner has not been afforded this power. Under the Criminal Records Act 1991 all convictions are capable of becoming spent, except convictions for which a prison sentence of more than six months has been imposed, convictions for sexual offences, convictions imposed against bodies corporate, and convictions prescribed by the regulations.

Pursuant to section 8 (2) of that Act, a conviction becomes spent if a person is found guilty of an offence without proceeding to a conviction. In cases such as these, the conviction is spent immediately after the finding has been made. This has caused problems in cases when an individual has been found guilty of a particular security industry offence but the magistrate has ruled that the finding should not proceed to a conviction. The individual's conviction is thus immediately considered spent and the commissioner is unable to take the conviction into consideration to revoke the individual's security licence. The individual therefore remains licensed.

Whilst the change proposed through this bill will not be retrospective, it will mean that in future all applications and renewals for security licences will have these new conditions applied. As members may be aware, licensees must undergo a full re-application process every one or five years under the Act. The third COAG-related proposal introduced through this bill provides for an amendment to the Security Industry Regulation to exclude individuals from obtaining a security licence who have received a fine of \$500 or more, or a term of imprisonment, for offences relating to prohibited plants or drugs or prescribed restricted substances under the Drug Misuse and Trafficking Act 1985 or the Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Regulation 2008. Again, this will not be applied retrospectively but will be a condition that any new licence applications or renewals will be required to meet in the future.

This bill also seeks to provide for an enhanced licensing and training regime for the provision of dog-handling security services. The intention is to ensure that holders of provisional subclass 1D licences under the Security Industry Act 1997—that is, trainee dog handlers—have access to competency-based training provided by accredited employers already established in the industry. The master licensees authorised to provide such training will need to be able to show that they have appropriate strategies in place to manage a range of factors, including the selection, training and kennelling of dogs to be used, and the use of force guidelines and guidelines determining the situations in which dogs will be deployed.

The application process for master licensees will also provide some flexibility. For example, firms opting not to use dogs in crowd control situations and only for patrolling would require a less rigorous training

regime to be in place than would be the case for firms specialising in the use of dogs for crowd control situations. The changes proposed through the Security Industry Amendment Bill 2008 will further enhance the regulatory regime we have in place for the security industry in this State and will help to streamline existing processes. As highlighted, the changes proposed through the bill will also align New South Wales legislation with the agreed Council of Australian Governments' national minimum standards. I commend the bill to the House.

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

TRANSPORT ADMINISTRATION AMENDMENT (RAIL AND FERRY TRANSPORT AUTHORITIES) BILL 2008

Agreement in Principle

Debate resumed from 23 October 2008.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN (Willoughby) [10.24 a.m.]: I lead for the Opposition on the Transport Administration (Rail and Ferry Authorities) Bill 2008. The objects of the bill are to change RailCorp and Sydney Ferries from State-owned corporations to statutory corporations, to require RailCorp to enter into rail services contracts with the Director General of the Ministry of Transport as to the rail services provided by it, and to provide for new service contract provisions for regular ferry services while retaining the service contract provisions for existing regular ferry services. The bill follows announcements made by both the Premier and the Minister for Transport in relation to abolishing the RailCorp board and decorporatising the Sydney Ferries Corporation. The bill in effect changes the corporate structure of both RailCorp and Sydney Ferries from State-owned corporations to statutory authorities.

The Government's rationale is, and I quote from the Minister's second reading speech, that "we do not have sufficient control over RailCorp or Sydney Ferries to produce results". The New South Wales Opposition does not accept or support this rationale. The bill is a clear attempt by the State Government to shift blame for the crisis in public transport to the very board members and bureaucrats that it has itself appointed. It is also an acknowledgement that the Government has abandoned any program to implement much-needed reform to public transport.

When the State Government corporatised these entities just four years ago, there was much fanfare about the reform this would bring by raising standards which would result in improved front-line services. This clearly has not happened, because of the State Government's total inability and unwillingness to make the tough decisions. When you decide to corporatise an entity, you need to follow through with what is required, such as establishing performance agreements and appropriate lines of accountability, and appointing the right people to the boards without unnecessary political interference. The Government made the decision to corporatise but, in true form, did not take the necessary steps to support that decision by putting these critical provisions in place.

The Opposition is concerned that the bill, if enacted, will result in an even greater level of politicisation in the delivery of public transport services. It will result in even less transparency about decision making. There will be even further blurred lines of accountability, and there will be no impetus for much-needed reform in this sector. If the bill is enacted, it will also mean that the establishment of performance benchmarks and any hopes for improvements in standards of service and accountability will fall by the wayside. For this reason the New South Wales Opposition will not support the bill. It will be a backward step for public transport in New South Wales, and we cannot in good conscience support taking such a backward step.

One of the concerning aspects of the bill is that the Government argues that these changes will give the Minister more direct control over the running of the rail network and the ferries. This in itself should be reason to oppose the bill. The Government continues to demonstrate its incompetence in managing the public transport network. However, it is important to note that even under current arrangements prior to the bill being passed, numerous commentaries have been made about politicisation within the transport bureaucracy and unnecessary political interference in the day-to-day running of agencies. These will only increase under the proposed amendments, given the absence of an independent board.

It is simply dishonest and misleading for the Government to suggest that respective Premiers and Ministers for Transport have not had adequate influence in decision making regarding the delivery of transport

services. That is simply based on a dishonest premise. Regrettably, the Minister's entire second reading speech is based on a dishonest premise. For the Minister to say to the people of New South Wales, "We have not had enough control in public transport over 13 years. This will do that" is absolutely dishonest and based on misleading criteria, and it should not be tolerated. Indeed, there are almost weekly examples—in some cases daily examples—of public transport announcements. The Premier or the Minister for Transport has interviewed every level of the agencies with which they choose to be involved. This Government has had its fingers all over transport bureaucracies for the last 13 years. Decorporatising these two institutions will result in their having less accountability, a reduced necessity for performance benchmarks and, ultimately, less accountability to the people of New South Wales.

It is ironic that Ministers of this State Government currently appoint the boards of both RailCorp and the Sydney Ferries Corporation. How can the Government say to the people of New South Wales that it wants even greater control of public transport when it already appoints the boards of these organisations? The Government already has the ability, through various provisions and day-to-day management, to interfere in every level of public transport delivery—which it does. But there is a double irony. Not only does the Government already appoint the boards of these organisations, and therefore already has ultimate decision making regarding many aspects of the day-to-day running of public transport services, but the bill will ensure that both organisations will retain boards, which again will be appointed by the Minister.

Therefore the rationale for the bill is flimsy. What does the bill try to do? It is not clear. The bill is nothing more than a political statement, and a bad one at that. Through this bill the Government is telling the people of New South Wales: We know we have a problem in public transport, that things are not quite right, but this will fix it. It will not. Decorporatising Sydney Ferries and RailCorp will not improve front-line services, and it will not increase accountability or transparency. It has the potential to politicise even further the day-to-day running of public transport services. Members on this side of the House shudder to think what that means. It means services will continue to decline. It means that the last bastions of accountability in those organisations, the boards—which were appointed by the Minister for the government of the day anyway—will be abolished and replaced by a board that reports directly to the Minister. The bill is nothing more than a political announcement. It will not improve front-line services or improve people's experiences with public transport. The bill is a furphy.

It is concerning that the Minister for Transport made a number of misleading statements in his agreement in principle speech. One of those relates to the report of Commissioner Walker released last year. Contrary to what the Minister said in his speech, Commissioner Walker did not support returning the Sydney Ferries Corporation to a statutory authority. This was highlighted by a very astute journalist with the *Australian*, Imre Salusinszky, who quoted the Walker report's scathing comment on the option of returning Sydney Ferries to a statutory authority under direct government control, without an independent board. I quote Mr Walker:

Its key weakness as a model is that it supplies no more incentive for better governmental value for money than the present model, and may even reduce the present statutory pressure for efficiency.

Here was the commissioner who handed the State Government a very critical report—which, incidentally, the Government has yet to respond to—warning the Government against reverting the Sydney Ferries Corporation to a statutory authority. He said that the statutory authority model provided taxpayers with less assurance of value for money than the current corporatised model. Here, in black and white, is Commissioner Walker putting on record that returning the Sydney Ferries Corporation to a statutory authority is not in the public interest. But what does the State Government do? It ignores the report.

Worse, the Minister had the hide in his agreement in principle speech to imply that the bill is in support of the Walker report recommendations. That was a dishonest statement. The Minister should explain. Has he read the Walker report? Has he been adequately briefed about the Walker report? Why did he mislead this Parliament in his agreement in principle speech about the implications of the Walker report on this bill? We have in black and white Commissioner Walker's attitude about reversing the Sydney Ferries Corporation to a statutory authority. He said it was bad for taxpayers and would not improve services. The State Government not only ignored that advice but pretended that the advice is to the contrary.

Commentators have argued that reverting these two corporatised bodies to statutory authorities will increase the ability of the trade union movement to avoid having performance benchmarks imposed on the respective organisations. Concerns have been expressed that stakeholders could avoid going through proper mechanisms within organisations by going straight to the Minister. That concern is expressed not by the Opposition but by many in the public. Many on this side of the House share that concern, which needs to be put

on the table. When the Sydney Ferries Corporation came into existence four years ago there was an attempt by that corporation and the Ministry of Transport to negotiate a funding agreement, including performance benchmarks. The agreement has been in draft form since December 2004. Is it any wonder State-owned corporations fail? For four years the State Government has not even been able to negotiate performance contracts with the Sydney Ferries Corporation. It is not the Opposition saying this; Mr Walker said it in his inquiry.

There is little wonder, when performance benchmarks are in draft form for four years and the State Government cannot negotiate these arrangements, that State-owned corporations fail. We all know that the Ministry of Transport is an extension of the Minister's office and that the Government appoints the board of Sydney Ferries. So to allege that the Government "does not have sufficient control" over the running of rail and ferry services in this State is simply absurd. There is absolutely no excuse for the Government's failure to reach an agreement after four years—except the incompetence of this State Government. The Government lacks an appreciation of what it means to establish a State-owned corporation. It needs to be followed through with the requisite obligations. The State Government has failed to fulfil those obligations on behalf of the commuters and taxpayers of this State.

The Minister should explain why his Government has not to this day put in place performance benchmarks for the Sydney Ferries Corporation, even though that entity has been in existence for four years. There is no excuse for that level of incompetence. To this day the Government has offered no explanation for its failure. In fact, it has still not responded to the Walker inquiry report, even though Mr Walker made numerous mentions of that fact in his report. It was a theme that was repeated in every chapter. Yet the State Government turns a blind eye to all that. This is a despicable state of affairs, but it explains to some extent why this State is in such a mess.

RailCorp underwent similar changes to its corporate structure in 2003-04, but again lacking transparency or clarity regarding funding agreements and performance benchmarks. We know that the Government failed to implement its sectorisation plans, which Vince Graham, under various Ministers, tried to implement. The failure was due to the State Government not taking the tough decisions. It was not prepared to require a raising of standards, it was not prepared to ask for productivity increases, and it was not prepared to ensure that maintenance culture and safety culture were measured against those of other organisations and institutions throughout this country. The State Government did not have the ability or the guts to put those measures in place when it re-established RailCorp as a corporate entity a few years ago.

It is simply dishonest and misleading for the Government to suggest that respective Premiers and Ministers for Transport have not had adequate influence on decision making regarding the delivery of transport services. If the State Government were serious about improving transport services, it would not put such a flimsy bill before this House. Instead, it would reinstate some of the services that it has slashed. Every member of this House was keen to talk about World Youth Day and say what a proud few days it was for Sydney. During the World Youth Day celebrations the State Government put on an additional 400 rail services each day. Why can some of those services not be delivered for commuters who struggle on a daily basis?

In September 2005, when the last rail timetable came out, 416 services were deleted. Yet when World Youth Day was on and the eyes of the world were on Sydney it was good enough for the Government to provide sufficient rail services. It somehow managed that. Somehow it managed to strike an agreement with the trade union movement in the dying days before the event. Why is it unable to deliver adequate rail services on an everyday basis? Reinstatement of even a small proportion of the slashed rail services would make a difference for the many people who must stand in non-airconditioned, overcrowded carriages to get to and from work. The people of Sydney should not have to put up with services of that standard.

As I have mentioned, there are almost weekly, sometimes daily, examples of the Premier or Minister for Transport having a direct involvement in, or making an announcement that impacts on, the delivery of public transport services. To suggest that that involvement does not exist currently is a lie. To suggest that it does not exist currently is misleading. And to suggest that this bill will, somehow, make a difference to the delivery of transport services is misleading. The bill is an inadequate response to the need for service delivery. I have already highlighted how the proposed changes are inconsistent with the findings of the Walker report. I would like the Minister to address, in his reply to this debate why he made comments to the contrary in his agreement in principle speech. It is not acceptable that the Minister, firstly, does not have a good understanding of that major report; and, secondly, misrepresented its findings, especially in relation to this bill when the statements put on the record by Commissioner Walker are exactly the opposite of what is proposed by the bill.

On this side of the House we are concerned about what the bill will mean for best practice measures in service standards, professional standards, benchmarking, and all the other things that are an intrinsic part of a State-owned corporation's viability and part of its ongoing mantra and corporate governance structures but which will fall by the wayside under the statutory authority model. The State Government failed to ensure that those benchmarks were in place for the Sydney Ferries Corporation and RailCorp, and services have deteriorated, not improved. The flimsy excuse that it will give the Government more control over transport is misleading. In fact, the opposite is happening in other States of Australia.

If we look north of the border to Queensland we can see that it is going great guns in public transport delivery. In 2007 Queensland Rail became a government-owned corporation, and is now registered as a public company called Queensland Rail Ltd. Queensland has built a lot of infrastructure, has provided additional transport services, has a smart card—which we do not—and is moving towards corporatisation. Most jurisdictions around Australia and the world use the corporatisation model as an effective way of delivering services. Yet in New South Wales we are going backwards.

The Premier and the Minister for Transport have not stated adequately what the implications of the change in corporate governance will be for other transport agencies. One concern raised on this side of the House is the lack of coordination and accountability between transport agencies. A prime example of that is highlighted on the front page of today's *Sydney Morning Herald*, which carries a story about how failures in the Transport Infrastructure Development Corporation and RailCorp caused two major safety bungles in relation to the Clearways project that could have put lives at risk. Regrettably, that front-page article is an example of the almost daily reports of the problematic relationship that exists within State Government agencies and in the lines of accountability. One former chief executive officer of a transport agency—whom I will not name—told me that while they were head of the agency the lines of accountability were so blurred they were not sure who they should report to.

What implications does decorporatisation have for the Transport Infrastructure Development Corporation? What impact will it have on the Rail Infrastructure Corporation? What impact will it have on the Public Transport Ticketing Corporation? The Government has said, "We are decorporatising the Sydney Ferries Corporation and RailCorp", but it has made no comment about all the other transport agencies. That is inconsistent. It reveals a failing on the part of the Government to look at the situation in a holistic way and to understand the need for better transport service integration. The bill further complicates the messy corporate structure of the public transport system in New South Wales.

In February this year the Coalition released a discussion paper entitled "Towards One Network", which goes to the heart of the concerns expressed by the community about the lack of integration, the lack of consistency in corporate structures, the lack of planning provisions, and the lack of foresight regarding possible crises. The Government has failed to acknowledge the statements made in that discussion paper. The Coalition believes there should be one transport coordination body and that each mode of transport should be run as a corporate entity to provide efficient services, which are measured against benchmarks. The Government has failed to implement benchmarks in the four years since it established the Sydney Ferries Corporation and formed RailCorp—a failing that goes to the heart of the Government's incompetence.

How can a State-owned corporation be established and then have only draft agreements in place after four years? No-one in the organisations knows to whom they are accountable, and there are no benchmarks to be measured against. What does that mean for the commuter? It means that they have no recourse when services get worse. What does it mean for the taxpayer? It means that millions of dollars are going down the drain in dysfunctional organisations that do not know where they are heading because the Government has not had the guts, the inclination or the ability to sit down and ratify a draft agreement! That is a huge failing on the part of the Government in relation to transport services, and has played a large part in the mess we are in.

What do we get instead of solid reforms? What do we get instead of establishing benchmarks and making the Government accountable? We get a bill that wants to change the corporate structure of two out of the 11 existing transport agencies. Decorporatising Sydney Ferries Corporations is the opposite of what Mr Walker recommended—contrary to the assertions of the Minister in his agreement in principle speech. Decorporatising RailCorp is an admission of the failure of the Government's wide-scale reform programs. The Government has spent millions and millions of dollars on the sector rotation plans for rail, which have now fallen by the wayside. The bill—apart from highlighting the incompetence of the State Government when it comes to public transport and highlighting the fact that it puts spin over substance any day—is an admission that the Government has failed to make the necessary reforms.

The Government is trying to run the transport agencies via a crisis management approach between now and 2011. The Minister for Transport has difficulty coping with his portfolio. I shudder to think what he will do when the entities are decorporatised. Regrettably, during estimates committee hearings the Minister did not know how long it would take to implement integrated ticketing—he obviously has not read the report of the Walker inquiry. It concerns me that the Minister's rationale for introducing the bill is, at best, flimsy and illogical. For those and other reasons the Opposition does not support the bill. Rail corporatisation has existed in New South Wales since 1977 in the form of the Rail Access Corporation and Rail Infrastructure Corporation, which were both State-owned corporations. In 1999 there was a Rail Infrastructure Corporation. From 2004 there was RailCorp. The Government is taking a huge backward step, and it will mean less accountability, fewer benchmarks, fewer performance measures, less transparency and ultimately more angst for commuters and taxpayers. I reiterate that the Opposition will not support the bill.

I urge members opposite to read both the agreement in principle speech of the Minister and the report of Mr Walker. Mr Walker was appointed, and asked to provide a report, by Mr John Watkins, the former Minister for Transport. The bill does the opposite of what Mr Walker recommended—even though the Minister alleges otherwise. Mr Walker said—his comments are in black and white—that it is a bad move for taxpayers and for commuters to revert Sydney Ferries Corporation to a statutory authority. He said there would be less accountability and less service standards delivery. Yet what does the Government do? It ignores the advice of Mr Walker in search of a quick political win. But there will be no political win because the people of New South Wales can see through this gimmick. The bill is an attempt to make it look as though the State Government is doing something in public transport. But it is nothing more than a gimmick, and should not be supported.

Mr GRANT McBRIDE (The Entrance) [10.48 p.m.]: Public transport is an important issue for every family on the Central Coast. The Transport Administration Amendment (Rail and Ferry Transport Authorities) Bill 2008 is about the Government regaining the ability to address proactively the problems in our public transport system. The provision of public transport services is a core responsibility of government. The people of New South Wales rely on these essential services to get to work and school, to access services, to visit family and friends—basically, to go wherever they need to go. They make about two million trips every day. Because these services, like health, are so important, our community expects its elected government to make sure they are delivered safely, reliably and efficiently. That is what this bill is about.

The people of New South Wales understand that this is the responsibility of the Minister for Transport of the day. It is breathtaking that the shadow transport spokesperson said the Opposition does not want the Minister for Transport to be responsible for the day-by-day administration and running of the transport systems in New South Wales. Given that we have an old freight rail network that also runs the passenger rail network, modernising it is difficult, demanding and not comparable to other States. It certainly is not comparable to the experience in other major world cities. It is important to understand the differences in how the systems run and perform, their design and in how they are used for commuters and freight rail.

The community rightly considers the delivery of these services to be the responsibility of the transport Minister—and they want it to be that way. Every day in all forms of the media the Minister is held responsible when anything happens to transport services. The bill provides that, for the first time, the Minister will have to accept that responsibility because it will fall squarely on his shoulders. Under the current governance model the Minister for Transport is constrained in his ability to make sure that the delivery of rail and ferry services responds to passenger needs and meets community expectations.

As State-owned corporations, Sydney Ferries and RailCorp are governed by an independent board, and when service delivery is not up to scratch the portfolio Minister must issue formal directions to achieve change. As Bret Walker, SC, noted in his report following the Special Commission of Inquiry into Sydney Ferries that this process can be cumbersome and time consuming, and needs to be changed. We are trying to get the system to deliver quickly in response to new issues. The transport Minister needs greater powers to ensure that the needs of passengers are being met. This bill provides the Minister of the day with the powers required to take decisive action if the delivery of rail and ferry services is not meeting the expectation of passengers and the Government.

Based on governance arrangements that apply to the State Transit Authority under the transport administration Act, the bill gives the Minister power to appoint and remove the chief executive officers and board members of RailCorp and Sydney Ferries. Those agencies will be required to comply with written directions from the Minister in relation to the exercise of their functions; supply the Minister with information relating to their activities and general conduct; prepare a draft corporate plan for ministerial approval and

operate in accordance with that corporate plan; and seek approval from the Minister on the sale, lease or disposal of land or other assets. If I repeat those requirements perhaps the shadow Minister will appreciate and understand that this legislation is the opposite of what she says it is. The bill puts the responsibility of running the network squarely on the shoulders of the Minister.

I repeat: The agencies must comply with written directions from the Minister in relation to the exercise of their functions, which means the Minister takes a hands-on approach to running the organisations; supply the Minister with information relating to their activities and general conduct; prepare a draft corporate plan for ministerial approval and operate in accordance with that corporate plan; and seek approval from the Minister on the sale, lease or disposal of land or other assets. Clearly, this legislation is taking responsibility from the bureaucrats and returning it directly to the Minister. It is disappointing, if not surprising, that some members opposite have chosen to take cheap shots at the Government's decision to regain control of the provision of these essential public services. Some members sitting opposite may not recall the time when a State-owned corporation ran Sydney Water and we had problems with giardia—and what was the other one?

Mr Mike Baird: Cryptosporidium.

Mr GRANT McBRIDE: Good on you; you pass the test. For three hours that issue remained the responsibility of the corporation.

Mr Mike Baird: It was David Hill.

Mr GRANT McBRIDE: It is good that the member for Manly knows about it; he will be able to verify everything I say. Within six hours the problem became the responsibility of the Minister, and within 12 hours it was the responsibility of the Premier. When a system fails a State-owned corporation model is not able to respond quickly. It becomes an issue of government—an issue for the Minister and an issue for the Premier.

Mr Mike Baird: How is that different now?

Mr GRANT McBRIDE: It is different because under this legislation we will return the model to the Minister, who will be directly responsible from time zero. Nick Greiner, one of the icons of the Liberal Party, introduced the senior executive service system, thus taking direct responsibility away from Ministers and transferring it to corporations and directors. This was the model that supposedly worked in the private sector. We all know today how well it works: the world economy is collapsing. Nick Greiner removed the power of Ministers to have direct and forthright control of their ministries. The Minister for Health is, and always has been, responsible for health services. However, because other government organisations were income-earning businesses it was considered that the responsibility would be handled better through a private sector business model. The private sector business model does not work. This bill will return portfolio responsibility—correctly—to the respective Minister.

In 2003 when the legislation that created RailCorp and Sydney Ferries as State-owned corporations was introduced, the aim was to improve management, increase accountability and lift performance in a financially responsible manner. The State-owned corporations model, which worked so well for other areas of government-owned services such as the utilities and ports sectors, showed promise as a governance model for Sydney Ferries and RailCorp. Establishing Sydney Ferries as a separate corporation was recommended as part of the Ministerial Inquiry into Sustainable Transport in New South Wales, which was conducted by the then head of the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal, the highly respected Dr Tom Parry.

The Opposition opposed the corporatisation of Sydney Ferries at that time because of concerns raised by the Charter Vessels Association. The then Minister addressed those concerns through the creation of the Working Group on Competitive Neutrality. The Opposition supported the corporatisation of RailCorp, although it criticised the limited powers of the Minister to direct RailCorp in the delivery of its functions. However, the State-owned corporations model has not worked as the Government and the Parliament intended. Accordingly, the Premier and the Minister for Transport are taking decisive action to make the necessary changes, which should be supported unanimously by this House, and not opposed in an attempt to score political points.

As the shadow Minister indicated, the bill is about delivering the best service to our rail and ferry commuters. It is disappointing also—although, again, not surprising—that the Opposition has tried to paint the Government's decision to restore accountability for the provision of rail services as being about handing control to the union. It is not. RailCorp and Sydney Ferries have been put on notice to lift their game. The Government

has announced already a market-testing process to compare Sydney Ferries with the private sector. The Premier has given RailCorp until 31 March 2009 to sort out rail maintenance and improve service reliability.

The bill also amends the Passenger Transport Act so that passenger rail and ferry services will be provided under modern and effective service contracts with the Ministry of Transport. This builds on the successful contract model for bus services. These contracts will set out clearly the services the Government wishes to purchase on behalf of the community and the standards of performance required from rail and ferry operators, ensuring that services are delivered in keeping with passengers' expectations. The new contracting regime will ensure a further level of accountability in the provision of rail and ferry services, ensuring effective oversight of the day-to-day management of the delivery of those services.

This complements the strategic powers of direction and control that the bill provides to the Minister for Transport. It is an act of hypocrisy for the shadow Minister for Transport and Opposition members to say that we should adopt the State-owned corporations model. Every day during Question Time in this House the Opposition asks repeatedly, "Why didn't the Minister do that?" or says, "The Minister is responsible, not the organisation."

Ms Gladys Berejiklian: He is.

Mr GRANT McBRIDE: He will be totally responsible. That is the aim of the bill. Opposition members want the Minister to be responsible when it suits them to say so in Parliament, but when that provision is inserted in legislation they say that do not want it. That proves the hypocrisy of their position. If they were fair dinkum, the shadow Minister for Transport would not ask those questions of the Minister. The shadow Minister, the member for Willoughby, is a very good performer. I think she will get there before the member for Manly. She is showing a lot of style and form. She is looking good; one out, one back, as they say in the racing industry. She is looking very strong. It is good to see a bit of competition there because, as we all know, there is nothing happening at the top. This legislation is about improving accountability. I know Opposition members disagree; they have to. But in reality they do not disagree, as shown by their actions in this House day after day when they repeatedly state that the Minister is responsible.

My constituents look to the Government to get on with the job of fixing the problems with rail and ferry services, as it has addressed the problems with bus services. In my electorate there have been major changes to the bus services, in response to the Unsworth report, and bus services have improved. The Government is following that model and it has worked. We have done it in one area of transport, despite what the shadow Minister said earlier. We are not instigating a model that has not been trialled. It has been trialled and run around the block on the Central Coast, in western Sydney, on the peninsula—as I think members from that area like to call it—and in other areas of Sydney. I wholeheartedly support the bill and I commend Premier Nathan Rees and the Minister for Transport, the Hon. David Campbell, for being so proactive in tackling the issues that have held back improvements to rail and ferry services in New South Wales.

Mr MICHAEL RICHARDSON (Castle Hill) [11.02 a.m.]: If the member for The Entrance were speaking in 2002 to the bill that corporatised the ferries and railways he would have said almost exactly the same as he has said today about the Transport Administration Amendment (Rail and Ferry Transport Authorities) Bill. He would have said how wonderful it was, that it would result in an improved and superior system, and that there would be more control and a greater degree of independence in decision-making. He would have said all those things. The member said that we are going back to the model.

Mr Grant McBride: Point of order: I am being publicly verbally. I have always been opposed to it and have taken the view that public services should be in public hands and that the Minister should be accountable.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! That is not a point of order.

Mr Grant McBride: The member for Castle Hill is verballing me and I need to correct the record.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! The member for The Entrance will resume his seat. That is not a point of order. I will listen carefully to the member for Castle Hill as he continues his speech.

Mr MICHAEL RICHARDSON: The member for The Entrance said that we are going back to the model, but really we are going back to the future. This is another example of mistake after mistake after mistake

that the Government has made for 13 long years, particularly in the area of transport where things have gone from bad to worse, but also in every other area of government endeavour—hospitals, schools, transport, the environment. The bill restructures both RailCorp and Sydney Ferries, but I particularly want to address the issue of RailCorp because there are no ferries in my electorate of Castle Hill. Rail Corporation New South Wales is the entity formed by the merger of the State Rail Authority New South Wales and the metropolitan functions of the Rail Infrastructure Corporation. RailCorp was established as a corporation on 1 January 2004 by this Government. In 2004, then Parliamentary Secretary Joe Tripodi said this about the restructuring:

The new entity, to be known as RailCorp NSW, will be a non-dividend paying statutory State-owned corporation, created under the State Owned Corporations Act 1989, or the SOC Act. A statutory State-owned corporation will deliver improved management—

That is the sort of thing the member for The Entrance was talking about—

and the merger will provide single-point accountability for the metropolitan rail network. Experience with vertical separation of agency both in New South Wales and internationally is that the splitting of functions across separate organisations reduces communication, spreads scarce technical expertise and leads to ambiguity in accountability and responsibilities.

He went on to say:

The hallmark of the new entity will be the development of a stronger safety culture and a commitment to excellent customer service.

What has that restructure done for New South Wales? Absolutely nothing. We still have one of the most inefficient, badly run train services in the world. We have a ferry service that is in drastic need of an overhaul—but not to the extent that the Government wants to overhaul it, which is to do away with it. My electorate has some experience of that. The Northern Line is the closest rail line to my electorate. I will not say that it services my electorate. Many of my constituents drive to stations on the Northern Line. The Northern Line trains run late 75 per cent of the time. That was exposed during the by-election in Ryde on 18 October when the people of Ryde voted on the Government's running of the rail system and delivered a resounding verdict.

In my electorate we have 200 metres of railway line. I inherited it from the member for Epping at the last election. That 200 metres of railway line comes with a railway station at Carlingford, but it does not come with a lot of trains. We have only one direct service to the city a day and none returning. As I have said previously, it is a Clayton's railway line: the railway line you have when you are not having a railway line. To add insult to injury, the Government not only abandoned its promise to build the Parramatta to Epping link and cut the guts out of the train system, but on 1 July this year it cut the shuttle service that runs between Carlingford and Ryde from four to three cars. I wonder what it will get down to—perhaps a minibus. The new Minister for Transport, the member for Keira, has said:

Transport is also an essential public service. It plays a vital role in the social and economic wellbeing of a community and we need a governance structure that works. We need a transport agency that can effectively run safe and reliable services that the people of New South Wales expect and most importantly deserve.

We would all agree with that. But who has been in Government for the past 13 years? Why has the Government not delivered those safe and reliable services over that period? Why are rail and ferry services in this city so poor? How will dismantling RailCorp and handing control to the Minister help that situation? In four years time, I venture to suggest—if, heaven forbid, this Government is still in power—the Government would probably be inclined to create a new RailCorp. It could do this ad infinitum. Forever and a day every four years the Government could restructure. It will have RailCorp, then it will go back to the future, then it will go back to RailCorp. That constant cycle of restructuring does nothing for service delivery. The Government does not seem to be committed to delivering better services to the people of New South Wales.

The original bill also created the Transport Infrastructure Development Corporation. This is the organisation that is giving us a new line on a map every couple of weeks, without delivering so much as a sleeper. Lest members disbelieve me, the saga of the North West Rail Link is worth repeating briefly. In 1998 the Government in its Action for Transport Plan, which was released just three months before the 1999 general election, promised to build a rail line to Castle Hill with a possible extension to Rouse Hill. At that time I described the promise of a rail line as an election stunt. Sure enough, that is what it turned out to be. Within a short period my constituents had come to regard the North West Rail Link as a ghost train. That is exactly what it is.

In March 2002 the Government committed to the extension to Rouse Hill, but scrapped the start and completion dates for the rail link. In August 2003 the Government set a corridor aside, but in November 2003

the then Minister for Transport, Carl Scully, talked about redeveloping areas around stations to pay for the line. The Government had no idea whatsoever how it was going to pay for it. In January 2004 Mr Scully said that the Government's position for the foreseeable future for north-west Sydney is buses—and this is only two months later.

In October 2004 Bob Carr said that rail is not a viable option for north-west Sydney in the short term. But in May 2005 the Government said that it was considering a new route for the line and also revealed that it was looking closely at private funding. In September 2005 the Government scrapped the Parramatta to Epping rail link—another blow to the people of north-west Sydney. In November 2005 the Government said it would only build the North West Rail Link after a line to Bringelly and another tunnel under the harbour had been completed.

In June 2006 Bob Carr announced the line shortly before he resigned, but the completion date was put back from 2015 to 2017. In November 2006 Morris Iemma said he would bring forward the delivery of the North West Rail Link to 2015 and increase public transport options for this growing region. In June 2007 a preferred project report was released without money or a start date. The report stated, "Specific funding arrangements have not been finalised"—that has always been the rub: the Government never had any money to pay for this—and talked about the use of developer levies or value capture options.

In September 2007 the then Treasurer, Michael Costa, revealed that the North West Rail Link was likely to be scrapped. However, the then Deputy Premier, John Watkins, said, "You have the Premier and the Deputy Premier guaranteeing the North West Rail Link will be built." Of course, the then Premier, Deputy Premier and Treasurer are no longer in the Government so it is a whole new ball game. At the end of 2007 Morris Iemma talked about what he was going to do with the proceeds of the power sale—not that he had got the legislation through at that stage, and of course we all know what happened to that—but there was no mention of the North West Rail Link being one of the projects he wanted to fund through the sale of the generators.

On 18 March 2008 Morris Iemma announced that a heavy rail link had been scrapped and would be replaced with a \$12 billion metro line from St James to Rouse Hill. Nobody believed that either. On 15 May 2008 John Watkins announced that the Government would appoint a shadow operator for the North West Metro Link. So we ended up with a shadow operator for a ghost train, and that is all we ever had in north-west Sydney. On 3 June 2008 Michael Costa introduced the budget and said that the North West Metro Link was fully funded without having to sell off the electricity industry, but ominously there was a footnote under the entry in Budget Paper No. 4 that read, "Arrangements for the construction of the North West Metro are still to be finalised."

In August 2008 the then Minister for Transport, John Watkins, said, "The North West Metro is the solution for Sydney and the solution for our future." But we know that later that month Labor failed to pass the electricity privatisation bill through the Legislative Council; the Labor Party went into meltdown; and Iemma, Watkins, Costa and Meagher departed. On 7 October 2008 a story appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* suggesting there would be no Federal funding for the North West Metro because there were no votes in it for Labor. It does not matter that it was going to service a very important part of Sydney and people who are the most car-dependent; there were no votes in it for Labor.

Finally, last Friday, the Premier announced the indefinite deferral of the North West Metro and its replacement by an inner-city metro. We had the spectacle of the Minister for Transport standing in the House on Tuesday—the greatest example of sophistry that I have ever seen in this place—trying to explain how the proposed new metro to Rozelle was going to be good for the people of the Hills district. If you believed that, you would be so one-eyed Labor you would have been a card-carrying member for the last 50 years! Incredibly, this bill does not privatise maintenance, despite the fact that the system we have is extraordinarily unreliable. Perhaps that is the reason why the Government does not want to proceed to build new lines. Two trains a day break down and the Government is happy to leave maintenance in the hands of the rail unions.

The Minister for Transport said that the Government has put the unions on notice that they must lift their game or face outsourcing and private sector competition. But what more evidence does he need of two trains breaking down every day than the spectacle of commuters walking the Sydney Harbour Bridge tracks in high heels because their train had broken down. Instead of a maintenance culture this bill delivers contracts that clearly stipulate what is expected of the rail and ferry authorities in relation to service levels. I reckon the rail and ferry employees probably know what is expected of them, but the lack of not just a maintenance culture but a service culture within RailCorp has meant substandard services across the board. RailCorp has had a culture of

corruption, as shown by the recent Independent Commission Against Corruption inquiry, which I am sure is what has prompted the restructuring of the organisation. We have seen headline after headline on that issue. So much for the commitment to excellent customer service: it just does not exist, and, indeed, has never existed.

The Minister for Transport also spoke about integrated ticketing—just another one of his jokes. He has been talking about integrated ticketing longer than he has been talking about the North West Rail Link, and we still have nothing to show for it. This Government cannot deliver on any public transport issues. It cannot make the trains that it has got run on time and it certainly cannot improve them. And the same thing is true for the ferries. This bill is a farce. If members think I am being unduly critical about this, let me just quote from the *Sydney Morning Herald* editorial on 22 October:

Nathan Rees's red-hot go is cooling fast, if the measures he announced this week to shake up two central elements of Sydney's public transport are a sign of what is to come. They amount to little more than studied prevarication ... the Premier has admitted it is riddled with archaic workplace rules which cripple its ability to maintain rolling stock and infrastructure. But it, too, is to get a last chance.

As with other government enterprises, the two organisations—

that is, Sydney Ferries and RailCorp—

have suffered under Labor from the unions' ability to undermine management by negotiating directly through factional channels with the minister. Before yesterday, Sydney Ferries was an independent corporation yet, as Mr Walker found, that was no defence against ministerial meddling. Yesterday's announcement has removed even that pretence at independent management. The minister is back in charge. The arm-twisting can be direct and unencumbered. Mr Rees has clearly delivered his union allies what they want. In return, what has the public gained?

Voters' impatience with Labor is obvious, and so is the reason: its inability to make a difference anywhere that matters. Perhaps Mr Rees would like to do better, but on the evidence so far he can't. NSW must await a change of government before progress can be made towards efficient public transport - or anything else.

That is not me saying that; it is the *Sydney Morning Herald*—the oldest paper in this city—and that is its considered opinion; that is its verdict on this Government and on the Government's administration of public transport in this city. I do not have any confidence in the Government's restructuring, just as I have no confidence in the way in which the Government is running this State. Personally, I do not think this bill will make the slightest improvement to the current situation, and indeed I think it could make things much worse by delivering more power to the unions. If this Government remains in power I do not think that in my time here I would see even the first sleeper being laid on the North West Rail Link.

Mr ALLAN SHEARAN (Londonderry) [11.17 a.m.]: The Transport Administration Amendment (Rail and Ferry Transport Authorities) Bill 2008 is about restoring accountability to the provision of rail and ferry services in New South Wales to ensure commuters get the service outcomes they expect. Taxpayers, quite rightly, hold the Minister for Transport of the day accountable for the public transport services funded by government. However, in the case of RailCorp and Sydney Ferries, the Minister currently has no direct control over the way services are provided.

As State-owned corporations, the portfolio Minister is constrained by the level of control he has over how RailCorp and Sydney Ferries are run. Unfortunately, commercial incentives do not always guarantee that services are responsive to customer needs. And, as noted in the report of the Walker inquiry, the process of the portfolio Minister issuing a formal direction to a State-owned corporation can be cumbersome and time-consuming. This just does not work in the public transport environment, where the Minister needs to be able to act quickly to ensure the needs of commuters are being met. This Government does not shirk its responsibilities. People expect us to act quickly when a need for a new service arises or when a problem arises on the network that needs to be fixed straight away. This bill will allow us to do that.

Government-owned public transport organisations deliver essential services to the public to help people get to work, schools, hospitals, shopping centres, or wherever they need to go. When they were originally corporatised, it was thought that imposing strict commercial incentives on RailCorp and Sydney Ferries would drive management to deliver efficiency improvements that would ultimately benefit passengers. Corporatising ferries was a recommendation of the Ministerial Inquiry into Sustainable Transport in New South Wales, conducted by the former head of the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal, Dr Tom Parry.

It is clear now that this is not the right governance model. For public transport, the focus needs to be on service delivery, recognising that public transport will always require a high level of taxpayer subsidies. The Government has recognised that this is a shortcoming of the current arrangements and this bill will fix that. Any

notion that these changes place more control in the hands of the unions is simply wrong. The changes give control to the people who should have it—the passengers. If passengers have a problem with the system, they make it known to the Minister for Transport, who is accountable for the delivery of the services and who will, with this bill, have the necessary levers to fix things. If the problem is not fixed to passengers' satisfaction, they can express their displeasure through the ballot box. That is democracy in action. The Government is not afraid of this responsibility. The question is, is the Opposition?

If members opposite think that they will be sitting on this side of the House after the next election, they should have no problem in passing this bill. This bill presents the Opposition with the opportunity to put up or shut up. They have the opportunity to demonstrate that we are not talking about politics but about enabling the Minister of the day to provide responsible and effective administration of services. I remind members opposite that the Walker inquiry stated that having the Minister issue a formal direction to a State-owned corporation could be cumbersome and time consuming. In other words, the Opposition has a chance to prove that it is serious about improving network efficiency. This bill provides the Government of the day with the power and responsibility it needs to be responsive to the needs of the travelling public. That is how it should be.

This bill will see RailCorp and Sydney Ferries placed under the same governance arrangements as the State Transit Authority. One need look only at the growth in patronage on Sydney Buses over the past few years to see that commuters are voting with their feet. The State Transit Authority is delivering the service outcomes that passengers want. In addition to changing the structure of RailCorp and Sydney Ferries, this bill will enable the Government to enter into modern and effective service contracts with the operators to ensure services are delivered and customers' expectations are met. Similar contractual arrangements are clearly working in the delivery of bus services. Patronage has grown across the network, not only on contracted services provided by the State Transit Authority but also on contracted services provided by private bus operators throughout Sydney.

The Special Commission of Inquiry into Sydney Ferries highlighted the need for public transport services to be delivered under strong and effective service contracts that provide incentives for patronage growth and service improvements. This bill creates a new service contract regime for rail under the Passenger Transport Act and addresses the current problems with the existing ferry contracting regime under that Act. These problems were clearly highlighted by Mr Bret Walker, SC, in his report. In responding to Mr Walker's inquiry, the Government has put Sydney Ferries on notice. Processes will shortly begin to invite private operators to show that they can deliver ferry services better than Sydney Ferries. If they can, they will be awarded the new service contract. If they cannot then Sydney Ferries will be awarded the new service contract. This market-testing process will ensure that we have the world's best practice ferry operation that Sydney deserves. However, none of this can be achieved without this bill. An effective service contract lies at the heart of the ferry reform process, and that is what this bill provides.

Importantly, the rights of existing private ferry operators who hold contracts under the Act will be affected. These operators are a small but vital part of the public transport network, particularly those providing services to communities that are difficult to reach by land-based transport. The bill allows these operators either to stick with their current contract or to work with government in moving to a new contract under the new regime. The challenge confronting the Opposition is to be fair dinkum and support this bill. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr ROB STOKES (Pittwater) [11.26 a.m.]: I oppose the Transport Administration Amendment (Rail and Ferry Transport Authorities) Bill 2008, the essential provisions of which are to change RailCorp New South Wales and Sydney Ferries from state-owned corporations to statutory corporations. The Government admits that this bill is all about bringing to an end a failed experiment with corporatisation. What it has not admitted is that the experiment, and the failure, is all of its own making. Sydney Ferries was corporatised by this Government in 2004 and RailCorp underwent similar changes in 2003-04.

We should not be misled for a moment that corporatisation itself is a recipe for failure, or the reason for failure. Corporatisation is just one category or type of management regime. It would be wrong to say the structure of management is itself a failure. It is the management itself that has brought about such waste, mismanagement and atrophy in our rail and ferry network. Corporatisation itself, like any management structure, will not work without the will, vision and discipline to make it work. There is no point in having a business model if one refuses to run an entity like a business. There is no point in having power to set performance benchmarks, standards and discipline if they are not going to be used or enforced.

Reorganising a business structure can be important. Continual change can develop continual improvement, invigoration and renewal. However, the challenge for the Government is not only to change the

structure, because a structure is just that—a framework to deliver services and, indeed, improved services. Without the will to engage in the real business of transforming the delivery of rail and ferry services, no structure will work, and changing the structure of service delivery with this bill is akin to moving deckchairs on a sinking ship.

Pittwater has two local ferry services that provide excellent transport to offshore communities, and they do not require structural reform to deliver excellent services. The Church Point ferry service has been in operation since the 1940s and today it is owned and operated by local couple Penny Gleen and Simon Wastell, who employ many local people who understand and love the area they serve. Matt Lloyd and the team at the Palm Beach ferry service operate two regular passenger services between the Central Coast and Palm Beach and the western foreshore of Pittwater, including the unique, beautiful and threatened Currawong site. The Palm Beach to Central Coast service provides an important lifeline for commuters from the Central Coast, including the many school students from that area who attend the excellent Barrenjoey High School on the peninsula.

These services run well, provide local employment and add to the unique character of Pittwater. They are great local businesses, with enviable vessel reliability. They run to schedule and provide a cost-effective service. There have been no scandals with their operation and they have not been associated with serious accidents, malfunctions or corruption. So, to say that our state-run services have not worked because they have not been under the direct control of the State is a specious argument. Our state-run services have not been working effectively because they have not been effectively managed. Corporatised, privatised, state-run, whatever, no structure can work without the will and the discipline to make it work.

This is not something that legislation can achieve by itself. It needs hard work and tough decision-making, not mere structural tinkering. Structural change can bring about unintended consequences. The Minister in his agreement in principle speech did not address the question of how the industrial relations system under which transport workers operate might be affected. It would be useful for this House, not to mention the public transport workers whose livelihoods are affected by this bill, if the Minister in his reply could explain what effect this changed corporate structure will have in relation to exposing rail and ferry employees to the Rudd Governments' Federal industrial relations laws.

While the Public Sector Employment Legislation Amendment Act 2006 sought to transfer all existing public sector employees employed by statutory corporations to the employment of the New South Wales Government, this bill does not seem to address the employment situation of workers whose employer will no longer be a state-owned corporation but a statutory corporation, which could be characterised as a constitutional corporation, and hence covered by the WorkChoices legislation. This issue needs to be clarified in the interests of transport workers. Fundamentally, however, this bill glosses over the real issue. The Government is seeking to exculpate itself by blaming the failure of the system on the boards and bureaucrats it has appointed. However, without leadership, discipline and direction from the top, no matter what the structure, the decline of public transport will unfortunately continue.

Mr PAUL McLEAY (Heathcote) [11.29 a.m.]: The Transport Administration Amendment (Rail and Ferry Transport Authorities) Bill 2008 gives force to the Premier's decision to improve accountability and performance in the delivery of rail and ferry services. Public transport use has been growing much more quickly than planners anticipated. Jobs growth in the central business district, petrol prices and cost of living are all factors. Population growth and increasing urban congestion are also factors. Transport plans for Sydney were made for a city growing from 4.3 million people to 5.3 million by 2030. The Australian Bureau of Statistics now says Sydney's population will reach 5.3 million by 2020. That is 10 years earlier than previously expected. So, our rail and ferry services were not delivering for growth. The Premier has made it clear that is not good enough. The agencies that have been run at arm's length have not delivered, but the ones that have been more actively and directly managed have.

Bus reform has brought the historic mess of exclusive contracts into one coordinated planning and delivery process. For the first time we worked directly with communities to design routes and set services levels. The team in the Ministry of Transport—run by Jody Connor, a dedicated public servant, very hardworking and a very smart woman—has come to my electorate a number of times to participate in forums on bus reform and stakeholder and community engagement. It is a case of asking, not just the companies like Veolia, which provides a magnificent service and which proved to be flexible and was one of the first to sign the new sustainable bus contracts, but also its drivers and the residents and citizens, what they want. It was not a case of routes and timetables being designed by people with the perverse motivation of just getting to the minimum

service levels; it was a matter of asking people what they wanted and then being responsive and delivering the outcome the community desired. The new sustainable bus contracts are working in my area, zone 10, with the excellent partnership of Veolia, and people are responding in droves.

Jody and her team talked directly with residents to understand their transport needs. Clearly we cannot deliver everybody's wish list but those discussions helped the ministry to improve route planning to maximise use and patronage growth, and it helps it to understand whether local operators are performing. For 75 years we had one standard for public buses and a lesser standard for private buses, and one fare for public buses and then for people in my community a higher fare for private operators. Now we have consistent, standard fares. We have pensioner excursion tickets on the whole transport system. For the first time, residents of the shire can get one pensioner excursion ticket instead of buying one ticket for the train and then, perhaps, getting to the Bundeena ferry and buying another ticket. They now have one pensioner excursion ticket. It shows we can get it right if we toughen up standards and have clear performance contracts.

The first step for fixing ferries and rail will be to introduce clear and accountable service standards under a performance agreement that is actively monitored and managed. Some people have asked what good is a contract if it is not contestable? This misses the point. We need a service agreement so we can clearly see when performance is slipping—and then get involved to fix it. Rail is inherently monopolistic. The only thing worse for customers than a public monopoly is a private monopoly. Improvements do not come from threatening people with the sack, but rather through directly managing them to do better. The reality is that transport needs to be integrated to work properly. International experience suggests that it is very difficult to introduce contestability into rail.

The Opposition wants a transport coordination authority. This is essentially what the Ministry of Transport will do. If members know anything about the London model—and I recommend that people get over and experience it, and I may do so shortly—they will know it is based on bus contract reform and coordination, which we have done, and clear service level agreements with rail and river service providers. The real challenge in London is the same as it is here—population growth and urban congestion. New letterheads and a catchy second-hand moniker are not solutions. The Premier has outlined some of his thinking for Sydney. Firstly, to get more people on to public transport we need more trains. Already, 112 outer suburban carriages are being delivered and 626 new air-conditioned carriages are coming in 2010. We have re-engineered parts of the network under the clearways program so we can fit more trains on each line.

The next step is to create a new service out of latent infrastructure at Central station and a connection to the new central business district spine, which the Premier has asked Infrastructure Australia to fund. This is because most people want to go through Central station, not to it. Central and its approach tracks can handle more trains, but without good interchanging options crowds will clog up Town Hall and Wynyard and the trains will take so long to empty that fewer trains per hour will be able to get through these stations. That is why we need a new corridor under the city. That is what CBD Metro is for. As for the lemon squash coaster allegations made by the Leader of the Opposition, this alignment is not new. It was specifically protected under SEPP 63—the infrastructure SEPP—in 2005. The Premier is determined to get better transport outcomes. He is driving a better approach from the top and he wants the Minister and the department to drive that directly with transport operators. It is a better way of running public transport and it will deliver a better result for the public of New South Wales.

Mr MIKE BAIRD (Manly) [11.35 a.m.]: The Premier and the Minister for Transport argue that the Transport Administration Amendment (Rail and Ferry Transport Authorities) Bill 2008 is necessary to give the Government sufficient control over RailCorp and Sydney Ferries to produce results. In this instance we agree with the Government that it does not have public transport services under control, nor does it produce the results commuters want. But we can all see through the facade of this bill. It is an attempt to shift the blame across to a group of public servants who have been managing these facilities, in accordance with ministerial direction, for the past 13 or 14 years. That is the nub of this bill. Whatever way you cut it, it is time this Labor Government was accountable. Until it starts taking ownership for its actions, until it stops shifting blame on to other people, the State will not move forward.

Services are in disarray because Ministers are not accountable and systems are not in place to deliver value for New South Wales taxpayers. Bret Walker was appointed as an independent expert to oversee Sydney Ferries and to put together a framework that would deliver better ferry services for the people of New South Wales, a key plank of this bill and a key part of the public transport network. It will be 12 months tomorrow since the Walker report was provided to us, and the Government has just decided that it will look at Sydney

Ferries for another 12 months and then make a decision. Members on this side of the House agree with the bulk of Bret Walker's recommendations. Notwithstanding the delay in adopting his recommendations, he was scathing about the option of returning the ferries to direct government control as a statutory authority without an independent board. The member for Willoughby, the outstanding shadow transport Minister, has said the same thing. It is a fundamental point. The *Australian* of 22 October reported Mr Walker as saying:

Its key weakness as a model is that it supplies no more incentive for better governmental value for money than the present model, and may even reduce the present statutory pressure for efficiency.

So, it is not about the models; it is about Ministers taking responsibility for their actions and holding to account departments and services they are responsible for delivering—nothing more, nothing less. Since 2004 Sydney Ferries and the Ministry of Transport have been trying to negotiate a funding agreement and ongoing benchmarks. Some benchmarks are published by Sydney Ferries, but the critical funding agreements with the definitive performance benchmarks still are not. It is no wonder the service is failing. It is the Government's responsibility to ensure services are delivered, yet it has allowed Sydney Ferries to continue operating in exactly the same way without this critical agreement in place, when what is needed are some finalised performance benchmarks that are not just token—which pretty much the current ones are.

During the estimates hearing earlier this month it was unbelievable to hear that the Minister for Commerce and her director general did not know what measures were in place to ensure the Government's new call centre was producing results. They could not name any metrics, they could not name the performance benchmarks or tracking systems to establish whether this call centre was delivering for the people of New South Wales. It is that lack of understanding of the process, that lack of accountability and that failure to have performance measures in place that show the State is failing. It is particularly relevant to our public transport system and day in, day out commuters all over Sydney feel very let down by the Government. A couple of months ago a leading architect compared Sydney's public transport infrastructure with the infrastructure in major cities, such as New York, Paris and Barcelona. He said:

When you compare to other cities, Sydney has just built nothing. This study shows that the State Government has been asleep at the wheel.

While the population has increased—it has risen by almost 800,000 people since this Labor Government was elected in 1995—it has provided no improvement in transport infrastructure; just a stream of empty promises. It has failed to manage the existing services. On numerous occasions I have spoken about the management performance of Sydney Ferries. The Minister oversees Sydney Ferries, yet over a five-year period its revenue rose 14 per cent while, at the same time, its expenses increased 46 per cent. According to the annual report, in 2005-06 the labour costs of Sydney Ferries were \$1.2 million over budget, so expenses are rising at almost three times the rate revenue. That is not sustainable and money cannot be strategically applied for future vessels or for future improvement of public transport generally.

Both the Minister for Transport and the Premier seemed determined to stop the JetCat service. The Premier said that "the JetCats spend almost as much time off the water as they spend on the water", seeking to shift the blame on to someone else. The Government runs the ferry services and is responsible for maintaining them. The Government must take ownership of the problem yet the Premier uses that as a reason for removing them from service. The maintenance budget has also been slashed by 27 per cent over the past two years. It does not take Einstein to work out that if maintenance is reduced, reliability will plummet.

The Palm Beach ferry service, which is operated by Riverside Marine, has a record of 99 per cent reliability. It is one of the country's largest maritime companies. The company has said it can operate a fast ferry service to Manly that is more environmentally friendly, uses 30 per cent less fuel, is cheaper, will provide more capacity and will be at no cost to taxpayers. If the Premier comes down to Manly wharf at 7.20 a.m. on a weekday he will see from the length of the JetCat queues the demand for that service. The onus is on the Minister for Transport and the Premier to consider Riverside Marine's proposition. It is not about changing structures or passing the buck. It is accepting that the service is unreliable but an alternative proposition has been put to provide a service that Manly commuters would be very proud of.

The Opposition opposes the bill. It is not necessary to force the Government to acknowledge its responsibility for public transport in New South Wales. It has been running ferries, buses and trains for 13 years and has no-one else to blame but itself for the appalling state of these services. We urge the Government to adopt the Coalition's integrated transport plan, which was released in February by the outstanding shadow

Minister for Transport, Gladys Berejiklian. We want to stop the Government's 10 separate transport agencies operating in isolation. Today we again debate rail and ferries—not buses. There is no integration; just bits and pieces. The Government should take a holistic approach to transport.

The Government should have integrated ticketing so commuters do not have to line up at three different booths on their journeys home; a system that coordinates both timetable and services and that provides seamless transport delivery in this State, something all commuters have been seeking. Other cities around the world, such as London, Vancouver, Zurich and even Perth, have a single transport authority and, as a result, have increased patronage. For the sake of commuters and every family in this State, it is time that this Government accepted its responsibility to deliver effective services and held its Ministers to account.

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

SMARTLINK TRANSPORT

Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO (Penrith—Parliamentary Secretary) [11.45 a.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) congratulates the Great Community Transport Inc. on the launch of its SmartLink transport project; and
- (2) acknowledges the cooperation and support of the Government in the development of the SmartLink transport project.

I proudly move the motion because Great Community Transport is an organisation that covers Penrith, Hawkesbury and Blue Mountains local government areas and has provided community-based transport over a number of years. The organisation is accredited with the New South Wales Department of Transport. This organisation relies on volunteers, supported by the coordinator of Great Community Transport, Ms Helen Walker. Her support and links with the community have allowed Great Community Transport to launch the SmartLink project.

The core values of Great Community Transport are community focus, commitment, respect, quality, empowerment and integrity in meeting the transport needs of Penrith, Hawkesbury and Blue Mountains communities. It also undertakes lobbying and advocacy. As well, it recruits, trains, coordinates and manages. In doing so, they meet the requirements of occupational health and safety and industrial relations laws. The group also fosters a culture of learning. It is within that culture of learning that over the years Helen Walker was able to get a group together to make the SmartLink project a reality.

When I first became a member of Parliament I met with Helen Walker and Great Community Transport. She had an idea, a vision and an incredible passion for the project. We worked through the project, decided what could be done, how it could be funded and the partnerships that could result. Helen ensured that there was always a focus on community. Community transport is vital in local areas, whether it is special care, small group transport, the volunteer visiting program, transport for individuals to shop, attend doctors or hospital—transport with flexible needs that require coordination and cooperation. SmartLink transport seeks to limit disadvantage by providing communication for people requiring transport to local hospitals, doctors, specialists, social functions and local shopping centres.

The SmartLink project would not have gone forward without the tireless work of Helen Walker and her committee. Helen has passion and dedication, and I speak on behalf of all the community when I express gratitude to her for her work. I acknowledge the people who have helped Helen with the SmartLink project. I acknowledge, chairperson, Greg Marshall; vice chairperson, Ann Murray, treasurer, John Marsh; and secretary, Roslyn Wells. Those people who knew Greg knew his passion for transport and community links for people with special needs. The volunteers are too numerous to mention. I have met many of them.

I congratulate Great Community Transport on its innovative SmartLink Transport Project. The project aims to become a demand-responsive transport system, and in the process to improve community transport for all users. It is about getting people to where they want to go, as close as possible to the time they want to travel, while at the same time making the most efficient use of the available vehicles and drivers. The SmartLink project works by creating a register of all available transport assets, and matching them up with demand. The project also tracks a pool of volunteer bus drivers who can be called upon to assist a group or individual in need of transportation. I also acknowledge David Denmark, who was part of the demand response team under Helen Walker.

David investigated the demand-responsive transport services operating internationally. Indeed, he visited my office and outlined the demand-responsive transport service that is operating in Northern Ireland. David addressed the distances that need to be travelled by people who live in the lower Blue Mountains, the upper Blue Mountains and Penrith. David then got together with Helen Walker and facilitated the SmartLink project, which provides innovative computer modelling to connect demand with project availability. The last time I met with Helen Walker she was proud to tell me that the spin-offs from the project have been wide-ranging. When the team was investigating how to get the computer program organised, including the housing of the technology, the Department of Commerce and the Ministry of Transport became involved, the local bus companies became involved, and private transport providers became involved. Discussions were also held with the area health system regarding patient transport.

One of the spin-offs from the project has been the collaboration between transport providers, including Westbus. Knowing that there is a skills shortage in driver training, Helen and her team addressed that issue and saw it as an opportunity. Indeed, Helen and her Great Community Transport team, as part of the SmartLink project, got together with the local TAFE college and developed a course for volunteer drivers. The course has a particular emphasis on raising awareness of patient safety, and on occupational health and safety standards regarding patient transport. At least five of these TAFE courses have been run. Helen is proud of this, because the course provides valuable training for volunteer drivers. Helen has achieved great success through the implementation of the course. A number of the graduates have been picked up by Westbus to be paid drivers. So Helen is nurturing her volunteer drivers, undertaking the necessary training, and the drivers are being picked up by the industry because of the connections Helen has had with the SmartLink project.

The second part of the project is a web-based development that improves the coordinating capacity of the community transport services. Bookings are made by individuals via phone or the Internet, and the system automatically allocates a vehicle and a driver using a best-fit approach. The system looks at variables such as the size of the group, the length of the journey, and whether there are special requirements such as wheelchair accessibility. The system is dynamic, and it optimises each new request or cancelled booking and communicates those changes to the driver if the vehicle is already on the road. Members are also able to conduct an online search for available vehicles and request a volunteer driver through the website.

Essentially, Great Community Transport and its partners in the Ministry of Transport have created a system that is more responsive to the needs of people using community transport. A great benefit of the SmartLink Transport Project is the links that Great Community Transport has been able to form with the Ministry of Transport and also with the community. In 2007-08 the New South Wales Government committed more than \$840,000 in funding to Great Community Transport from the budgets of Home and Community Care, the Community Transport Program and the Area Assistance Scheme. The New South Wales Government recognises the vital role that community transport providers play in our communities. This year the Government will spend in excess of \$35 million statewide on community transport projects. I commend and congratulate Helen Walker on the SmartLink project, which is an innovative demand responsive transport system, and on the collaboration that occurs with the local community. I commend the motion to the House.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN (Willoughby) [11.55 a.m.]: I also acknowledge the efforts of Helen Walker in relation to community transport. Community transport is an important part of our public transport network. It provides important non-emergency services to members of the community who cannot travel by car or public transport. It fills an important void. All of us really appreciate the hardworking volunteers, organisers and employees of the community transport network—not just in Sydney but especially in regional, rural and remote parts of New South Wales where public transport options are few and far between. Community transport fills that void and provides essential services.

Whilst acknowledging the comments made by the member for Penrith in relation to the community transport services in her electorate, I wish to address broader issues regarding community transport. It is concerning that whilst community transport plays a vital role in assisting people with transport issues, there has not been an increase in community transport funding since the 1998-99 budget, despite an increase in demand for community transport. As I am sure the member for Hornsby, who is in the Chamber, would agree, as we see an ageing population and as health services become more and more centralised, it means that people have more difficulty accessing those services. People have more difficulty accessing social activities because they are isolated in their homes. People also have more difficulty getting to important appointments when there are no public transport options and they do not have mobility or the ability to drive a car.

I am aware that the community transport organisations that are separate entities within the various cities and suburbs across New South Wales, together with their peak industry bodies, have met with the various

Ministers in the Labor Government. They have also made a number of requests to the Director General of the Ministry of Transport with regard to funding issues. Regrettably, however, they have received no response regarding their requests. This is a sad state of affairs given that the demand for community transport services is increasing yet the Government's response has been a deafening silence.

There is an inequity in funding for community transport providers across New South Wales. Many providers do not receive adequate recurrent funding. Indeed, many providers raise their own capital funding if they need a new bus or other necessary assets. In my job as the shadow Minister for Transport I have had the absolute privilege of visiting many community transport organisations throughout New South Wales. I have made a concerted effort to visit community transport organisations in rural and regional parts of the State, to get a deeper appreciation of their struggles.

What heartens me, no matter where I go, is the absolute dedication of the volunteers and the community transport coordinators. They do an outstanding job, and I would like to thank all of them. I know I speak on behalf of all members of this place when I acknowledge the fantastic contribution they make. Many of the volunteers are in their sixties or seventies themselves, and they give unstintingly of their time to support the concept of community transport. It is a shame that the Labor Party is letting them down by not providing increased funding for community transport over the last decade, despite numerous calls for such funding. The community transport lobby has been very reasonable in its requests.

I understand that one of the most recent requests sought a funding increase of 12 per cent through the Ministry of Transport, which equates to \$319,000. That is a lot of money, but in the context of a multi-billion dollar State budget it is a relatively modest increase that the lobby is seeking, given that community transport has not received any increases in funding over the last decade. It is concerning that there is debate amongst the community transport organisations about the need for better regulation of drivers to protect both drivers and those who use the service and to clarify everybody's responsibilities. The Government has not adequately addressed those issues.

A number of departments have a say in community transport. Home and Community Care [HACC], a program funded jointly by the Federal and State governments, provides \$30 million; and the Ministry of Transport provides \$3 million to fund non-health related community transport. Health-related community transport is additional to that. Many community transport volunteers and coordinators have indicated their concern that, depending on the needs of their clients, they must approach a number of different departments involved in providing community transport. These include the Disability Council of New South Wales, the Department of Health, and the Ministry of Transport.

As the shadow Minister for Transport, I regret to say that many community transport workers have highlighted to me that often staff in the Ministry of Transport do not treat sympathetically community transport volunteers and coordinators who work under difficult circumstances with limited resources. Those transport volunteers and coordinators are often forced to turn people away from a service because there is not enough money. That places a huge burden on families and people who would remain isolated but for the community transport service.

Notwithstanding those difficulties, I am pleased to report to the House that community transport groups provide approximately 680,000 health-related trips every year in New South Wales—which is about a third of all community transport services. Nearly two million community transport trips occur every year, which is an outstanding result. Most of these trips are conducted by volunteers, who are the backbone of the service. I again express our heartfelt gratitude to the volunteers who give unstintingly of their time to participate in this worthwhile program, even though resources are limited. Community transport groups estimate that every year they refuse about 90,000 requests for transport to health services alone—a difficult situation.

Regrettably, that problem will increase because of lack of funding, because of the ageing population and because the Government has centralised many health services in larger town centres. The centralisation of health services in larger town centres means that those in smaller townships face added difficulty. I visited the Central West recently, and I know that for many in rural and regional New South Wales access to dialysis treatment is a major concern. Many community transport volunteers must often drive for up to seven or eight hours to get people to important medical facilities. I acknowledge the wonderful work done by community transport organisations throughout New South Wales. The member for Penrith particularly noted the efforts of Helen Walker. I also acknowledge and thank the many volunteers and community transport operators I have had

the privilege of meeting. I have visited rural and regional towns such as Albury, Wagga Wagga, Parkes, Forbes, Orange and Port Macquarie to discuss community transport issues. I have also visited a number of community transport organisations, and I look forward to seeing more in the future.

I thank the community transport peak body. Recently I was pleased to attend the regional conference of that organisation in Orange, which was very interesting. Community transport coordinators from across New South Wales were in attendance. I heard firsthand the issues of the organisation and its aspirations for becoming stronger. The organisation makes each dollar go so far. It is not an understatement to say that a modest funding increase would go a long way towards helping those who are isolated, who need medical attention, or who are disabled, infirm or immobile to get to important appointments. The Government must turn its attention to this issue, given that funding has not been increased for more than a decade.

The 2003 Parry report acknowledged the unmet need for community transport services but the Government is yet to respond—and that was five years ago. The working party to establish accreditation for community transport drivers has stalled. Its last meeting was in October 2004 and there has been no word about it since. In 2007 the Community Transport Organisation, in conjunction with the New South Wales Cancer Council and the Council of Social Service of NSW, made a submission to the Ministry of Transport for a funding increase from \$3 million to \$10 million. But it has not received a response either. The Community Transport Organisation does a wonderful job but it is struggling with its funding. In light of the comments of the member for Penrith about her electorate, I urge the Government to increase community transport funding.

Mr ALLAN SHEARAN (Londonderry) [12.05 p.m.]: I support the motion of the member for Penrith that congratulates Great Community Transport Inc. on the launch of its SmartLink transport project. I acknowledge the cooperation and support of the Government in the development of that project. The member for Penrith made mention of Helen Walker. Helen should be congratulated, and all possible accolades should be conveyed to her for establishing Great Community Transport [GCT]. The service provides transport options in the Blue Mountains and Penrith local government areas for people who need to get to doctors appointments, shopping centres, hospitals and various other places that would not otherwise be easily accessible.

Great Community Transport also helps organise regular social activities, including shopping days, morning teas and general get-togethers. The value of the service cannot be underestimated as it provides transport options that would otherwise not be available for those who are often elderly, alone or disabled or who have difficulty travelling around the district. The SmartLink transport project is a demand-responsive public transport system that was trialled last year. It matches unused transport assets, such as buses, to community groups that require transportation. It has a phone or online booking system that matches transport requirements—such as the size of vehicle required, the destination, whether wheelchair access is required, and the availability of volunteer drivers—to the organisation or the individual making the booking. The home page of the Great Community Transport website states:

Great Community Transport Inc exists to look at areas of transport need and where appropriate provide flexible, special care transport assistance, within the available resources, for eligible "transport disadvantaged" residents of the Blue Mountains and Penrith Local Government Areas.

To provide those services, as I mentioned, the organisation has buses to take people shopping, to medical appointments—both local and out of area—to social and respite outings, and to a range of activities that the people of the Blue Mountains and Penrith local government areas would be lost without. Wheelchair access vans are available, and the service also has station wagons, small vans and volunteers to assist. It should be acknowledged that the volunteers in Australian communities provide a service that is somewhat unique compared with that offered overseas. In fact, many overseas communities are rather envious of our volunteer associations. For example, the Sydney Olympic Games was acknowledged as being one of the best Olympics ever largely because of the input of the volunteers.

As part of the SmartLink transport project, in the current financial year the Government has provided \$840,000 to Great Community Transport, which is made up of \$775,000 from Home and Community Care, \$36,000 from community transport programs and \$31,000 from the Area Assistance Scheme. The Government has recognised the importance of the community transport sector by spending in excess of \$35 million throughout the State on community transport. On a personal note, community transport services have given my elderly mother-in-law a new outlook on life. After her husband died, she was lonely and confined to her house. But volunteer associations such as Great Community Transport have enabled her to be free from constraints and to carry on a somewhat normal lifestyle.

Mr PHIL KOPERBERG (Blue Mountains—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.10 p.m.]: I support the motion moved by my colleague the member for Penrith. In so doing, I pay tribute to the people involved in community transport not only in the Blue Mountains electorate but throughout the State. Helen Walker, OAM, is responsible for the very fine work that is undertaken in Penrith and the Blue Mountains by Great Community Transport Inc. The organisation is the consequence of an amalgamation with a group that began operations in the Blue Mountains in about 1986. The group received funding for those operations.

A couple of years later the same needs were identified in the electorate of Penrith and, ultimately, an amalgamation took place. Helen Walker is worthy of the highest possible praise. She is the organiser and manager of Great Community Transport. She won the Woman of the West award in 2008 for her achievements in working to address and bring about public awareness of issues and causes important to the Western Sydney community. The Blue Mountains electorate is very proud of Helen's efforts, and particularly acknowledges her dedication to, and ceaseless passion for, the work that she and her team are committed to.

Community transport plays a vital role in communities such as the Blue Mountains. The Blue Mountains has peculiar needs. My electorate has a single service corridor, the Great Western Highway, from which jut spurs of development—mostly ridge-top developments—some of which go for quite a distance. People with disabilities, the elderly and the frail, or people for numerous other reasons have unique difficulties accessing transport in the area. Unlike urban city areas where, hopefully, people can take a short walk to a bus stop and hop on a bus, places like the Blue Mountains and Penrith do not have such facilities because of their topography and geography and the way they have developed over the years. It is vital that services such as community transport are provided. As the member for Willoughby pointed out, it behoves the Government to ensure adequate funding for these services, which otherwise would have to be provided within the public transport system.

The fabric of our society is dependent on the efforts of these volunteers and the many hundreds of thousands of other volunteers who fight fires, mitigate the effects of storms or floods, provide Meals on Wheels and so on. There can be no finer examples of volunteers than those involved in Great Community Transport. Their work is not without some risk and they realise the liabilities that are attached. It behoves the Government to ensure the welfare of the people who contribute towards these schemes and also to ensure that this vital service is funded in an appropriate manner. I am happy to advise the House, as previous speakers have said, that during 2007-08 some \$840,000 was provided for this purpose, with proposed funding in excess of \$35 million for community transport throughout New South Wales.

The member for Penrith and I, and other members, must ensure that our electorates get a reasonable share of the money because the work of these people is vital. We should never miss an opportunity to do two things. Rhetoric is important, but we must acknowledge the work that these people do and back it up with a tangible level of support. That is much more important than mere words. I am sure that the member for Penrith, who moved this motion, supports that contention wholeheartedly. I assure Great Community Transport and Helen Walker that we will remain passionate advocates of this service and do the best we can to secure the necessary funding.

Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO (Penrith—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.15 p.m.], in reply: I thank the member for Willoughby, the member for Londonderry and the member for Blue Mountains, who spoke to the motion. I particularly note the acknowledgement of volunteers by the member for Willoughby. Volunteers are a vital part of community transport schemes across New South Wales, particularly Great Community Transport Inc. A couple of weeks ago the Minister for Volunteering held his inaugural Volunteers Forum in the electorate of Penrith. Helen Walker attended the forum, as did many other volunteers from the electorate.

Volunteers provide a variety of specialised and important programs and services for people in New South Wales. These include community transport, home visitations, Red Cross programs, and giving manicures and pedicures to women with cancer. Volunteers do a wonderful job. The Minister for Volunteering was informed at the forum about issues affecting the volunteers' roles and responsibilities. As the member for Blue Mountains said with regard to Great Community Transport, of particular importance is the issue of liability and occupational health and safety for drivers of community transport.

As the member for Willoughby outlined, the Federal and State governments have cooperated in funding the SmartLink transport project. In 2007 then Federal Minister Helen Coonan attended the launch of the project to show the Federal Government's support for such an innovative project. Although the SmartLink transport project relates to demand-response transport, it might bring together all those agencies that provide funding for

community transport as outlined by the member for Willoughby—that is, health transport, shopping transport or short trips transport. The agencies may find that cooperation is a great way forward. The cooperation between the Federal and State governments on driver training is an example of how joint action is a step forward in providing important services to our communities.

The member for Londonderry gave a personal account of his mother-in-law's experience with community transport. As the member for Blue Mountains said, people who do not drive have difficulty accessing health treatment. Even though a medical facility may be just streets away, they do not have the capacity to attend an appointment or receive treatment. It is a matter of concern. That is where Great Community Transport steps in and does valuable work within our communities. I also acknowledge Helen Walker's Woman of the West award, for which I congratulated her at the time. She is one of the women of the west who show what innovation, cooperation, passion, vision and drive can do for a community when people come together—whether it is David Denmark, information technology specialists, people from the Ministry of Transport, or people from the Department of Commerce.

I acknowledge too the work of the Department of Commerce, which hosts the server for the SmartLink project computer program. Like the member for Blue Mountains, I recognise that the Blue Mountains—the lower mountains and the upper mountains—and Penrith have a unique geography and topography. Penrith extends over a wide area and the topography of the Blue Mountains is quite steep; villages across the mountains can be quite isolated. As the member for Willoughby outlined, a large proportion of community transport trips are in relation to health care, and Great Community Transport meets the needs of those isolated patients. I thank Helen Walker and all those involved with the SmartLink project.

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

Motion agreed to.

NEW LINE ROAD, CHERRYBROOK AND DURAL

Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [12.20 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that the New Line Road through Cherrybrook and Dural is a dangerous thoroughfare needing upgrades to improve traffic flow and safety;
- (2) notes that repeated requests made by the member for Hornsby to the Roads and Traffic Authority and Minister for Roads for advice on traffic counts and crash statistics have been ignored;
- (3) condemns the Minister for Roads for refusing to provide information since first requested in early August 2007 when this road continues to be a danger to drivers and pedestrians; and
- (4) condemns the Government and the Roads and Traffic Authority for readily giving a journalist at the Hornsby *Advocate* the same requested New Line Road statistics for a recent story.

I point out that it has taken one year for this motion to be debated, so I will be referring to the article that appeared in the Hornsby *Advocate* one year ago. New Line Road continues to be a nightmare for all who need to traverse that road to go to and from work or to appointments. Nothing has changed recently—although we may be a little wiser about some of the statistics. On 8 August 2007 I made an urgent request to the then Minister for Roads for traffic counts of vehicles using the road and for crash statistics, including fatalities. That request was ignored. On 28 September I sent a reminder to the then Minister for Roads asking again for that information. To my surprise, on 1 November 2007 an article appeared in the Hornsby *Advocate*, written by journalist Brett Cox. It was entitled "New pique hour" and discussed this section of road. The article stated:

It's a slow, frustrating drive to work for commuters travelling along New Line Rd at Dural and Cherrybrook. Negotiating double lane roundabouts is tricky enough, let alone in clogged-up traffic.

The article went on:

RTA figures provided to the *Advocate* indicate there have been 39 crashes resulting in 41 injuries and one death in the past three years.

Last year, there were 12 crashes that led to 12 injuries and one death. An RTA representative said the authority was "investigating future road improvements for New Line Rd from Purchase Rd, Cherrybrook to Quarry Rd, Dural".

The urgent question I had asked the Minister in August 2007 was answered in a journalist's article on 1 November 2007 without the local member, who was representing the many people who had expressed concern about the road, being informed. That is the genesis of this motion. The motion also stems from the fact that in the time I have represented this area—the boundary changes were formalised at the 2007 election—many, many people have complained to me that they have difficulty negotiating New Line Road. The boundary line between the Hornsby and Castle Hill electorates runs down New Line Road, and the member for Castle Hill today will support this motion.

There are many issues associated with the road. I draw the attention of the House to some of the correspondence that I have engaged in on behalf of residents who have written to me about this matter. Mr Keith Power, a resident of Dural, wrote to me concerning the section of New Line Road in his local area. I wrote to the Minister about the matters raised by Mr Power, and on 17 December 2007 the ministerial liaison officer in the Minister's office acknowledged my representation. His letter stated:

The Minister has arranged for the matters raised to be examined and a response will be provided as soon as possible.

In May this year, some five or six months later, I received a letter addressing Mr Power's concerns. It stated:

I am advised the Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) is currently considering future road improvements on New Line Road from Purchase Road, Cherrybrook to Quarry Road, Dural.

In the meantime, the NSW Government has provided significant transport projects in Sydney's North-West. As you would be aware, the RTA recently completed a major upgrade of Windsor Road to considerably increase traffic capacity in the region.

Even though that was a major move forward, that is small compensation for the people who live in and around New Line Road. The letter went on:

A comprehensive listing of public transport and road initiatives in the North-West region is summarised in the NSW Government brochure (Better Transport for the North-West, February 2007).

The letter then sets out the website address of the Roads and Traffic Authority. This is obviously a cop-out and the horror stories on that road will continue. Mr John Campo of Dural also wrote to me concerning traffic issues in the Hills district, and he mentioned New Line Road. The ministerial liaison officer acknowledged Mr Campo's letter on 5 November 2007 and an answer from the Minister was sent in July this year. Again, it took months and months to reply to correspondence from constituents. There are many other examples of delays such as that. The Round Corner Region Traffic Task Force was created in 2004 to address people's absolute frustration at the barriers they have confronted over a long period of time regarding traffic issues. Their many requests to have issues addressed in relation to not only New Line road but also Old Northern Road have fallen on deaf ears.

I commend John Leckie and many others in and around the Round Corner, Dural and Cherrybrook area who have joined concerned residents in trying over many years to get the Government to listen to their concerns about this area. I refer to a study undertaken by the Roads and Traffic Authority in conjunction with Baulkham Hills and Hornsby shire councils. They commissioned Gutteridge, Haskins and Davey to undertake a strategic route study on the development of Old Northern Road and New Line Road in Sydney's north-west. The final report of the study was entitled "Old Northern Road and New Line Road, Final Report—Strategic Route Development Study", dated November 1998. There are many recommendations about New Line Road in this very comprehensive document. However, they have obviously been ignored because nothing has happened. The Round Corner Region Traffic Task Force produced a report and submission entitled "Towards a Better Community—Traffic Action for the Round Corner Region", dated August 2004. The executive summary states:

Roads and traffic issues are a major concern for local residents and businesses in Round Corner and the surrounding rural-residential areas of the Hills district. Each of the area's main roads has problems including New Line, Old Northern and Kenthurst Roads.

It is a substantial submission and it provides a list of priorities, including:

New Line Road widening between Hastings Road and Sebastian Drive.

Sebastian Drive/New Line Road (roundabout, bus access and review pedestrians access across New Line Road).

The list goes on. This is a substantial document and those who prepared it are to be congratulated. Hornsby Shire Council made a submission on the recent review of region four bus routes requesting that buses be permitted to go into Sebastian Drive, which is the entry road for a residential development that is surrounded by

bushland. The only way in and out of the area is via New Line Road. The council sees this issue as so serious that it has called for bus route 644 to be rerouted into Sebastian Drive so that bus passengers are not required to cross New Line Road.

Ms SONIA HORNERY (Wallsend—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.30 p.m.]: I thank the member for Hornsby for moving this motion. However, the Government opposes it. The Parliamentary Secretary assisting the Minister for Roads wrote to the member for Hornsby on 4 March 2008 providing the crash statistics she requested and traffic counts for that section of New Line Road. The *Hornsby and Upper North Shore Advocate* and other publications have requested the Government to supply information on behalf of the member. The Parliamentary Secretary advised that an analysis of the crash statistics for the most recent five-year period ending December 2005 revealed that 179 crashes were recorded on that section of New Line Road.

Importantly, no crashes were recorded as having occurred on the New Line Road and Sebastian Drive, Dural section, which is the area to which the member has referred. I repeat: For that period, no crashes were recorded on the section to which the member referred as a horror stretch. I suggest that if the people to whom the member for Hornsby is referring and who are complaining to her about the road have an accident they should report it. The Roads and Traffic Authority will not be able to do anything if it does not have the correct statistics. The crash statistics for the same period at the various intersections of that section of New Line Road are as follows: at Boundary Road there were 10 crashes; at County Drive/Shepherds Drive there were 25 crashes; at Purchase Road there were 11 crashes; at Jenner Road there were four crashes; at David Road/James Henty Drive there were 19 crashes; at Hastings Road there were 12 crashes; at Sebastian Drive there were no crashes; and at Old Northern Road there were 13 crashes. Thankfully, no schools are located on that section of New Line Road.

The Roads and Traffic Authority has indicated that on the section of New Line Road, Cherrybrook, north of Hastings Road the annual average daily traffic count for 2002 was 26,261 and for 2005, three years later, it was 26,382. That is an increase of about 100 vehicles on the road over three years. It should be noted that annual average daily traffic figures are calculated on the number of axle pairs passing by each day. These relatively modest growth forecasts for the Old Northern Road/New Line Road corridor would indicate a likely continuation of an incremental improvement strategy for the route, with a focus on localised improvements in association with, and where possible funded by, development applications that warranted upgrading regional road access.

Such improvements would particularly focus on better outcomes for pedestrian safety, managing access to commercial developments and intersection efficiency. An extra 100 vehicles on the road over three years suggests that road use has not increased significantly when compared with increased traffic flow on other roads in New South Wales. That is where the crash statistics are important and interesting. They reveal the comparison between one road and another road in New South Wales or one road over a period. Over three years, average road usage increased by 100 vehicles. I would argue that that is not significant.

In comparison to such localised improvements, the Roads and Traffic Authority will find it difficult to contemplate more extensive strategic proposals for the widening of New Line Road while there is a whole-of-government focus on the need to service north-west sector growth through the improvement of, among other routes, Windsor and Richmond roads. The Roads and Traffic Authority is looking at the busiest roads and the areas of greatest growth and ensuring that those roads are improved according to the needs of the community.

To ensure that this approach represents an appropriate ongoing response to the road safety and traffic requirements of north-western Sydney, the Roads and Traffic Authority will review previous strategic planning information about New Line Road from Cherrybrook to Dural. That includes the proposed widening of the two-lane sections of New Line Road to four lanes north of Hastings Road and the intersection improvements. The Roads and Traffic Authority will examine how it can improve the road for commuters and the constituents of Hornsby. That is very important and we should focus on how those improvements are occurring.

The member for Hornsby digressed by making a reference to Hornsby Shire Council and bus routes. I am sure that the Roads and Traffic Authority will work in collaboration with the local bus service operator to ensure that those issues are taken into account. That issue is not relevant to the motion we are debating. However, when the road is changed we must ensure that services are changed for the comfort of motorists and bus passengers. I am pleased that those statistics have been provided for the member for Hornsby. They reveal that for the period in question no recorded crashes occurred at the intersection of New Line Road and Sebastian Drive, Dural.

Mr MICHAEL RICHARDSON (Castle Hill) [12.40 p.m.]: I was astounded when the member for Wallsend said that the Government opposes the motion. The first part of the motion states:

notes that New Line Road through Cherrybrook and Dural is a dangerous thoroughfare needing upgrades to improve traffic flow and safety.

That is unarguable on the basis of work done and correspondence that I have from the Government about this matter. In 1998 the Government and Hornsby council commissioned Gutteridge, Haskins and Davey to carry out a study on New Line Road. The figures published in that study were at variance with the figures the member for Wallsend has been quoting in this debate. In 1998, New Line Road carried up to 28,000 vehicles a day. There is no way that New Line Road is carrying fewer vehicles now than it was 10 years ago. I do not know what sort of traffic counters the Government is using—maybe they are as reliable as its trains—but they are clearly way off the mark.

That study also compared Old Northern Road and New Line Road. Between July 1991 and June 1996, 377 crashes were recorded on Old Northern Road and 139 on New Line Road. One might say that makes Old Northern Road a more urgent priority, but the crash rate on 3.4 kilometres of New Line Road was 84 to 89 accidents per 100 million vehicle kilometres. Four people died on just 3.4 kilometres of the road—it is not nearly as long as Old Northern Road—and the fatality rate per kilometre was 12 times as high as for the 47.4 kilometres of Old Northern Road. Four people died between July 1991 and June 1996 on New Line Road and, unfortunately, there have been deaths since.

The section crossing Pyes Creek, where the road narrows to two lanes with no footpath or any room for error on either side—there is barely room for a couple of large vehicles to pass—is extremely difficult. I am well aware of the fatality that occurred there when one car veered into the path of another. There was a head-on collision and a man died. The person in the other car, a local doctor, came to see me about that fatality. Yet the Parliamentary Secretary is saying the Government is not going to spend money on this road, it is going to spend it somewhere else, other roads are more important. We have heard this in relation to the North West Rail Link. The member for Baulkham Hills will be talking about the North West Rail Link very shortly, and I am not surprised. In a letter to me dated 28 October 2004, the then Parliamentary Secretary for Roads, Tony Stewart, had this to say:

I refer to your Private Member's Statement in the Legislative Assembly on 14 September 2004 ...

I am advised that the Roads and Traffic Authority ... carried out a study—

I have spoken about that. The letter went on:

The study identified a need to widen these sections of Old Northern and New Line Roads to four lanes.

I inform the member for Wallsend that it is here in black and white. It went on:

The study also identified the need to install a roundabout at the intersection of New Line Road and Sebastian Drive, Dural—

which the member for Wallsend denied—

and traffic signals at the intersections of Old Northern Road and Hastings Road, and Old Northern Road and Glenhaven Road, Glenhaven.

That relates to Old Northern Road. The letter continued:

In addition, the RTA has indicated that it would be appropriate for the section of New Line Road, from Purchase Road to Boundary Road, Cherrybrook (which was not included in the study), to be widened to four lanes.

That is unarguable. That is what I have been saying for more than 10 years. That is what the member for Hornsby has been saying since that area became part of her electorate. There is no doubt that New Line Road is a dangerous road. The level of traffic congestion is discouraging people from using public transport, not only because buses take so long to go down New Line Road and Boundary Road to Pennant Hills station, but because you take your life in your hands just walking across the road to catch the bus. It is very dangerous for children, in particular near the County Drive roundabout. I know in many instances pedestrians walk an extra kilometre or so just to cross the road safely. These facts are unarguable. Wallsend is a long way from The Hills. I encourage the member for Wallsend—and I am sure the member for Hornsby would be delighted to help to facilitate this—to come down in the morning peak hour and look at the problems for herself, rather than spout nonsense here that has been given to her by her new masters.

Mr WAYNE MERTON (Baulkham Hills) [12.45 p.m.]: I support this very important motion moved by the member for Hornsby concerning traffic difficulties on New Line Road in the Cherrybrook and Dural areas. The motion also deals with repeated requests by the member to the Roads and Traffic Authority for advice and traffic counts, which she says have been ignored, and condemns the Minister for Roads for refusing to provide information requested in August 2007. New Line Road is a very dangerous road. It is the alternative road for many people seeking access to the city. It is a matter of history, and Parliament has heard it time and again, that in 1985, when a former Labor Government, in which Bob Carr was planning Minister, announced the north-west sector, that part of Sydney changed. Some 23 years later what was planned and announced in 1985 has come to fruition.

The north-west sector, when completely developed, will have a population in excess of 300,000 people, which is almost the population of Canberra. The north-west sector development has gone ahead and people are moving there in droves because it is a nice place to live, but the Government, since it was elected to office in 1995, has refused to provide any alternative transport other than road and buses, and it has failed to provide a rail link. In 1998, when former Minister Carl Scully announced Action for Transport 2010, a rail line was promised from Epping to Castle Hill, to be built by the year 2010, and thereafter to Rouse Hill. To date, not one sod has been turned.

The Government's broken promise about a north-west sector rail service was well described by the *Daily Telegraph* recently with the phrase "10 years of deceit". I could not put it any better than that. The people of north-western Sydney have been deceived by promise after promise and by a subtle change that was introduced after one promise was made. The rail service was to go from Parramatta to Epping and then it was changed to go from Epping to Chatswood. The Minister made changes to the north-west rail link route. Finally, to buy more time the Government decided to build a metro. The metro did not last as long as the rail idea. The rail promise was made in 1998 and was current until about 12 months ago, if not later. The metro had a lifespan of something like six months, yet recently the Government made an announcement, perhaps in a state of confusion, that it will build a metro from the city, St James, to Rozelle. Of course, the rail to Rouse Hill has gone.

Ms Sonia Hornery: Point of order: I ask you to direct the member for Baulkham Hills to return to the leave of the motion, which is about New Line Road, not the metro from St James to Rozelle.

Mr Richard Amery: To the point of order: It appears the member for Baulkham Hills does not know the difference between Rouse Hill and Rozelle.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Matthew Morris): Order! I uphold the point of order. The member for Baulkham Hills will confine his remarks to the motion before the House.

Mr WAYNE MERTON: The problem is the traffic generated along New Line Road. I thought the member for Wallsend would have been able to grasp the simple concept that traffic has to come from somewhere. I was explaining it was coming from the north-west sector. This Government's failure and ineptitude has betrayed the people of north-west Sydney and it will continue to do it until there is a change of government.

Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [12.50 p.m.], in reply: I thank the Parliamentary Secretary for Roads, the member for Castle Hill and the member for Baulkham Hills for their contributions on this important motion. I draw to the attention of the Parliamentary Secretary for Roads that the motion refers not only to the dangerous condition of New Line Road and to the Government ignoring requests for accident statistics, but also to traffic flow and safety. This road has been totally neglected for many years, and residents are frustrated after attending meetings in good faith. The Roads and Traffic Authority commissioned a report in 1998 that stated New Line Road should be a four-lane road and that more roundabouts should be constructed. Hornsby Shire Council made a recommendation about the bus route, in which it stated:

Current lack of public transport services in the Sebastian Drive area is forcing passengers to cross New Line Road at uncontrolled locations. The provision of bus route 644 will address some of the existing pedestrian safety issues and may reduce the traffic generation of this subdivision, which currently relies mostly on private car use. The proposed bus route 644 along Sebastian Drive and Ravensbourne Circuit, includes eight bus stops be approved as detailed in the report.

That recommendation relates directly to the incredible congestion on New Line Road during morning and afternoon peak hours. I pay tribute to everyone who has raised this matter with me over the time I have represented the area. I thank the member for Castle Hill and the member for Baulkham Hills for drawing the

Government's attention to the fact that New Line Road is in desperate need of upgrading. Eleanor Gilmour, who lives off Sebastian Drive, has raised this matter with me many times. She is very concerned about her inability to turn right out of Sebastian Drive because of dangers along New Line Road.

Even though some sections of New Line Road have four lanes, most of the road needs upgrading, with some sections having only one lane either way, which is totally inadequate to meet the needs of local people. I support debate on the north-west rail. However, the motion relates directly to the problems on New Line Road because the only transport available to residents in this area is either a car or bus. There is no rail transport. Rail is desperately needed in the north-west sector. I spoke to the Minister for Transport yesterday and impressed upon him the need for rail to relieve congestion on New Line Road.

Ms Sonia Hornery: Point of order: I ask the member to return to the leave of the motion, which is about New Line Road, not rail.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Matthew Morris): Order! I uphold the point of order. The member for Hornsby will confine her remarks to the leave of the motion.

Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD: The Government has completely missed the point of the motion. The Government has admitted that this is a dangerous road. The Government is abrogating its responsibility to the residents by ignoring a road that is in desperate need of upgrading. The Government provided the crash statistics well after the *Hornsby and Upper North Shire Advocate* article. That was a cop-out by the Government. I have been so desperate about this road that I have set up a Facebook page titled "New Line Road is a disgrace"—and it is. The residents deserve better. It is about time that the Government started to govern for all, not just for its own electorates.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 38

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

Noes, 44

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

Pair

Mr O'Dea

Ms Burton

Question resolved in the negative.**Motion negatived.****BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE****Postponement of Business****General Business Notice of Motion (General Notice) No. 4 [Mental Health Intensive Care Unit] postponed on motion by Ms Judy Hopwood.****KAPOOKA BRIDGE FUNDING****Mr DARYL MAGUIRE** (Wagga Wagga): [1.03 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that plans for the Kapooka bridge have been completed for a number of years and remain with the Minister for Roads;
- (2) notes that another serious accident on the bridge has occurred endangering both motorists and trains; and
- (3) calls on the Minister for Roads to approve and fund the immediate construction of the Kapooka bridge.

This motion would not be necessary if it were not for the incompetence and mismanagement of the portfolio of the Minister for Roads. I first raised the issue of Kapooka bridge when I became a member of this place in 1999. I again raised the issue in 2000, 2001, 2002 on a number of occasions, 2003, 2004 and 2007. Recently an accident occurred on the Kapooka bridge in which a semitrailer, negotiating the bend, went over the bridge and onto the railway tracks. When I last raised the issue in this House I forecast that it was only a matter of time before train passengers and train drivers would be either killed or injured because of the poor state of the bridge, and that motorists who use the Olympic Highway and the bridge would lose their lives.

I took the previous Minister for Roads, Carl Scully, to look at Kapooka bridge. To his great credit, the then Minister allowed funding to be approved for the planning of a new bridge. Originally about \$100,000 was set aside for planning works to upgrade the bridge, and the money needed to be augmented. Carl Scully, to his credit, ensured that that happened. Almost 10 years on, \$600,000 has been attributed to the planning of the new bridge over the main Sydney to Melbourne rail line and the Olympic Highway.

Since that time tragedy has occurred in the Riverina area: five young men lost their lives. A new bridge was commissioned, originally at a cost of about \$11 million, but eventually the cost blew out to about \$23 million because of engineering problems. It is a wonderful bridge, and it has removed a black spot from the road-rail network. In that time I have also campaigned hard for more funds for boom gates at level crossings, and I am pleased to say we have had some success in that regard. However, Kapooka bridge is now in a very bad state of repair; it is crumbling and it needs a major upgrade. Indeed, it needs to be replaced. When the last truck went over the bridge correspondence was sent to the Minister regarding the bridge. The correspondence reads:

Accident data shows 8 accidents between 2001 and 2006 inclusive.

The eight accidents referred to were accidents that caused injury; indeed, there were more accidents than that in that period. The correspondence continues:

The most recent accident shown in the attached photos occurred on Friday 2 November 2007.

The guardrail on the approaches to the bridge regularly needs repairing because trucks continually crash into it. The repairs involve a significant cost to taxpayers. The 25 kilometres per hour curve warnings have been erected to notify drivers of the severity of the bend. When a crash occurs it causes major disruption to the traffic flow on that extremely busy highway, and it means that traffic has to be re-routed. The potential for a major disaster occurring when a truck goes over that railway line is great. The funding for the project has been allocated and

the plans are sitting in the office of the Roads and Traffic Authority; there is no doubt about that. The problem is that each time I raise the issue, either through questions or during debate in this House, we are given all sorts of excuses.

The last time I placed questions on notice to the Minister regarding the bridge I asked a number of questions, 13 in all. I received a three-paragraph response to 13 important questions. I had asked the Minister how many accidents had occurred involving semitrailers; how many involved motor vehicles; how long had it been since the \$600,000 plans for Kapooka bridge were completed; and where on the priority list was Kapooka bridge. I have been told that there is a priority list, and on behalf of our community I want to know where Kapooka bridge is on that list. I also asked whether the Australian Rail Track Corporation had indicated the urgent need for the bridge replacement to allow double-decker containers to be shipped from Sydney to Melbourne. I asked what is the time frame for construction of the bridge and the estimated cost.

I pointed out that the \$600,000 that has been spent on the plans for the project is wasted money. I have said that it is a waste of taxpayers' funds because, if a new bridge is to be built ultimately, the plans will be out of date. In the meantime, the Redhill Road bypass has opened, again courtesy of Carl Scully. I took the former Minister to the intersection and showed him why we needed funding for the bypass, and he made \$500,000 available to achieve that. However, these improvements simply put more traffic onto the main road, creating more dangerous conditions for drivers. So it is essential that the new bridge be constructed. The current Minister for Transport responded to my 13 questions regarding Kapooka bridge as follows:

Information relating to traffic crash statistics is provided annually by the RTA in the publication, Road Traffic Crashes in NSW, which is publicly available on the RTA website ...

When one looks up the RTA website, it does not provide the detail that I asked for. The Minister's response continues:

Concept designs for alignments to replace Kapooka Bridge have been prepared by the RTA. These are at a preliminary stage.

I believe that to be untrue. Those plans are completed. There is no more work to be done because this is the link between the bypass and the Olympic Highway. I know that the plans are finished—they are collecting dust in the office of the Roads and Traffic Authority. He goes on to state:

A new rail overpass was built south of Gerogery on the Olympic Highway—

the one that I spoke about—

At a cost of \$23 million. Four new rail overpasses were built in the Albury Wodonga Hume Freeway Project—

of course that was paid by the Federal Government—

In Albury at North Street, Fallon Street, Corrys (Dallinger) Road and Thurgoona Drive.

He goes on to say that maintenance for all rail bridges is a matter for the Minister for Transport. What we have is a classic case of New South Wales Government buck-passing. When you approach the Australian Rail Track Corporation, it will tell you that it does not have authority over the bridges. When you approach the Minister for Transport, he will tell you he is not responsible. We never seem to get to the bottom of who will make a decision to fix this dangerous bridge. People will die on the Kapooka bridge if it is not fixed. It is only through good luck and God's will that it has not happened so far. That road carries thousands and thousands of cars per day to Albury, Melbourne and other centres. The Olympic Highway goes through the electorates of other members. The member for Burrinjuck will speak to this motion because she also had the same problems with the Zouch bridge: cries for help fell on deaf ears. The time has come for the Government to make a decision, stand up, and be responsible for delivering infrastructure, particularly to spots such as the Kapooka bridge.

The *Hansard* records many accidents that have occurred on the Kapooka bridge. I have raised the matter in budget speeches and at every given opportunity, but there is always indecision. I acknowledge that the Government has a real problem with its budget. I understand that, but it has had rivers of gold in revenue over the 13 long years it has been in power, yet each time it finds an excuse as to why the bridge cannot be built. I ask the Government to produce the priority list. Where is it? On each attempt I make to see the list it does not exist or the Government has found an excuse to shift the blowtorch, so to speak, to another portfolio. No-one seems to be able to make a decision—I see that as dysfunctional.

The Level Crossing Strategy Council manages the creation of level crossings and audits road safety at level crossings. Who is doing that for bridges? It would seem that no-one is responsible for bridges and the

council is at its wit's end trying to get the bridge fixed. Why? Because when an accident occurs it takes the State Emergency Service, and all those great volunteer organisations, and the professionally paid organisations away from work their work to clean up the mess and carnage that has occurred on this terrible bridge crossing. Those resources would be better spent elsewhere. The ambulance officers at the Wagga Wagga hospital are screaming out for more resources. Councils are stretched financially because of unfunded mandates and because of a decision that has not, and will not be made. The Government is wasting resources.

Ms SONIA HORNERY (Wallsend—Parliamentary Secretary) [1.13 p.m.]: The Government opposes the motion of the member for Wagga Wagga. The Kapooka Road Junction and bridge over the railway is located about eight kilometres south of Wagga Wagga on the Olympic Highway. I am advised that the Rail Infrastructure Corporation owns the Kapooka bridge structure. The State Government does not own the road; the Rail Infrastructure Corporation owns the road. The road alignment at the bridge comprises a pair of reverse right-angle bends at the road junction to the Kapooka Army base. In mid-1993 safety was improved by upgrading signposting on the approaches to the bridge, including advisory speed signs. The Roads and Traffic Authority has developed preliminary design options for the replacement of the Kapooka bridge on a new alignment.

Further assessment is required to identify a preferred option. Detailed project development will be completed once funding is identified. However, as the Rail Infrastructure Corporation owns the structure, a decision on any replacement of the structure needs to be made in conjunction with the owner. That is why the Government opposes the motion. Paragraph (3) of the motion moved by the member for Wagga Wagga requests that Government fund the immediate construction of the Kapooka bridge. The Government is not the owner of the bridge, but it acknowledges the concerns of the member for Wagga Wagga. That is why the Roads and Traffic Authority has advised it will continue to hold discussions with the Rail Infrastructure Corporation regarding the future management of the Kapooka bridge, which is important.

I refute the comments of the member for Wagga Wagga about the incompetence and mismanagement of the Minister for Roads. I do not think those sort of comments add anything to his motion about an important bridge on a busy highway. I acknowledge that road safety is important, and I am sorry that the semitrailer accident occurred. It must have been very devastating and extremely disruptive to traffic and travellers on the Olympic Highway. The member for Wagga Wagga acknowledged the good work of the former Minister for Roads, Mr Carl Scully. I also thank the former Minister for his interest in that road and his acknowledgment of its importance. The member for Wagga Wagga also acknowledged that more funding has been provided for level crossings. I understand that level crossing funding is important to the safe commuting of road users in the country, particularly in the three electorates of the members opposite.

The member for Wagga Wagga spoke about the number of accidents on that road. The Government acknowledges that it is a busy road. The fact that guardrails need regular repair and replacement is acknowledged and will be looked into. A crash on any road causes major disruption, particularly when the road is as busy as this one. I refute the argument that this is a classic case of buck-passing. It is important that the Roads and Traffic Authority and the Rail Infrastructure Corporation talk to one another regarding the future management of the Kapooka bridge, and I understand that will happen. The member for Wagga Wagga should remain within the leave of the motion and focus on Kapooka bridge rather than speak about ambulances and other things. I repeat that the Rail Infrastructure Corporation owns the structure and any decision on the replacement of the structure should be made in conjunction with the owner of the bridge.

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck) [1.18 p.m.]: I support the motion that has been moved by my hardworking colleague the member for Wagga Wagga. The Kapooka bridge shares a road that runs through my electorate: the Olympic Highway. It is a long road that has many dangerous bridges and black spots. In May this year I moved a motion in this House on the Zouch Street bridge. During debate on my motion the member for Wagga Wagga raised by way of interjection the Kapooka bridge. The member for Murrumbidgee, who is also familiar with the bridge, said in his contribution to my motion:

The member for Wagga Wagga refers to the Kapooka bridge, which many of my constituents cross along the Olympic Way on their way to Albury.

It is a significant bridge for the member for Wagga Wagga and the member for Murrumbidgee. For innumerable heavy vehicle transport operators, it is a significant grain haulage track and is used by many heavy vehicles. From my perspective, I was delighted when the Rail Infrastructure Corporation came to the party and announced \$1 million for the Zouch Street railway bridge, thanks to a lot of campaigning and the fact that I raised the issue so often. The Parliamentary Secretary, the member for Wallsend, should not dismiss this matter out of hand and say it is between the Rail Infrastructure Corporation and the Australian Rail Track Corporation and the Government can do nothing: the Government can do a lot. About half a million dollars, according to the

member for Wagga Wagga, has already been spent on planning for the replacement of this bridge. With every day of delay on the replacement of this bridge, which is broadly recognised as being in need of total replacement, the cost continues to spiral.

We wonder why the Government runs out of money and needs a mini-budget. All these dollars are spent on planning, but nothing happens: no infrastructure; no new roads; no new railway tracks; nothing for country New South Wales to facilitate the effective transportation of grains and for other essential transport needs to assist heavy vehicles to move safely through country areas, and to reduce the number of road fatalities. The money that has been spent on planning has probably gone to consultants who are sitting on reports, for which they will charge another couple of hundred thousand dollars to revise in a couple of years when the Government wants to make another announcement in the lead-up to the next election. When it comes to implementing the infrastructure that is strongly needed in this State, the Government does nothing. It sits on its hands and says it cannot do anything. It says, "Don't blame us, we are just the Government."

Ms Sonia Hornery: Point of order: I ask that the member for Burrinjuck return to the leave of the motion and tone down her voice. She talks about sitting on hands. She does not talk about improvements to the road.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Matthew Morris): Order! I ask the member for Burrinjuck to return to the leave of the motion.

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON: It is an emotional issue for members who live in country New South Wales. I get emotional about infrastructure because country New South Wales has missed out for so long. The Kapooka bridge is just one example in country New South Wales of infrastructure that should have been implemented years ago. In the lead-up to the 2000 Olympic Games, former Premier Bob Carr clearly said in this Chamber, "We will spend \$3 billion on the Olympic Games at Homebush. We will take it out of the infrastructure fund for the State. Don't worry, all those residents living in country New South Wales, we will pay you back. We will get it back to you." That has never, ever happened. That \$3 billion worth of funding, which came out of the country infrastructure funding program, has never been repaid to country New South Wales. Country residents are sick and tired of being treated like second-rate citizens in this State. We demand that the Government take effective action and get the Kapooka bridge rebuilt now.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS (Murray-Darling) [1.23 p.m.]: I thank the member for Wagga Wagga for moving this important motion about the Kapooka bridge. The member for Wagga Wagga is a hardworking member who is frustrated with the Government's inaction. The Government is not focused on improving infrastructure in this State. It is more focused on spin and building up a profile by suggesting that it will spend money on all these infrastructure projects in the city, which all go up in smoke. The inner city metro rail project is another one of its spins.

Ms Sonia Hornery: Point of order: I ask the member for Murray-Darling to return to the leave of the motion.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Matthew Morris): Order! I uphold the point of order. I ask the member for Murray-Darling to confine his remarks to the leave of the motion before the House.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS: We need to drill down and look at the intrinsic problems we face in trying to get infrastructure projects in country New South Wales. To give an example of the way the Government manages infrastructure in the country, I invite members to see the eighth wonder of the world, which sits out at Hillston over the Lachlan River on the road from Hillston to Mossiel. This bridge is a bandaid on a bandaid. It is a perfect example of the Government's sheer and utter lack of commitment to bridges in country New South Wales. It can blame any organisation it wants, such as the Rail Infrastructure Corporation, but that does not solve the problem. There has to be a resolution. The Government has the responsibility to put this infrastructure in place and complete it. It is important for the safety of people who travel on New South Wales roads. The Government is blinded by what happens in the city. It needs to get out and see the situation that country people face when they cross these bridges. As to the frustrations faced by people in my electorate, Wakool shire has 32 wooden bridges that are desperately in need of replacement.

Ms Sonia Hornery: Point of order: I ask the member for Murray-Darling to return to the leave of the motion, which is about the Kapooka bridge.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Matthew Morris): Order! I uphold the point of order. I remind the member for Murray-Darling that the motion is specific to a single bridge. He should confine his remarks to that topic.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS: I accept the ruling. I am talking about road safety and people's lives. The Government is not focused on this issue, which is important to all of regional and rural New South Wales. We want people to be safe when they travel on our roads. If this bridge is in need of replacement it should be done now, not later.

Mr DARYL MAGUIRE (Wagga Wagga) [1.27 p.m.], in reply: I thank the members for Wallsend, Burrinjuck and Murray-Darling for their contributions. I will not speak long in reply because it is a simple issue: The bridge needs to be replaced and the Government needs to stop passing the buck. Whether it comes under the Rail Infrastructure Corporation or the Roads and Traffic Authority, the Government owns it and is ultimately responsible for it. The Government must address this issue. It needs to get the agencies together, as it does with level crossings and other issues, and solve the problem. It must ensure that funds are made available in the budget to build the Kapooka bridge. As the member for Murray-Darling said, it is a road safety issue. I do not resile from the fact that I called the Minister incompetent. He is incompetent. If members want confirmation of that, they can look at yesterday's paper where people are calling for the Government's head.

Ms Sonia Horner: Point of order: I ask the member for Wagga Wagga to return to the leave of the motion. The motion is not about the competence of the Minister, it is about the Kapooka bridge.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Matthew Morris): Order! I uphold the point of order. The member will confine his remarks to the leave of the motion.

Mr DARYL MAGUIRE: Earlier I raised the issue of ambulances. Vital resources are being used elsewhere because of accidents occurring on this bridge. The plans are completed. The Government must show gumption and make a decision. I once again thank the members who participated in this debate. I say to the Government: stop blaming other people, get out and do the job and build the bridge. I commend the motion to the House.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 37

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

Noes, 46

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

Pair

Mr O'Dea

Ms Burton

Question resolved in the negative.**Motion negatived.***[The Speaker left the chair at 1.35 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]***QUESTION TIME**

MINISTER FOR SMALL BUSINESS STAFF MEMBER COMPLAINT

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: My question is directed to the Premier. How can he stand by the claim of the Minister for Small Business that there was no incident last Wednesday between him and a female staffer when his own staff removed the woman from the Minister's office for—in his own words—"her own welfare"?

Mr NATHAN REES: I addressed this matter in detail yesterday.

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order. The Leader of the Opposition has asked his question.

Mr NATHAN REES: The staff member was moved to another office at her request. The most recent advice to me is that the staff member has indicated that she does not wish to take the matter further at this time. That is where the matter rests.

ALCOHOL-RELATED VIOLENCE

Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO: I direct my question to the Premier. What action is the Government taking to crack down on alcohol-related violence across New South Wales?

Mr NATHAN REES: Let there be no doubt that people in New South Wales have a right to enjoy a drink or two, or perhaps even three on a hot day. Sadly, antisocial drinking and alcohol-related violence are growing problems throughout the State. In fact, while the total number of non-alcohol-related assaults has decreased in the past two years, alcohol-related assaults have increased by almost 5 per cent. In 2007 there were 21,000 alcohol-related assaults across the State. Most of these offences are committed late at night, by young men, in and around licensed venues and drinking precincts. Historically, this violence tends to increase over the summer. I am determined to act quickly and decisively to get on top of this problem before the summer starts.

Today I have brought forward a comprehensive set of new initiatives to deal with this problem. This is a bold first step to address a drinking culture that, in some cases, has been out of control. We have a drinking culture in Australia going back to the Rum Rebellion and those periods of excess. I want to be clear: These new measures are not targeted at drinkers who do the right thing, nor should they impact on licensed venues that are already providing a safe drinking environment. But they have to be tough, and I am not afraid of ruffling a few feathers to stop this violence. The Commissioner of Police and the Director of the Office of Liquor and Gaming have advised me that, to a large degree, these problems are concentrated in and around particular licensed premises. They have told me that in the worst performing more than 50 assaults occur each year. They have also provided me with a list of around 50 pubs and clubs that, in their view, are likely to be alcohol violence hot spots over the summer.

From 1 December a new set of standard licensing conditions will apply to these venues. They will include mandatory 2.00 a.m. lock-outs, cessation of alcohol service 30 minutes before closing time, plastic or polycarbonate glasses after midnight to stop this most recent spate of glassings, no shots and drink purchase limits after midnight, and 10-minute alcohol sale time-outs every hour after midnight. We will also review the security arrangements in place for each of these pubs and clubs. Where it is needed, they will be required to provide extra security and drink marshals to monitor alcohol consumption levels. We will also work with these venues to address local transport issues. For example, this could include placing a levy on a group of licensed premises within a high-risk drinking precinct to fund security at nearby taxis ranks or bus services.

We will do our bit by providing targeted and high-visibility policing in alcohol violence hot spots as well as a targeted advertising campaign in high-risk venues. More venues may be added to the 2.00 a.m. lockout if police see a local spillover effect occurring. A high-level implementation team including the Deputy Commissioner of Police will oversee the new arrangements and advise me where and when changes need to be made. We will refine and tweak the policy settings and implementation as required. If the team identifies new problems over the summer, we can add to or improve these conditions. Similarly, if licensed premises clean up their act over the summer and succeed in reducing incidents of alcohol-related violence, then we will consider amending these conditions. This set of standard conditions for high-risk licensed premises is designed to deal with this problem over the coming summer, but we need to find longer-term solutions.

From today the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing will work with the industry on replacing these targeted conditions with a statewide sanctions scheme. The scheme would be graduated and could start with mandatory conditions like lock-outs for first-time incidents, going right up to removal of licences for repeat offenders. We will also develop a safety star rating system to reward safe practices and provide responsible drinkers with information about where they can go to enjoy a drink in safety and comfort. As I said, we know most alcohol-related assaults occur in and around licensed premises late at night and in the early hours of the morning. Accordingly, we will also bring forward new laws to impose a freeze on any new 24-hour licence. New licensees will be limited to 18-hour trading and existing licensees will have their conditions reviewed to improve safety.

As I have repeatedly emphasised both in this House and in the public domain, transparency is a central feature of this administration. So to help increase public awareness about which licensed venues are safe places to drink, the Government will authorise the New South Wales Police Force to provide the independent Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research with figures that link violent criminal incidents to specific licensed venues. Licensed premises and the Government both have roles to play in dealing with this problem, but so do the idiots who engage in this reckless behaviour. The Government has provided police with the powers to deal effectively with antisocial drinkers. This includes the power to move on intoxicated persons and the power to detain a person who appears to be seriously affected by alcohol and is behaving in a disorderly manner. But there is more we can do to make antisocial drinkers take responsibility for their behaviour. That is why we will also bring forward new laws to crack down on minors who use fake IDs and to give police new on-the-spot tip-out powers to deal with people who drink in declared alcohol-free zones.

In recent times the community has witnessed a spate of what are known as glassing attacks. Let us not beat around the bush on this issue: Glassing is gutless, glassing is un-Australian and it has to stop. We have in place severe penalties to deal with people who attack with glasses. This includes a maximum 25 years in prison for a charge of causing grievous bodily harm with intent, and a maximum 10 years for recklessly causing grievous bodily harm. Let us not forget that this stupid behaviour could kill someone, and that would see someone serving serious jail time. However, I want to be sure that our criminal laws are fully equipped to deal with these cowards. For this reason, the Attorney General has asked the New South Wales Sentencing Council to undertake a review of all sentencing laws relating to alcohol violence. That council is chaired by Justice James Wood and includes representatives of victims of crime and New South Wales police. If they tell us we need to change our laws in any way to deal with this behaviour, we will.

Alcohol-related violence is a growing problem in our community. My Government is determined to deal with it. This is a comprehensive set of initiatives. It is a serious attempt by my Government to get on top of a drinking culture that in Australia has seen too much violence in and around licensed premises and, regrettably, too much violence in people's homes. Law-abiding people have the right to be safe and to feel safe when they enjoy a drink or two. But be warned: My Government will do whatever is necessary to protect and enforce their right to have a quiet, safe drink.

MINISTER FOR SMALL BUSINESS STAFF MEMBER COMPLAINT

Mr ANDREW STONER: My question is directed to the Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Cancer). Will he confirm or deny that an incident occurred last week between him and a female staff member that led to her being removed from his office?

Mr TONY STEWART: I thank the member for his question. As I indicated yesterday, I have no further comment on this.

Mr Andrew Stoner: Point of order: I refer to Standing Order 126, which states:

A Minister may be asked a question which relates to:

1. Public affairs;
2. Matters under the Minister's administration; or
3. Proceedings pending in the House for which the Minister has carriage.

Question time is a fundamental principle of parliamentary democracy.

The SPEAKER: Order! The point of order taken by the Leader of The Nationals was predicated on the basis that the Minister did not answer the question as required by the standing orders. The Minister did respond.

Mr Andrew Stoner: This is the one opportunity—

The SPEAKER: Order! Do not interrupt me when I speak.

Mr Andrew Stoner: I am entitled to—

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of The Nationals will resume his seat. There is no point of order. The Minister walked to the microphone and gave a response, as is required under the standing orders.

RECYCLING

Ms TANYA GADIEL: My question is addressed to the Minister for the Environment. What action is the Government taking to help local councils improve their recycling and environmental performance?

Mr George Souris: She is recycling announcements!

The SPEAKER: Order! I place the member for Upper Hunter on two calls to order.

Ms CARMEL Tebbutt: The recycling of announcements is not on this side of the House. The New South Wales Government has a very strong record of improving recycling and reuse of materials. The community has embraced this issue—from kerbside recycling of newspapers, green waste and bottles, to the use of the green bags that seem to be everywhere now as the community attempts to reduce its use of plastic bags. The community has a real appetite for recycling and reusing waste. Household recycling in New South Wales has gone from 62 kilograms to 102 kilograms per year and, correspondingly, waste to landfill has dropped from 430 kilograms to 278 kilograms per person per year. These are good results. We are seeing a reduction of waste going to landfill with a corresponding climate change impact as well.

We cannot achieve these results unless we work in partnership with both local government and the community. The Government is committed to working in partnership with local government. We recognise the very clear role that local councils have to play in waste reuse, recycling and reduction of waste going to landfill. There is no doubt that a major driver of the improved environmental performance is the waste levy. It continues to be a successful lever for reform right across the waste industry. It is a strong price signal and makes recycling more competitive with respect to landfill. Its impacts can be seen in the recent establishment of new alternative waste technology facilities in New South Wales. These plants cost between \$50 million and \$60 million to build. They are a significant investment, and New South Wales is leading the way on alternative waste technology facilities. As of September 2008 New South Wales has six operating alternative waste technology facility plants, with a further three under construction and several more in the planning stages.

I am pleased to inform the House that all local councils in what is known as the regulated area will this week receive a waste service performance improvement payment in return for cutting waste to landfill. This is the third year of the waste service improvement payment and this year all 51 eligible councils will share in performance payments that total \$12.3 million. This is \$12.3 million that local councils would not have received if members opposite were sitting on the Government benches. Opposition members do not understand the importance of the waste levy.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Lismore will contain himself. I call the member for Castle Hill to order.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: The Opposition does not have credibility on this issue. When addressing local councils earlier this week, the Leader of the Opposition, in an attempt to bring councils on board with his campaign, claimed that only \$13 million of the waste levy was returned to local councils. That is simply not true.

The SPEAKER: Order! Government members will remain silent.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: The Leader of the Opposition is misleading councils. Councils benefit from the \$12.5 million with respect to the waste service improvement payment and I think he recognises that. He failed to share with councils this week that they also benefit from a range of city-country environment projects that are also funded by the waste levy. It is not \$13 million that goes back to councils but in fact \$38 million that councils benefit from. I suggest the Leader of the Opposition checks the facts before he talks to local councils and misleads them on the benefits of the waste levy for recycling and waste reduction. The return of these funds is terrific news for communities and councils. Some have had a remarkable performance.

This is not just good environmental practice but is also an example of cost avoidance, which takes on even greater importance during this time of global economic uncertainty. Improving the way we deal with waste, including recovering, reusing and recycling materials that may otherwise have been thrown away and sent to landfill, will also have a significant positive impact on our levels of greenhouse gas emissions. In 2006-07 kerbside recycling in New South Wales recovered more than 650,000 tonnes of waste, saving more than 320,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions. This is equivalent to taking more than 80,000 cars off the road permanently.

In order to qualify for these payments, councils are required to put in place by June 2009 policies and procedures to ensure that all new multiunit dwelling developments include dry recycling services, all new developments consider waste management and resource recovery during construction and demolition, and that all new developments incorporate facilities for ongoing waste separation and collection. These waste improvement payments of up to \$80 million are available over five years and are part—and only part, the Leader of the Opposition might note—of the New South Wales Government's City and Country Environment Restoration Program. I commend to the House all 51 councils for their efforts in reducing waste and for recycling. We will continue to work with local government to make sure that we return less waste to landfill and that we support councils and the community in their efforts to recycle and reduce waste.

MINISTER FOR SMALL BUSINESS STAFF MEMBER COMPLAINT

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: My question is directed to the Premier. Given allegations that the female staffer involved in the incident with Tony Stewart last week was told to keep quiet and she would be looked after, and the fact that the Minister even refuses to answer questions on the affair in this House, will the Premier finally stand him aside and allow the matter to be independently investigated?

Mr NATHAN REES: I checked with one of my most senior and trusted advisers this morning regarding that media assertion and he assures me that it is untrue. I reported my position on the record in the House yesterday on this matter. The Leader of the Opposition sat in the House and heard that. I said that if it is established that the Minister's version of events is wrong, I would act. Today we read that an anonymous caller made a series of allegations. What did the Leader of the Opposition do? He took no steps to verify the information. He took no steps to contact me, my office or my department.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: He took no steps to ensure the welfare or privacy of the staff member concerned. Instead, he picked up the phone and called a journalist in desperation to score a cheap political point with no regard for the welfare or the wishes of the staff member.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: It was irresponsible and reckless, and it should not have happened.

The SPEAKER: Order! Government members will remain silent.

GRAFFITI

Ms SONIA HORNER: I address my question to the Minister for the Hunter. Will the Minister update the House on the latest efforts to crack down on graffiti in the Hunter, and related matters?

The SPEAKER: Order! I hope the Minister heard that question.

Ms JODI McKAY: I confirm that I did hear the question. For members who may not have heard the question, it relates to graffiti, which is certainly an issue for us in the Hunter. I suspect it is also an issue for many members of this House. Graffiti is more than just a costly annoyance; it can cause serious safety problems, with vandals often putting their lives and those of others in immediate danger. It can also create an environment of lawlessness, leading to further crime problems. As the member for Wallsend indicated in her question, graffiti is a serious issue in Newcastle and the Hunter region. Sadly, areas such as Hunter Street in Newcastle, as well as suburbs such as Cardiff, are often targeted. One alleged offender in Cardiff reportedly caused \$100,000 worth of damage.

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

Ms JODI McKAY: Recently, in a despicable act in Newcastle, vandals defaced the city's Commander Frank Gardner Memorial. This morning there was yet another report of graffiti by a gang. The member for Port Stephens would be interested in this. This time, a veterinary clinic, a scout hall and a girl guides building in Tanilba Bay were hit. These senseless criminal attacks are frustrating and costly for our businesses, councils and the community. Vandals often use graffiti to mark their turf. Which reminds me of another kind of turf warfare going on in the Hunter, between the Liberals and The Nationals. I can tell the House—

The SPEAKER: Order! Government members will cease interjecting.

Mr Greg Smith: Point of order: We have all been listening to the relevant discussion about graffiti and taking notice of it because such behaviour is a disgrace. However, it has nothing to do with political fights in any area of New South Wales, and particularly in the Labor Party—over who is not on the frontbench and who has been put on the backbench.

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind the Minister of the question before the House. The Minister has the call. I call the member for Bathurst to order.

Ms JODI McKAY: As I was saying, the Hunter Liberals did not exist before the local government elections. In fact, when they decided to encroach on that territory, they did not even have the courtesy to let the member for Upper Hunter know that they were moving in. I can tell the House that the turf war in the Hunter region is on. I can also advise the member for Upper Hunter that the time is right for him to mark out his territory, because the member for Ku-ring-gai is moving in.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129. I am sure all members appreciate the difficulties that graffiti cause. We would like to hear an answer from somebody who joined the Labor Party a day before she was preselected—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murrumbidgee will resume his seat. The Minister has the call. I ask the Minister to confine her remarks to the leave of the question.

Ms JODI McKAY: It is important to note that the Libs do not trust a local to represent the Hunter either. When they chose a shadow Minister for the Hunter, they did not choose—

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

Mr Andrew Fraser: Point of order: Mr Speaker, I draw your attention to Erskine May's *Parliamentary Practice* at page 305, which says, "An answer should be confined to the points contained in the question, with such explanation only as renders the answer intelligible." I suggest that the Minister's answer is not intelligible—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Coffs Harbour will resume his seat. I commend him for his research, but that is not a point of order. The Minister has the call.

Ms JODI McKAY: When the Opposition chose its shadow Minister for the Hunter, it did not choose the experience of the member for Upper Hunter, the long-serving member for Upper Hunter—

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the Minister for Transport, and Minister for the Illawarra to order.

Mr Andrew Stoner: Point of order: I refer to Standing Order 129, which refers to relevance. Mr Speaker, I know you allow some latitude in relation to "related matters". However, given that the question was about graffiti in the Hunter, how this drivel could be a related matter is beyond us all.

The SPEAKER: Order! I uphold the point of order. The Minister will return to the leave of the question. Opposition members will remain silent. The Minister does not need the assistance of Opposition members.

Ms JODI McKAY: Let me return to the critical issue of graffiti. The strength of feeling on graffiti in the Hunter is high, as it is across the State.

Mr Andrew Stoner: What are you doing about it?

Ms JODI McKAY: More than you. In Newcastle, the newly formed Pride of Place taskforce has met to help deal with graffiti and vandalism. I know that local police do their utmost to catch and convict these people. The New South Wales Government backs this work with a range of tough laws to punish graffiti vandals.

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind the Leader of The Nationals that he took a point of order—I presume, because he wanted to hear the answer. He will pay the Minister the courtesy of listening to her answer. The Minister has the call.

Ms JODI McKAY: Last year we passed new legislation giving police the power to confiscate spray paint cans from juveniles unless they have a lawful excuse for having them. We also doubled penalties for vandals who damage or deface war memorials, and gave courts a new option to order these offenders to undertake community service work. This comes on top of a range of sentencing options we have given courts to punish graffiti vandals. These sentencing options include: community service orders, reparation orders requiring the offender to pay compensation toward repair of the damage, and a maximum five years in prison for the offence of malicious damage. Offenders who are sentenced to perform community service work can find themselves being forced to clean up their own mess.

The Department of Corrective Services engages community service order offenders in graffiti clean-up work in three different local government areas. Similarly, last financial year, young offenders on community service orders across the State completed more than 6,000 hours of graffiti removal work, as part of the Graffiti Removal Program of the Department of Juvenile Justice. The department works in partnership with councils to arrange the community service work, with more than 20 councils on board across the State. Areas include Baulkham Hills, Bondi, Bourke, Blacktown, Campbelltown, Fairfield, Gosford, Hurstville, Lake Macquarie, Leichhardt, Marrickville, Moree Plains, Parramatta, Penrith, Shellharbour, Randwick, Burwood, Sutherland, Wollongong, Woollahra and Wyong.

In 2006 the Government established the anti-graffiti action team, to provide advice on how best to combat graffiti. The team includes representatives from major government agencies, public utilities and industry. Recently the Government asked the team to review existing graffiti laws. We also asked them to provide advice about whether we should ban spray paint cans outright. While the team advised that an outright ban would unfairly punish legitimate users, and encourage more vandals to find alternative tools, they did recommend an overhaul of existing graffiti laws. In line with this recommendation, the Government will introduce a new Graffiti Control Act to amalgamate the State's existing graffiti laws and standardise penalties.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: My point of order relates to the length of the Minister's answer, which has been going on for some time. I know the Minister used a fair bit of her time in unrelated matters but I would ask the Speaker to direct the Minister to draw her answer to a close.

The SPEAKER: Order! I will extend the Minister a little latitude given the number of points of order that have been taken. However, I ask her to commence concluding her answer.

Ms JODI McKAY: The new Act will also make it simpler for police to charge suspects and for courts to impose more consistent punishments. The Graffiti Control Act will also include new provisions, such as: giving Fair Trading inspectors the power to issue on-the-spot fines to retailers who fail to securely lock away their spray paint cans; fines of \$2,200 or six months jail for damaging or defacing any premises; fines of \$1,100 or three months jail for anyone caught in possession of any instrument intended for use in damaging or defacing premises; and directing an offender to perform community service work.

Offenders who inflict serious damage on property will still be able to be charged with malicious damage under the Crimes Act, which carries a maximum jail term of five years. The new Graffiti Control Act demonstrates the Government's determination to deal harshly with graffiti vandals, and the message to vandals in my electorate of Newcastle and all electorates around the State cannot be clearer. If you think it is okay to deface people's property, then be warned. The police will catch you, and when they do, you face serious penalties including harsh fines, community service and even jail time.

MINISTER FOR SMALL BUSINESS STAFF MEMBER COMPLAINT

Mr ANDREW STONER: I direct my question to the Premier. Given the repeated failure of the Minister for Small Business to answer even basic questions in this Parliament, does the Premier still have confidence in Mr Stewart as Minister?

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

Mr NATHAN REES: I refer you to my previous answers on this matter.

MENTAL HEALTH AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Ms NOREEN HAY: I direct my question to the Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Mental Health). Will the Minister update the House on what measures the Rees Government is taking to support young people who are experiencing mental illness?

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting. The Minister has the call.

Mrs BARBARA PERRY: As the House would be aware, mental health problems can have a significant long-term impact on young people, their parents and families, and the whole community if left untreated. The most recent Australian Burden of Disease study estimated that in 2006 more than 600,000 people across New South Wales suffered from depression and/or anxiety. Figures from the National Youth Mental Health Service, Headspace, show about 10 per cent of young people aged between 18 years and 25 years experience anxiety-related issues within a given year and, worryingly, around one in four young people between the ages of 12 years and 25 years will become depressed. It is clear that effective early intervention is so important. We want to stop symptoms of stress and anxiety in our young people as quickly as possible. International research indicates that the majority of adults with mental disorders had recognisable symptoms by the age of 15 years.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is still too much audible conversation in the Chamber. I ask members to bear in mind that this is a very significant issue.

Mrs BARBARA PERRY: The Rees Government is targeting prevention and early intervention as major priorities. We are implementing an innovative reform agenda to deliver mental health care for adolescents and young people. This began with a \$28.6 million commitment over five years from 2006-07. This includes the placement across the State of some 60 new clinical positions dedicated to youth mental health. A further \$2.6 million in recurrent funding is being provided in 2008-09 for improved child and adolescent mental health services. This will be allocated across New South Wales, including funding of \$400,000 for the North Coast, \$300,000 for Justice Health, and \$300,000 for Sydney west. These enhancements will provide for community-based and inpatient services and will target priority mental health needs for children, adolescents and families.

As we all know in this House, young people are our here and now and the key to our future. Investing in their wellbeing will ensure better outcomes for all of us. Some of our flagship programs are School-Link and the Youth Mental Health Services Model. Both of these services provide youth-friendly information and support

for young people aged from 14 years to 24 years. The Youth Mental Health Services Model provides co-location of primary health, drug and alcohol and other services. The model focuses on easy and early access to a full range of mental health and other health services for young people.

A major component of this project has been the development of Y-Central. This is a mental health "one-stop shop" making it easier for young people to access the services when they need it most. I am pleased to inform the House that earlier this month the Minister for Health opened the first Y-Central at Gosford. Its services include youth mental health information, assessment, and immediate access to specialist care for young people. With the Higher School Certificate currently underway, we are all very aware of the stress young people face. But I want to say to those young people who may be feeling the strain that you are not alone; there is a wide range of services available to help you deal with the stress you may be feeling.

Supporting young people in the school environment is a priority for the Rees Government and our service School-Link is playing a key role. The three key aims of School-Link are to strengthen links between TAFE, schools and local child and adolescent mental health services; develop and implement training for mental health workers, and school and TAFE counsellors; and support the delivery of promotion and prevention programs. I am pleased to report that School-Link has now delivered training to more than 2,000 counsellors and mental health workers on several areas, including adolescent depression and related disorders, and the assessment and management of adolescent depression and related disorders including self-harm.

The School-Link training program has also resulted in improved communications and referral patterns between school counsellors and mental health services, and easier networking. Over 65 per cent of school counsellors, for example, stated that as a result of School-Link they are retaining clients that they would have previously referred on to other agencies. This year the School-Link initiative has been extended to include the Children's Hospital at Westmead and Justice Health, to better meet the needs of young people at increased risk of mental health problems. I take this opportunity to acknowledge the strong partnership between the New South Wales Department of Health and the New South Wales Department of Education and Training in delivering the School-Link program. It is testament to the strong commitment across government departments to provide the best standard of care for people in our community living with mental illness.

Programs are in place in each area health service to provide localised support to young people in the community. Some examples of our achievements include the Greater Southern Area Health Service. The Local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services team in Culcairn had received a number of complex referrals from students who attended a secondary school. With the support of mental health staff, school staff developed a student welfare plan. Did an Opposition member say, "Who cares?"

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting. The Minister will continue.

[Interruption]

Mrs BARBARA PERRY: I apologise, the interjection was "acute care beds".

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

Mrs BARBARA PERRY: A Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services clinician also provided on-site outreach to the school. As a result of the dedicated school and mental health partnership, referrals have dramatically decreased and school morale has lifted. Only last weekend, when I was at Broken Hill to attend the local government conference, I took the opportunity to visit mental health services in the Broken Hill region. I pay tribute to the incredible work done by clinicians and nursing staff at Broken Hill Base Hospital. In particular, I pay tribute to the non-government organisations involved with the Broken Hill Base Hospital who day in and day out deliver incredible services to the community. These are people with passion and commitment. For the remarkable achievements that we have arrived at today in mental health, particularly with young people, we must applaud the people in the field and at the coalface. I thank them today on behalf of the House. I am sure I speak for all members when I commend all those who work with our State's young people to ensure the best outcomes for their mental health.

TAFE PRIVATISATION

Mrs DAWN FARDELL: My question is directed to the Minister for Education and Training. Given community concerns about the future delivery of skills by TAFE New South Wales being under threat and the possibility of the forced closure of many rural and regional colleges, will the Minister rule out the privatisation of or any other threat to our existing TAFE New South Wales system?

Ms VERITY FIRTH: I thank the member for Dubbo for her question. I look forward to visiting Dubbo soon. I have heard excellent things about Dubbo TAFE.

[Interruption]

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order. The Minister has barely started her answer.

Ms VERITY FIRTH: I have heard some great things about Dubbo TAFE, including its great partnerships with the wool industry and aged care industry and its involvement in indigenous recruitment with the Police Force. I am very excited about visiting Dubbo. I am also pleased I have been asked this question because it allows me to place on record that the Rees Government has absolutely no intention of privatising TAFE. The New South Wales Government is extremely proud of TAFE and the vocational education it delivers. We stand by TAFE 100 per cent. I understand that concerns about this issue have emerged as a result of the release of a national discussion paper on skills and workforce development. It is part of a process initiated by the Council of Australian Governments, involving all States and Territories. I am advised that the paper, which was prepared by Boston Consulting Group, compares New South Wales with other States on a number of counts. I can advise the House that New South Wales stood up well in these comparisons, including in our apprenticeship training. In fact, we were described as the "strongest in providing trainee-employer choice".

It is widely acknowledged that there are flexible and varied ways to drive reform in the training sector to meet the challenges of the future and the needs of the modern economy in a globalised world. We will pursue reform directions that support our economy, our population as a whole and our regional areas. We have a strong TAFE system and we remain committed to supporting the provision of high-quality training. We also have robust competition in New South Wales, with about 1,700 training organisations operating in the State. The Rees Government understands the value of TAFE New South Wales. TAFE New South Wales trains over 90 per cent of the State's apprentices and has very strong employer support. Independent research has shown that every dollar invested in TAFE returns \$6.40 over 20 years. That is a 640 per cent return.

[Interruption]

I can hear Opposition members refer to funding. We are delivering record levels of funding for vocational education and training.

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

Ms VERITY FIRTH: We have provided more than \$1.73 billion this financial year alone for vocational education and training in New South Wales. We are delivering record levels of funding, unlike the levels we would have seen if the Opposition were in power. All we ever see when they are in power are real reductions to education and training. Members should remember that when they were in power at the Federal level we saw 10 years of real reductions. Education and training is a critical tool in providing support for economic and workforce development. TAFE helps firms become competitive, productive and innovative. It helps people lead purposeful and constructive lives. It gives people the skills they need to gain employment and the adaptability they need to retain employment as the type of skills employers need change. These skills are more important than ever in difficult economic times. TAFE New South Wales plays a key role in tackling skills shortages by giving priority to areas where skills are in demand. Most of all, the reason I love TAFE is because TAFE gives people who need it a second chance at their education. It is the big second chance. TAFE supports industry to develop and grow their business. That is why the Rees Government supports TAFE New South Wales and will continue to do so into the future.

HEAVY VEHICLE DRIVER FATIGUE

Mr STEVE WHAN: My question is addressed to the Minister for Roads. Will the Minister update the House on action the Government is taking to improve safety for heavy vehicle drivers, especially on our regional roads, and related matters?

Mr Wayne Merton: Point of order—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member has taken a point of order before the Minister has started his answer. I am intrigued to hear the point of order.

Mr Wayne Merton: My point of order relates to the question, specifically "related matters". Yesterday I raised this issue. I do not ask for a ruling, Mr Speaker, but I want you to consider these factors: Questions should be short and uninvolved—Speaker Ellis; Questions must raise one matter only—six rulings by Speaker Ellis; Members have been cautioned against asking broad ambit questions—Speaker Rozzoli. In the circumstances, I believe that "related matters" is a recipe for Question Time to get out of control. To give an example, today the Minister for Tourism flagrantly disobeyed these rulings and her answer became a whole encompassing ministerial statement that did not relate to the issue.

The SPEAKER: Order! I will look at the issues raised by the member for Baulkham Hills and discuss them with him. He should be aware that if he seeks to impose the strict rule of only one question, the Leader of the Opposition would be in serious trouble. The Minister may respond to the question, which is in order.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: I thank the member for Monaro and Country Labor for their interest in heavy vehicle fatigue laws. Heavy vehicle fatigue laws are particularly relevant for people who live in the bush.

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order. The Minister has the call.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: The honourable member for Coffs Harbour came to me to speak about these laws. He has been harshly treated—he has been made a scapegoat for the disaster in Port Macquarie.

Recently, the Government put into place numerous nationally consistent heavy vehicle fatigue laws that are designed to make our roads safer for all users. The House may be interested to know that heavy vehicles constitute around 2 per cent of the total number of registered vehicles in Australia, yet they account for an estimated 6 per cent of vehicle travel by kilometre. But the telling fact is that they are involved in 19 per cent of fatal crashes. In the years 2003 to 2007 there were 432 fatal heavy vehicle crashes, resulting in 501 fatalities. More than 8,500 injuries also resulted from those accidents. Statistics can be telling but they have a tendency at times to hide the human cost of crashes. Recently, the member for Monaro and other Country Labor members arranged for me to go and see a delegation—

Mr Andrew Stoner: Name them.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: It would take longer to name them than to name people on your side.

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order. Members will cease interjecting.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: One of the women present was from the bush—the Leader of The Nationals should listen to this instead of mouthing off, which is all he is good for. She said to me, "My husband is a truck driver. He's away for four or five days at a time. He's on the road. He is continually being pressed to drive for longer periods". Her plea to me was: Don't squib on these laws. She said, "We need the Government to care for truckies. I want to make sure my husband comes home to me at the end of a long haul". That is what these laws are designed to achieve.

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

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: It is telling to note that most of the interjections coming from the other side of the House are from members of The Nationals. I find that surprising. The Government is looking after rural communities. What is the Opposition doing on this and other issues? Nothing. The Opposition has no policies on this issue. The Leader of the Opposition thinks policies are optional extras. But he can be excused because he is a busy man—he is worried about his leadership. He is looking now not to his own party—it is not the member for Manly and others that he is worried about—

Mr Brad Hazzard: Point of order—

The SPEAKER: Order! Government members will remain silent. The enormously supported member for Wakehurst has the call.

Mr Brad Hazzard: Standing Order 130 states that the Minister shall not debate the issue; he shall adhere strictly to answering the question.

The SPEAKER: Order! I will ask the Minister to return to the leave of the question.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: I will. It is important to note that the member for Coffs Harbour came to see me. He is the only member of The Nationals who has taken the time to speak to me about this issue. The Leader of The Nationals has not spoken to me about it—the executioner of sight-impaired Liberals has the Leader of the Opposition in his sights.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: The executioner of sight-impaired Liberals has a policy-challenged Liberal leader in his sights.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Opposition front bench, in particular, will cease interjecting.

Mr Andrew Fraser: Point of order: The Minister is misleading the House. I went to see him on behalf of the Coalition to save him the embarrassment of a disallowance motion in the upper House.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Coffs Harbour will resume his seat. I remind all members that they have the opportunity to make a personal explanation at the appropriate time. The Minister has the call.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: Members should look no further than the *Daily Telegraph* of 25 October, which stated:

Stoner would personally stand to gain from a merger. He sees himself as a future leader of a conservative party, and Premier, an ambition that could never be realised—

—while Barry O'Farrell is sitting there as the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: Standing Order 129 relates to relevance. The question was not about that issue. It was an important question. The Minister is now referring to other, unrelated areas. Mr Speaker, if you expect Opposition frontbench members not to respond to the Minister's comments I suggest that you urge him not to diverge from the content of the question.

The SPEAKER: Order! I direct the Minister to return to the leave of the question.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: The member for Murrumbidgee rises like an arthritic when his leader is attacked. These are important laws. I said on day one that I would consult with all people in the industry who want to consult me, including farmers, livestock carriers, containerised truckies and people in the logistics chain. I have been consulting, and I will continue to consult, about these important laws—nationally consistent laws—that save lives.

Question time concluded.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of Motions

Government Business Notices of Motions (for Bills) given, by leave.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON LAW AND JUSTICE

Government Response to Report

Mr David Campbell tabled the Government's response to the report of the Legislative Council Standing Committee on Law and Justice entitled, "The prohibition on the publication of names of children involved in criminal proceedings".

NSW OMBUDSMAN

Report

Ms Kristina Keneally tabled the report of the NSW Ombudsman entitled "Review of Parts 2A and 3 of the Terrorism (Police Powers) Act 2002, Preventative detention—interim report, Covert search warrants—final report", dated September 2008.

UNPROCLAIMED LEGISLATION

The SPEAKER: Pursuant to Standing Order 117, I table a list detailing all legislation unproclaimed 90 calendar days after assent as at 30 October 2008.

PETITIONS

Drink Container Deposit Levy

Petition requesting a container deposit levy be introduced to reduce litter and increase recycling rates of drink containers, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Hornsby Area Haemodialysis

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

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**.

Edgecliff Interchange Upgrade

Petition requesting the upgrading of Edgecliff interchange, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Barangaroo Planning Guidelines

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

Star City Casino Proposal

Petition opposing the Sydney Harbour Casino Properties proposal for the Star City Casino, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Pet Shops

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

Wedderburn Longwall Mining

Petition opposing Illawarra Coal's exploration lease application 3474 for longwall mining at Wedderburn, received from **Mr Graham West**.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai—Leader of the Opposition) [3.16 p.m.]: I seek leave to move that standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow me to read onto the parliamentary record a message left on my electorate office answering machine concerning matters relating to staffing in the office of the Minister for Small Business.

Leave not granted.

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

Ms TANYA GADIEL (Parramatta) [3.17 p.m.]: I seek priority for this motion that recognises volunteering because in 2006 there were approximately 1.7 million volunteers in New South Wales. They donated a staggering 235 million volunteer work hours and contributed an estimated \$5 billion to the New South Wales economy. The New South Wales Government wants even more people to be involved in volunteering activities in our communities. This Government wants to reduce the gap in volunteering participation rates between low-income, non-English speaking and Aboriginal communities and the general New South Wales population.

The Rees Government is currently rolling out local volunteer forums across New South Wales, giving community members an opportunity to talk about their views on volunteering and community participation with their local members of Parliament and the Minister for Volunteering. The Government also has launched an \$8.4 million Community Service Begins at School Program, which involves students from years 9 and 10 volunteering a minimum of 20 hours in community service while they are at school.

Minister for Small Business Staff Member Complaint

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai—Leader of the Opposition) [3.18 p.m.]: My motion is urgent because today the Premier wants to have it both ways. Firstly, yesterday and again today he confirmed that a female staffer was removed from the office of the Minister for Small Business "for her own welfare". The other way he wants to have it is he wants to stand by the Minister for Small Business in the affair. My motion is urgent because it would allow the Premier to come to the Chamber and explain the difference between standing up for someone he clearly portrays as a victim and doing nothing about the person who sits on his front bench—the person who, in his analogy, is the perpetrator.

Mr Alan Ashton: What did you know, Barry?

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: In relation to the interjection and to the lies the Premier told in question time today, I am more than happy to read onto the record—as I tried to do a moment ago—the anonymous statement left on my answering machine. That statement was left before the media reported yesterday's news. It told us about an event last Wednesday night at the Garvan Institute. It referred to a female staffer, an incident with the Minister and a complaint made about that incident.

Mr Richard Amery: Point of order: The Leader of the Opposition is trying to bring before the House a document that he purports to be accurate. Has he told the House, for example, which of his staff members or who in the shadow Cabinet—

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

Mr Richard Amery: There are clear rules about the tabling of documents.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Mount Druitt raises a valid point of order. Members must clearly identify documents quoted from and state the exact source. I believe the Leader of the Opposition is about to touch on that matter now.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Remarkably, I have not yet quoted from the document. I have referred to the document and the transcript of a message left on my answering machine before yesterday's media reports. Those reports quoted the Premier's own chief of staff confirming the four matters that I have referred to. The fifth matter was the statement, "They have told the staff member to keep quiet and they will look after her." That is the allegation, and there are others. In response to you, Mr Speaker, that is why I tried to move the suspension of standing orders to allow the transcript to be read onto the record to detail the instance of a staff member, who has been an officer of this Parliament for 13 years and who took the message—

Mr John Aquilina: Point of order: Once again, the Leader of the Opposition is making reference to a document that he cannot verify to be accurate. If it is anonymous, there is no way that he can verify, first, its source and, secondly, its accuracy. Such a document would be out of order and reference to that document in this Chamber would also be out of order.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: To the point of order: The source is a Parliament House provided answering machine at the electorate office at Wahroonga. The source of the transcript is a staffer who has been employed by this Parliament for 10 years.

Mr Gerard Martin: We don't know that.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: That is the source of the transcript.

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

Mr John Aquilina: Further to the point of order: How can the Leader of the Opposition verify that an anonymous document is in any way accurate? No-one in the history of this House has been able to do that, and I defy the Leader of the Opposition to do it in this instance.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Further to the point of order: I made it clear that the message contained five allegations. I referred to four and they were confirmed yesterday by the Premier's own chief of staff to the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Daily Telegraph*. The Premier confirmed that. That bloke likes to pretend that no incident occurred, and that is why the Minister for Small Business is still here but not answering questions. That bloke likes to portray the person who has been removed from the office as a victim—

Mr Steve Whan: Point of order—

Mr John Williams: You probably made the phone call so you could get Tony's job.

Mr Steve Whan: That interjection demonstrates the veracity—

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

Mr Steve Whan: My point of order is that the Leader of the Opposition stood up to speak to the point of order that you have not ruled upon.

The SPEAKER: Order! I appreciate that this issue is very difficult. However, I will hear further from the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: If the Government had allowed me, I could have detailed the document. The soap opera continues, but it is now "The Dumb and the Reckless".

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

Question—That the motion of the member for Parramatta be accorded priority—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 49

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

Noes, 40

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

Question resolved in the affirmative.

VOLUNTEERING**Motion Accorded Priority**

Ms TANYA GADIEL (Parramatta) [3.30 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) congratulates all volunteers in New South Wales;
- (2) acknowledges the enormous contribution they make to this State; and
- (3) congratulates the Government for recognising this important contribution by taking action to attract and retain more volunteers.

The Rees Government recognises the value of volunteering and increased levels of volunteering as one of the key components of a cohesive and harmonious community. This is why the Government is working to support volunteering in New South Wales. We want more people involved in volunteering, sports, and cultural and artistic activities. We want to reduce the gap in participation rates in volunteering between low-income, non-English-speaking and Aboriginal communities, and the general New South Wales population. The Government alone cannot make communities more harmonious. The Government can support the efforts of those who want to move in that direction. Community harmony is everyone's responsibility. Religious organisations, sporting groups, schools, and arts and cultural groups can all encourage participation. Corporate social responsibility is also an increasing trend that can support these efforts.

Volunteering efforts make an incredible contribution to our community and our economy. Most of us have heard the staggering statistics before, but they cannot be stressed enough. In 2006 alone, approximately 1.7 million people volunteered in New South Wales, contributing 235 million volunteering hours. If we are to increase community harmony, we need to support and encourage everyone in the community to get involved in volunteering. We know from research that communities with high levels of volunteering and participation are stronger and more harmonious. The Rees Government is committed to supporting volunteering. The New South Wales Government established the volunteering unit in the Department of Premier and Cabinet for this very reason. The unit is charged with coordinating cross-government strategies that support volunteering.

One of our initiatives is the Community Service Begins at School Program. It involves years 9 and 10 students volunteering to perform a minimum of 20 hours community service while they are at school. This is an \$8.4 million program to encourage even greater participation in voluntary service. Volunteers frequently give up their time and make an effort to help their communities. At the same time, they reap the rewards that volunteering brings. In 2009 the Government will start a pilot program involving two schools from each of the 10 regions of the Department of Education and Training. From 2010 all students in year 9 and in 2011 all students in years 9 and 10 will be able to participate in the program for a minimum of 10 hours per student each year. A Premier's community service award will be presented in year 10 to each student who completes a minimum of 20 hours service over years 9 and 10. Ten educational scholarships of \$10,000 will be awarded for

most outstanding young volunteers and one annual school grant of \$5,000 will be awarded to the school with the best volunteering record. By encouraging young people to give just 20 hours of their time we can teach students the value of serving the community and helping organisations that provide vital services.

Yet another Rees initiative is the local volunteer forums that will soon be rolled out across New South Wales. The pilot forum was held in Penrith recently, with the member for Penrith, Karyn Paluzzano, and the member for Londonderry, Allan Shearan, in attendance. The forum provided an opportunity for community members to talk about their views on volunteering and community participation. Future forums will also give communities the opportunity to talk openly with their local members of Parliament and the Minister for Volunteering about issues that may impact on their volunteering efforts. By identifying some of the barriers to volunteering we will be able to achieve greater levels of participation in our communities. Participants at the forums will look at strategies that will make it easier for people to volunteer, as well as new ways to attract, train and retain volunteers.

When we talk about volunteering, we mean all types of volunteering. Voluntary participation occurs in a range of forms and can be as simple as providing assistance to an elderly neighbour. Volunteering also includes making contributions to some online communities or being a member of the management committee for groups such as parents and citizens associations. The New South Wales Government is mindful of the vast numbers of volunteers in this State and the time involved in the management of organisations in our community. Committee members have many legislative requirements thrust upon them and it is important that we support them in meeting these obligations by reducing red tape and barriers to their volunteering. The Minister for Volunteering is coordinating government efforts to put in place building blocks and implementation strategies that make it easier to volunteer and which attract, train and retain volunteers, diversify the volunteer workforce, promote the value of volunteering and support regional volunteering.

We also need to recognise the valuable contributions made to our communities by those who volunteer. One way the Government does this is by supporting the New South Wales Volunteer of the Year Awards. These awards are coordinated by the New South Wales Centre for Volunteering and provide a way to recognise and publicly acknowledge the important work done by thousands of volunteers across New South Wales. There are two major categories of awards: the New South Wales Volunteer of the Year Award, which has 16 regional subcategories, and the New South Wales Corporate Volunteer of the Year Award. These awards will be presented on 5 December 2008—International Volunteer Day—by the Minister for Volunteering. The Government also provides significant funding to support volunteering and participation in the community through assistance for community health care, aged care, and cultural, artistic, sporting and environmental activities.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE (Bega) [3.37 p.m.]: I move:

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

- (3) calls on the Rees Government to take action by reducing the level of red tape and costs associated with being a volunteer.

I put on record the Liberal-Nationals appreciation for the outstanding contribution made by volunteers in New South Wales. Without doubt, the lives of our most needy and vulnerable citizens depend on volunteers. We admire and are in awe of all their efforts. For that reason, we are happy to support paragraphs (1) and (2) of the motion, which congratulate volunteers and acknowledge their enormous contribution to the social and economic wellbeing of New South Wales. Across the country, 5.2 million people perform some volunteer duty within their communities. They make an enormous contribution to the overall welfare of the Australian community.

I was disappointed that the member for Parramatta did not refer to the problems many volunteers face. The Government needs to tackle a myriad of issues. For example, pensioners wanting to undertake volunteer work in the local nursing home have expressed concern to me as shadow Minister for Ageing that they have to go to the local police station and undertake a police check, which costs \$55. Many have stated that is prohibitive and is another example of inequities in the system that the Government must address. Reforms are required to encourage greater volunteer participation.

Some of the issues the Government has promised to tackle but so far has failed to address include: costs of insurance, especially public liability; the costs of administering volunteer groups, such as the paperwork and time involved complying with red tape; fundraising to pay for administration and insurance; over-reliance that some organisations are forced to place on a few volunteers resulting in high rates of burn-out; and the personal liabilities of volunteers appointed to boards, particularly with respect to occupational health and safety.

One of the biggest failings has been the review of the Associations Act, which dates back to the time of Queen Victoria and is notoriously out of date and in need of reform. The Government released a discussion paper pledging to reform this antique and cumbersome Act in April 2003. Five years and five fair trading Ministers later we are yet to see the promised reforms. A report on the consultations conducted was produced last year for the Minister, but that report remains a secret. The House is not allowed to see it because the Government wants to keep the matter in limbo. Meanwhile, other States are leaps and bounds ahead of us.

For example, in 2006 the Queensland Government moved to cut red tape faced by thousands of small community organisations by removing the need for fully audited annual financial reports and mandatory public liability insurance. New South Wales has more than 39,000 registered associations, 60 per cent with a turnover of less than \$100,000. Such legislation simplifying the bewildering bureaucracy and rules they have to comply with would be very welcome and would liberate them to spend more time on the actual purpose of their volunteering. Unfortunately, there is no sign yet of any such reform. There is only talk.

One of the great lost opportunities was when Minister Burney was both Minister for Fair Trading and Minister for Volunteering. As the review of the Associations Act had been grinding away for four years, for the sake of volunteers she should have sorted it out and pushed it through the House. Unfortunately, Minister Burney had no time to do this because she was too busy volunteering to represent the Minister for the Arts at the Cannes Film Festival. A few weeks ago Volunteering Australia released the results of the 2008 survey of volunteers. The media release stated:

Volunteering Australia CEO, Cary Pedicini, said that some results were not surprising. "28% of volunteers surveyed said that the costs of volunteering had a negative impact on their volunteering, whilst nearly half (47%) said they do not receive any reimbursement for the volunteering expenses. The cost of fuel and telephone expenses were identified as the two major areas of expense for volunteers."

These rising costs are clearly a major hurdle for people who want to contribute their time and money to actually helping. The very least this Government could do is proactively help by reducing State-based red tape and expenses. Yet for five years the Government has failed to undertake this simple regulatory reform. The Government has a hide to move a motion congratulating itself on its work with volunteers. The Government has repeatedly let down volunteers.

Mr David Campbell: Who wrote this?

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: I wrote it during question time. The rate at which the citizens of this State volunteer compared with volunteering throughout Australia is declining because the Government sends wrong messages, ties volunteers up in red tape, ignores pleas to get on and reform the Victorian rules under which volunteer organisations labour, and ignores growing pressure on volunteers, at the expense of those whom they assist, the most vulnerable in the community—the children, the elderly, the sick and the frail. We support paragraphs (1) and (2) of the motion. We celebrate the great work done by volunteers.

However, both sides of the House should support my amendment. Government members, including the member for Drummoyne, know only too well the costs associated with being a volunteer. No doubt volunteers knock on her door to raise funds, which should alert her to the costs associated with being a volunteer, such as red tape compliance. In my neck of the woods the volunteers might be associated with the Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol, rotary clubs or lions clubs. We want the red tape cut to encourage more volunteers to help the most vulnerable in our community. I hope the Government takes note of my comments and supports my amendment.

Ms ANGELA D'AMORE (Drummoyne—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.44 p.m.]: In 2006 there were approximately 1.7 million volunteers in New South Wales. They donated a staggering 235 million volunteer work hours and provided an estimated \$5 billion to the New South Wales economy. For this enormous contribution, I acknowledge each and every one of them. These volunteers have given up their time and energy for many New South Wales services and organisations. When most people think of volunteers, they think of volunteers saving houses after storms, rescuing people from the surf, providing Meals on Wheels, giving hospital or home care, or even fighting fires. But, the reality is that many hardworking New South Wales citizens who are volunteers work quietly behind the scenes. They help at the school canteen, they raise funds, they are committee members, and they undertake the day-to-day administration that keeps New South Wales community organisations running smoothly.

There are very few ways we can really say how much we appreciate their generosity or how we can acknowledge the difference that volunteers make to our communities. One way the Government does this is to

provide support for the New South Wales Volunteer of the Year Awards. These awards are coordinated by the New South Wales Centre for Volunteering and provide a way to recognise and publicly acknowledge the important work done by thousands of volunteers across New South Wales. There are two major categories of award: the New South Wales Volunteer of the Year Award, which has 16 regional subcategories, and the New South Wales Corporate Volunteer of the Year Award. Another way we can do this is by acting as a Government to ensure that volunteer numbers continue to grow.

The Minister for Volunteering is coordinating government efforts to put in place building blocks and implement strategies that make it easier to volunteer; to attract, train and retain volunteers; to diversify the volunteer workforce; to promote the value of volunteering, and support regional volunteering. The Government has established a unit in the Department of Premier and Cabinet to coordinate cross-government strategies that support volunteering. The Government also provides significant funding to support volunteering and participation in the community. We do this through support for community care, health and aged care, cultural, artistic, sporting, and environmental activities.

As we are all very aware, there are many people out in our communities already working hard to help make our lives better. We, as a Government, will work hard to encourage more people to see the benefits for themselves and their community so that they, too, start volunteering. Building community harmony and creating communities in which we feel comfortable means reaching out to others in our community. It means developing respect and understanding of others through shared experiences.

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES (Barwon) [3.47 p.m.]: I thank the member for Parramatta for moving this priority motion on volunteering. Service is a virtue; and charity is a virtue. Service has been very much part of the Australian culture since time immemorial, particularly in country areas. These areas, particularly isolated areas, have had to help themselves because there has been limited access to government services and other agencies and, as a result, there is a strong culture of volunteering in rural areas.

The school pilot project is important. The project has been discussed for some time. I am aware that it will commence and will be expanded over the next two years, but the Government needs to get on with it. It is a little sad that we have to move into our schools to reinvigorate a virtue that has been very much part of the Australian culture. Whether it is due to the fact that we have become a little more self-centred over the years, or that current generations have not had to do it as tough, certainly the voluntary assistance that occurs in New South Wales has very much fallen to our senior citizens. Sadly, today there are far fewer people volunteering than there used to be years ago.

It is somewhat of an indictment on our society that the number of people volunteering has dropped off. Having said that, we need to congratulate and support the people who do volunteer and, as the Government has alluded to, look at some of the reasons why the number of people volunteering has dropped off. As the member for Bega rightly said, too many impediments have been put in the way of volunteers. If we are to encourage people to get into sport, we need to encourage volunteers to get into coaching. The liability impediments of working with children have grown astronomically. The amount of public liability involved in running a carnival these days is enormous. The amount that people now have to pay to have security police at these venues is also enormous. I note that the previous Minister for Police is in the Chamber and I know he has been lobbied on that.

I am aware that the member for Swansea attends country race meetings on a regular basis. Race clubs now have to pay for ambulance support at such race meetings. If we are to encourage volunteerism, we need to remove some of the impediments. At the next sitting I will introduce an amendment in this House—it has already gone through the upper House—to amend the Occupational Health and Safety Bill because currently we do not have protection for volunteers. The Opposition's amendment provides, "A director or person concerned in the management of a corporation who is a volunteer is not liable to be prosecuted under this section for anything done or omitted to be done by the person as a volunteer." We must protect our volunteers, get the liability issues out of the way, and encourage more participation.

Ms ALISON MEGARRITY (Menai) [3.50 p.m.]: Today we are recognising and publicly acknowledging the invaluable contributions given by the 1.7 million volunteers in New South Wales. No level of government, no matter how large or how efficient, could possibly match these contributions. Services that we take for granted would struggle to meet community needs and expectations if it were not for these community-minded people. In our day-to-day work, members of Parliament frequently have the opportunity to see first hand a wide range of organisations where volunteers positively contribute their time and energy. I am continually impressed by the efforts of the wonderful members of the Illawong, Menai, Sandy Point and

Woronora Rural Fire Service brigades. Menai District Neighbour Aid and other excellent services that run from the Menai Community Resource Centre substantially rely on volunteer assistance. There are so many other examples in my electorate that I could list today.

I am certain that every member of this Chamber could do the same, leading to a total of thousands of such organisations across this State. Not only are volunteers keeping vital services ticking over, they are bringing our communities together. These ordinary people do extraordinary things for our communities. And without them, our social fabric would disintegrate. According to the New South Wales Centre for Volunteering, there are approximately 300,000 completely volunteer-managed organisations in this State alone. And most of the 30 to 40 per cent of the Australian population who volunteer do so for these small to medium community associations. These volunteers work approximately 235 million volunteer hours and contribute an estimated \$5 billion to the New South Wales economy each year.

The New South Wales Government is today saying thank you to these special and selfless people. We are acknowledging their dedication and hard work, and the contribution they make to the wellbeing of the people around them. These people are in communities across New South Wales right now, helping the young, the elderly, the unwell, and the disadvantaged. An increasing number of these volunteers are now coming from corporate organisations. It is good to see that corporate social responsibility is becoming integral to the way the corporate sector "does business". By enabling staff to volunteer their skills, passion, time and energy to the community, companies are playing a crucial role in enhancing the social and environmental health and sustainability of our State.

But the Rees Government recognises that social and community initiatives are not the sole responsibility of business. That is why the New South Wales Government's volunteering strategy includes a strong commitment to extending staff volunteering opportunities right across the public sector. We encourage all people to embrace the opportunity to volunteer, and we again thank our existing New South Wales volunteers for their ongoing commitment to this State. I commend the member for Parramatta for moving the motion today. I move:

That the amendment be amended by leaving out "Calls on the Government to take action by reducing" and inserting instead "Supports the reduction in".

Ms TANYA GADIEL (Parramatta) [3.53 p.m.], in reply: I thank members for their contributions. The member for Bega and the member for Barwon were almost gracious but they just could not help themselves; they had to—

Mr Thomas George: So you're agreeing with us.

Ms TANYA GADIEL: The Rees Government is already doing a lot to get rid of the red tape, as I referred to in my contribution. If members opposite had been listening, they would have understood that. Perhaps then they would not have bothered to draft their amendment. I try to be gracious back to members opposite, because I am such a magnanimous soul. However, because members opposite try to be smarmy about an issue such as this, and they decide that they just have to put some kind of negative spin on it, I feel compelled to support the amendment to the amendment. However, unless the Government amendment is passed, I will not support the Opposition amendment.

The member for Bega is absolutely correct when he talks about the need for the reform. That is in fact what we are doing. It is our obligation, indeed our commitment, to make the life of volunteers so much easier. At the end of the day, they are performing a community service and they do not need to have their valuable time wasted in unnecessary red tape. There is no argument on that from us; indeed, that is what we have been doing. The member for Barwon said it is an indictment on our society that we have to go into schools and teach children these principles. When I was at school we were always doing things like working in gardens. Certainly in the schools that I visit in my electorate, we continually have schoolchildren helping out. We have them volunteering and going to some of the aged facilities, and that is heartening to see.

Indeed, you do not have to go too far to see volunteer work taking place, even in your own neighbourhood. I have an elderly couple in the street where I live. One of the couple's neighbours gets in and mows their lawn. Mowing the nature strip out the front of somebody else's place is another way of helping out. For instance, if an elderly person cannot take their dog for a walk, I have seen young kids in the community offer to do that. That is a great credit to them. It demonstrates a terrific community spirit. In conclusion, we acknowledge the work that volunteers do. We acknowledge them and support them. Volunteers bring our communities together and make Australia a much better place in which to live.

Question—That the amendment of the amendment be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 50

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

Noes, 36

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

Pair

Ms Burton

Mr Hazzard

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

Amendment of the amendment agreed to.

Amendment as amended agreed to.

Motion as amended agreed to.

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

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

Legislation Review Committee

That:

- (1) Robert Anthony Furolo be appointed to serve on the Legislation Review Committee in place of Noreen Hay, discharged.
- (2) a message be sent informing the Legislative Council.

Public Bodies Review Committee

That Nickola Lalich be appointed to serve on the Public Bodies Review Committee in place of Lylea Anne McMahon, discharged.

SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT**Motion by Mr John Aquilina agreed to:**

That the House at its rising on Friday 31 October 2008 do adjourn until Tuesday 11 November 2008 at 12 noon.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order! It being before 4.30 p.m., General Business Orders of the Day (for Bills) will be proceeded with.

HEALTH SERVICES AMENDMENT (MANDATORY BACKGROUND CHECKS OF MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS) BILL 2008**Agreement in Principle****Debate resumed from 20 June 2008.**

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER (North Shore—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [4.08 p.m.], in reply: In June 2008 I introduced the Health Services Amendment (Mandatory Background Checks of Medical Practitioners) Bill. The intention of the bill was to close the circle in relation to the employment of doctors in the public health system. This involved both directly employed staff doctors and those under contract as visiting medical officers. I am astonished by the response of the Government and I repeat the comments of my colleagues that the Opposition cannot understand why the Government does not support the bill. It appeared from the comments by the Parliamentary Secretary, the member for Macquarie Fields—himself a doctor—who was reading a speech prepared by the former Minister for Health, that he did not believe what he was saying. He said:

The operation of the bill would present significant practical difficulties for the Medical Board, public health organisations and individual medical practitioners.

He claimed the bill would undermine important aspects of the regulatory system of medical practice. I note that the Parliamentary Secretary is not present in the Chamber. I wonder whether he is totally embarrassed about his blunder in making the statement. A number of his colleagues have asked me whether I know why the Government is not supporting this legislation. I congratulate the member for Bega and the member for Hornsby on their measured speeches. I also thank the member for Burrinjuck and the member for Lismore for their contributions. I thank the Government members for their comments, although I believe they are entirely deluded about this legislation. To recap: This bill amends the Health Services Act. It closes the loop. The Government previously amended the Medical Practices Act and the Health Care Complaints Commission Act following a review by Justice O'Connor, a retired judge.

Government members referred to her recommendations in relation to those amendments. They did not understand—and obviously did not read her judgement—that she was asked to look at those two pieces of legislation only. She was not asked to look at the Health Services Act. The Medical Practice Act, as its title infers, is about the practice of medicine. The Health Care Complaints Commission Act is about handling complaints. The Health Services Act is about the employment of doctors. They are entirely different things. With Coalition support, as was acknowledged by the member for Macquarie Fields, the Medical Practice Act was amended to make it legally mandatory for doctors to report to the Medical Board any of their peers who they believed were seriously impaired.

That is now a legal requirement and carries 20 penalty units if doctors do not report their impaired peers. The Medical Board will investigate reports—and, under the Act, must follow detailed measures—to ensure it is satisfied that a doctor is fit to practise medicine. If the Medical Board does not believe that to be the case, and the doctor had plenty of time and opportunity to put his or her case, it can deregister the doctor or place limits on the practice of and treatments provided by the doctor. The Coalition supported that legislation through the Parliament. The legislation strengthened the provisions somewhat. The matter of Dr Graham Reeves really gave rise to this legislation. The member for Bega first brought the matter of Dr Reeves to the attention of the House. Dr Reeves, who practised for a number of years, most latterly in the Bega area, was responsible for providing treatment to a number of women in Bega and Pambula that led to serious allegations of mutilation and horrendous consequences. That matter is now the subject of legal action, so I will not go into further detail.

The problem is that while medical practitioners are now required to report to the Medical Board matters they believe should be investigated—and if they do not they are liable to penalty—there is nothing to require

area health services or hospitals to check with the Medical Board if there is an impediment against a doctor practising. As the member for Bega said in his contribution on 20 June, in notes attached to Justice O'Connor's report it was stated that a bureaucrat had checked Dr Reeves's credentials. Dr John Mortimer had made a phone call to a referee, who said that Dr Reeves was not supposed to practise obstetrics. This was all done before the contract was given to Dr Reeves and signed. If the bill before the House had been law at the time, that would have been the end of it. Dr Mortimer would have had to approach the Medical Board and the board would be required to give him the advice that Dr Reeves had an order against his name that he could not practise obstetrics.

If this law has been in place at the time, the very brave women who came forward to tell the Parliament and the world about the treatment they suffered at the hands of this doctor would not have had to suffer. If members need further proof that this legislation is sorely needed, they need only look at what has happened since then. The Government has said that this situation can never happen again because they have got it all under control. I refer to the latest case being investigated by the Health Care Complaints Commission of Dr Roman Hasil who treated women in the Lismore area, as was mentioned by my colleague the member for Lismore. If my proposed legislation is not passed, there is nothing to stop a hospital employing a doctor without checking his or her record.

Labor members have tried to explain it away by saying there is government policy on this issue. There is also government policy that sets out certain procedures to follow in the case of complaints of staff harassment. That government policy has not been followed. Government policies and guidelines are ignored all the time by the Labor Government that is now in office in New South Wales. At the moment it may be true that most hospitals and area health services check with the Medical Board because the matter of Dr Reeves is fresh in their minds. But what happens in a few years' time when it has slipped off the radar? It will only be an obvious requirement if it is mandated by law and the people who employ and sign off on contracts with doctors know they will be legally responsible and liable to penalty if they do not comply.

Some Government members have suggested that an impediment to their supporting this bill is that it applies only to the public sector. I am very happy to consider Government amendments to this legislation. I do not even mind if it wants to present the bill as its own. If it is worried that it will be a political win for the Coalition, I would be happy in the interests of women to come back and debate it again. The member for Bega has said that this legislation is particularly important to his electorate and the women who were so poorly treated by Dr Reeves when he was practising in Bega and Pambula. Some of those women are from the electorate of the member for Monaro. I am very disappointed that he is not present in the Chamber and has made no contribution to this debate. In effect, he is not speaking up for those patients in his electorate, just as none of the other Labor members has bothered to stand up and say that they want to protect women above all costs.

I made a comment when my colleagues spoke to this bill last week that this legislation is not just about the patients. It is also about the 99.9 per cent of doctors who are fantastic and do a wonderful job in our health system. They want to know that they are working alongside people who are not deregistered and do not have orders against them that prohibit their carrying out certain procedures. They do not want to be compromised. They want to know that everything possible has been done to make sure that only the best-qualified doctors work in our hospital system. I commend the bill to the House.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 38

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

Noes, 47

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

Pair

Ms Burton

Mr Humphries

Question resolved in the negative.**Motion negatived.****Bill not agreed to in principle.**

The SPEAKER: Order! General Business Orders of the Day (for Bills) having concluded, the House will now proceed to private members' statements.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS**Question—That private members' statements be noted—proposed.****NARARA VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL STAGE**

Mr GRANT McBRIDE (The Entrance) [4.27 p.m.]: Today I speak about the developments associated with the performance stage area and the long ongoing campaign by the Narara Valley High School to achieve this outcome. After four years of intensive campaigning I can now report that the stage area at Narara Valley High School has been completed and was officially opened on Thursday 23 October 2008. The construction of the stage in the high school auditorium included professionally planned and constructed underground lighting and sound facilities, and first-class performance amenities to enable all the schools in the area to conduct a variety of concerts, plays and official functions. The Central Coast is renowned for contributing to the cultural future of Australian talent and the stage will service all the schools in and around Narara, again ensuring that the public system plays an important role in the arts on the Central Coast.

I congratulate the Narara Valley High School Parents and Citizens Association who raised \$260,000 towards the project, which cost in excess of \$650,000. In particular, I mention the efforts of Mrs Deborah Amison, the secretary of the parents and citizens association; Mr Ron Miller, the president; and all the members, carers, parents, students and supporters of the school. I acknowledge also the school staff and the principal, Mr Andrew Eastcott, who have added immensely to the project. The recent official opening ceremony was a huge success, with entertainment provided by Narara Valley High School, Valley View Primary School, Gorokan Public School, Kanwal Public School, Avoca Public School, Northlakes Public School, Wadalba Community School, Wyong High School and St Josephs Catholic College. More than 500 people attended the inaugural event during which performers from the majority of the schools in the area took advantage of the first-class services that the new stage provided.

The musical directors of the evening included Rowen McBride—no relation to me—who studied trombone and conducting at Newcastle University; Sharnée Klempert, head teacher of creative and performing

arts; and Sean Cadogan, who completed a Bachelor of Music degree in percussion. All were former students of Narara Valley High School. Another musical director was Dianne Gardner, who is on the staff of Central Coast Grammar School and the Central Coast Conservatorium of Music and is a member of the SBS Television Youth Orchestra. Musical numbers included performances by the Narara Valley High School Classical Band, a rousing performance by the Percussion Ensemble, the Combined Schools Concert Band and the Senior Woodwind Ensemble. Individual performances were presented by Cameron Sing, Anna-Puma Srivistava, Lindsay Hall, Hayden Blain and Elizabeth Woolnough, who were supported by more than 100 singers, dancers and musicians.

To ensure that maximum benefit is gained from the new stage, Narara Valley High School has formed a partnership with Mr Ed Fardell of Bytecraft Entertainment. He has extensive industry experience, including as technical director at the Sydney Opera House. He is working closely with the school to provide other facilities such as a recording studio, lighting and drama and dance spaces, and he is adding specialised artistic instruction to help all local schools, not only Narara Valley High School, to achieve excellence in performing arts subjects. The addition of the new stage and its ongoing influence in the school region will give increased attention to music and drama in schools, focus on performance quality. It will also help to build a place for music and drama in the curriculum and, as a result, raise the status of the performing arts in Central Coast schools in general.

As I said, I commend everyone associated with this project. It took a long time to complete and we all know the trials associated with these projects. I congratulate everyone involved for their determination. The school worked cooperatively with both the local member and the Federal member to complete the project. At one stage the school was in the electorate of the member for Gosford, Marie Andrews. She and the Federal member for Robertson, Belinda Neal, supported the project and funding for the school. This is a great addition to our cultural assets on the Central Coast. The school should also be commended for not assuming ownership of the facility. It will be made available to all schools on the Central Coast. Everyone who played a part in this project should be commended for their contribution to this new, outstanding performance centre.

TUMUT HEALTH CARE FACILITIES

Mr DARYL MAGUIRE (Wagga Wagga) [4.32 p.m.]: I have spoken on many occasions in this place about the desperate need for a new hospital in Tumut. I report today a very disturbing turn of events. I have been contacted by No More Bandaid Solutions Inc. and have been provided with a media release entitled "Kelly backs down on support for new hospital". It states:

In an extraordinary political turn about, Eden-Monaro MP Mike Kelly today backed down on his election promises to fight for a new hospital for Tumut, stating in an interview with the editor of the Tumut and Adelong Times that he "remained to be convinced" that a new hospital was required.

NMBS Inc. spokesperson Sue Swann said that she was stunned by Dr Kelly's comments.

In fact, Ms Swann rang me today and sent an email about her alarm at what was being said. The press release continues:

"I truly believed Mike Kelly when he said he would support our campaign," said Mrs Swann. "I am bitterly disappointed by his comments today," she said.

According to the T & A Times (Kelly pursues funds for hospital & Gocup Rd Tues 28.10.08 p.1) Dr Kelly cited conversations with locals and hospital staff for his change of heart. However, hospital staff contacted by NMBS Inc. deny this and are adamant that they are united in their support for the push for a new hospital.

Member of Tumut ALP and former Mayor Geoff Pritchard publicly questioned the need for a new hospital last month following his election to Tumut Shire Council. His televised outburst on the steps of the Council Chambers whilst the New Hospital for Tumut Committee met upstairs with Minister for Health Nicola Roxon and Mike Kelly, caused considerable comment within the community.

I understand that Dr Kelly will meet with the Minister for Health today. The press release further states:

Dr Kelly told the T & A Times he will seek to have yet another detailed assessment of the hospital buildings. "We need a proper, professional assessment of the condition of the building," he said.

Secretary of NMBS Inc. Sue Swann said that further expenditure on assessing the buildings on the Tumut site would be a total waste of money. "This work has already been done. Even health authorities agree that any further money spent on the current hospital buildings is a waste of money. Enough is enough," she said.

The last detailed assessment was conducted in 2006/7 by New South Wales Health to obtain a strategic overview of assets owned and maintained by New South Wales Health. This assessment, called the New South Wales Health Asset Strategic

Planning-Stage 1 (Asset Audits), was carried out jointly by Greater Western Area Health Service, Area Health Services and Dept of Commerce who managed the Asset Audits. The current Minister for Health, John Della Bosca, was Minister for Commerce at the time. Mr Della Bosca met with NMBS Inc. in October 2006 about conditions at Tumut Hospital and Tumut's changed economy.

The Asset Audit Report for Tumut Hospital, dated 30th May 2007 and other documents were personally handed to the TSC New Hospital Committee by the former GSAHS Asset Mgr Mr Steve Butt at a meeting in Tumut on 1 November 2007. It rates Tumut Hospital's functionality at 39.3 per cent and clearly indicates that the facility is in poor condition. Only two hospitals (Bega and Kenmore) scored lower than Tumut out of the 24 GSAHS hospitals listed on the Audit Average Scores Summary.

Both the architect and GSAHS executive staff praised the site at Tumut, saying it was a magnificent location and an easy site to build on. In their view, \$40 million would be adequate to build a new Level 3 hospital.

GSAHS staff told the committee: "If we had the money, we would build it tomorrow and it would be completed with three years, without the need to interrupt the present hospital's services."

No More Bandaid Solutions Inc. sources said today that Dr Kelly's about-face is a serious blow to Tumut. The organisation was formed out of community frustration at the reluctance of politicians and bureaucrats to address real needs for services and infrastructure, instead offering political bandaids.

Dr Kelly has urged "the town" to put in an application to upgrade Sheahan House under the Rudd Government's National Rural and Remote Health Infrastructure Fund. However, when asked for details about the proposal, staff in Dr Kelly's office declined to comment, saying that any money for building improvement should be welcomed.

I wrote to the Minister today seeking information about who applied for that funding—whether it was the Greater Southern Area Health Service or the department—and to verify that that had occurred. The press release continues:

According to the Asset Audit Report, Sheahan House has an "extreme risk of asbestos issues", its adaptability was "poor" with a "very limited capacity to modify the building. There were "structural limitation to workflows between departments and support units, future service provision is hampered by numerous factors," to name a few of a long list of negative comments...

It was made abundantly clear to him, they said, that there was a cast iron mandate for the replacement of Tumut Level 3 hospital as a matter of urgency.

I call on Dr Kelly and the Minister to make their position clear.

Mr STEVE WHAN (Monaro—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.37 p.m.]: I had the great pleasure of joining Dr Mike Kelly, the Federal member for Eden-Monaro, at a meeting today with the Minister for Health. Once again the member proactively represented his constituents in the Tumut area when talking to the Minister about local health facility requirements. The difference between Mike Kelly and previous Coalition representatives of Tumut is that he approaches issues constructively and with a view to getting results rather than simply headlines. He has already taken the Federal Minister for Health to see the facility and he has been in discussions with her about the way that the Federal Government can be involved. He has now had very constructive discussion with the New South Wales Minister for Health about the hospital's future. He understands that we must ensure that we have a very good idea of what is required and the services that should be delivered.

Unlike Opposition members, Mike Kelly understands that we cannot do everything at once. It is Labor governments that deliver new hospitals in New South Wales. More than 50 new hospitals have been delivered by this Labor Government. Of the five hospitals in my electorate, three have been built or rebuilt by this Government. The previous Coalition government did nothing. The construction of hospitals in rural New South Wales will continue in places such as Broken Hill, Walcha and so on, which have enjoyed the results of substantial investment by this Government but which received nothing from Coalition governments. The people of Tumut can be assured that in Mike Kelly they have a representative who is 100 per cent for his area and who will ensure that they get the best health care possible.

BARRACK HEIGHTS PUBLIC SCHOOL

Ms LYLEA McMAHON (Shellharbour—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.39 p.m.]: On Monday 27 October I was afforded the opportunity to spend a day in the classrooms at Barrack Heights Public School. At the invitation of principal Robert Cusack I had the privilege of gaining an insight into the magnificent work of both students and teachers as they demonstrated the school's outstanding achievements in literacy. My visit to Barrack Heights Public School has come at a time when the school has been at the centre of teaching and learning innovation in the Illawarra. Barrack Heights is a school with a significant presence of indigenous

Australian students. The integration of groundbreaking literacy programs including the Accelerated Literacy Program and the Teaching Handwriting, Reading and Spelling Strategies Program has had highly commendable results and led to notable learning improvements amongst the students.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge the teachers of Barrack Heights Public School, including Elizabeth Scott, who teaches second and third grade, and Denise Broomham, who teaches first grade, for their great work, dedication and commitment to our children and their future. Their amazing contribution to the success of the literacy program is undoubtedly demonstrated through the accomplishments of the students. I was privileged to witness these successful outcomes as the students of grade one, including Tarneaka Brown, Casey Campbell and Page Hill, were able to demonstrate the skills they had acquired from the Teaching Handwriting, Reading and Spelling Strategies Program.

I was amazed not only by their accelerated and surprisingly advancing literacy skills, but also their love of learning. As reported in the *Illawarra Mercury*, "They are having Literacy discussions at the age of six." The students of years two and three, including Shanae Shepherd, Maddison Feeney and Jack Zhang, were able to exhibit their literacy improvements that have resulted from the successful implementation of the Accelerated Literacy Program. I was extremely impressed upon witnessing these students deconstructing text through their latest in-depth study of the book *Where the Wild Things Are*. The students were not simply breaking down text in a bid to understand the grammar and develop comprehension but developing advanced and deep understandings of the cultural and textual meanings hidden within it.

The Accelerated Literacy Program has evidently had a positive impact on the future of Barrack Heights Public School students. It was implemented initially in the Northern Territory for indigenous students. The Accelerated Literacy Program also incorporates an intense focus on the needs of underperforming students. It aims to improve their literacy status by teaching them not at a lower level they can understand but at a higher level to challenge them and bring them up to the standards of their peers. This teaching technique is known as scaffolding literacy and it enables teachers to instil a deeper understanding of textual meaning. The basis of this process is guided by the belief, which I found was thought of highly at Barrack Heights, that a more complex understanding through literacy greatly contributes to a student's analytical skills and textual understanding, which is essential for them to succeed educationally and to attain lifelong learning and health.

As a result of this initiative, Barrack Heights Public School has been able to implement the literacy program at no additional cost and the teachers of Barrack Heights have been able to undergo intensive training with the Aboriginal Education and Training Directorate. This has allowed them to implement the program effectively and to work towards lifting the standards of all students. I was proud to see that the school received external support from the Shellharbour district support team to complement the efforts of the teachers. That illustrates our local community's commitment to our children's education. With that support, children who are in the lowest band of performance are targeted through ongoing guidance and individual programs.

Through my experience at Barrack Heights I have discovered how the recent results of grade five students are illustrative of the school's success in committing effectively to the educational outcomes of the students and implementing the literacy program. Two years ago the students were ranked second-last in writing. This year their grade average sits 14 points above the State's average. They are in fourth position for reading among the schools of the Shellharbour electorate, and in overall literacy they have come up from a middle ranking to be positioned third. Barrack Heights has demonstrated that with hard work and dedication from trained teachers and students, and the successful implementation of these literacy programs, the findings of the report can be reversed.

As the students of Barrack Heights Public School established, higher, above-average standards and fantastic results can be achieved. The success of the school, the teachers and the students is a combined effort, yet I cannot forget the efforts of the community. It has contributed greatly to the school's ability to provide the equipment and facilities essential to a child's development. The latest fundraising effort, the Jogathon, was on Friday 24 October. As the member for Shellharbour, I am very proud of the perseverance and commitment of the teachers, parents and the community, working together with the aim of giving our children a brighter and more promising future.

TWEED NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH AND SCHOOL WATCH PROGRAMS

Mr GEOFF PROVEST (Tweed) [4.44 p.m.]: I am 100 per cent for the Tweed. I have been involved in, and actively supported, the Tweed Neighbourhood Watch program for many years. In the past two years

I have taken over the role of chairman of the regional program. The Tweed Neighbourhood Watch program sets a great example for the rest of the State. We have approximately 800 active members, which is one of the highest participation rates anywhere in the State. There are 17 individual groups, and I also chair the Banora Point Neighbourhood Watch. This is a very successful program. Just over the border, the Queensland Labor Government is allocating much greater funding to its Neighbourhood Watch programs. But all New South Wales Neighbourhood Watch programs must rely on local businesses for donations in order to operate.

A major point I bring to the attention of the House is that for 18 months I have been monitoring the progress in Victoria of involving schools and younger people in Neighbourhood Watch programs. Many such attempts have been made. We took some of the best ingredients of that initiative, and I am pleased to announce to the House that on the seventeenth of this month we launched our first ever School Watch program. The Banora Point School Watch program involves students of all ages meeting on a regular basis with a number of nearby residents in an effort to curb vandalism and to create greater awareness amongst our youth. Our first meeting involved active participation by young people from the school. I sought permission from the Department of Education and Training, and it has become the first pilot program in New South Wales. It will be a great success in the Tweed.

In recent times the Tweed has experienced some gang-related violence and crime. There already seems to be a good flow of information from our School Watch program. I urge members of the House to introduce similar programs in their local areas. I praise Ron Hankins, our regional director of education; Michael Kenny, our police superintendent; and also June Rogan, the Banora Point High School principal. Without their support this program would never have eventuated. I plan to attend as many meetings as I possibly can. We must support the youth of our town because it is an investment in our future. We will shortly be looking at other Neighbourhood Watch programs. A program in another school is using our volunteers to engrave identification numbers on pushbikes. We initially picked Pottsville Primary School. We thought we would be there for a few hours; we ended up engraving well over 250 bikes. Parents, uncles and aunties brought them in. Other schools are now requesting that we attend with our engraving tools to do their students' bikes as well.

We are also looking seriously at launching a Marine Watch. The Tweed has many boats and boaties, and we are trying to emulate on the waterways what we have done with Neighbourhood Watch. Following that, we will be looking at the business community. I believe this will set the benchmark for all other Neighbourhood Watch programs. The House should note that recently the Victorian Government invested a large sum of money in the continuation of its Neighbourhood Watch. The Tasmanian Government also invests a large amount of money in its program, but in New South Wales not one cent comes from the State Government. All the money has to be raised, and we actively seek local sponsorship. I thank Marc Anderson from the Good Guys. The Good Guys in our town sells engraving tools and marker pens and it donates to us money from their sale. So, without Rory Curtis and Marc Anderson from the Good Guys we would not have the funds to continue all these great operations. This is the way the community can take back its streets. It is the way the community can feel proud about the Tweed. Just as I am 100 per cent for the Tweed, the local community is 100 per cent for the Tweed through Neighbourhood Watch.

HEATON PUBLIC SCHOOL FIFTIETH BIRTHDAY

Ms SONIA HORNERY (Wallsend—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.49 p.m.]: Thank you for your invite to your birthday party. I loved the singing, dancing and fanfare. Let us all pay tribute to Heaton Public School by joining together to celebrate its fiftieth birthday in 2008. Happy birthday also to past and present students and their families, past and present staff and, of course, to Heaton Public School itself. Heaton Public School is situated in the learning hub of Jesmond in my electorate of Wallsend. It is adjacent to the University of Newcastle and shares its location with secondary school students at Jesmond campus, Callaghan College. The picturesque grounds include built gardens, paths, observation deck and striking garden sculptures, all created in 2003 by clients of Hunter Workways, a project for unemployed people, and the families of Heaton Public School.

Some current students at Heaton Public School are the grandchildren of kids who started when the school opened in 1958. I believe one of the junior students is the great-granddaughter of a female student who started at Heaton Public School in 1958. Some of the many dedicated teachers at the school now have taught generations of students. To commemorate this great milestone, Heaton Public School dedicated 11 September as a day of fun-filled events and activities, including a formal assembly presided over by the principal, Mrs Vicki Taylor, and featuring school captains Georgia Hartley and Christopher Hughes, and vice captains Jasmyn Boulton and Curtis Reay.

The organising committee was led by Ms Amanda Pleash and consisted of Lee Corrigan, Melanie Guy, Trudy Harris, Natalie Hartley, Renee Kirkman, Michelle Lees, Anne Littlewood and Jenny Northam. Special guests included Ken Weatherall, who gave the acknowledgement of country at the assembly. There was also a pre-recorded message from Rear Admiral Davyd Thomas, Deputy Chief of the Royal Australian Navy, a former student, who spoke fondly of his memories of Heaton Public School and encouraged students to achieve their dreams, as he had been able to do. I understand that he and Commander Stuart Taylor of HMAS *Kanimbla*, and members of the ship's company of *Kanimbla*, a transport ship in the Royal Australian Navy, have since visited the school. They gave a spectacular presentation and took students onto the *Kanimbla*.

As patron of the parents and citizens association, I was pleased to speak about the achievements of Heaton Public School—particularly in technology, for which it has an enviable reputation. The school is likely to be one of the few schools to have fully interactive whiteboards and a connected classroom, allowing worldwide videoconferencing—unimaginable in the original classrooms of 1958. The principal, Mrs Vicki Taylor, spoke about the many achievements of Heaton Public School, including its outstanding academic, cultural, social and sporting programs, the richness and diversity of its multicultural population, and the school's enduring connections with the local community. She spoke passionately about the resilience of the school community and its ability to rebuild after the tragic fire that all but razed the school in 1999. Vicki said:

With the building of the new school came a resurgence of pride and re-born sense of community and belonging. From these new beginnings we have been able to create a school that enjoys an enviable reputation for innovation and excellence.

She spoke of the tireless dedication of all staff to the students' achievements and wellbeing, and paid tribute to past teachers for establishing traditions of excellence at Heaton Public School. She spoke about the importance of teaching values as well as the key learning areas. A fiftieth birthday would not be complete without a cake, and it was at this stage of the proceedings that a huge cake with delicious-looking icing—in the school colours of gold and maroon—was cut, to the strains of *Happy Birthday*, of course. Heaton's youngest student, Daisy Smith, and Mr Sam Hobbs, a former student, cut the cake.

What a magnificent day! What a magnificent school! Heaton Public School is a model of public education at its very best. I congratulate every student, every teacher and every single community member with past or present associations with the school, and I pay tribute to all the organisers of the big day. May the school have many more birthdays! No school has a more meaningful or prophetic motto than Heaton Public School: "Only the Best". Happy Birthday.

KOREAN WAR VETERANS RECOGNITION

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK (South Coast) [4.54 p.m.]: This evening I speak again in this place about recognition of the service of Korean War veterans post 1953—the date that is generally recorded, incorrectly, as being the end of the aptly named "Forgotten War". My previous contributions in this House have been in support of Korean War veterans who have lobbied tenaciously for more than five years for recognition of the service of veterans who remained in Korea after the 27 July armistice in 1953. Hostilities did not cease following this so-called armistice—in fact, war-like circumstances continued, resulting in the loss of 18 Australian lives and many more lives from a number of allied nations.

Today I am pleased to report that the Hon. Dr Mike Kelly, the Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support, announced yesterday that the recommendations of the Korean Post Armistice Service Review relating to recognition for post-armistice service will be agreed to following Royal Assent. This is a great day for Korean War veterans. This decision will result in the awarding of the Australian General Service Medal—Korea and the Returned from Active Service Badge to those who served in Korea after 1953 and who either lost their lives or who have not been recognised for the past 50 years for their significant contributions and sacrifices. On this occasion I am pleased to give credit where credit is due. That credit goes to the Rudd Labor Government, which included the above in its election commitments for the 2007 Federal election and has honoured that commitment, although somewhat belatedly.

However, I pay special tribute today to Mr Bob Morris, President of the Korean War Veterans Recognition Committee and a South Coast constituent. Mr Morris' magnificent obsession has been long and arduous and has taken him and his good friend Rod Coupland, their wives and supporters to various Ministers' offices all over this State for meetings on a weekly—often daily—basis for more than five years. To be precise, this battle for recognition has taken Mr Morris, his supporters and the Korean veterans involved five years, nine months and 22 days. Bob Morris led the charge and should be congratulated on behalf of all Korean War veterans who fought for this country but who should not have had to fight for recognition of their service and their sacrifice.

The Rudd Government made its decision due to the factual and indisputable information gathered by Bob Morris and others. Mr Morris spent much of his time researching events in Korea post armistice and the deaths of the 18 Australians. As a result of these efforts, an Australia-wide service review was established in 2005 that travelled throughout Australia, taking submissions from veterans and interested parties. This panel recommended action in favour of recognition, and it is disappointing that the prolonged decision in respect of this review has resulted in Korean War veterans passing away without the recognition they so richly deserve. The New South Wales Government should now take appropriate action to reflect the Federal Government decision, particularly regarding the impending construction of a Korean War memorial in Moore Park in Sydney. The proposed wording for the memorial to honour the service of Korean War veterans between 1950 and 1953 should be now altered to reflect the dates 1950 to 1956.

Indeed, efforts should be made throughout Australia to alter the dates on each and every memorial that only denotes service between the years 1950 and 1953 to reflect accurately the war service of men and women who sacrificed so much in this horrific and often forgotten war. I understand that, as I speak, four of the Korean War veterans are meeting with Minister West, and I have had discussions with the Minister as well. This has been a very difficult issue for the Federal Government. I hope it will not be difficult for the State Government. Because of the precedent established yesterday by the Hon. Dr Mike Kelly, I am sure the State Government will be able to move forward and honour Korean War veterans appropriately.

This is a great day for Korean War veterans. Veterans from throughout Australia, not just in New South Wales or on the South Coast, were on the phone all day yesterday congratulating each other. In particular, I convey my very best wishes to one of my constituents on the South Coast, a gentleman by the name of Mr Kevin Cook, who is gravely ill and who may not survive next month. He was involved in this long battle, and I pass on my congratulations to him and his wife, Dot. They made an enormous contribution. I commend also Mr Bob Morris and give my unending thanks to the Hon. Dr Mike Kelly.

RURAL FIRE SERVICE STATE MEDALLION CEREMONY

Mr FRANK TERENCE (Maitland) [4.59 p.m.]: On Saturday 19 April 2008 I attended Maitland City Bowling Club to represent the then Minister for Emergency Services, the Hon. Nathan Rees, at the State Medallion Awards Ceremony to recognise Rural Fire Service staff and volunteers who assisted in the 2007 Hunter and Central Coast floods. Twenty-three brigades, representing 878 personnel, were recognised at the ceremony. The geographical zone covered by these volunteer Rural Fire Service [RFS] units is 5,470 square kilometres of land and 100 square kilometres of waterways. The zone represents a population of 163,704, covering four local government areas. In attendance at the ceremony were, amongst others, Chief Superintendent Bruce Holtz, Director Operations, representing Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons; Councillor Peter Blackmore, the Mayor of Maitland; Councillor Bob Pynsent, the Deputy Mayor of Cessnock; Chief Superintendent Steve Yorke, the Region East Manager; Superintendent Jason McKellar, the Lower Hunter Manager; and Superintendent Paul Jones, the Hunter Valley Manager.

In conjunction with the other emergency services, the Rural Fire Service made an outstanding contribution in assisting the community in the areas of the Hunter that were badly affected by flooding and storm damage. To commemorate that spirit of caring and support, the then Premier ordered that the medallions be made to ensure that the extraordinary effort the RFS units put into the recovery operation is not forgotten. It was a pleasure to represent the then Minister on that occasion. It was truly an honour and a privilege to represent the New South Wales Government in presenting the medallions and to express the thanks and gratitude of the whole community. I acknowledge the brigades that took part in the recovery operation. They included Benwerring, Bishops Bridge, Bolwarra, Bucketty, Central, Greta, Kearsley, Laguna, Lochinvar, Louth Park, Maitland Vale-Luskintyre, Millfield, Mulbring, Neath, North Rothbury, Pokolbin, Quorrobolong, Rothbury, Thornton and Wollombi. I also acknowledge the invaluable assistance provided by the catering, communications and support brigades, and that of the local group officers and staff.

The New South Wales Government has long recognised the importance of the Rural Fire Service and the invaluable work it does—not just during fires but in natural disasters such as the one in June 2007, which the community may not immediately think of as having an RFS involvement. That is why the State Government has continued to ensure that the RFS receives the funding it needs to do its work. This year the Government has provided a record \$198.6 million to the Rural Fire Service, an increase of \$30.5 million on last year. The funding includes \$34.5 million for bushfire tankers, \$15 million for fire stations and fire control centres, and \$9 million for bushfire protection works. The Rees Government will continue to support this valuable resource for the community.

Not only does the Rural Fire Service participate in emergencies and fires, but it conducts many community activities to assist the community in many ways. The service also holds open days at various Rural Fire Service depots, so the community can come along, especially on Saturday afternoons, to have a look at the work the brigades do. The RFS also holds demonstrations so people are able to get an idea of the sort of work they do. All these people are volunteers. I have visited all nine of the RFS brigades in the Maitland area to ask them how things are going and what sorts of resources they need. It seems that they are pretty well equipped. I can see by the way they run their meetings and the way they look after their equipment, and by their keenness and enthusiasm, that we are very well looked after by these volunteers. Without them we would not have this valuable resource and the Government's job in having these emergencies attended to would be so much harder, especially in country areas. Maitland has a significant rural component, where these emergency services are much needed. I congratulate all the volunteers who received medallions at the ceremony. Certainly we depend on them to keep up their great work, to sacrifice their time to attend their meetings, and to ensure the safety of the community.

HAWKESBURY RIVER

Mr RAY WILLIAMS (Hawkesbury) [5.04 p.m.]: I have been fortunate to have undertaken two important boat tours of the Hawkesbury River over the past year to view riverbank damage, the shallow depths of the river, and severe weed infestation along the banks of the river. While the trips were relatively short in terms of the length of the river covered—between Windsor wharf and Cattai, and then to Wisemans Ferry—the problems we witnessed were immense. Severe riverbank erosion is evident, especially at bends on the river, which suffer due to the natural flow of the river and wash from boats. Large trees, which fall into the river, take even more riverbank with them, and residents continually fight with government departments just to remove the trees before they cause further damage to their properties.

Residents along the river regularly seek approval from government departments to repair this damage. However, the departments are less than accommodating in terms of delivering even the most basic information. Some residents have advised me that the departments can sometimes take up to two years to grant approval to remove trees or repair damage to the banks. In the case of the Howard family, approval has been refused and the damage to their property in terms of riverbank erosion continues because of the problems associated with getting approvals from the many departments and bodies involved with the Hawkesbury River. There is the Department of Energy and Resources, the Department of Fisheries, the Department of Lands, the Department of Water and Maritime, Hawkesbury River County Council, Hawkesbury City Council, the Hawkesbury-Nepean Riverbank Management Program, the Catchment Management Authority and—my old favourite that has so much control over all things environmental in New South Wales—the Department of Environment and Conservation.

This erosion is not only damaging to the environment but the effect of it is that private property is disappearing. The river is also home to a once flourishing prawning industry. For years the people engaged in the prawning industry have watched the reduction in prawns due to an ever-diminishing quality of water from sewerage outflows and the silting of the river. Indeed, at one point a person can safely walk across the mighty Hawkesbury River because of the shallow depth. Prawns depend on deep water to breed and migrate upstream from the mouth of the Hawkesbury River. Because of the siltation problems we are losing the Hawkesbury River prawning industry. The siltation also plays havoc with water skiing activity because the shallow depths of the river further jeopardise this vital tourism facility. Unless these problems are addressed we will continue to see the riverbanks erode, the fishing industry lost, private property washing down the river, and water skiing stopped because of safety concerns about the depth of the river.

Hawkesbury River County Council, which does its best to remove weeds along the river and remediate riverbank erosion in conjunction with private landowners, has been restricted in using a suitable herbicide to eradicate the weeds. It is absurd that we have good people who actually know what needs to be done but they are restricted by bureaucrats. The once-pristine Cattai State Recreational Area is now adorned with a weed known as balloon vine, or *cardiospermum grandiflorum*, which adorns the sides of the river for several kilometres. The weed forms a dense layer of leaves, smothering the host plant and starving it of light. Indeed, a sign at the Cattai park advises tourists of the problems that were experienced with balloon vine in this area 20 years ago. Unfortunately, you have to fight your way through the balloon vine that is now present to read what is written on the sign. The weed has been ignored and permitted to grow unabated over the past decade, to the point where it is an absolute blight on the environment in this area.

Along with balloon vine we have a couple of other choice weeds: castor oil plant, whose seeds are poisonous to livestock and humans; turkey rhubarb, a climbing vine that can smother native plants and block out

light, and competes for nutrients; and honey locust, a rapidly growing, aggressive tree that can smother pastures and out-compete native vegetation. It also regularly takes out the eyes of cattle with its large, sharp thorns. Other weeds include green cestrum, which actually kills cattle. The weed is a long-lived shrub that is toxic to stock, birds and bees, and it is a ready coloniser of bushland. Others include paddy lucerne, a prolifically fruiting plant with seeds that remain dormant in the soil for long periods; wandering Jew, an invasive weed that is capable of covering an entire ground surface, preventing any other native species from establishing; and wild tobacco tree, from which people can suffer serious allergic reactions after coming into contact with the hairs on the stems and leaves.

These are just some of the more notable weeds that the various State Government departments choose to ignore and which all play a role in the destruction of a once beautiful and pristine Hawkesbury River environment. When the Government puffs out its chest and talks about its environmental credentials, it should take a close look at what is in its own backyard. The Hawkesbury River is suffering, and until we put in place a single authority to oversee the restoration of this river the suffering will continue unabated. When one looks at the various departments which all have a say in how the environment surrounding this river is protected—or, in this case, is ignored—one immediately understands why nothing happens. We have a case of over-governance to the extreme in this case—too many chiefs and not enough Indians. Too many bureaucrats are sitting around in their ivory towers and no-one is undertaking the necessary and vital work that is required to get this river back to its once glorious condition. What is needed is a single river authority. I am pleased that the Premier has acknowledged that. Hopefully a single authority will be put in place. Certainly it will not be before time.

HEATHER CARR BENEFIT FUNCTION

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.09 p.m.]: As a member of Parliament one has the privilege of meeting some wonderful and inspiring people. Last Sunday, 26 October, I was fortunate to meet Heather Carr. Heather's husband David died two years ago, after a ten-year battle with cancer, and now she has developed an aggressive form of cancer herself. Heather is undergoing chemotherapy and radiotherapy, and battles daily against her condition. Heather and her three daughters, Amy, Charlotte and Alison, live at Harrington Park. The girls attend William Carey Christian School in my electorate. The school community organised a benefit function in Heather's honour—the day was a wonderful celebration. Last year I spoke of the wonderful sense of caring for each other at William Carey Christian school, and yet again this was in evidence last Sunday. Psalm 46:1 says:

God is our place of safety. He gives us strength. He is always there to help us in times of trouble.

I pay special tribute to Caroline Young and Kylie Adams who organised the day, which is expected to raise between \$30,000 to 40,000. They are having further fundraisers to set up a trust fund for the children. Colin Buchanan donated his time and a concert for the children was held Friday evening. The event was sold out with 950 people attending. I was able to meet Amy, Charlotte and Alison and again they confirmed my faith in the upcoming generation. They are pleasant, intelligent and delightful young people who will contribute an enormous amount to the community during their lives. They have the support of Heather's family in the area, but it still is very hard for them.

I would also like to pay tribute to the Campbelltown Hospital Cancer Centre, which is helping Heather. In particular, I pay tribute to the doctors who are caring for Heather: Dr Stephen Della-Fiorentina, Dr Amanda Walker and Dr Fowler. I was able to be at the Campbelltown 24-hour Fight Against Cancer Walk the preceding week, and was again amazed at the wonderful support our community gives to cancer services in our area. Also present on the day was councillor Fred Borg from Campbelltown City Council. Fred is the driving force behind the Campbelltown 24-hour Fight Against Cancer Walk. He is a true leader of our community and for his many good works I congratulate him. I also congratulate Fred on his re-election, and thank him for his work on the walk against cancer, which I expect will raise over \$170,000. Well done, Fred! I know that the entire William Carey Christian School community will look after the Carr family in their time of need. I would also like to offer my support to this family in any way that I can.

At the function, the entertainment by Jim Peters was memorable. The Jesus Ute team were there as well, and spoke of their faith and told me of the finer points of Ute racing. Stephen Fisher King, who has a magnificent voice, sang brilliantly. I would like to thank the sponsors for the day, particularly the Liverpool Catholic Club, and Blake Lazarus—an up-and-coming young player from Wests Tigers, my favourite team and the team of all people with taste in rugby league. But, yet again I return to Heather. Everyone who meets

Heather would be struck by her courage, determination, and generosity of spirit. I was humbled just to talk with her, and want everyone in New South Wales to know her story. She is one of the most inspiring people you could ever meet. I commend Heather Carr to the House.

GRAFFITI

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN (Willoughby) [5.13 p.m.]: Graffiti is a major problem for all local members and from time to time increased incidences of graffiti are experienced. I want to acknowledge those in my community who are vigilant in the reduction of graffiti and who appreciate that the speedy removal of graffiti is the best way to ensure that other forms of crime do not escalate and that the residential amenity of the community is not impacted by the scourge of graffiti. In particular I would like to highlight a solution proposed by Mr Peter Nardone, a constituent in my electorate who is vigilant about graffiti prevention. Mr Nardone has been somewhat frustrated by the brick walls that have been put up for him when he has tried to raise his solution. For some time now Mr Nardone has proposed to make a non-removable button a legal requirement on all aerosol dispensers of capacity 50 millilitres to 100 millilitres sold in Australia. He argues that without being able to remove the buttons, and then re-pressurise containers, graffiti vandals will find their criminal activity much more expensive.

He further argues that currently graffiti vandals can transfer nozzles without any difficulty from one can to another, thereby refilling that can and making it a weapon of destruction. If the nozzle were permanently fixed to the can the propensity for vandals to change the nozzle, refill and reuse the can would be severely reduced. It is the argument of Mr Nardone that the law should require a tamperproof aerosol button system to be fixed permanently to the valve's stem, so it is no longer removable. This will also render the can to be non-refillable due to the system being inaccessible. Mr Nardone's proposal is simple but one which requires attention both at the State and Federal level. He has raised the issue with various State authorities, including the Department of Fair Trading. He has also raised the issue with the police and has received some support. In fact, one highly regarded member of the New South Wales Police Force wrote that legislation should be considered to:

1. prohibit the refilling of aerosol cans intended in manufacture for a single use;
2. prohibit the possession of any aerosol cans containing a product other than that described on the manufacturer's or retailer's label;
3. prohibit the sale of aerosol cans for anything other than the labelled contents;
4. amend the current standard concerning the sale/manufacture of aerosol cans so that a statement appears on them stating that it is an offence to refill the can or to be found in possession of an aerosol containing anything other than the manufacturer's or retailer's stated contents.

Mr Nardone is aware that a number of State and Federal agencies need to give approval to ensure this becomes an Australian standard. He has been very active in lobbying the Standards Australia Committee to ensure that the committees looking at the proposal have a broad-base membership. The committees need to work in consultation with State bodies to ensure an independent process. No doubt many industry representatives, community organisations and business organisations hold strong views on the issue. At the end of the day this is but one of the many solutions put forward on graffiti but I felt it appropriate to raise Mr Nardone's proposal as he has presented his case to me over a long period of time. I urge the Department of Fair Trading to reconsider putting its views on the proposal at a Federal level to support the recommendations of the police and others in the community who agree this is one way of ensuring that graffiti does not continue to be a scourge in our community.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.18 p.m.]: I thank the member for Willoughby for her contribution this evening and for her wonderful commitment to her community despite her numerous duties as a shadow Minister. Graffiti is a problem for us all and it does alienate public space from other citizens. For this reason ideas such as those proposed are worthwhile. I know that the member will be pursuing the matter raised by her constituent further. I agree that all levels of Government should welcome any achievable ideas. I congratulate the constituent of the member for Willoughby for his fine work so far.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Ms CLOVER MOORE (Sydney) [5.19 p.m.]: My constituents are very concerned about the serious impacts of global warming leading to climate change and they support the move to a green and sustainable

economy that requires progressively replacing coal-fired power with cleaner energy. Today the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that Federal Treasury modelling shows that the cost of waiting for the rest of the world to act in response to climate change will be greater than acting now. Electricity is a major producer of greenhouse gas emissions. In fact, almost 80 per cent of Sydney's greenhouse gas emissions come from electricity supplied to homes and businesses. We urgently need to green this industry if we are to combat climate change.

The New South Wales Government's renewable energy target of 10 per cent by 2010 and 15 per cent by 2020 falls short of both what is needed and what can be achieved. Environmental groups agree that our target should be 25 per cent by 2020 and the target should encourage local industry by ensuring only New South Wales energy sources are included. Governments regularly claim that renewable energy is limited because it cannot provide baseload power. This argument does not gel, given increasing examples of mass scale renewable energy sources.

Earlier this year I met with members of the Clinton Climate Foundation who informed me about the potential of geothermal power. Geothermal power comes from hot rocks four to five kilometres below the earth's surface. Water is pumped to the rocks and returns heated or as steam that can be used to generate electricity. Because the process does not rely on the availability of wind or sunlight, geothermal plants can operate continuously to provide baseload power. Twenty countries already use geothermal power, including France, Indonesia, Japan and China, and a plant in South Australia will be operational by the end of the year. Reports state that geothermal power could meet all of Australia's energy needs within 10 years. Coal power stations are only 36 per cent efficient. Decentralising power can play a major role in emission reductions.

Feed-in-tariff systems encourage the uptake of solar photovoltaic panels by requiring retailers to buy renewable energy fed back to the grid from homes and businesses. Currently, consumers must negotiate prices with retailers who onsell the renewable energy at market prices, while some retailers refuse to buy this renewable energy. A number of other States and Territories have or will have a feed-in-tariff system. I note that South Australia already has over three times the per capita uptake of solar panels and photovoltaics of New South Wales. An exciting aspect of the City of Sydney's Sustainable Sydney 2030 strategy includes a proposal to encourage the development of green transformers, also known as co-generation or tri-generation.

This is decentralised power generation for city buildings and city blocks. This offers a real alternative to a continued reliance on coal-fired power stations in regional areas and, most importantly, it can help achieve significant reduction targets. The technology exists. It is being used in cities such as Kuala Lumpur, Helsinki, Guangzhou, and Woking in the United Kingdom, which was consequently taken off the grid. New sustainable development recently approved or under construction in Sydney is incorporating co-generation and tri-generation. A good example of this are the exciting new plans for the Carlton United Brewery site at Broadway.

The State Government must reverse its commitment to long-term coal-fired power. I am also concerned that the Federal Government's Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme green paper recommends compensation for coal-fired power from the scheme's impacts. The emissions trading scheme is the biggest market tool that could rein in Australian industry emissions. It can enable greener alternatives to compete, but these alternatives will have difficulty in a market that compensates cheap coal. I note that a *Sydney Morning Herald* report on 7 August 2008 revealed that the industry intends to raise electricity prices anyway, despite compensation. We cannot rely on clean coal, which environmental experts agree will not be commercially viable in time for coal power to achieve the drastic greenhouse gas cuts needed. Public money should not fund clean coal research. The coal industry should invest in its own future and public money should be invested in renewable and sustainable electricity sources with proven emission reductions.

A March 2008 Newspoll survey of 1,200 Australians found that 90 per cent want renewable energy to receive the same or more Government financial support as that received for fossil fuels. Just as the industrial revolution transformed the nineteenth century, the green revolution is now transforming the twenty-first century. The State Government's energy efficiency strategy, together with aggressive renewable energy targets and investment in new and existing renewable energy, including geothermal, solar, wind and green transformers, can help us move away from coal-fired power. I call on the State Government to initiate a plan to phase out coal-fired power and transform the electricity sector into a green and sustainable industry.

DEATH OF NATIONAL PARKS AND WILDLIFE SERVICE FIREFIGHTER BRYCE LAUT

Mr PETER BESSELING (Port Macquarie) [5.24 p.m.]: Tonight I speak on behalf of all members of the Port Macquarie community and to celebrate the life of Bryce Laut, a dedicated member of the National

Parks and Wildlife Service who sadly lost his life on Sunday evening in the service of his State. In order to do justice to the legacy of a man whose total dedication was to his work and community, I have talked to a number of his work colleagues to gain a better insight into Bryce and the high regard in which he was held. Bryce was a long-time active firefighter whose passion for his work extended over 20 years between both the Rural Fire Service and as Fire Manager with the National Parks and Wildlife Service—a dual service role of which he was very proud. He was an extremely passionate fire manager who strived to protect the community and the environment through careful planning and engagement with the community and neighbours of the National Parks and Wildlife Service. His experience as a fire trainer and assessor provided Bryce with a great depth of knowledge, and he was only too happy to pass on his teachings and firefighting skills to other staff within the organisation.

Bryce lived, breathed and ate the National Parks and Wildlife Service. It was not a job for him but a lifestyle that he believed in with great conviction. He once said he could not imagine a time he would retire from the National Parks and Wildlife Service and would expect to keep working well into his elder years. He was also passionate about marine mammals. On many occasions he risked his own safety to rescue and disentangle large whales, as part of the National Parks and Wildlife Service marine mammal rescue team. It was a sign of his total involvement in all aspects of the service, whether it was on land or in the sea. Bryce was a friend and colleague who often would put other people's needs before his own. An active and contributing member of our local community, his loss has been sorely felt among a broad range of his friends, as well as his workmates in the Hastings, Manning and Macleay areas and those right across the State.

I wish to pay tribute to Bryce and those like him. We have many good people who work in the service of their communities and their State, who are totally dedicated to their role and who take great pride in a job well done. In an era where it seems that great joy is taken in highlighting the failings and inefficiencies of our public service and of the people who serve the public, we must never desert the many good people whose total commitment and reason for being is to serve their communities. These people deserve our full support, our thanks and our encouragement for the work they do. I know that we are lucky to find a good deal of these people working for our communities in the Port Macquarie electorate. Unfortunately, for people like Bryce and their families who serve in the many volunteer and professional emergency services, there are times when the ultimate sacrifice is paid for their service and lives are lost. It is particularly distressing to learn that many of the difficult and dangerous situations that emergency services personnel are put in can be simply avoided through community vigilance and better communication.

The fire that Bryce was fighting was believed to have been deliberately lit. I have been made aware of Bryce's family's anguish that their son's death was caused through an act of arson and that the implications of actions of the person or persons involved in starting the fire have been severe. I can also confirm their wishes for the broader community to take measures to help protect against the crime of arson and the danger arson poses to individuals, their property, communities, firefighters and especially our natural heritage. I acknowledge the kind words of both the Deputy Premier and the member for Goulburn in the Chamber yesterday, which have been noted by many in our area. I thank them for their support. I commend the work done in our community by people like Bryce Laut and wish to extend my sincere sympathy to his family, his friends and his co-workers who held him in such high regard.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.29 p.m.]: I thank the member for Port Macquarie for his moving and heartfelt private member's statement. The life of Bryce Laut sets a wonderful example to all in this place and across the State of New South Wales of leaving the world better for their presence. He humbles all of us with his commitment to others. At this time of loss for all of New South Wales we offer his family and friends our most sincere condolences. A life well lived, a tragic loss, his memory will live forever.

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

Private members' statements noted.

The House adjourned at 5.30 p.m. until Friday 31 October 2008 at 10.00 a.m.
