

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Thursday 27 November 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.

LIQUOR LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2008

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

SECURITY INDUSTRY AMENDMENT BILL 2008

Message received from the Legislative Council returning the bill with amendments.

Consideration of Legislative Council's amendments set down as an order of the day for a later hour.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of Motions

General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) given.

RURAL LANDS PROTECTION AMENDMENT BILL 2008

Agreement in Principle

Debate resumed from 26 November 2008.

Mr ANDREW STONER (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [10.08 a.m.]: Rural lands protection boards are the front line for managing animal health and pest control issues in New South Wales. They comprise 47 boards across the State, underpinned by 130,000 ratepayers in rural, country and coastal areas. The Government commissioned a report via the State Council of the Rural Lands Protection Boards into reform of the current system. A group called Integrated Marketing Communications did the report following an examination of organisational structure, administrative functions and service delivery. The report was done as a desktop review, and therein lies part of the problem with the way in which this review has been carried out. The directors and staff of the boards and many landholders feel that they have not had proper opportunity for input into this review.

There is no doubt a need for reform of the current system, which was put in place many years ago. Certainly agriculture has changed in that time, as has the demographic across country and coastal New South Wales. However, if we get this wrong, it would be very serious, particularly in relation to biosecurity issues. Recently we had an outbreak of equine influenza and the rural lands protection boards were the front line in dealing with that issue. Whilst we support change, we should not be hastening the change, and we should not be cutting out the views of those who know how to manage rural lands diseases, pests and so on. The Government justifies its proposal to change rural lands protection boards via this bill by saying that net savings of \$8 million to \$8.3 million will ensue. Rural lands protection board staff and directors, and landholders, are not convinced that that is the case.

The proposal under the legislation is that rural lands protection boards will be restructured and renamed. Boards will be reduced from 47 to 14. There will be a State policy council created with 28 members, two members from each of the 14 boards, and that council will establish working groups for particular policy areas. The 14 new rural lands protection boards will each have eight members—local ratepayers will elect six, and two will be appointed by the elected directors based on merit. Merit selection will be defined as expertise and experience in law, business, financial management, and so on. Under the new legislation, a nine-member State management council will manage the 14 new rural lands protection boards. Eight of those members will be chosen on merit by the State policy council and the ninth member will be the Director General of Primary Industries or his or her nominee, who will be responsible for statewide biosecurity.

There will be a centralised payroll, accounting, auditing and treasury function in Orange where the current rural lands protection board head office is located. There will be centralised rate notices, annual land and stock returns, a new animal health management matrix, which will hold the board accountable for ensuring that statewide programs agreed to between the Department of Primary Industries and other stakeholders are implemented. It is pleasing to see that the Government is not proposing to change the management of travelling stock routes, which are critical in rural life and in agriculture, particularly in the west of the State. Calculating rates will change quite noticeably with the minimum rateable area for a district increasing from 4 to 10 hectares. This will be welcomed in more built-up rural areas, rural residential land and the like, such as coastal areas and areas around, for example, Queanbeyan. In the far west, where properties are significantly larger, rates will begin at 400 hectares.

The Nationals and the Liberal Party agree with the need for reform. However, the process by which this reform has been undertaken is seriously flawed. We warn that if this legislation goes ahead we will achieve a suboptimal reform. Not all of the changes that I have mentioned are negative—we support many of them. However, if we want to get the reform right we need genuine consultation and a genuine opportunity for input from all stakeholders. Many concerns have been expressed to The Nationals, including centralisation of power and resources, cost savings not eventuating, autonomy being compromised, regional offices possibly closing, and certainly that the January 2009 deadline for implementing these changes is unrealistic.

No response has been received from the Minister or from the Rural Lands Protection Boards State Council to correspondence from concerned rural lands protection board directors and staff. During the Coffs Harbour annual conference for rural lands protection boards the State Council did not allow the opportunity for boards to voice their opinions. Boards were led to believe—incorrectly—that the report would be debated at length. This did not occur. Information about these changes is not filtering back to ratepayers currently or to existing boards. The promise by the Labor Government that all local offices will remain open is in doubt, particularly as eight Department of Primary Industries research sites were closed in the recent mini-budget. They were termed in that document as excess offices. Once the changes to rural lands protection boards have been implemented there is no guarantee that the shopfronts in the newly amalgamated board areas will remain open.

The appointment of 14 general managers for the new boards was well underway prior to the legislation being debated or passed, with 11 of those general managers having been appointed prior to 21 November. Why this has been made a priority when a number of rural lands protection boards have asked serious questions that remain unanswered by the State Council is a matter of concern. The January 2009 timetable is unworkable to properly implement the reforms. My office has been contacted by a number of rural lands protection boards. The vast majority acknowledge and accept the need for change, but they are concerned about the process and that the recommendations they have put forward have not been properly considered. There are concerns that the local knowledge of current directors and staff will be lost, particularly in terms of policy development and service delivery in the future. I received correspondence from James Maslin of the Forbes Rural Lands Protection Board, who stated:

As Chairman of the Forbes RLPB I am very concerned with some of the changes being implemented ... The main problem that I wish to bring to your attention is the centralising of land transfers. It is obvious the IMC and those still pushing this have no concept of the amount of work that is done with land transfers and the value of local knowledge when portion numbers and areas aren't correct. At the moment virtually all 47 Boards have one person and sometimes another part time doing transfers, these aren't inefficient people, and some like one girl in the Forbes Board have been doing them for over twenty years and has the knowledge to know if something has not been entered correctly. It is expected that six or seven in Orange without local knowledge will be able to do the same and do it efficiently.

We the Directors have never been consulted on the final report, it was released to the media the same day we received it and the Minister announced his acceptance without allowing any discussion from the people who own the RLPB—the ratepayers and Directors. I am in no way trying to stifle necessary changes but essential efficiencies must be maintained. A minor concern that could be more important than it sounds ... the new name "Animal Health and Pest Authority". The Directors were asked to give a list of suggested name changes. This was certainly not one of them and we believe will not be representative for the growing number of minimum ratepayers who don't have animals and believe they don't have pests.

He goes on to say:

After further consideration I believe the new "Animal Health and Pest Authority" will be totally irrelevant to possibly 50% of rural land occupiers. Any rural land occupier who does not have animals and does not care about foxes and rabbits are irrelevant to them will rebel against paying rates to an authority that is irrelevant to them. These people would include grain growers, grape growers, orchardists, minimum ratepayers and many more.

This is one board expressing concerns about not only the process, the outcomes of the process, and particularly the opportunity lost by the Government to take on board these concerns and expert knowledge. Rural lands

protection board staff is being lost as we speak. They know the writing is on the wall and they are seeking other employment, with a great degree of uncertainty about their future job prospects. The general consensus is that not enough consultation on the report took place with directors, and proposals put forward by rural lands protection boards were not considered. The State Council appears to be taking a one-size-fits-all attitude by grouping the majority of so-called good boards with the minority of bad boards. Today's *Land* newspaper carries a letter to the editor from Mr Max Hams, the chairman of the Broken Hill Rural Lands Protection Board. He states:

I recently read the Member for Monaro, Steve Whan's introduction of the Rural Lands Protection Amendment Bill to the NSW Parliament and could not help feeling dismay and anger at the absolute garbage contained in that speech.

It is easy to see why the world is in such a mess when people in a position of power can spruik such rubbish and make policies which are doomed to fail because they aren't based on facts.

Unfortunately, it is the working people who have to pay for, and suffer, the consequences of these ill-conceived policies and legislation...

I have serious concerns about the budget for the new State Management Council being approved only by the Minister.

Given the present State Council's track record, and the unaccountable waste of money which has occurred, I believe there will be serious blow-out of the cost of administration in Orange.

These forced amalgamations are simply a forced takeover of the entire RLPB system by government and State Council, who expect it will be easier to control 14 large boards than 47 smaller ones.

The Government is definitely not taking the stakeholders along with it in these changes. That is why the Coalition believes that the reforms will be suboptimal and calls on the Government to hold the legislation over. It should not be rushed through in this sitting but should be left on the table until the people who have the expertise, experience and knowledge on the ground have had a proper opportunity to have an input into this process. As I said, the Coalition is not against reform—we believe reform must take place—but it must be the right reform and it must involve all stakeholders.

The Coalition is also concerned about the purported \$8.3 million in savings. The Government has not provided the current boards with any economic modelling to support that figure. A cost-benefit analysis should be undertaken before this legislation as proposed by the Government is enacted in January. It is disappointing that the Minister for Primary Industries did not facilitate a meeting of all state directors of rural lands protection boards to discuss their concerns about the recommendations published in the review following its release. Why is there such a rush to make these changes? Why are the Minister and the State Council accelerating this legislation through the House? Are there concerns that if the Minister and the State Council consult with the boards that the recommendations could be rejected?

These changes are important and necessary, but the process has been seriously flawed and those who stand to be affected by these important issues of biosecurity, control of pests and the health of our livestock—all rural landholders—should be consulted. Our livestock is the best in the world and we are a disease-free nation and our trade depends on that. This is an extremely important issue and that is why we ask the Government to hold over this legislation, to consult more widely, to take on board these concerns and to introduce amended legislation next year with the support of this side of the House.

Mr RICHARD AMERY (Mount Druitt) [10.23 a.m.]: I will make a fairly brief contribution to the debate on the Rural Lands Protection Amendment Bill 2008. The overview of the bill is self-explanatory and the Leader of The Nationals has read it to the House. It refers to the New South Wales rural lands protection board review undertaken by Integrated Marketing Communications Pty Ltd, the review of the boards' rating system undertaken by Richard Bull and the changes to the principal Act. Those changes involve renaming the boards and districts as "livestock health and pest authorities" and, as far as some rural communities are concerned, the dramatic amalgamation of boards that reduce the number from 47 to 14.

I can understand rural communities being very protective of their rural lands protection boards and their predecessors, the pasture protection boards. They have an interesting history and they have been part of the New South Wales landscape for well over 100 years. They kicked off in the 1800s. I believe they were once known as scab boards because they were charged with addressing diseases affecting sheep and the like. They quickly became an acceptable part of the rural community and they have done an excellent job through the generations. I suggest to members of the Opposition, and particularly The Nationals who are obviously defensive about the

role of the boards, that this legislation is simply part of the evolutionary change and reform that is occurring in the way that rural lands and areas are being administered, and certainly in regard to the way that rural lands protection boards have been administered.

Members would be aware of the dramatic changes at government level that have seen the amalgamation of government departments. New South Wales agriculture now is very much covered by the broader umbrella of the Department of Primary Industries. The changes have been dramatic, particularly since this Government came into office. In 1995, when the Labor Government was elected, I was confronted with a review of rural lands protection boards that was carried out under the authority of former Ministers for Agriculture Ian Causley and Ian Armstrong. A number of recommendations were made about how that process should take place. Amalgamations and financial accountability were high on the list of topics to be examined.

A number of changes were made in the early years. The first and very painful process was dealing with the question of amalgamation. We had about 56 boards and we wound that back to 47. That modest amalgamation of boards caused an outcry. I remember the well-publicised rallies held in the battle to stop the amalgamation of the Merriwa and Mudgee rural lands protection boards. The people of Merriwa, which is a small country town, were fighting to save a service. The town had lost banks and government departments and the residents saw the amalgamation of the board as losing yet another service. The residents were given assurances about offices remaining open and the service being maintained, and that only the location of the board and its administration would be affected.

That is the principle behind this legislation. It will not affect the excellent work done by the experts working through the rural lands protection boards to safeguard our primary industries. It will wind back the cost of administration of the boards. In the 1990s we had to deal with the different financial standards applied by each board. It is glib to say that some boards were not submitting financial returns and people would claim that the records of some boards were kept in a shoebox under the bed. Of course, some boards did conform to appropriate financial procedures. The boards were rate-collecting entities—they were taking money from the public in one form or another or under one levy system or another—and the Government felt that there should be some form of accountability. Despite criticism, it was decided that the boards would be covered by the Public Finance and Audit Act arrangements. That was a costly process, but it was a wake-up call for the boards that the money they collected from the public had to be properly accounted for and that returns had to be lodged in the same way that any other public or private entity would be required to do so.

There has been continual change since the 1800s in the way that we administer these boards. The board boundaries were originally based on police boundaries. It was common practice in those days to use police boundaries when setting up many organisations. It was seen as easier than coming up with a new process. As a result, the board boundaries took no account of landscapes, environmental conditions and the suitability of stock. Some coastal boards were responsible for administering parts of the inland, so police boundaries were perhaps not the most suitable basis for managing livestock and landscape issues.

Another matter I put on the record is the excellent work done by people who work for rural lands protection boards or pastures protection boards, or whatever they will be called under this new arrangement. Those officers will continue to do an excellent job. In generations gone by there has been a view that holding office on those boards was a training ground for National Party or Country Party members of Parliament. It is fair to say that may have been an exaggeration, but many of those people who held a position as directors on those boards were very much a part of the rural political landscape. Many members of this Parliament and the Federal Parliament, particularly in years gone by—National Party and Country Party members—will proudly show on their CV that they served, as did their fathers and grandfathers before them, on the boards of various pastures protection boards and rural lands protection boards. That should not detract from the excellent role they play.

In effect they were rural people representing their local electors, and the qualified people they employed who looked after the livestock and so on did an excellent job. One might say that is a form of rhetoric, but the Legislation Review Committee gave a good rundown of the history of this particular legislation. While I do not intend to read slabs of that into *Hansard*, I refer members to it. We should recognise the work that was done by rural lands protection boards during the recent outbreak of equine influenza. I also recall, because I was involved in it, the outbreaks of Newcastle disease that afflicted many parts of the State, including the Hunter and the western suburbs of Sydney, and the poultry industry in general. The public in the metropolitan area saw just how valuable these experts were in containing a disease. They worked with New South Wales Agriculture and all the other government departments that were involved and provided a model for other countries in how to control an outbreak of disease of this nature and protect an industry that was so valuable to this State. I do not think the ability to look after an exotic disease outbreak will be affected by this legislation.

The legislation is all about tidying up the administration of the 47 boards around New South Wales, which are funded by a comparatively small rate base. It was crying out for reform, and that has been carried out by consultants and a former National Party shadow Minister for Agriculture, the Hon. Richard Bull, who did an excellent review of rural lands protection boards and, I believe, provided a very objective report. In supporting the bill before the House I say to members of the Opposition, who obviously are being lobbied by rural communities, that this is another part of the evolution of reform of rate-based organisations, whether they be scab boards, livestock boards, pastures protection boards or rural lands protection boards. The boards will continue, but their funding and how the rates are set and the number of people in administration as opposed to those who are doing work on the ground will be enhanced by the legislation. The Government has made some tough decisions in bringing forward this bill; members should support it.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE (Bega) [10.33 a.m.]: I, like all members in this place, recognise the need for reform of rural lands protection boards or pastures protection boards in New South Wales. The question that arises relates very much to process and the potential fallout from this legislation, which was not intended by the Government. It is on that premise that the Opposition is arguing the need for consultation, particularly among landholders who might not necessarily know about these reforms or what they mean. On behalf of coastal ratepayers I welcome some aspects of the legislation, but I still have some very serious concerns about the further centralisation of power and decision making, given that we are talking about the front line of managing animal health and pest control in New South Wales.

We have to recognise that the process involves 130,000 ratepayers across the State who will want to have an input. At the moment they have not been given that opportunity. We need only read the *Land* today to see the response, which I think is only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the reaction to this legislation. We are asking the Government to give it more time and to go out and find out what people think about these reforms. We think that is a sensible way forward, particularly given that board numbers will be slashed from 47 to 14. In my electorate and that of the member for Monaro we have a board that could have done with a lot more assistance from State Council by way of provision of information and support. Again, we are looking at a board that is trying to deal with the anomalies that might exist between a coastal zone and the Monaro. The forms of agriculture, the practices and the responses to animal health and pest control vary and one has to wonder what contribution the geographical placement of these boards has made to the problems in the current system. I would like to see further examination of this process given that the number of boards will be cut from 47 to 14.

Another concern, of course, relates to the loss of knowledge and local input. We see this all the time in other areas of government in relation to centralisation, particularly in rural communities. My concern is that we are going to see a loss of knowledge and expertise. We have just been through the equine influenza disaster, during which those involved with rural lands protection boards demonstrated an enormous amount of expertise. Where does that information go now? Has it been gathered? Is it going to be lost? I worry about the process laid down in this bill and the loss of expertise. I do not think anyone would dispute the need for reforms relating to governance, but let us see what the outcome of that process will be. We are hearing a figure of \$8 million in cost savings being mentioned. Where is the benefit to ratepayers in those cost savings? Where is the economic modelling that was undertaken to determine those cost savings and why can that not be made available across the State so that people can look at it and assess it properly?

The restructures had started to take place well before legislation had been debated and passed in this place; there are some questions around that process as well. In some ways the Government is railroading this through. However, some unintended consequences of the bill need to be properly examined and I believe the Government has an obligation and a responsibility to go back to those communities and have the proposals properly assessed. Yes, there are conflicting viewpoints around the State depending on the need for reform and the level of reform required, but I believe it is important for the Government to take a step back and go back to the drawing board. I encourage the member for Monaro to read the *Land* today because he has copped a caning, and I think there will be more coming towards the Government if it does not take the time—

[Interruption]

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! The member for Bega does not need the assistance of Government members.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: I am happy to quote from the letter from Max Hams, the Chairman of the Broken Hill Rural Lands Protection Board in the *Land*, in which he says:

I recently read the Member for Monaro, Steve Whan's introduction of the Rural Land Protection Amendment Bill to the NSW Parliament and could not help feeling dismay and anger at the absolute garbage contained in that speech.

I hope the member for Monaro did not write his speech. He will be able to confirm that. It is worth delaying this process for further consultation. As I said before, I do not think anyone in this House would dispute the need for reform. It just needs to be done properly and in a consultative and collaborative way with country New South Wales.

Mr PETER DRAPER (Tamworth) [10.40 a.m.]: In examining the proposed changes in the Rural Lands Protection Amendment Bill 2008 to the Rural Lands Protection Act 1998 the question must be asked: Will these changes benefit farming and rural communities, improve the management of animal disease plus insect and vegetation control, while maintaining or improving the world-class animal health and pest control systems that exist in New South Wales? Will the new method of managing the State's 600,000 hectares of travelling stock reserves benefit the environment and the farming community? Will it provide an appropriate level of local management, and will local producers have their opinions and concerns satisfactorily listened to and addressed?

No doubt many challenges face the existing board system, including an increased number of boards experiencing higher budget deficits, higher administrative costs, shifts in land use patterns and the changing expectations of ratepayers. However, this legislation ignores the input that local organisations are desperate to provide. It fails to recognise the great strengths of the rural lands protection boards [RLPB] system, which includes local knowledge, local vigilance, and local response by professionals, immediate response capacity and community building. I have received more than 1,000 letters plus emails and telephone calls from RLPB ratepayers on this issue. I am surprised that more members have not spoken loudly in opposition to the legislation. I have received letters not only from the Tamworth Rural Lands Protection Board, but also from the Northern Slopes, Yass, Cooma, Bombala, Broken Hill, Grafton, Central Tablelands, Milparinka, Tweed-Lismore, Hume and Hunter rural lands protections boards, among others, all expressing concern at the lack of consultation and inadequate time for submissions on boundary changes.

The various boards raised concerns about the loss of financial autonomy and the creation of another level of bureaucracy. Ratepayers are concerned that a centrally operated land database may compromise RLPB systems and compromise the primary role of biosecurity. They told me of concerns about job losses, the inadequacy of \$1.8 million allocated to fund the review, the loss of ratepayer representation on the new boards, and the potential for an increase in payroll tax liability. In addition, the Tamworth board has expressed serious concerns about the boundary changes. I have written to the Minister on a number of occasions regarding this important concern; however I am still waiting for a response while we debate this legislation today. Having said that, yesterday afternoon I received a letter addressing the concerns of the Bombala board that I had raised, but the Tamworth concern has not been sufficiently answered.

In a number of meetings, representatives from the Tamworth board expressed support for the concept of reviewing operations, but are understandably upset that their concerns have not been addressed in the process. The Chairman of Tamworth RLPB, Geoff Britten, said to me, "They've taken a chainsaw to the system when a handsaw would have done." Local farm ratepayers do not oppose change, but the consultation process has been patently inadequate. Of the 1,027 ratepayer letters received by my office, only two expressed opposition to the Tamworth RLPB submission to amalgamate with the Coonabarabran board only. Meetings were held, but the local input and suggestions were ignored. The Government appears to think that when people sit in the same room it equates to community and stakeholder consultation. This is not the case. There is an obvious need to continually evolve, as the eloquent member for Mount Druitt said earlier, and to adapt and improve efficiencies, but the bill leaves a lot to be desired in the opinion of the many people who have contacted my office.

Gunnedah Shire Council supported the submission to amalgamate Tamworth and Coonabarabran but expressed its concern that a centrally operated land database used by staff lacking local knowledge may potentially result in inaccuracies and that matters that require accurate information on particular land parcels may be compromised. It is also concerned that no cost savings will follow amalgamations, given the associated problems. It points out that any loss of local jobs to a regional centre in another district is a very real concern, especially during a period when councils are focussed on increasing local job capacities. The concern of the RLPB Customer Service Officers Association that 33 managers positions, 100 customer service operators positions as well many ranger and field assistant positions will be lost is justified. Can any member representing rural communities remain silent if jobs are threatened within their backyard, especially when there are such grassroots concerns about the whole issue?

The member for Bathurst continually referred to consultation with the State Council as the peak body as though that was sufficient, and that ratepayers concerns had been addressed through this process. That is

clearly not the case. What about consulting with the farmers who fund the scheme and incorporating their suggestions into the process? My conversations and contacts indicate that the vast majority, probably 30 out of 47, of RLPBs around the State oppose the changes in their current form. The Minister's staff have kept me apprised of progress as they developed the legislation and I thank them for that, but despite promising to allow me to see a copy of the bill before it was introduced, I saw nothing until the legislation was under debate.

The Tamworth board is well run, profitable and efficient. Just because other boards do not have the expertise or financial skills to operate successfully, does not mean that a good operation like Tamworth should be dumped into a remediation process that will not deliver the appropriate outcomes according to my local ratepayers. It is necessary to strengthen the relationship between boards and the Department of Primary Industries, as biosecurity is a key factor that must be a priority for the future. But surely it would help to have the ratepayer base on side to get the best results. Of course, one question constantly keeps being asked: What will happen to the funds and assets of good operations? The Government is saying, "Trust us—we will look after everything properly." The community remembers how electricity county councils were dismembered and their funds moved into Consolidated Revenue. My feedback is that the community does not trust the Government on this issue.

The member for Barwon pointed out that the IMC report on which the Government has based the changes was viewed by the farming community as a draft for further discussion—not as a final document. I fully agree with his point. When the number of boards is cut from 47 to 14, a massive amount of experience and expertise will be lost. Has the Government learned any lessons from the equine influenza outbreak? We need vigilant, experienced people on the ground when serious threats like equine influenza occur. I have listened with interest to the many contributions made to this debate, but the ambiguous ramblings of the member for Coffs Harbour yesterday left me confused as to where he stands on the bill. One of the statements from his contribution was:

The Government has the opportunity to consult in a full and open manner before the legislation reaches the upper House. If the Government meets that challenge the Opposition will support the legislation ...

Another was:

On the basis of \$8.3 million worth of projected savings anyone who read the report would be silly not to support it.

He said also:

We fully support the thrust and the intent of the Integrated Marketing Communications [IMC] report and the State Council in relation to a review of rural lands protection boards across New South Wales.

Then he stated:

The Coalition does not support the Rural Lands Protection Amendment Bill 2008

Mr Richard Amery: So that cleared that up.

Mr PETER DRAPER: That cleared it up completely. My constituents are telling me, quite loudly, that the opportunity to get this legislation right has been wasted through poor consultation, and I agree because of the number of people who have expressed that sentiment. As I said, the eloquent member for Mount Druitt referred to continuing evolution. Most of us would remember Darwin's the *Origin of the Species* and the survival of the fittest. I sincerely hope that the remaining board members will be fit enough to survive this process.

Mr Richard Amery: I didn't mean to be that scientific actually.

Mr PETER DRAPER: I thought it was very analytical. He also referred to the board as being a training ground for Nationals members of Parliament. I hope that is not a reason to institute changes like this. I welcome the training grounds. I think they need quite a bit of training, to be honest. In conclusion, let me quote from the report of the Rural Lands Action Group on this issue:

The paper presented to State Council and used by the Minister for Primary Industries as the base for sweeping and radical changes to the RLPB system lacks depth of investigation, and often draws conclusions that lack common sense. It appears to be a discussion paper, and cannot be used sensibly to encompass wholesale changes without further in-depth analysis of the costs of implementation, and the social and environmental effects it will have on country areas of New South Wales.

After receiving a massive amount of feedback from my local community on this issue and after speaking on behalf of the ratepayers who have contacted me—local RLPB members, employees and their families—I strongly oppose this bill in its current form.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI (Murrumbidgee—Deputy Leader of The Nationals) [10.49 a.m.]: I speak in debate on the Rural Lands Protection Amendment Bill 2008. Having visited rural lands protection board [RLPB] offices in my electorate, in particular, in Condobolin and Narrandera, I have several concerns about the proposed reforms in this legislation. There is no doubt that, like most organisations, there is scope for the reform of rural lands protection boards. The issues that have been raised with me usually come from ratepayers and relate to RLPB rates that they have to pay.

Over the past few years many concerns have been raised about the change to the hectare size of rating lots. A number of citrus and grape growers came to see me and asked why they were required to pay RLPB rates for services that they did not require or access—for example, locust control, fox baiting and management of current stock routes. They are happy to pay on a fee-for-use basis but they have raised questions about those rates, which is fair enough. Recently the RLPB resolved an issue confronting the St Francis De Sales Regional College in Leeton, which had been given an RLPB rates notice. There is no doubt that there is scope for reform of the fees that farmers have to pay to rural lands protection boards.

In light of that, if this reform proposal had been accompanied by proposed reductions in the rates that members have to pay, I would have been inclined to support it. If the Government had indicated that additional services would be provided, or that rates would go down, that would have been an incentive to support the bill. Over the past 13 years the track record of the New South Wales Labor Government has revealed that it commissions many reports and states that it will save ratepayers a great deal of money but, in the end, those savings never eventuate, in particular, in the centralisation of services.

Essentially, this proposed reform will reduce the number of RLPBs and centralise them in larger centres, for example, Wagga Wagga, Orange and Dubbo. In New South Wales centralisation rarely leads to improved services and reduced costs, and I give as examples the areas of education and health. When services have been centralised costs do not go down and services do not improve. Those are my major concerns about this legislation and that is why I will not support it. I support reform, but nothing in this reform package has given me any comfort. Costs will not be reduced and services will not be increased. The Auditor-General's report into World Youth Day, which was released yesterday, revealed the Government's commitment to that event. Initially it was meant to be only \$20 million and the Government said that it would generate a number of benefits for New South Wales. World Youth Day ended up costing \$100 million or \$120 million.

Mr Steve Whan: It was \$100 million.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! The member for Murrumbidgee will direct his comments through the Chair.

Mr John Williams: You are not attacking World Youth Day.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: No, I am attacking the New South Wales Government for getting most of its research and information wrong, as it got it wrong with World Youth Day. The report that has been commissioned by the Government has forecast savings to rural lands protection boards, but we have witnessed on many occasions that any information given to us by the New South Wales Government cannot be relied upon. I do not take great stock of any report that recommends reform in this area. I am concerned about the loss of jobs in country New South Wales. I have been informed that about 50 jobs will be lost in towns in country New South Wales that can ill afford to lose them. In Condobolin the RLPB will lose 1½ full-time equivalent jobs and 13 jobs will be lost as a result of the proposed closure of the Department of Primary Industries field station. That represents the loss of 14½ jobs in a town that has suffered a great deal as a result of this drought.

On the issue of job losses alone it is difficult for me to support the reforms in this bill. In addition, we have been given no reliable information by the Government that this will reduce rates and result in the provision of cheaper or better services. For those two reasons other Coalition members and I will not support this legislation. I commend the work of the Condobolin Rural Lands Protection Board. Last week I had a conversation with some of its members. They do great work in trying circumstances. The recent locust plague prompted the RLPB to put up a map showing daily changes in locust locations. Rural lands protection boards do a terrific job to help the farmers of New South Wales.

Ms PRU GOWARD (Goulburn) [10.55 a.m.]: I congratulate the Goulburn Rural Lands Protection Board, which does a phenomenal job in an area that has had to carry some heavy burdens, for example, the ovine Johne's disease that scoured that area for so long. Central to this bill are the proposed amalgamations. Some people see amalgamations as cost savings and others see them as centralisation. Indeed, amalgamations can be both. The amalgamations proposed in this bill should enable some economies of scale and, in particular, economies of scale in administration. However, economies of scale to one person could represent a job loss to another.

Local graziers and farmers in the Goulburn district want staff employed at the Goulburn Rural Lands Protection Board properly remunerated and afforded workplace protection. Currently, Goulburn Rural Lands Protection Board administrative staff do not receive wages consistent with public service rates. If the newly amalgamated boards are to attract and retain high-quality staff, some of those savings could be used to better support staff and ensure a high standard of service. It is entirely unclear from the bill whether savings will be used for staffing and service improvements, or merely fee reductions. Many farmers in every part of New South Wales would welcome fee reductions, but local communities would welcome better standards of service.

I hope that the amalgamations do not remove technical officers from local areas—for example, the local veterinarian in the Goulburn area must be retained. If the veterinarian's position moves to the new regional headquarters it would be a tragedy for farmers in our region, which is a leading beef and sheep area. Farmers with only a few hectares complain that the current RLPB set-up does not meet their needs. They are hoping and expecting that these changes will mean greater access for them. The Goulburn board has carried the load for ovine Johne's disease, the National Livestock Identification Scheme, as well as a growing number of State regulations imposed by the Department of Primary Industries.

All boards, including the Goulburn board, believe that the staff available cannot hope to administer the increasing number of regulations to a satisfactory level. Instead, the RLPBs have become a cheap way for the Department of Primary Industries to impose regulations without having to find the resources to ensure that they are properly administered and policed. In these amalgamations it is important to ensure that local knowledge is not lost, or that the culture of vital local commitment is replaced with a culture of remoteness and disinterest. If the move from local area health boards to regional area health services is anything to go by, regionalisation could represent the same disaster for local animal health and pest control standards as the regionalisation of health has for local hospital service standards.

Graziers in the Goulburn area have told me that their local RLPB is carrying a heavy administrative workload, in particular, in the area of financial reporting requirements. Again, one might have thought that with advances in computer technology it might not have been the load that it once was. Sadly, the answer seems to be no. It is imperative that these reforms provide an opportunity for improved processes and greater support from the department, which along with the taxpayers of New South Wales, is the grateful recipient of the free administration and management of rural pastoral lands.

In these circumstances it is vital that the bill be held over until consultation with local communities and stakeholder groups can be completed to the extent proposed by the Leader of The Nationals. Governments only get so many chances at reform and to make a mistake now is to condemn livestock management in New South Wales for years to come. It is vital that local knowledge and commitment to livestock health standards are maintained and that in reforming our boards those crucial ingredients are not lost. The best public administration is administration with public support and commitment. The boards are a high-quality and cost-effective example of this and, for the sake of further consultation, it would be irresponsible if the Government were to proceed with this bill at this time.

Mr DARYL MAGUIRE (Wagga Wagga) [11.00 a.m.]: I acknowledge the contributions of all members to the Rural Lands Protection Amendment Bill 2008, in particular, the shadow Minister, who led for the Opposition. I, too, have received correspondence on this important issue, including correspondence from the Chairman of the Wagga Wagga Rural Lands Protection Board, Mr John Walker, who expressed concerns about the bill. Directors of the board were concerned about changes to the board that will significantly affect service delivery to ratepayers and centralisation of financial land management functions to Orange that will lead to approximately 50 customer service officers and a minimum of 33 managers or executive officers losing their jobs. They stated that the current 47 boards would be amalgamated into 14 regions, with a main office employing a general manager and an estimated two customer service officers.

Currently, offices will remain open at this stage as so-called shopfronts, with a manager and two to three customer service officers, but in future they will have only one. In many cases this will have a major effect

on small rural towns. They also state that district veterinarians and rangers throughout the region will not be affected by the change. Boards currently pay little or no payroll tax. With the proposed changes the regions on average will pay \$65,000 each per annum, making the combined payroll tax for the State RLPB system of \$910,000. Payroll tax was not even discussed in the review; merely estimated savings. It was suggested that any increase in costs was summarily dismissed as not being significant. The State Council of the Rural Lands Protection Boards cannot answer questions asked about this matter.

The directors of the Wagga Wagga Rural Lands Protection Board wanted me to ensure that their comments were placed on the record. In doing so, I acknowledge the great work of local RLPB staff, management and board. I have a good professional relationship with them. As a landholder, I understand the importance of the work they do on the ground. Currently they are fighting the locust plague. Indeed, this morning when I rang home we had locusts in the paddocks, as have many others. Rural communities face many challenges: if it is not ovine Johne's disease it is horse influenza or some other outbreak. I place on record the detailed submission of the Rural Land Action Group in response to the Integrated Marketing Communications review. It is important to do so because, although no person would be opposed to finding efficiencies in the system, these efficiencies must be productive and progressive, something this bill will not achieve for the reasons previously outlined. Much more could have been done, and indeed people have written in to the *Land* calling for the bill to be delayed to provide for proper and professional consultation. The submission states:

The RLPB system is well serviced by locally based Boards who have intimate knowledge of the areas they manage. When given autonomy to manage their areas local directors, with strong community service intentions, do a very good job. This is the corner stone of the system.

A regional network comprising eight regions already exists, and this network should be strengthened to allow a more formal level of cooperation by forming regional boards. The regional boards would be advisory in function, and would meet biannually to discuss their board's financial position, animal health and TSR plans, voluntary amalgamations, resource sharing possibilities, and any challenges faced at regional level.

The regional board would consist of two directors and the manager/administration officer from each board in the region.

The combination of local and regional Boards will continue to strengthen the RLPB by ensuring that decisions are based on local knowledge, and continue the community building strength of the system ...

General comments on the IMC report

The IMC report has outlined very radical changes to the Rural Lands Protection Board system but has given no consideration to the ramifications of those changes on the very people who fund the system, rural ratepayers. It would appear to be a poorly thought out paper designed to fit a preconceived system more suited to strengthening bureaucratic intervention, and retracting representation by ratepayers by reducing numbers of Directors by 80%.

The report is regarded by the action group as a discussion paper, lacking detail upon which to make the decisions that have been made by the Minister for Primary Industries. The conclusions drawn are tenuous at best, deceitful at times, and without credibility where financial costings are incomplete and inadequate.

The Rural Land Action Group was formed to address the inadequacies of the report and the subsequent decisions that were made because it is our fear that the implementation of the review findings will significantly impact on rural ratepayers, particularly the professional farmers, while not significantly addressing the problems within the system that lead to the review in the first place.

IMC reported in their preamble that "it is appropriate finally to pay tribute to the massive contribution made by volunteer Board directors and their committed teams of skilled local staff across the decades. Historically, these people have delivered massive benefits to the State of NSW and to Australia and their collective and individual contribution should not be underestimated." In this vein we feel our collective contribution can continue as we attempt to guide the present government to accept that they have made a hasty, ill-advised, and untested decision to accept IMC's findings without proper consultation with the stakeholders involved.

The review identified that the great strengths of the RLPB system include:

- Local knowledge
- Local vigilance
- Local response by professionals
- Immediate response capacity
- Community building

The Rural Land Action Group commend the report on these findings, but believe the implementation of the restructure will destroy the very strengths that have been outlined. The group is very mindful that these strengths must be maintained, despite realizing that changes are needed to the system.

The group has been mindful that any changes to the system must encompass economic, social and environmental rationale, whilst the IMC paper omitted any social and environmental discussion and that their economic discussion was based upon flawed financial analysis that stemmed from State Council. The repeated stating of cost-cutting measures of \$8 to \$8.3 million has since been refuted publicly despite it being a cornerstone of the argument for change. Once that assumption was dropped the implementation process should also have been stopped until proper cost analysis was carried out.

I will lay the report upon the table for the edification of members and administrative officers involved in drafting the legislation. The report continues:

Major recommendations of the IMC Review

IMC recommend the RLPB be renamed. The only argument formed by IMC for this statement is one anonymous quote from a submission of the NSW Government's Review of the Rural Lands Protection Act 1998.

One person's opinion, as far as the IMC team is concerned, carries enough weight to change an entire corporate name, without regard for the cost of changing that name, which could be into the millions of dollars by the time every sign in the State is changed, and without any regard to the cost borne by ratepayers to market that name, and logo, in the past few years. The cost to ratepayers of changing the name somehow was neglected by IMC in its review. The fact that IMC could not come up with an appropriate new name is noted by the action group.

We agree that part of the core business of the system going forward is to be as New South Wales's advisor, regulator and facilitator in animal health and in pest animal and insect management. We do this now. We must be mindful that New South Wales also has a large number of private veterinarians whose livelihood is based on animal health functions and we must not be seen to compete for their work.

The memoranda of understanding between the Board network and DPI has long been overdue for renegotiation because of the significant public good undertaken by the Board vets to help keep significant disease risks at bay, and who are required instantly by State agencies if the State is threatened by a disease outbreak. This became abundantly evident in the outbreak of equine influenza from a government quarantine station last year. The EI outbreak was a good wake up call to address possible confusion in the chains of command for exotic disease control in Australia.

IMC recommends that the number of local Boards be reduced from 47 to 14. The Rural Lands Action Group strongly opposes this radical shift for a number of reasons:

- Ratepayers representation is cut by a reduction of elected directors by 80% in this radical plan. That means that 80% of the wise and experienced decision making is cut from the system. As IMC realised these people have delivered massive benefits to the State of New South Wales ...
- The areas covered by the new Boards are vast. As an example the Western board runs from the Queensland border down to the Victorian border. The dilution of local knowledge, local vigilance and immediate response capacity, the identified strengths of the present board system, will be severe. Directors will not know their Board area well enough to make informed, efficient decisions. Ratepayers will bear the brunt of poor decisions.
- Directors will move from providing a community service to part-time employment. Part of the strength of the present Board system is that directors fulfil their obligations because of their desire to see the best possible outcomes for the community they live in ...
- The Action Group believes that some amalgamations would occur under a voluntary scheme. Boards that do not consider themselves to be viable would be encouraged to amalgamate rather than be forced to by the Minister. This could be achieved within the existing regional setup of eight regions where cooperation has already improved the use of resources and could be expanded under the watchful eye of the experienced directors of the boards within the region.
- IMC have, we believe, made the fatal flaw of expecting good financial viability to come from increased size of Boards alone. It does not happen that way.

The document goes on to explain that. Mr Acting-Speaker, I seek an extension of time.

Extension of time not granted.

It is shame that I have not been given the extension of time I sought, because the document outlines many more concerns expressed by the Rural Lands Action Group. Given that I have limited time, I will lay the document upon the table for members' edification. The conclusion of the document states:

The paper presented to the State Council and used by the Minister for Primary Industries as the base for sweeping and radical changes to the RLPB system lacks depth of investigation and often draws conclusions that lack common sense. As previously stated it appears to be a discussion paper and cannot be used sensibly to encompass wholesale changes without further in depth analysis of the costs of implementation and the social and environmental effects it will have in country areas of NSW.

The very strengths of the present system will be thrown out because IMC have not been vigorous enough in their analysis and have indeed used State Council staff costings instead of their own findings.

This action group proposes as an alternative plan that all local boards be retained, but with the view to establishing which boards could voluntarily amalgamate. The existing regional areas would be strengthened by the creation of boards of advice who would meet at six month intervals. These boards would comprise two directors and the manager from each of the boards within a region. The boards would be responsible for receiving a monthly report from each board, including financial statements, TSR activities and conditions, pest animal and insect activities and animal health activities, all in line with plans of management. This board would help establish voluntary amalgamations where it was deemed appropriate.

In conclusion, I note that the Parliamentary Secretary the member for Monaro copped a swipe from writers in today's *Land*. He will continue to do so if he continues to follow the path of implementing legislation without decent consultation.

Mr THOMAS GEORGE (Lismore) [11.15 a.m.]: It is a very sad day for rural New South Wales when a member is gagged when he seeks to represent the people of the Wagga Wagga area by putting the case on behalf of the rural lands protection board in their area. It is a very sad day when the so-called member for Country Labor gags the member for Wagga Wagga when he is succinctly putting the case on behalf of the people of Wagga Wagga. It is a disgrace. I am sure the people of the rural areas of this State will never forget that, and I hope they do not. It is a disgrace that members cannot have their say on such an important issue.

Mr Steve Whan: Fifteen minutes and three hours debate.

Mr Thomas George: It does not matter. The Parliamentary Secretary says that we have been debating this bill for three hours. I want him to get his facts right for a start. Secondly, it is such an important issue for members on this side of the House, together with the Independents. It is not just The Nationals. Together with the Independents, we are trying to put the rural voice across in this House, and it is a disgrace that we have been gagged. I place that on record with no fear of contradiction.

A number of members have highlighted the overview and objects of the Rural Lands Protection Amendment Bill 2008, so there is no need for me to reiterate them. However, I point out that it is not just The Nationals who are trying to voice the concerns of the people of regional New South Wales; it is also the Independents. Sadly, this Government has not been listening to what the people of regional areas of the State have been saying with regard to the bill. They do not dispute that there should be some reform. However, it is the process that is in question. That is what we on this side of the House have been harping about, and still we cannot get the message through. The reaction of the Parliamentary Secretary the member for Monaro shows that Government members have not been listening. I hope that we can go on with this debate for another three hours, but I think it will be a waste of time anyway.

As I think all members in this debate have highlighted, we are concerned about the loss of local experience and knowledge. I will highlight a few concerns about the effect of the legislation on the North Coast of New South Wales. Originally the reforms covered areas as far down the coast as Coffs Harbour. However, I am pleased that commonsense has prevailed and it now covers the Grafton, Casino, Tweed and Lismore Rural Lands Protection Boards. However, there are many concerns about the legislation, and I will highlight some of them. I want to touch on the contribution to this debate of the member for Mt Druitt, for whom I have a lot of respect.

The handling of the recent equine influenza outbreak by the Department of Primary Industries and the handling of the outbreak we had at Newcastle by New South Wales Agriculture, as it then was—referred to by the member for Mount Druitt—was an unbelievable mighty job, but they were able to work with local experience. At that time we had officers all around the state but sadly today they do not exist. Those officers have either taken redundancies or their positions have become vacant. Those positions are gradually being wound back in country and regional New South Wales and, as a result, we are losing local expertise and knowledge. I hate to think of what would happen now in country and regional New South Wales if we were to suffer any outbreaks without that local expertise and knowledge.

I heard it said that originally this was done on police boundaries—they are out of date today. The police boundaries were splitting towns, and that is not on. I hope common sense will prevail. We draw boundary lines on a map but those boundaries have split towns in two: half a town is in one rural lands protection board area and the other half in another. That is not sensible. Wherever I have been around the State listening to issues these matters have been highlighted to me. I met with the Casino Rural Lands Protection Board and the Tweed Lismore Rural Lands Protection Board. I want to place on record the concerns of those boards, most of which have already been highlighted by other speakers. Two thirds of all ratepayers in the amalgamated Casino Rural Lands Protection Board, Tweed Lismore Rural Lands Protection Board and Grafton Rural Lands Protection Board area will pay minimum rates. What that will do to those organisations financially is of major concern.

One of the key elements of the review was based on the poor financial viability of a handful of boards in this State, and many boards have projected budget deficits. I have been told that was often caused by the boards being forced to keep rates down. Minimum rates and service fees are outside the control of the individual boards, and the financial stress this has caused has been a major concern to boards on the coast. Rates will need

to rise to cover the loss of minimum rates in some of these areas. Many people already object to the rural lands protection board rates. I do not know how they are going to pick up any losses they have. The decentralised administration has not been costed or scoped in relation to what functions will be carried out. To prove that it will result in savings of staff, premises and overheads there needs to be further consultation at a local level to sort through these issues. The speed of implementation has also been a major concern to all the boards that I have spoken to.

I recently attended a meeting at Legume and Liston—part of the Tenterfield area, which the Speaker and I represent—where concern was expressed because that board has already been through an unsuccessful amalgamation affecting the Tenterfield end. The Tweed Lismore Rural Lands Protection Board is concerned that the review was undertaken by IMC at the request of the State Council and that the State Council presented the recommendations to the Minister with no consultation at a local level. The board has many reservations regarding the changes, as they appear to be inaccurate and uninformed. That is the strong message that has been coming from all these boards. The directors I met with believe the projected savings of \$8 million to \$8.3 million stated in the report are incorrect and unsubstantiated—

Mr John Williams: Probably interest on the \$50 million.

Mr THOMAS GEORGE: That is right. The report included a disclaimer regarding the figures. Figures quoted to me as savings in manager salaries and on-costs of \$80,000 per manager were believed by the two boards and their executives to be absurd and grossly overstated. The figures given of 47 managers on \$70,000 per year is incorrect; most are on less than \$70,000 and nine of them are on approximately \$45,000 per year. Due to a lack of consultation the figures are based on assumptions and lack facts to back them. The boards also made the point that if they were a board of management of a public company which took a similar proposal to an annual general meeting they would have been laughed out of the meeting by shareholders as being most unprofessional and incompetent, and not having any sound financial figures and future projected outcomes to support such a restructure. The figures also did not include the cost of redundancies, or the additional cost of payroll tax.

The issue of payroll tax is continually being raised. That is another major burden that they look like being forced into. Initial figures for the North Coast regional board show that it will be worse off financially than if the three boards operated individually. This will ultimately result in increased costs for the ratepayer, which I touched on earlier. They believe that the amalgamated board will be more costly to run than it would be to run the three boards individually.

The Tweed Lismore Rural Lands Protection Board believe if the minimum rateable area of 10 hectares is introduced it will mean a great loss of revenue: many smaller areas exist within the north-eastern corner and the landholders still require a service in many respects but they will not all be ratepayers. There are a number of small unit holders in the Northern Rivers area. Ever since I was elected Laurie Stubbs has been making representations to me, to the rural lands protection board and to other areas, together with submissions to inquiries relating to these smaller areas. A lot of those small block holders believe they do not get any benefit whatsoever from paying rural lands protection board fees and they object to it. That is not only isolated to the northern part of the State but applies right up and down the eastern seaboard.

Mr Steve Whan: That is why we are making it 10 hectares.

Mr THOMAS GEORGE: Yes, but that then reduces the income. There are some small landholdings that have goats. In my area we have problems with ticks. I can assure the Government that it will have the greatest war on its hands if it tries to hand over the responsibilities for tick control to the rural lands protection board. That is not going to be accepted. That is a major concern to all stockholders, not only in my area but across New South Wales also. The problems associated with ticks cannot be handed over to the rural lands protection board. As I have said, the Speaker and I represent the Tenterfield area and a big part of the rural lands protection board is in that area. People have expressed strong concerns about the shopfront now closing at two o'clock. I did not think that the shopfronts would be interfered with, but they are closing at two o'clock.

Mr Steve Whan: The change has not happened yet.

Mr THOMAS GEORGE: I know, but an administrator was appointed and now the shopfront at Tenterfield is closing at two o'clock. Already it is an STD call to Tenterfield and now people will have to go to

Armidale, which is another 200 kilometres down the road from Tenterfield. The local communities have to work through the many issues in consultation with their local boards. I join with my colleagues in saying that reform is necessary, but the consultation process must be tidied up.

Mr STEVE WHAN (Monaro—Parliamentary Secretary) [11.30 a.m.], in reply: I thank all members who participated in the debate on the Rural Lands Protection Amendment Bill 2008. A number of members participated in the debate, including 10 Opposition members and two Independents. Despite the Opposition's cries that they have not had enough time, their voices have been heard for more than three hours on this bill. Most people in New South Wales would say that if they could not get their point across in that time they probably are not effective representatives. There were a number of positive contributions in the debate, and I want to highlight some matters in reply. The Rural Lands Protection Amendment Bill 2008 will make much-needed changes to the rural lands protection board system that will benefit farmers and ratepayers across New South Wales. These reforms will increase the level of services that are provided to ratepayers, and ratepayers will benefit directly from a reduction in administration costs and the reallocation of resources to front-line services.

During the debate the shadow Minister for Primary Industries and his colleagues raised a number of issues, many of which were based on misinformation. It was a bit of a last-ditch effort by some members who are resisting change and want to hijack some of the reforms. Previously the shadow Minister has strongly supported the reforms, and in his speech he essentially supported the reforms. He said that the Opposition supports the reforms and the bulk of the Government's initiatives but they should not happen now. Unfortunately, that seemed to be the Opposition's theme. It is an easy way out for an Opposition to say that there should be reform but not to offer an alternative or give an opinion on what should happen. They just oppose it because they think there are a few easy votes in it. It is a cheap, cowardly way to address a difficult issue. We see that from them over and over again. On 6 June 2008 the shadow Minister said:

It was essential for the RLPB State Council to commission this independent review ...

The shadow Minister said this on the basis that:

Some areas of the RLPB network were financially unstable, not prepared for modern technological changes, and there was a pressing need to develop a stronger chain of command system for emergency animal disease outbreaks such as Equine Influenza.

Further in support of the reforms he said:

The downsizing of the number of local boards from 47 to 14 will make the level of services more cost-efficient, freeing up money within the RLPB system to increase opportunities for future development.

He applauded the State Council for taking this bold step. Now he and his colleagues do not have the courage to vote for the reforms that he so vigorously supported only a few months ago.

Mr John Williams: Point of order: The Parliamentary Secretary is misleading the House. The comments made by the shadow Minister were made before the findings of the report. We now are hearing from our constituents that there has not been any post-consultation on the report. We are representing their interests.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Matthew Morris): Order! There is no point of order. The Parliamentary Secretary may continue.

Mr Andrew Constance: Point of order: The Parliamentary Secretary is introducing new material into the debate. He is not entitled to do so under parliamentary procedures. I ask that you refer him back to the bill before the House, which we have debated.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I get unlimited time in reply, so you are not wasting my time by taking points of order.

Mr Andrew Constance: I am not wasting time.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Matthew Morris): Order! There is no point of order. The Parliamentary Secretary has not introduced any amendments or changes to the bill. The debate was wide-ranging and a fair degree of latitude was extended to all members who contributed to it. The Parliamentary Secretary has the call.

Mr STEVE WHAN: The member for Bega clearly has no comprehension of the standing orders of this place, despite nearly six years as a member. He should go and do some homework. I am quoting the shadow Minister, who applauded the State Council for taking this bold step and went on to say:

The recommendations laid down by the IMC review—

the member for Murray-Darling believes that the shadow Minister had not seen the review at that time, so he must be very clever to know the recommendations—

will make the RLPB system more effective and definitive in its role as New South Wales's adviser, regulator and facilitator in animal health, and I welcome their initiative.

I turn now to specific issues raised in the debate. Half-truths have been made about travelling stock reserves. Travelling stock reserves are Crown land, whether they are managed by the rural lands protection boards or by the Department of Lands. Contrary to the comments of Opposition members, including the member for Murray-Darling, this bill does not change anything about travelling stock reserves. Recommendations in the reports suggested reform in this area. I can inform members that under the current system of rural lands protection boards 18 boards have asked for 198 travelling stock reserves to be withdrawn and passed over to the Department of Lands. They have done so because they consider they are unable to afford the management of the reserves and that the reserves would be better managed by the department.

It is not new for the management of travelling stock reserves to be transferred to the Department of Lands; it happens every year. The only change that is being proposed—an administrative change, which is not in this legislation—is that each board review the way in which travelling stock reserves are currently being used and managed. It is a very sensible approach. I inform the member for Murray-Darling, as he should be aware, many reserves in the Western Division are not affected at all by this process. I assure the House that the Government is committed to ensuring that those travelling stock reserves that are transferred to the Department of Lands are available to farmers and drovers in times of need.

Contrary to comments by previous speakers, considerable consultation has taken place on this process. In late 2007 the State Council of Rural Lands Protection Boards recognised the need for the system of rural lands protection boards, which it oversees, to be reviewed. That is why in 2007 the boards provided input into the terms of reference for the review. Integrated Marketing Communications [IMC] undertook the review, with 67 submissions from New South Wales Farmers, the Department of Primary Industries and a range of others. Following the release of the report in June 2008 the State Council continued to consult with boards on a number of significant implementation issues, including external boundaries for districts, office locations, district names, internal boundaries and organisational names. That is reflected in this legislation. The reform agenda presented in the bill dates back to about 2003. A statutory review of the Rural Lands Protection Act was undertaken in 2004. That review included a number of groups, such as the Department of Primary Industries, the Cabinet Office—

Mr Andrew Constance: It has taken you four years.

Mr STEVE WHAN: The Opposition interjects that it has taken four years. One minute Opposition members say it is too quick; the next they say it is too long. They are bouncing around all over the place. They are the flip-flop party.

Mr Kevin Humphries: Point of order: The Parliamentary Secretary is misleading the House. My point of order also relates to relevance. The Parliamentary Secretary said that the IMC report was presented in June. Basically, the transparency and consultation ceased after that. We have offered bipartisanship in this matter and the Government has refused it.

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

Mr Kevin Humphries: You are leaning on the State Council and you will get a poor result.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Matthew Morris): Order! The member for Barwon will resume his seat.

Mr Kevin Humphries: You are breaking down the strengths that this system was designed to set up.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Matthew Morris): Order! The member for Barwon will resume his seat. I call the member for Barwon to order. The Parliamentary Secretary has the call.

Mr STEVE WHAN: What amazes me is some of the comments we have heard from the member for Barwon and others on the other side of the House. On the one hand, they say that they agree that reform is needed—and the shadow Minister basically agreed with everything in his speech on this bill—but, on the other hand, they say that they do not think any change should occur. A number of Opposition members spoke about fewer eyes on the ground and were crying out about the loss of directors. In this State at the moment there are 380 directors and 400 staff on rural lands protections boards.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Matthew Morris): Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Mr STEVE WHAN: The member for Lismore compares this to the board of a public company. He said they would be laughed out. A board of a public company with 380 directors and 400 staff would certainly be laughed out.

Mr Thomas George: Point of order: My point of order is on relevance and on the Parliamentary Secretary misleading the House. My comments referred to taking a proposal to a board without proper consultation.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Matthew Morris): Order! There is no point of order. The Parliamentary Secretary may continue.

Mr STEVE WHAN: The Opposition's absence of knowledge of standing orders always amazes me. I would like to deal with some of the issues raised, but if I do not get time to deal with them I apologise to the people who read this later because this debate needs to be concluded this morning. Locals in my area have raised some issues with me and one related to disease control—an issue raised also by the Murray-Darling. The member for Murray-Darling and others seem to think that by making an area bigger the incidence of disease-free areas—for instance in Bombala, which is free from bovine Johne's disease—will change. In fact, the disease control boundaries will stay; they will not change. The member obviously did not understand that.

I would like to raise a few other issues in the very short time I have left to speak. The member for Coffs Harbour raised a number of issues. Unfortunately, because of the constant interjections I am not going to have a chance to deal with those. Some of those issues will be raised in the upper House. The member for Coffs Harbour and the member for Burrinjuck talked about disease control. There are still property identification codes, and ratepayers on land under 10 hectares will still be part of disease control. Many of the issues raised by the Opposition about biosecurity are not relevant. The member for Murray-Darling said the cost of permits is too high. They will be exactly the same as they are at the moment. The Opposition clearly does not understand that.

Mr John Williams: Point of order: Once again, the Parliamentary Secretary is misleading the House. We are talking about uncontrolled stock movements in these areas—nothing to do with some arrangement or some dream that he has got.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Matthew Morris): Order! There is no point of order. The member for Murray-Darling will resume his seat.

Mr Andrew Fraser: Point of order: The agreement in principle speech and the response forms part of the legislation. The Minister has clearly indicated that issues were raised in debate that he will not respond to. It is not good enough that they are responded to in another place. The issues were raised here; they should be responded to here. I ask you to direct the Parliamentary Secretary to respond to those issues we raised. They are serious issues and we need to have them responded to so that members making a decision on this legislation will have the agreement in principle debate to refer to. If there are consequences of this debate that are taken before a court of law—for example, on the fact that there is still a notional and current capacity within the legislation—we need to ensure that those issues are addressed by the Parliamentary Secretary. I ask that you direct the Parliamentary Secretary to address those issues.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Matthew Morris): Order! There is no point of order. I cannot direct the Parliamentary Secretary to respond in a particular way.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I will continue my remarks at another time. We have seen a ludicrous and juvenile performance from Opposition members, who clearly are not fit to be members of this place.

Mr Andrew Constance: Mr Acting-Speaker, I draw attention your attention to the time.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Matthew Morris): Order! I am well aware of the time.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I would have liked to respond more fully to this bill. Unfortunately, I will have to continue my reply at a later stage. I am happy to finish my reply tomorrow and we can vote on the bill next week if that is what the Opposition wants. The member for Murray-Darling and others raised some issues about the size of boards—they liked the smaller boards in the area that the member for Murray-Darling represents.

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

WHITE RIBBON DAY

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [11.45 a.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) notes International White Ribbon Day was held on 25 November 2007 to highlight the elimination of domestic violence against women;
- (2) congratulates the work of the Hornsby Ku-ring-gai Domestic Violence Network; and
- (3) congratulates the tireless application of Hornsby Soroptimists in their fight against domestic violence.

This motion is being debated one year to the day on which I gave notice of the motion. The subject matter is still relevant; only the year needs to be changed. I highlight the symbol of the white ribbon as a pledge. Over the past couple of days many members have worn a white ribbon, particularly on White Ribbon Day on 25 November. Armbands are also being sold this week and over the 16 days of activism. Some armbands say, "Men—not violent, not silent" and others say, "Stop Violence against Women (VAW) 16 days of activism". I also note the significance of the White Ribbon Foundation of Australia, which aims to eliminate violence against women by the promotion of a change in culture around domestic violence.

The major objective of the foundation is to educate and get the message out into the community through initiatives such as the well-established White Ribbon Day. The foundation's objectives are aimed at leadership programs to get the message particularly to men and boys around Australia. The foundation is a not-for-profit organisation and all the funds received by the foundation are used to support the various strategies that are working towards that objective. Many references have been made on the issues raised in my motion—in the Parliament, in the media and generally in the wider community. It is very distressing to note that domestic violence is at a 10-year high. I quote from a media article from the *Australian* on 24 November, headed "Domestic dispute deaths at 10-year high":

The number of NSW women and children killed in domestic disputes has hit a 10-year high, prompting calls from the Ombudsman for an urgent review of the state's legal, policing and community systems.

Bureau of Crime Statistics figures show there were 29 domestic violence-related murders in NSW last year to June - the highest number in 10 years ...

There were also 27,000 domestic violence-related assaults – 30 per cent of all assaults reported to police.

NSW Ombudsman Bruce Barbour has called for an urgent review of the state's justice and community services systems, saying many of the deaths may have been preventable.

I pay tribute to the many people in my electorate who have been involved in this issue. As mentioned in my motion, the Hornsby Soroptimists play a wonderfully active role in the domestic violence network and other projects. The overriding aim of White Ribbon Day and other campaigns about domestic violence is to achieve cultural change through education. We must promote a culture of non-violence and respect, particularly among men and boys. Everyone agrees that it is important to highlight the need to reduce the incidence of domestic violence. Violence against women remains the most widespread human rights abuse in the world. A recent report produced by the White Ribbon Foundation revealed that one in four 12-year-olds to 20-year-olds surveyed in Australia reported that they were aware of domestic violence against their mother or stepmother by their father or stepfather.

I was at Hornsby station with members of the Hornsby-Ku-ring-gai Domestic Violence Network committee selling white ribbons when I was approached by a woman who purchased a ribbon and who very sadly told me that she was 10 years into a cycle of domestic violence with her partner. She was still trying to escape the clutches of that relationship; she had been to court a number of times and was fronting up to yet another hearing. Her partner had been imprisoned, but the cycle of violence started again when the woman took him back. While I was working in accident and emergency units I saw victims of domestic violence with varying degrees of physical injury. That was very distressing. It was probably about 15 years ago and many of the victims refused to lay charges. It was very likely that they continued to be victims.

I pay tribute also to members of the Hornsby-Ku-ring-gai Domestic Violence Network committee: Sue McReynolds, Anna Wilshire, Tania Smith, Julie Griffin, Fiona Zhou, Julie Matthews, Martin Butcher, Joan Dumbrell, Irena Husaric, Matthew Solomon, Dianne Kim, Jenny Huxley, Roslyn Curran, Amy David, Jian Zhao, Matt Flynn, Tina Jin and Josie Gregory. Josie is a court support person at Hornsby court and is a real dynamo. The 16-day anti-domestic violence campaign is well underway and a number of events will focus on the issue. In the Hornsby area next Thursday evening we are holding an event highlighting the message about domestic violence and screening the film *Australia*. Many other events will be held around Sydney and New South Wales.

The media coverage of the White Ribbon Day campaign has been phenomenal. It is good to see that people acknowledge the seriousness of this issue in our community. I commend the *Sydney Morning Herald* in particular for its coverage. The Hornsby-Ku-ring-gai Domestic Violence Network committee is very pleased with the attention that that newspaper has given the issue this week. An article written by Ruth Pollard and published in the newspaper on 24 November states:

At least 74 women and dozens of children die in Australia each year at the hands of violent men, making up the majority of all murders committed.

But experts warn the real death rates are even higher because of serious weaknesses in the way homicide data is collected. Family law changes that force shared custody and mediation have placed even more women and children at risk of harm.

Another article by Ruth Pollard in the paper that day told the stories of women who were victims of domestic violence, and states:

Some leave with just the clothes on their back. Others make discreet trips to a relative's house, taking small bundles of belongings to prepare for their escape. A few squirrel away meagre savings to help them survive on their own.

Most have left more than once and many will return yet again.

The article goes on to talk about the journalist having visited the State's refuges and having spoken to women who have, in an act of extreme bravery, escaped from brutally violent marriages and partnerships and found shelter temporarily from a life of fear. That is only to be commended. I call on the Government to consider the establishment of the homicide review team that has been called for by domestic violence groups for a long time. Another article written by Ruth Pollard in the *Sydney Morning Herald* states:

A STATEWIDE domestic violence review is being urged, driven by incoherent domestic violence policies and the failure of the legal system to help protect women from being killed by their violent partners.

I commend all the work that has been done and I acknowledge that legislation has been amended over the past couple of years and that more amendments are mooted. I also commend the efforts of anti-domestic violence groups in New South Wales.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY (Heffron—Minister for Planning, and Minister for Redfern Waterloo) [11.55 a.m.]: No-one could fail to be moved by the deaths of women and children, and any domestic and family violence related homicide is, of course, a tragedy. The Government is well aware of the calls for it to establish a domestic homicide review process both from the Ombudsman and more recently from the Domestic Violence Committee Coalition. This is a very complex issue that demands careful consideration. As members may be aware, governments across Australia have been giving consideration to this issue and until just days ago, when Victoria announced it would implement a review, no Australian government had introduced such a scheme.

The New South Wales Government will continue to examine rigorously all options for the prevention of domestic and family violence, but it is committed to ensuring that it develops and implements the right options, that is, those that can demonstrate long-term, positive outcomes for women and children. The Premier

has indicated that the Government is certainly prepared to consider this option and it is doing so in the context of both its response to Justice Wood's report into child protection this week and the development of the strategic framework on domestic and family violence, which is currently underway. The Violence Prevention Coordination Unit located in the New South Wales Office for Women's Policy, Department of Premier and Cabinet, has begun work on the development of a whole-of-government strategic framework that will provide a blueprint for responses to domestic and family violence.

As part of that process, the Government will be considering all options to help prevent deaths associated with domestic and family violence. This Government is determined to tackle the terrible crime that is domestic violence and is giving top priority to measures that will support victims and bring perpetrators to justice. While Labor is continuing to prioritise tackling domestic and family violence by targeting perpetrators and supporting victims, the Opposition failed to mention violence against women and children prior to the 2007 election. That is a terrible indictment on the priority that members opposite give to protecting women and children in New South Wales. Over the past 18 months this Government has been meeting its election commitments about domestic and family violence.

Late last year the Government undertook to review how its efforts could be better coordinated and how it could build on existing strategies to better respond to victims of domestic and family violence. Following that review, in February this year the Government implemented a new, whole-of-government approach to domestic and family violence that will better coordinate agencies to help prevent violence and support women and children, to ensure better engagement with the non-government sector and better align criminal justice and human services responses. As part of this approach, Government is investing some \$40 million into improving responses to domestic and family violence, including increased counselling, case management, accommodation and support services.

As a result, we have now set up a centralised Violence Prevention Coordination Unit located in the Office for Women's Policy, which is in the Department of Premier and Cabinet. This unit is at the very heart of government and is leading a comprehensive whole-of-government response to tackling domestic and family violence. Secondly, we are currently rolling out five key domestic and family violence projects across the State. These are the elements of the integrated domestic violence case management project, which will prevent victims from having to tell their story again and again to different agencies and so make it easier for women to escape violence once and for all.

Our second project is the Staying Home Leaving Violence Program, which allows victims and their children to stay safely in their homes while the perpetrator is removed. The Government is rolling this program out to a further 16 sites from the two pilots currently operating in Bega and south-east Sydney. Staying Home Leaving Violence is a specialised domestic violence program aimed at preventing victim homelessness. It is based on intensive long-term casework. It is needs based and integrated with key agencies. All sites will be funded by 2010-11. The third project—the Domestic Violence Court Intervention Program—is seeing increases in guilty pleas, decreases in court waiting times and improvements in police responses to victims. We are also rolling out a common risk assessment tool to help us identify people at risk of domestic violence; and consistent, coordinated training for health practitioners.

This new approach also included establishing a new expert advisory body—the Premier's Council on Preventing Violence Against Women. This council had its first meeting in October with the Minister for Women and the Premier. The council is made up of a range of eminent and expert women, and provides the depth of knowledge and experience needed to advise the Government on dealing with violence against women. Among the members are Dr Lesley Laing, a well-respected academic from the University of Sydney; Betty Green, Convenor of the Domestic Violence Committee Coalition; Karen Willis, from the Rape Crisis Centre; and Libby Carney, an Aboriginal domestic and family violence worker and advocate from Bourke.

As well as our reforms to the way domestic violence policy and services are organised, the Government has also implemented a suite of legislative reforms aimed at enhancing women's access to justice and bringing perpetrators to account. The legal changes offer greater protection to victims of domestic and personal violence, recognise the gravity of domestic violence and how it may differ from other violent crimes, and minimise as much as possible the stress and trauma that is associated with apprehended violence orders. The legal changes also streamline the process of making an application and having that application heard, and minimise the impact that apprehended violence order proceedings have on children.

In legislation introduced this time last year, we created new laws that focus specifically on the offence of domestic violence. The Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act creates a specific offence of domestic

violence. It automatically protects victims via an apprehended violence order if their attacker is charged with certain personal violence offences, and it protects children by automatically including them on an apprehended violence order unless there are good reasons for a judge not to do so. Police now have extended powers to apply for a 24-hour telephone interim apprehended violence order and can apply for AVOs on behalf of a victim who is reluctant to proceed. We have also installed more video link equipment in New South Wales courts to reduce trauma for victims and witnesses when testifying.

Police have been given greater search powers for homes where there is domestic violence and we are giving greater protection to children by automatically including them on AVOs. We have also increased police specialist training and expanded the number of domestic violence liaison officers, and we will ensure local area commands have domestic violence evidence kits by the end of this month. Forty new domestic violence specialists are being rolled out across the New South Wales Police Force, with five officers already in place in police head office. These officers are in addition to the network of nine regional coordinators within the New South Wales Police Force who are part of the structure established earlier this year.

These coordinators are located in Newcastle, Coffs Harbour, Dubbo, Tamworth, Wollongong, Wagga Wagga, Surry Hills, Bankstown, and Parramatta. New domestic violence standard operating procedures for the Police Force, based on recommendations of the New South Wales Ombudsman, are also about to be released. This Government will continue its work to ensure that the services it provides to women in the most dreadful circumstances are the best equipped and most coordinated. Ultimately the Government aims to reduce the impact of domestic and family violence on victims and on society.

Ms PRU GOWARD (Goulburn) [12.05 p.m.]: I support this motion and extend my congratulations to the Hornsby-Ku-ring-gai Domestic Violence Network. I also acknowledge that everywhere in this State there are similar domestic violence networks, such as the Southern Highlands network, which is coordinated by Finette English. These networks do a remarkable job under extremely trying circumstances to coordinate with local police, Housing and other crisis services. It is also important when acknowledging White Ribbon Day to recognise the importance of involving men in the campaign against domestic violence. I acknowledge that the men in this Chamber have proudly worn their ribbons. I sometimes think their support has a much greater impact on other men than the remonstrations of the women's movement and of women.

I was reminded of this impact when I took a CD featuring the then Prime Minister, John Howard, to China when we were doing some work with the Human Rights Commission on domestic violence in China. I can guarantee that that was the only point at which the Chinese gave me their full attention. They were absolutely staggered to see a male political leader defending the rights of women and stressing the importance of campaigning against domestic violence. I noticed a similar reaction when I showed the same CD in other places—in Hong Kong, for example. It is important that the Premier and Barry O'Farrell, the Leader of the Opposition, and all our male leaders make it clear that domestic violence is everybody's business, not just the business of women.

However, I turn to the importance of a fatality review, the domestic violence homicide review that the Opposition and the domestic violence movement have called for. It is heartening to note that 12 years after the Federal Government began partnerships to deal with domestic violence this Government has instituted a strategic planning point in the Department of Premier and Cabinet to address domestic violence. It is a little bit late, but it is pleasing to see an appreciation of the importance of a strategic and coordinated approach between agencies. This does not obviate the need for a fatality review. A fatality review in a year when the domestic violence homicide rate is at a 10-year high is not before time. It is the pointy end of this issue. At some point in their lives one-third of women claim to have been the victims of domestic violence; 20 per cent of that begins in pregnancy, and all of it is distressing. It is an abuse of the rights of women.

There can be no greater crime than to murder somebody who, often, is the mother of your children and who, when it suits you, is the person you claim to love. Taking a life in the circumstances of domestic violence, when overwhelmingly women are the victims, requires a particular response, and that must start with a review. If we do not review how these fatalities occur, how do agencies monitor those families? The first time one hears about the death of a woman in domestic violence is not the first time she has been hit. It often starts many years before that. The violence escalates, and without it being arrested and addressed by the various agencies, it inevitably takes this horrific course. We need a fatality review. We need to work out what went wrong with a case. We can go back years through the management—or the lack of management—of this woman and her family in the system.

It is not just about the police and the attitudes of police. People are fond of blaming the police. It often makes police frustrated that they do not get to work in a supportive way with other parts of the puzzle, such as the justice agencies and the Department of Housing. If women cannot find decent housing to get away from the violence, they return to it. The importance of a fatality review cannot be overestimated. I am heartened by the Premier's indication that he might consider it. I cannot see how we can address this record homicide rate without doing the first most obvious thing, which is to ask why.

Ms TANYA GADIEL (Parramatta) [12.10 p.m.]: I congratulate the member for Hornsby on bringing this important matter to the attention of the House. It is a privilege to speak to the motion and to highlight some of the work that the Government is doing to deliver better and more effective services to women and children who experience domestic violence. Among our new initiatives this year, the Government has established an annual grants program of more than \$2.9 million to non-government organisations to deliver front-line domestic and family violence services; \$900,000 of the grants funding is specifically quarantined for Aboriginal projects. This significant new annual grants program funds partnership projects with non-government organisations to prevent violence against women and, in particular, domestic and family violence.

A number of innovative and important projects and services have already been funded under this program, particularly those supporting women and families in western Sydney. Joan Harrison Support Services in Liverpool has received \$130,000 for an innovative pilot project focusing on domestic violence and mental health. The project involves casework with individual women, community development and the ongoing development of a training package for local workers. We are providing funding through the Penrith Women's Health Service and WILMA Women's Health Service at Macarthur for a project to assist women with an intellectual disability who experience domestic violence, and for support for deaf and hearing-impaired women.

Mirang Din Aboriginal Women's Resource Centre will receive almost \$150,000 to support its family violence project. Mirang Din provides a safe space for Aboriginal women affected by family violence and is the only dedicated Aboriginal women's family violence service in western Sydney. The United Nations Development Fund for Women [UNIFEM] has received \$65,000 to support White Ribbon Day campaign activities in New South Wales. The Rape Crisis Centre has received \$261,000 to enable the service to employ a counselling coordination assistant. This position will work with mental health, sexual assault, and drug and alcohol services to develop coordinated clinical care networks for people suffering complex trauma as a result of violence.

The National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect [NAPCAN] has received \$150,000 for its successful Love Bites Program. This program aims to reduce sexual assault, and domestic and family violence by educating and informing young people in schools. We are providing nearly \$160,000 to the Women's Refuge Resource Movement for an important project focusing on family law. This will provide non-legal support, information and referrals for women attending the Sydney Family Law Registry who are separating from a violent partner. Amelie House domestic violence outreach service in Menai will receive \$50,000 for another project focusing on gaps in domestic violence service delivery for older single women aged 45 years to 80 years.

The Immigration Advice and Rights Service, and the Australian Bosnian Women's Association will receive funding to provide education about domestic and family violence to women from a range of ethnic backgrounds in a number of community languages. A new round of grants for 2008-09 was announced by the Minister for Women only yesterday and information is available on the Office for Women's Policy website and will be advertised in the press from this weekend. I encourage all members to bring this important program to the attention of organisations in their electorates. Again I take this opportunity to congratulate the member for Hornsby on highlighting this matter, her work in her community and those who are working with her.

As a member of Parliament it is a great privilege to work with people who are so committed to something that is so important to this generation of women and future generations of women. I am pleased that some gentlemen are now in the Chamber and that they will speak in this debate. As the member for Goulburn said, it is often more powerful when men become involved so that it is not an argument coming from the so-called sisterhood.

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck) [12.15 p.m.]: I give full support to the motion moved by the member for Hornsby, who is a hardworking local member. I congratulate her on the timeliness of this motion because Tuesday 25 November 2008 was White Ribbon Day, although I note that notice of this motion

was given 12 months ago, such is the extent of notices of motions in this House. It is fortuitous that we have the opportunity to debate this important motion at this time and it is gratifying to see so many members on both sides of the House wearing white ribbons in support of the elimination of domestic violence against women.

Nothing is more degrading than domestic violence against a woman. A woman is at the lowest ebb in her life when she is being subjected to violence in her home by somebody she thinks loves her. Unfortunately, far too many women have that experience. Anywhere from 40 per cent to 57 per cent of women will experience physical or sexual violence by a man at some stage of their lives. In the last year between 5 per cent and 10 per cent of all Australian women have experienced at least one episode of physical or sexual violence by a man. It is just extraordinary that in 2008, when we are reaching parallels in so many areas—business, various professions, Parliament—when we are making a genuine effort to bridge the divide, that domestic violence is still so insidious in our community. It is almost unfathomable that one in three women will experience domestic violence at some stage in their lives.

I am concerned that the Government has not leapt at the opportunity to establish a domestic violence homicide review team. I know that the member for Goulburn has put a lot of work into this as well, but there have been many reports, even this week, about the need to establish a statewide domestic violence homicide review team. We have heard from Ingrid Poulson, an incredible woman. With the indulgence of the House I will read an excerpt from the article she wrote in the *Sydney Morning Herald* dated 25 November 2008. She states:

Out of tragedy, hopefully some good may come.

Perhaps the only thing worse than having your family killed is being told their deaths could have been prevented. I lost my four-year-old daughter, my 23-month-old son and my father to a domestic homicide. That was painful enough but to hear their deaths could have been avoided is almost unbearable.

This claim is made by proponents of domestic homicide review teams, who see domestic violence-related deaths as a predictable pattern of behaviour, and therefore preventable.

Given the sometimes dramatic falls in homicide-related deaths where the review teams have been set up, their claims appear to be substantiated.

The role of the teams is to comprehensively investigate domestic homicides and use the findings to inform training, systems, policies and procedures. Although coronial inquiries play this role to some degree, the reach of the review teams is more extensive because it draws information from all of the agencies involved in domestic violence investigations.

She then details some of her experience as follows:

Knowledge, gleaned from the wisdom of hindsight, can help us to pinpoint patterns, and this is the bold claim of the review teams: domestic homicides are preceded by recognisable patterns of behaviour, patterns that essentially raise warning flags.

When I went to New Zealand a couple of years ago to speak about my experience, one police officer said he had studied my case, had counted the "flags" and if he had been involved, he would have put protection in place far earlier ...

What if someone knew to ask the right questions and look for the right evidence at the right time? Wouldn't they have been able to assess the danger, in real-time, instead of, sadly, in hindsight?

There is wisdom in hindsight and that wisdom has been hard-earned, through the heart breaking, unnecessary deaths of women and children, the death of babies such as mine. To think their deaths could have been prevented is difficult. But knowing the lessons learned may be used to stop someone else having to go through what my family went through, may give me, at least, some small measure of peace.

If Ingrid Poulson's heartfelt plea to us does not assist the Government in establishing a statewide domestic violence homicide review team, I really fear for the future of domestic violence services in this State. Obviously it is a heartbreaking tragedy for any woman to go through what Ingrid Poulson has been through. Clearly, many women who experience domestic violence might not do so to the extent that Ingrid Poulson has experienced it. However, it is enough to put them down for a substantial period as they try to escape and try to get into women's refuges. There is a dire need for additional women's refuges, more beds, and more funding to be spent on women's refuges throughout this State, particularly in rural and regional areas and in western Sydney. I cannot emphasise enough the importance of White Ribbon Day in bringing domestic violence to our attention. I call on the Government to take action to help alleviate domestic violence.

Mr GERARD MARTIN (Bathurst) [12.20 p.m.]: I commend the member for Hornsby for bringing this motion before the House. I speak today as a White Ribbon Day ambassador, a role I have had for the past three or four years. I have been working very actively with the domestic violence groups in my electorate,

particularly the Bathurst group. It is important that we men take a stand on this issue. Whilst almost invariably—indeed, 99.9 per cent of the time—it is women and children who are the victims of domestic violence, it is men who are the perpetrators. Until men take a stand against domestic violence, and stand alongside women, we will not make inroads into dealing with domestic violence. Andrew O'Keefe—who is better known as a television personality—is an inspiring Chairman of the White Ribbon Foundation.

Over the past three or four years the Bathurst Domestic Violence Liaison Group has worked hard to get the message out. I pay tribute to Mimi O'Reilly, who chaired that committee for the past 20 years. Mimi works in community housing and has been extremely dedicated to the cause. She has now been succeeded as Chairman of the Bathurst Domestic Violence Liaison Group by Jack Goldberg, who works for one of the benevolent societies in child care. These people are extremely dedicated. In recent years they have taken on some challenges to get the message out that we need to get men involved in this cause. Last year, for example, we used a grant from one of the government departments to bring the Sydney Street Choir to Bathurst. We held a concert around the theme of domestic violence. Many of the women involved in that event had been the victims of domestic violence. A lot of the men involved were perpetrators of domestic violence, and many of them admitted it was the result of their drug or alcohol addiction.

The year before last we held an essay writing competition, which encouraged victims of domestic violence to put their experiences on paper. Andrew O'Keefe was one of the judges. The finalists were then asked to read out their work. The winning essay writer—I will refer to the lady as Jenny—read one of the most harrowing tales one could ever hear. The eloquence of her writing was such that you could sense the hurt coming out in her writing. It was certainly a very sobering experience. Indeed, it should be compulsory for men to sit down and listen to these stories. We men who are happy to support the cause have a responsibility to know those around us who may be perpetrators and do something about it: look them in the face and say, "This is not on."

As we know, this year the advertising slogan for White Ribbon Day is "If you hurt my mum, you hurt me" or "If you hit my mum, you hit me". That is to get the message across that every time a man bashes his partner, wife or spouse, regardless of whether he physically assaults the children, they are hurting from it. The mental torment those kids grow up with is something that stays with them right throughout their lives, unless help is provided. It is important that we stand united on this matter. As other speakers have pointed out, the Government has implemented a number of initiatives to address the issue. However, until the whole community takes a stand and ensures that those who perpetrate domestic violence are seen for the pariahs they are, we will not make the gains we should make.

I challenge all the men in this House, and those in the community, to become involved in the White Ribbon Day campaign. Apart from being an educational campaign, it is quite inspiring to mix with the people who are really making a difference. From Andrew O'Keefe right down through the system, they are very committed people. Saatchi and Saatchi, the advertising agency involved in White Ribbon Day, gives its time free of charge. Every year the agency comes up with a fairly controversial or confronting advertising campaign. There was some criticism about it early in the piece. But if you are going to confront this issue, you cannot do it in a mealy-mouthed manner. The message has to be strong, it has to be confronting, and it has to be aimed at men.

Given the support that White Ribbon Day is now getting, including in this House by way of motions such as that moved by the member for Hornsby, we have an obligation to encourage support for the cause in every venue possible. If we do not do so, the price we will pay will be continuing domestic violence. As we have heard, unfortunately from time to time domestic violence ends in innocent deaths. I commend the motion to the House.

Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [12.25 p.m.], in reply: I extend my thanks to the member for Heffron, the member for Goulburn, the member for Parramatta, the member for Burrinjuck, and the member for Bathurst for their contributions to debate on the motion. I note that the member for Heffron listed the various government initiatives to address domestic violence, both past and those that are in the pipeline. The member for Goulburn highlighted the essential need to review domestic violence fatalities. The member for Parramatta highlighted many grant opportunities to assist in dealing with domestic violence. I particularly noted her comments about men speaking out about domestic violence, and about their purchasing and wearing white ribbons. At Hornsby railway station, a number of men broke through crowds of people to get to me to purchase a white ribbon.

The member for Burrinjuck outlined a number of heart-wrenching stories and read quotes from people who have been victims of domestic violence. The member for Bathurst spoke about the White Ribbon Foundation. I was interested to hear about the Choir of Hard Knocks—a choir I heard sing at the Sydney Opera House—and its involvement in increasing awareness about domestic violence. I acknowledge that a number of the homeless people on our streets have been victims of domestic violence. The definition of "domestic violence" is that it can be individual, or a mixture of physical, social, sexual and economic abuse that is perpetrated on another person. I pay tribute to the soroptimists in my electorate and also to the Hornsby-Ku-ring-gai Domestic Violence Network. I also acknowledge, as other members have, the fantastic work done by many domestic violence network groups and other interested groups.

I believe I spoke about domestic violence before the 2007 election. I have been working with my local domestic violence group for a number of years and I have outlined the importance of the issue on a number of occasions in this House. Again I quote from a *Daily Telegraph* article entitled "Disturbing attitudes to violence against women uncovered in the White Ribbon Foundation survey" The survey referred to is headed "An Assault on Our Future: The impact of violence on young people and their relationships". The article reads:

One in every three boys believes it is acceptable to hit girls and many children are routinely exposed to domestic violence, according to a disturbing survey.

The unprecedented survey of violence and attitudes shows one third of boys believe "it's not a big deal to hit a girl". One in seven thought "it's OK to make a girl have sex with you if she was flirting".

I also quote again from a *Sydney Morning Herald* article written by Ruth Pollard and dated 26 November:

A risk-assessment tool soon to be introduced will help frontline workers better evaluate women and children's risk of domestic violence, allowing experts to intervene earlier to prevent deaths and injuries.

That, combined with recently introduced domestic violence evidence kits and a two-day training course for all police, would improve police responses in one of the most difficult parts of the job ...

The risk-assessment tool is very welcome, as are the other measures. Given that domestic violence cases make up 35 per cent of police work and they have such a large impact in our community, it is absolutely essential to have a homicide review team look at what is going on in our communities, following the lead of Victoria. It is a real shame that the PACT meetings have been abolished in my area. I raised the issue of isolating domestic violence cases from assault cases, which the local area commander did. I also highlighted the importance of looking at the children involved in these cases: those children are also victims of domestic violence. I thank all members who have contributed to this important debate and I thank everyone in New South Wales who is focusing on domestic violence, violence against women and violence generally during these important 16 days. I look forward to the initiatives of the Government in keeping with what has been suggested today.

TERMEIL CREEK BRIDGE

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK (South Coast) [12.30 p.m.]: After 12 months to the day of first giving notice of this matter in this place I am very pleased to formally move my motion this morning. I move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that the Minister for Roads has failed to answer correspondence in relation to the Termeil Creek Bridge project, conveyed to him in January and September 2007; and
- (2) calls on the Minister for Roads to address the concerns of the local residents in the area regarding the Termeil Creek Bridge project and to answer his correspondence in a more timely manner.

It is a tame motion. A couple of things have changed in the past 12 months but nothing in respect of corresponding with the community or answering the concerns of my constituent Mr Les Stewart. One thing that has changed though is that we have a new Minister for Roads. I am optimistic about the new Minister for Roads. The Minister can be a little abrasive and rude at times—he can even be a bit of a bully—but he shows some real emotion in this House. The new Minister for Roads has passion for his job and he is sincere about trying to answer his correspondence. I hope that the Minister tries to catch up with all the unanswered correspondence of the previous Minister for Roads.

I moved this motion last year following two years of absolute and utter inaction and ineptitude on the part of the Government. Three years have now passed and nothing has been resolved regarding the Termeil Creek Bridge project. Most members would question the location of the bridge. It is not on a back road but on

the Princes Highway. It is a very important bridge that needs to be replaced or realigned because it is simply dangerous. In 2006 the bridge was identified by the Roads and Traffic Authority as unsafe and nearing the end of its design life. An election promise was made that a new bridge would be built and \$1.3 million was allocated in the 2007-08 budget. Not one sod of dirt has been turned on this project and the community and affected landowners are completely in the dark: they have no information. They write letters, I write letters, they make telephone calls, I make telephone calls but there is no information forthcoming—nothing has happened.

The first part of my motion relates to the failure by the former Minister for Roads, the Hon. Eric Roozendaal, to answer correspondence. The refusal of the former Minister for Roads to answer correspondence has been a problem for not only me but also other members on my side of the House for some time. I am aware that Labor members love to infuriate Opposition members. They like to think they have made us cranky by ignoring us. But I have to say this symbolises what it is the worst thing about the Labor Party in New South Wales at the moment: the mistreatment of constituents whose views are being raised by members. The issue is now to be addressed by the current Minister for Roads. The Minister needs to go back to the wastepaper basket or the bottom drawer where the former Minister threw all that correspondence and get to the bottom of some of these issues.

The history of the Termeil Creek Bridge goes back a long way. Three years ago my constituent Mr Les Stewart became aware that the Roads and Traffic Authority was preparing to replace the Termeil Creek Bridge. The preferred option was to go straight through his property and take two hectares of his land—Mr Stewart was not given the chance to say anything about it—though there were other routes available on the eastern side of the highway. At that time Mr Stewart was a constituent of the member for Bega—who is present in the Chamber—and he made representations to the member for Bega. The member for Bega will no doubt tell us about the lack of meaningful correspondence he received when he made representations on behalf of Mr Stewart.

When the boundaries changed Mr Stewart came to me and I began making representations on his behalf. I was somewhat amazed that the concerns of the whole community at Termeil and Burrill Lake and Mr Stewart continued to be completely ignored. I eventually received some correspondence from the former Parliamentary Secretary for Roads about four months after I had originally moved this motion. He did not answer any of the concerns I had raised, however, but he did provide me with a letter indicating some 2½ years after I had raised this issue with him that the road project was in its preliminary investigation stage—utter and complete rubbish.

There had already been 2½ years of studies carried out, there had been a public meeting which the Roads and Traffic Authority attended and spoke about the various options at, and plans had been conveyed and shown around the place. This was not preliminary investigation mode. I made repeated phone calls to the office of the Minister following the public meeting. The Roads and Traffic Authority gave a commitment that it would keep in touch with the local community on this project but nothing happened—the community was sidelined. A public meeting of probably 200 people supported Mr Stewart in this project. I now return to what the Roads and Traffic Authority had to say about the Termeil Creek Bridge. This project is not unimportant; it is a very important project. Only two years are left to do something about it. Back in 2006 the Roads and Traffic Authority said:

We are conducting studies into the feasibility of replacing Termeil Creek Bridge and subject approaches. The existing bridge, based on current vehicular usage is considered to be too narrow, poorly aligned and nearing the end of its design life. If retained the bridge will require major rehabilitation within the next five years.

That was three years ago. We have two years left. All that time has been wasted. There was money in the budget and then the money disappeared from the budget—no correspondence and no answers to correspondence, no sitting down to resolve an issue that has been of concern to a community and to Mr Stewart, whose life has been turned upside down as a result of the Government's absolute and utter ineptitude. The bridge could now be dangerous. Constant proposals are being investigated and yet three years later we are told the project is in preliminary stages. Rubbish! What about the budget allocation? It was in the budget last year and it has now gone from the budget. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that some of the officers of the Roads and Traffic Authority are saying that the money has been spent elsewhere. What about that broken election promise?

Representations have also been made by Shoalhaven City Council objecting to the option of going through Mr Stewart's property. The council has said, "We object to this. You have other options. You can go on the eastern side of the highway." The council also has not received a response to a reasonable request. Why? Because the Roads and Traffic Authority was intending to simply go through Mr Stewart's land and present him

with a fate accompli. Despite objections by Mr Stewart, the Roads and Traffic Authority completely ignored what he had to say. But everything changed when Mr Stewart received unprecedented support from the community. The community rallied behind him and they instigated a public meeting that resulted in the Roads and Traffic Authority backing down. The Roads and Traffic Authority made a commitment that it would continue to listen to him but it has not done so. I am sad that I have to raise this issue three years after my constituent first went to the member for Bega for help.

The second paragraph of my motion calls on the Minister for Roads to address the concerns of the community. Today I call on the Minister not to emulate the behaviour of the previous Minister—that is, do nothing—but to show some compassion and answer our questions. What is happening in relation to the Termeil Creek bridge project? Where is the project up to? As I asked 12 months ago, has the money identified in the 2006-07 budget disappeared from this project and gone to another project? If so, where has it gone? Have discussions taken place with the National Parks and Wildlife Service [NPWS] on an eastern bridge alignment? Twelve months ago the NPWS was not aware that that was an option and no discussions had taken place between the NPWS and the Roads and Traffic Authority. As the bridge has been identified as unsafe and has only two years before it comes to the end of its life, why have the Roads and Traffic Authority and the department been so reluctant to pursue this project with vigour?

The Minister has to get out the file and have a look at the reams of correspondence. Lastly, but most importantly, why has a single constituent, Mr Les Stewart, who has attempted to communicate with the former Minister for Roads, the current Minister for Roads, the Roads and Traffic Authority and anyone else he can think of, been so poorly treated by the Government? Mr Stewart's life has been turned completely upside down. He does not know what is happening. He does not know whether the Roads and Traffic Authority will resume his land. He does not know what the Roads and Traffic Authority is going to do. The Government must resolve the issue for the sake of Mr Stewart and the community.

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.40 p.m.]: I thank the member for South Coast for bringing the issue of the Termeil Creek Bridge to the attention of the House. The Government acknowledges that this is an important bridge across the Princes Highway and we understand why the member has raised this issue in the House. The Government opposes the motion for the reasons I will outline. The Roads and Traffic Authority has advised that all correspondence sent by the member for South Coast in relation to the Termeil Creek Bridge has been responded to. The Termeil Creek Bridge is located on the Princes Highway approximately 15.2 kilometres south of Ulladulla. The bridge was identified in 2004-05 under the State-funded Infrastructure Maintenance Program as a structure that was suitable for replacement under the Bridge Widening Program. The structure would be improved by providing safer, wider travel lanes and widened shoulders on an improved 100 kilometres per hour alignment.

I understand that the Roads and Traffic Authority held a community information session in April 2007 about plans to replace the Termeil Creek Bridge. The meeting, which was attended by approximately 80 people, included members of the local community, directly affected landowners and State and Federal local members of Parliament. The meeting gave the community and other interested parties an opportunity to raise issues surrounding the project with the project team. I understand that a number of issues were raised at the meeting by the community in relation to the alignment of the Princes Highway immediately to the north of Termeil Creek. The Roads and Traffic Authority carried out further preliminary investigations, which indicated that the bridge over Termeil Creek should be widened in conjunction with the northern section of the highway to further improve the network efficiency at this location. It is important to point out that the Roads and Traffic Authority is working on this project. Currently it is developing a detailed realignment option for the highway to the north of Termeil Creek, including the widening of the Termeil Creek Bridge.

To digress slightly, in relation to the inner-city bypass and the road that is to be constructed across Sandgate and wetlands, it has taken the Roads and Traffic Authority an immense amount of time to undertake the realignment because of the complexity of designing and building a bridge across the wetlands. These types of projects take time if they are to be done properly. I have asked the Roads and Traffic Authority to ensure that the community is consulted on any future alignment of this section of the highway. I believe that is very important. I am advised that all correspondence received from the member for South Coast in relation to the Termeil Creek Bridge has been answered.

However, if the member is aware of any outstanding correspondence, the Minister has indicated he will be happy to follow that up. I indicate that as Parliamentary Secretary for Roads I am happy to do so as well. In relation to the turnaround of correspondence, I make sure that correspondence is responded to within 24 hours.

I received correspondence yesterday which I signed late last night and returned. I will continue to follow that procedure. I give that guarantee to the member for South Coast. When Parliament is not sitting I regularly come to Sydney to sign correspondence. I acknowledge that it is important, and I try to do it as diligently as I can. If constituents take the time to write a letter they deserve a timely response.

Mrs Shelley Hancock: You are out on your own on this one.

Ms SONIA HORNERY: All members would recognise that constituents deserve a timely response. There are others who are more knowledgeable about roads than I, and we must make sure that we have the correct information. I reiterate that the Roads and Traffic Authority is working on the project. We acknowledge this it is an important bridge on an important and busy road. I applaud the member for South Coast for bringing this matter to the attention of the House. Let us get working on it.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE (Bega) [12.45 p.m.]: I acknowledge the contribution by the Parliamentary Secretary for Roads, who is very hard to argue with. I am very pleased that she has put on the record that correspondence should be responded to in a timely manner by Government members. The reality is that Michael Daley joins a long list of members—Carl Scully, Joe Tripodi, Eric Roozendaal and perhaps even Michael Costa at one point—who have been Ministers responsible for roads over the past six years and who have been notoriously slack in responding to correspondence. I particularly refer to Eric Roozendaal in that regard. Even Government members have criticised him for his lack of responding to vital correspondence on the State's roads network. In this case Eric Roozendaal failed time and again to respond in a timely fashion to a critical issue. It involves a bridge, which is dangerous, on the Princes Highway. Local residents have been up in arms, and correspondence has been flying left, right and centre from the Opposition to the Government to try to get the bridge fixed.

I first wrote to the Government on this issue on 28 February 2006. It was not until 19 June that the then Parliamentary Secretary, Matt Brown, finally responded. The response was that the Government was looking at a number of options. We suggest that the road diversion be not put through Mr Stewart's property but put on the eastern side of the highway through land that previously was part of the estate of State Forests but now comes under the responsibility of the National Parks and Wildlife Service [NPWS]. The NPWS should allow the roadway to be aligned through that part of the national park. Time and again all we hear are excuses. The bridge comes to the end of its design life in two years' time. This matter has been ongoing since 2006. It is now almost 2009 and a dangerous bridge is exposing people using the highway to unnecessary risk.

I have had reason to raise matters with the new Minister for Roads. He seems to be much more responsive than the previous Minister, which is encouraging. I hope that approach continues. The indication by the Parliamentary Secretary for Roads that the Minister has agreed to look at this issue is a very encouraging sign. However, we have some major issues in relation to the Princes Highway. Time and again in this House, whenever matters relating to the Princes Highway have been debated—and the member for South Coast would agree with me—members such as the member for Kiama, the member for Monaro, the member for Shellharbour and the member for the former electorate of Illawarra, have said that the Federal Government must fund the Princes Highway. It has been 12 months since the election of the Rudd Government and no-one from the State Labor Party has mounted that argument in this place.

The member for South Coast and I have argued consistently that AusLink funding should be allocated to the Princes Highway. We have not seen that consistency from Labor members, who have been very conveniently silent for the past 12 months about the need for Federal funding to go into the Princes Highway. Yet in the past 12 months the State Coroner has handed down recommendations for major upgrades on the Princes Highway, particularly on sections of the highway where people have tragically lost their lives. The State Government is playing politics again on this issue.

I hope the Roads and Traffic Authority and the State Minister for Roads have the good sense to submit some applications for AusLink black spot funding and make sure that this bridge is designed, that there is community consultation and that it is built as quickly as possible. The best option is for it to go east of the current highway alignment. I encourage the Minister for Roads to look at this matter very seriously and respond to the member for South Coast as quickly as possible.

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck) [12.50 p.m.]: I am delighted to support the motion of the very hardworking member for South Coast that the House note that the Minister for Roads failed to answer correspondence in relation to the Termeil Creek Bridge project conveyed to him in January this year and

September 2007. I too have had to raise concerns in this place about the failure of the previous Minister for Roads to answer correspondence from my office. It is obviously of concern to many members of Parliament that Ministers, who take on the responsibility of a portfolio—particularly one of such a high calibre as Roads, with myriad public servants, many advisers and departmental officers at their beck and call,—cannot answer correspondence from a member of Parliament in a timely way.

As members of Parliament we have the right to make representations on behalf of our constituents to any Minister on any matter pertaining to State government. When we do not get a response from a Minister, firstly, it smacks of the Minister's laziness and, secondly, we cannot close the file in our office relating to the matter. I have files that have been open for more than a year because of the failure of the Minister for Roads to provide an answer to correspondence. Examples of correspondence for which I have been awaiting a response are Mr McClure of Cootamundra, dated 11 February 2008; Mr Hill of Cootamundra, dated 24 August 2007; Mr Francis of Forbes, dated 24 August 2007; from Mr and Mrs Burman of Young, dated 18 February 2008; and there are others.

I had a brief chat in this Chamber with the new Minister for Roads in relation to this matter and I told him of the problem I have in my office. I keep very comprehensive files—as all members of Parliament on this side of the House clearly do—and I have to close a file before I can put it away. Until I receive correspondence back from the Minister in relation to a particular inquiry I have put to the Minister that I cannot close the file. I have files that have been open for a year and a half because the Minister is too lazy to reply, despite the number of people he has working for him and the hundreds of thousands of dollars spent in his department just on bureaucracy. How can a Minister have the gall not to respond to correspondence that is in his or her purview? It is part of a Minister's brief to provide this correspondence.

We know that the State's roads are absolute shambles and we often hear the member for South Coast and the member for Bega talk about the need for additional funding for roads such as the Princes Highway, on which many lives are lost every year. We often hear the member for Coffs Harbour, the member for Kempsey, the member for Tweed and other members talk about the need to upgrade the Pacific Highway. In my electorate there is a crying need to upgrade urgently the Lachlan Valley Way, the Burley Griffin Way, the Olympic Highway and, of course, the Barton Highway, which I have spoken about so many times in this place.

The Minister for Roads might not think that the items raised are of sufficient gravity to deserve a reply; they might be simple matters such as concerns about not having a drivers licence renewed or the process senior citizens are subjected to when having their licences renewed. Such matters might not be so important to the Minister but they are very important to the citizens who write to my office. They have taken the time out of their busy lives to write to their local member of Parliament. I make representations on their behalf, but correspondence is not coming back from the Minister for Roads.

Dr Andrew McDonald: Point of order: The motion is about the Termeil Creek Bridge.

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

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON: The Minister for Roads has failed to answer correspondence from the member for South Coast dating back to September 2007. I have had the same problem and that is why we raise this issue in Parliament. It is extremely important for the Minister for Roads to answer correspondence.

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK (South Coast) [12.55 p.m.], in reply: I appreciate the comments from the member for Wallsend, the member for Burrinjuck and the member for Bega. I note with some interest that Labor members have not come to the Chamber to queue up to defend the former Minister for Roads, Eric Roozendaal. Labor members did not even have a second speaker to my motion. Yet members on this side of the House queued up to talk about correspondence not being answered.

I turn to some of the comments made by the member for Wallsend. She obviously has been sent to the House with some comments from the Minister or the Roads and Traffic Authority to say that all of my correspondence has been answered. I have sent correspondence to the Roads and Traffic Authority and it has referred my correspondence to the Minister. That is what the Roads and Traffic Authority does—it refers my correspondence to the Minister—but then the Minister does not answer the correspondence. Yes, the Roads and Traffic Authority does respond: it sends an acknowledgement that it has referred the correspondence to the Minister. To say that the Roads and Traffic Authority has responded to my correspondence is just ridiculous.

The Minister for Roads is in the hot seat for not answering correspondence—not just from members on this side of the House. I have given the warning this morning that the current Minister has to do something about changing the culture within the department to ensure that constituents' concerns are appropriately answered and addressed as they arise. I note also that during the debate the member for Wallsend said that the Roads and Traffic Authority had called a public meeting. The Roads and Traffic Authority called a public meeting because there was so much angst, controversy and concern and so many letters going to the authority and the Minister that it thought it had better have a public information session. But it never intended to have a public information session; it was forced into that situation.

The member for Wallsend also said that these things take time. We have got only two years left: the bridge might crumble into the creek because the Roads and Traffic Authority and the Government are taking so much time. I saw plans floating around for this project two years ago. Yes, things take time, but this is a fairly simple project: it is the realignment of the approaches to the bridge and widening of the bridge. The Government should get on and do something. We had money for the project in the budget last year but it has disappeared.

The member for Wallsend talked about her correspondence turnaround. It is fantastic that she can reply to her correspondence within 24 hours. I do not think many members could achieve that. However, that achievement demonstrates the inefficiency of the former Minister for Roads and some of the current Ministers, who have a habit of not acknowledging or replying to correspondence. Responses to correspondence are a problem. We can send a letter to a Minister or a Parliamentary Secretary and, yes, we might get a response, but it will not answer any of the questions that have been raised. That happened with a response I received from Parliamentary Secretary Michael Daley at the beginning of this year.

I received a response, but it did not address any of the concerns I raised on behalf of Mr Stewart and the community—or anything else for that matter. It was one of those standard letters that we all file away because they are meaningless. That says more about this Government's ability to spin than its determination to resolve an issue for the community. I am disappointed that the member for Wallsend has left the Chamber. All she has been told is that the Roads and Traffic Authority is working on the project. Wow! It has been working on it for three years and money has been allocated to the project in the budget. We want to know what is the Roads and Traffic Authority's preferred option. It should be more specific about this project. It should not dilly-dally, swan around and pretend that this project is in the preliminary stages and that it is working on it.

Mr Stewart has been turned upside down because of this Government's ineptitude and laziness. He does not know where to turn or what to do because no-one returns his phone calls or responds to his correspondence. He does not know what is happening. He does not know whether the Roads and Traffic Authority will simply resume two hectares of his fairly small property on the side of the Princes Highway. He does not know whether to sell or what decisions he can make. I ask the Minister—if he is listening somewhere; he is probably busily answering three-year-old correspondence from someone else—to answer the questions I have asked about the Termeil Creek Bridge project. This is an important project on the Princes Highway, not on a back road to nowhere, and it needs to be completed. The Government must deal with the inaction of the former Minister for Roads.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 36

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

Noes, 47

Mr Amery	Mr Greene	Ms Megarrity
Ms Andrews	Mr Harris	Mr Morris
Mr Aquilina	Ms Hay	Mrs Paluzzano
Mr Borger	Mr Hickey	Mr Pearce
Mr Brown	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
Mr Daley	Mr McBride	Mr West
Ms D'Amore	Dr McDonald	Mr Whan
Ms Firth	Ms McKay	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Gadiel	Mr McLeay	Mr Ashton
Mr Gibson	Ms McMahon	Mr Martin

Pairs

Mr O'Farrell	Ms Beamer
Mrs Skinner	Ms Burton

Question resolved in the negative.

Motion negatived.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**Postponement of Business**

Private Member's Business item No. 6 postponed by Mrs Judy Hopwood.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**Postponement of Business**

Private Member's Business item No. 10 postponed by Mrs Judy Hopwood.

KU-RING-GAI COUNCIL OVALS

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA (Davidson) [1.09 p.m.]: I move:

That this House calls on the Government to ensure that all existing ovals in the Ku-ring-gai council area are maintained as recreational facilities, including for sporting activity.

Like my children—and the member for Macquarie Fields when he was a child in Lindfield—many school students play sport in my local area. The increasing deficiency of sporting facilities on the Ku-ring-gai side of my electorate has many parents and children concerned. I am mindful of the importance of outdoor recreational activities in fighting childhood obesity—a subject about which the member for Macquarie Fields is also interested—and investing in children's long-term health. The quantity of different types of open space in Ku-ring-gai was addressed in the 2005 open space strategy, which found, among other things, that the provision of sportsgrounds at 1.16 hectares per thousand people was lower than the traditional standard of 1.21 hectares per thousand people. Sports club demands and the level of use indicated that there were insufficient facilities to meet present and anticipated future needs. Further, the strategy found that the provision of non-sport parks at 0.49 hectares per thousand people was low compared with the traditional standard of 1.62 hectares per thousand. However, I acknowledge that the area is blessed with some environmentally significant national parks in addition to those areas I have mentioned.

The undeniable reality is that local sporting clubs are under strain, with many constituents properly concerned that sporting activities in their local government area should be increased. They should certainly not

be lost. That is why I have moved this motion. During the summer months the North Shore Junior Cricket Association runs one of the largest junior competitions in New South Wales, involving around 2,400 players. Last year 140 teams competed and the association reported that up to 200 North Shore schoolchildren were deprived of a game every weekend because of a shortage of playing fields. Soccer—or football, as it is also known—is in a similar position. It is the main winter sport on the North Shore, with around 17,000 players. The soccer association has warned that players will have to be turned away this year due to a lack of grounds. Likewise, netball is looking for additional or upgraded facilities, as is Little Athletics.

I acknowledge particularly the efforts of Ku-ring-gai Council to address the issue of sporting facilities and ovals in a number of ways. Firstly, it has endeavoured to cooperate with local schools in the area to share sporting facilities. For example, the council makes Koola Oval available to Killara High School at no charge. Discussions are currently ongoing between St Ives High School and St Ives Football Club. Hopefully an arrangement will be reached that permits them to share an area controlled by the local high school. The football club, which has many players at the school, would contribute financially to its upkeep and upgrading. Those negotiations continue.

The council has also been looking for extra training facilities for various sports and has been thinking innovatively and creatively—as it needs to. One possible solution is to use underutilised bowling greens. A major initiative of the council is to develop new grounds in North Turramurra adjacent to the old tip. In November 2007 the council and the community adopted a plan for three sporting ovals and four netball training courts. That project, which will be the only large regional complex in the area, will cost some \$21 million. The council has indicated that it can contribute some \$13 million, which it has allocated to the project. I appeal to the State Government to entertain an application for funding for this project, given that it currently has a shortfall of \$8 million. We cannot afford to miss opportunities to create fields, just as we cannot allow fields to disappear from the area.

I gave notice of this motion at a time when the Leader of the Opposition introduced a bill to utilise the University of Technology, Sydney [UTS] site at Lindfield—a suburb with which the member for Macquarie Fields is familiar. I am pleased to note that since then the oval at the UTS site has been retained for sporting use—the local community has used it for that purpose for many years. However, instead of UTS handing over the oval for community use under council's guardianship, the council was required to waive some \$11 million or \$12 million in section 94 contributions. In effect, this means the local community had to purchase the oval, despite the fact that the public gave UTS the site for only \$1. The \$11 million or \$12 million that the council has had to use for that purchase could have been spent on protecting, upgrading and expanding land, or purchasing new open land for sporting use. While I am pleased to see the sporting oval retained at the UTS site at Lindfield, it is concerning that the State Government did not help the council to maintain it, other than at significant financial cost.

As I am giving special recognition today to the member for Macquarie Fields, I mention another facility in West Lindfield that is under discussion with the Department of Sport and Recreation. I understand that the Minister for Sport and Recreation is currently considering funding of some \$100,000 to \$200,000 for a new Futsal facility. I would be delighted to see the former resident of Lindfield support the application and those discussions. It is a small amount but a necessary and worthwhile initiative, not only for Lindfield but for the surrounding area and its children, whom we must look after and encourage to be healthy.

I have some comments about planning in the broader sense. What extra or enhanced infrastructure is planned for the North Shore for the next 20 years? Under the metropolitan strategy, at least 10,000 new dwellings and many more people will be required to move into the area before 2031. However, it is not clear how the growing sporting needs of this population will be met. The Government's emphasis is too much on new residential development and not enough on supporting infrastructure, including sporting facilities. Encouraging more families into the Ku-ring-gai Council local government area with higher-density residential developments and encouraging young families to the North Shore but not providing adequate sporting facilities is bad planning policy, both locally and for the State. We should be looking after our kids and looking after our health. We should be building properly for the future.

Mrs BARBARA PERRY (Auburn—Minister for Local Government, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Mental Health)) [1.19 p.m.]: I thank the member for Davidson for raising this matter today. Some of the matters he raised relate to sports grants and planning issues and therefore are not within my purview as Minister for Local Government. However, it is the role of the Department of Local Government to set the legislative framework in which councils operate. It has no role to play in individual council management

decisions. The Local Government Act 1993 gives councils significant autonomy and enables them to determine what happens with land under their purview, particularly with respect to open space. Councils can provide for open space through forward budgets, as any government or organisation would do, by good asset and management planning. As the Minister for Local Government I will be engaging in that process over the next few months.

It is a matter for councils to determine what resources their communities seek and what they will deliver on. Therefore, I encourage councils to play a proactive role with their communities to determine priorities. As the member for Davidson stated, councils are keen to provide open space because it is important for health and for recreation. Councils derive revenue from a range of sources including rates, and councils are open to apply for various grants. Decisions in relation to the use of community land are a matter for the specific council. I urge the member for Davidson to raise his concerns directly with the council and with his colleague the Leader of the Opposition. Councils are autonomous bodies, with the power to make decisions in relation to these matters. Therefore, although the motion is well intentioned, it is somewhat misguided.

Mr ROB STOKES (Pittwater) [1.22 p.m.]: I speak in support of the motion moved by my colleague, friend and neighbour the member for Davidson. Like many of my fellow citizens in Pittwater, I use the ovals in the Ku-ring-gai Council area. In fact, as a former member of the St Ives rugby union team, I played at Hassell Park, and many years ago, as a Barra Brui Beaver, I played on Barra Brui Oval in the junior rugby competition. I note the presence in the Chamber of the member for Macquarie Fields, whose fine figure was chiselled and formed on the ovals of Ku-ring-gai. It is appropriate that he is present to support a motion to maintain the excellent sporting facilities that the ovals of Ku-ring-gai provide. It is important to ensure that all communities have access to appropriate sporting facilities, and the local oval plays an important part.

Contrary to what may be said in some circles, ovals are not dusty wastelands that can be sold off to fill some budget black hole in which a government may find itself from time to time. In the Australian context, and in light of the significance of sport to our communities, ovals are places for social interaction, expression, fitness, good times and great memories—certainly I have great memories of Ku-ring-gai ovals, as would the member for Macquarie Fields. We must ensure that all northern Sydney and Ku-ring-gai ovals are maintained appropriately and that none are lost because they are essential to our wellbeing.

In what has been described as a refraction of the baby boom, the northern beaches of Sydney is experiencing a mini baby boom. About 1,000 babies are being delivered in hospitals such as Mona Vale, where my wife delivered our third child earlier this year. I can vouch for the excellent obstetric services at that hospital. Therefore, we need to ensure that our sporting facilities are planned and equipped to deal with our growing young population in areas of northern Sydney. In this context, it is appropriate to inquire as to whether our ovals are under threat. In particular, I refer to the mini-budget and the rather ominous, spectral suggestion that the Government intends to raise \$200 million by flogging off surplus Department of Education and Training sites. My question to the Government is: What ovals belonging to the Department of Education and Training in the Ku-ring-gai area and northern Sydney generally are surplus to the needs of the department, and which of our ovals are under threat?

It is appropriate for the Government to explain whether any of our school ovals will be sold off as part of the mini-budget process to fill the black hole in the New South Wales budget. Contrary to the suggestions of the Minister for Local Government that this is primarily a local government issue, the State Government plays an extremely important role—which should not be minimised—in maintaining our ovals. I refer particularly to ovals in Pittwater and Ku-ring-gai that may be under threat as a result of the suggestion that \$200 million worth of school lands will be flogged off. I refer also to the insidious creeping urban consolidation, in its many forms, which is completely unsustainable. It is happening at the expense of ovals in areas such as Ku-ring-gai. As a result of the hard work of the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Davidson, the oval at the University of Technology, Sydney site is to be maintained. That is a terrific result for the community, but urban consolidation should not occur at the expense of ovals. Communities that are more densely populated require more areas where young people can exercise. I commend the motion to the House, and I commend the member for Davidson. During the luncheon adjournment I urge members to go to the nearest oval and have a run around.

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA (Davidson) [1.27 p.m.], in reply: I thank the Minister for Local Government and my colleague, friend and neighbour the member for Pittwater. I acknowledge especially the member for Macquarie Fields not only for being at the table during the debate but also for declining to speak so that I can speak in reply and the House can vote on the motion. I point out in response to the Minister for Local Government that in the case of the site at the University of Technology, Sydney, the council was required to

waive some \$11 million to \$12 million worth of section 94 contributions. That was a State-driven issue. I point out also that the State Government funds regional sporting facilities across a large part of Sydney but in our area there are no regional facilities. I work closely with the Leader of the Opposition and with Ku-ring-gai Council. We will continue to fight for our kids, for health and for local regional sporting facilities.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 32

Mr Aplin
Mr Baird
Mr Baumann
Mr Cansdell
Mr Debnam
Mr Fraser
Ms Goward
Mrs Hancock
Mr Hartcher
Mr Hazzard
Ms Hodgkinson

Mrs Hopwood
Mr Humphries
Mr Kerr
Mr Merton
Mr O'Dea
Mr O'Farrell
Mr Page
Mr Piccoli
Mr Piper
Mr Provest
Mr Richardson

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

Noes, 45

Mr Amery
Ms Andrews
Mr Aquilina
Mr Borger
Mr Brown
Ms Burney
Mr Campbell
Mr Collier
Mr Coombs
Mr Corrigan
Mr Costa
Mr Daley
Ms D'Amore
Ms Firth
Mr Gibson
Mr Greene

Mr Harris
Ms Hay
Mr Hickey
Ms Hornery
Ms Judge
Ms Keneally
Mr Khoshaba
Mr Koperberg
Mr Lalich
Mr Lynch
Mr McBride
Dr McDonald
Ms McKay
Mr McLeay
Ms McMahan
Mr Morris

Mrs Paluzzano
Mr Pearce
Mrs Perry
Mr Sartor
Mr Shearan
Mr Stewart
Ms Tebbutt
Mr Terenzini
Mr Tripodi
Mr West
Mr Whan

Tellers,
Mr Ashton
Mr Martin

Pairs

Mr Dominello
Mrs Skinner

Ms Beamer
Ms Burton

Question resolved in the negative.

Motion negatived.

[The Deputy-Speaker left the chair at 1.36 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER: On behalf of the House I acknowledge the presence of a delegation led by Glenn McGrath on behalf of the McGrath Foundation, guests of the member for Lismore. I also welcome and acknowledge members of the Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs of the Parliament of Namibia, guests of the Australian Parliament.

MUMBAI TERRORIST ATTACKS

Ministerial Statement

Mr NATHAN REES (Toongabbie—Premier, and Minister for the Arts) [2.17 p.m.]: Early this morning Sydney time a number of terrorist attacks took place in the Indian financial capital of Mumbai. First, I express my deepest sympathies for the victims, their families, friends and colleagues. Our thoughts are with them. The Government is doing all it can to assist the Commonwealth during this difficult time. Sadly, there has been some loss of life. While the details of the situation are still emerging—and are continually changing—media reports indicate at least 80 people are dead, hundreds wounded and scores have been taken hostage. Terrorists using automatic weapons and grenades attacked about nine locations across Mumbai, including luxury hotels, railway stations, police headquarters and cinemas. There are reports of hostages being held in hotels, notably the Taj Palace and Oberoi Hotel.

While this tragedy continues to unfold, I can confirm that a New South Wales trade mission to India was staying at one of the hotels targeted by the terrorists. There were 12 delegates from New South Wales in Mumbai at the time of the attacks. An officer accompanied them from the Department of State and Regional Development. Throughout the morning officials from the department have been in touch with family members of the delegates and the companies involved. We have now heard, in one form or another, from 11 of the delegates, but the situation remains extremely fluid and volatile. Of course, our main priority is the safety of these men and women, and we will work with the Commonwealth to do all we can to bring them home safely. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is the lead agency on this matter, and my Government and our agencies are working with it to locate our people and to make sure they are safe.

The Department of State and Regional Development is also working closely with the Commonwealth and the Australian Federal Police. It also has been liaising with the Australian Consulate in Mumbai and Austrade representatives on the ground. The Australian High Commissioner to India is in Mumbai and is leading the Government's consular response. The travel advice for India has been reissued today and it advises Australians to avoid travel to Mumbai at this time. Australians in Mumbai should remain in a safe location and follow the advice of local authorities. My Government unreservedly condemns these cowardly terrorist attacks, which have killed and injured innocent people. Anyone who has inquiries about family, friends or loved ones should contact the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, which has set up a special hotline for Australians with concerns for family or friends in Mumbai. The number is 1800 002 214. Our thoughts are with the delegates and their families.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai—Leader of the Opposition) [2.19 p.m.]: I join the Premier in condemning this cowardly attack, in commending the efforts of those involved in the rescue and location in particular of the Australian citizens who were there at the time, and in offering our support to the families and friends of those caught up in this evil atrocity. I thank the Premier for his briefing. His Government has the support of the Opposition in its effort to locate these Australian citizens. Times like these can lead a person to lose faith in humankind as we catch a glimpse of the evil that exists in our world. There is no better person to go to for words of comfort than Mahatma Gandhi, whose family has been repeatedly struck by acts of terrorism. Gandhi said:

You must not lose faith in humanity. Humanity is an ocean; if a few drops of the ocean are dirty, the ocean does not become dirty.

In the month that we remember the sacrifice of those who fought for freedom in World War I, we should on this day, in the face of this latest terrorist atrocity, renew our commitment to the same cause.

BERNIE BANTON

Ministerial Statement

Mr NATHAN REES (Toongabbie—Premier, and Minister for the Arts) [2.21 p.m.]: It is one year to the day since the death of the asbestos campaigner Bernie Baton. It is fitting that this House takes a few moments to honour once again his service and his sacrifice. The last thing that Bernie would have wanted would be another solemn commemoration, another occasion for long faces and dutiful speeches. That was never his style. He was brave, cheerful and humorous to the end. There was something he would not have wanted us to forget—that is, the cause for which he fought: the cause of justice for asbestos victims, the cause for which he literally gave his life. There are those great men and women, modest and selfless, whose lives we will always

remember. Bernie Banton was one of them. Perhaps more than any politician, dignitary, celebrity or high official of recent times, he held a special place in the hearts of Australians, especially the people of New South Wales and his city of Sydney, where he lived and fought his battles.

Thousands attended his State funeral on 6 December last year at Sydney Olympic Park. I remember that extra trains were used to take mourners to the service. It was as if no church was big enough for the occasion or for the spirit or legacy of Bernie. He was 61 when the disease claimed him. The formalities of public recognition—the Order of Australia, the obituaries, the flags at half-mast, the State funeral—would have meant little to Bernie. He never sought fame or honours for himself. His thoughts were always for others and to remind us to be vigilant about health and safety in our workplaces and in our homes. The images we retain of Bernie are the kindly smile, the face with, yes, the plastic tubing, and the twinkle in his eye. His humour never failed him. In 2004 when he heard of the payout that James Hardie was making to its departing chief executive Bernie said:

It's taken my breath away—and I only have 20 per cent of it left as it is.

He would have loved the irony that he died last year during Asbestos Awareness Week. The ink was barely dry on the settlement he had reached with James Hardie in his last days. That settlement was his gift to all victims of asbestos disease. Bernie's life and example were his gift to us all.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER (Terrigal) [2.24 p.m.]: The late Bernie Banton exemplified the best of the Australian spirit. He was a fighter who fought for social justice, for those who had been left behind in the modern economic system. It was well exemplified by his life and his works in the sense that he did not fight for himself: he fought for others. As the Premier has acknowledged, in the eulogy that was given on the occasion of his burial at Sydney Olympic Park the then Premier, Mr Iemma, made the point that only Sydney Olympic Park would be large enough to hold the throng wishing to attend to pay tribute to Bernie. No cathedral, no church would be large enough. Why did he touch the hearts of so many people? Because, as I said earlier, he exemplified what we regard as the best in Australia—the best of the working movement, the best of the trade union movement that seeks to ensure that justice is available to all.

On this side of the House and throughout the whole of the Australian community we acknowledge that in his work he saw an injustice and sought, in his own humble way, to right that injustice. As was said by the Minister for Education and Training when she paid tribute to him some time ago, of the 130 people who had worked with him in 1974, only 10 were still alive in 2004. That was the mark of the terrible injustice that victims of asbestosis and mesothelioma suffered throughout many years in Australia. Bernie was the shining light, the beacon, the symbol of the fight for justice. The values that he imparted were the values of the Australian spirit. That is why it is important that we continue to commemorate him and to remember him today.

QUESTION TIME

GARLING REPORT INTO ACUTE CARE SERVICES IN NEW SOUTH WALES PUBLIC HOSPITALS

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: My question is directed to the Premier. Given the damning critique of Labor's decade-long mismanagement of the State's hospitals, how does the Premier justify the repeated assurances about conditions in our hospitals that have been given by successive Labor Premiers and health Ministers, which now have been exposed by Commissioner Garling as blatant lies?

Mr NATHAN REES: Earlier today we received a report from Peter Garling, a Senior Counsel with experience in medical and legal matters. Mr Garling has made 139 recommendations in his 1,100-page report. Those recommendations are far-reaching and go into considerable detail on matters of workforce planning, clinical care and hospital culture. All those recommendations will be responded to. The Government has committed to responding to that report by March next year. It is a comprehensive report that will set us up for the future.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will cease interjecting. The Leader of the Opposition will remain silent. He should set an example for other members during question time.

Mr NATHAN REES: Garling makes the point very clearly. He says yes it is a hospital system under stress, as every hospital system in Australia is under stress. He also makes the point that hospital care in New South Wales is up there with the very best in the world.

GARLING REPORT INTO ACUTE CARE SERVICES IN NEW SOUTH WALES PUBLIC HOSPITALS

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: My question is directed to the Premier. What is the latest information on how the Government is working to improve health services in New South Wales?

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order, including the member for Clarence.

Mr NATHAN REES: I thank the member for Macquarie Fields for both his question and his longstanding contribution to health services in New South Wales.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: He is the only one who hasn't told lies. He is the only one who has told the truth.

Mr NATHAN REES: When you cease your ambulance chasing you might find time to develop some policy.

[Interruption]

Ambulances that are on call every 30 seconds in our State; that is the ambulance I am talking about. The Garling report is a serious report: It charts directions for change and it will get the priority it deserves from my Government to get the best possible results for patients right across the State.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Mr NATHAN REES: Earlier this week I had the opportunity to talk to the commissioner and I am attracted to the sensible and innovative recommendations he makes about improving transparency. The commissioner recommends that we review the requirement for reporting key performance indicators to ensure that the health data that is being collected is necessary and not simply a burden on clinical staff.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: When I spoke with the commissioner he was concerned that we needed to collect the data that mattered to patients. It is consistent with my strong views on improving access to information across government, and he has made specific recommendations around that. Patients and their families have the right to know information about the hospital they are attending and the care that they can expect to receive. It would also arm the Government with information on what patients expect from our health system. We need to measure patient care, not simply the numbers that get churned through an emergency department, for example. Was the patient better at the end? What time did it take? Did staff make the right decisions about treatment? The commissioner has centred his inquiry on patient care, noting that demographic changes, rising costs and workforce shortages require far-reaching change to our health system. This inquiry was commissioned following the tragic death of a young patient. I am determined to use this report to learn from the past and to make the changes necessary to provide better patient care in the future.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: The commissioner makes some serious observations about the health system's difficulties in responding to sudden increases in demand. He paints a picture of a system that for many years has been absorbing the pressure of rapidly rising costs, an ageing population that requires more and costly care and workforce shortages that are impacting on every region, particularly west of the great divide.

Mr Andrew Stoner: And mismanagement by you and cover-ups.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the Leader of The Nationals to order.

Mr NATHAN REES: If it is important enough to ask the question, I suggest it is important enough to hear the answer.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: Point of order—

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

Mr Barry O'Farrell: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129, relevance. The question of the member for Macquarie Fields was about improving the health system. These sorts of excuses and lies have got this State into this problem.

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

[Interruption]

Mr NATHAN REES: Make some decisions is the call. I refer you to the mini-budget reply speech.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: Another John Hewson moment.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: There are also recommendations with serious implications for some hospitals and changes to the way we have delivered care to meet the times. I draw the attention of members to a number of observations that may be missed today. The first is the commissioner's assessment of our workforce. Commissioner Garling described medical personnel as "well-trained, skilled, caring and dedicated who provide some of the most sophisticated care available in today's world". His comments about the high standard of our public hospital system are a tribute to the work of those dedicated personnel. I will just quote a short passage from the commissioner's report:

I have formed a clear view that the level of healthcare provided in NSW and Australia is comparable with, if not better than, most of the first world and developed countries. By any world measure, Australia's healthcare is amongst the best. This fundamental attribute will never be overlooked or forgotten.

It is very important I mention those statements from the commissioner because—

Mrs Jillian Skinner: Read on.

Mr NATHAN REES: It is an inconvenient truth for you, Jillian.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: It is very important that I mention those statements because they provide context and balance. The Chief Health Officers report was released today also and it backs our health system. According to that report, New South Wales has the lowest rates of cancer death and the lowest rates of heart disease on record, coupled with a growing life expectancy, ranking us third in the world. A newborn male in 2006 can expect to live to 79.3 years, while a female has a life expectancy of 84.2 years. The report reveals that death rates from cardiovascular diseases, including coronary heart disease and stroke, have declined significantly in the past decade. Our world-class doctors and nurses are delivering lifesaving and innovative care to patients suffering chronic disease. The advances in medical technology mean, for example, that patients at Concord Hospital now have access to significantly advanced keyhole surgery. This means that a patient who needs to have major bowel surgery needs to stay in hospital for only 48 hours, whereas previously they would need at least a week to recover.

Last week—another example of our system's brilliance—we saved the lives of 16 critically ill babies at the Children's Hospital at Westmead thanks to the new technology in the newborn care ward. Fifteen years ago that expertise simply did not exist. Until 1997 patients in Sydney's south-west had to travel to other parts of Sydney, notably in the centre of Sydney, for heart surgery. Now Liverpool Hospital provides heart surgery and advanced cardiological procedures. Compared with 20 years ago, children suffering from cancer now have an 80 per cent chance of survival due to a better understanding of the disease and improvement in treatments. I do not downplay the improvements we need to make—they are substantial. I do not turn a blind eye to the shortcomings of our system when occasionally things slip through the cracks. As the commissioner notes, even the very best systems are not perfect.

The Government will respond comprehensively to this report. We will consider each of the recommendations carefully. As I have indicated, recommendations about improving the data we provide so that patients have a better understanding of the performance of our hospitals are sensible, and we will use that data to improve. I welcome the recommendations to encourage hospital management and clinicians to work better together, the recommendations to encourage doctors and nurses to work together in the clinical innovation agency and the recommendations on better note taking and clinical records. This is a landmark report. I thank everyone who contributed to it, particularly the families who provided evidence that was clearly emotionally very difficult for many of them. Commissioner Garling has done the State a great service and gives us the base for an action plan to deliver improvements to our health system that the community expects and deserves.

GARLING REPORT INTO ACUTE CARE SERVICES IN NEW SOUTH WALES PUBLIC HOSPITALS

Mr ANDREW STONER: My question is directed to the Premier. Today's Garling report is damning of the Government's continuing inability to adequately staff the hospital workforce in rural areas. When will the Premier finally cut the spin and get clinicians into country and coastal New South Wales where they are desperately needed?

The SPEAKER: Order! Government members will cease interjecting. The Premier has the call.

Mr NATHAN REES: The Garling report made far-reaching recommendations regarding the overhaul of the training of our clinical workforce as it relates to specialists, generalists and nurses. It is a priority recommendation for us to consider.

CHILD PROTECTION CASEWORKERS

Mr NICKOLA LALICH: My question is directed to the Minister for Community Services. What is the latest information on the recruitment of additional front-line child protection caseworkers?

Ms LINDA BURNEY: I congratulate the member for Cabramatta on his inaugural speech last night and thank him for sharing a remarkable story about his family's journey from Yugoslavia to Australia. This is an important week for child protection in New South Wales. With the release of Justice Wood's report we have a blueprint for change. Significantly, Justice Wood's report comments on the role of a number of government agencies, the non-government sector and, importantly, makes the point that the primary responsibility for the wellbeing of children rests with families. Work on formulating the Government's response has already begun. The report was received on Monday and our partners in the non-government sector and unions were comprehensively briefed on Tuesday. Senior officials from the departments nominated in the report met yesterday. There will be an intense period of work over the next three months leading to the release of an action plan in March and legislation in the first session of Parliament next year.

This is serious work, and it is not without its challenges. However, the Government is determined that Justice Wood's report will result in genuine and lasting change. That should not overshadow the progress that has been achieved over the past five years. The Government recognised in 2002 that the community services sector needed a big injection of money. As a result, \$1.2 billion was provided over five years. In fact, Justice Wood wrote in his report that the reform was "a comprehensive and smart package which made enormous gains in the face of an increasingly complex client base and spiralling reports". The budget for the Department of Community Services this financial year was \$1.35 billion, which is a 7 per cent increase on last year and a 225 per cent increase since 2002.

A major plank of the reform package over the past five years has been the recruitment of new caseworkers. Today I am pleased to inform the House that we have reached a significant milestone. There has been a net increase of 1,000 caseworkers in the Department of Community Services. The Government has nearly doubled the number of front-line staff and the new caseworkers have been hired in early intervention, child protection and out-of-home care. The department has also hired more legal officers and administration staff. The Government is providing more help and better support to families and children in New South Wales.

What is commendable is the fact that the department's ability to attract high-quality staff has improved. There has been a significant increase in the number of tertiary qualified candidates applying for departmental positions. Last year the department received more than 6,000 applications from people wanting work, and 1,300 of those applications were from Aboriginal people. In fact, 7 per cent of the department's workforce is

Aboriginal and that figure increases to 20 per cent in the north and western regions. I have met a number of Aboriginal caseworkers in the past few weeks. My recent visit to the Lismore community services centre was fantastic. The many staff I met help to make the department's services accessible to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and they keep the department honest when it comes to the Koori community. Just like our hundreds of other caseworkers around the State, these workers are doing a great job reaching out to families in need.

Two weeks ago I visited the staff working at the Toomelah Boggabilla communities and I talked with my colleague Minister Lynch about that this morning. Just last week I opened a new office in Charlestown and met many of the caseworkers based there. Recently I had the honour of formally recognising 38 staff members who have worked for the Department of Community Services for 20 or 30 years. It is this collective wisdom and experience gained from a life of work that helps departmental staff to stand strong in the face of their many challenges. When new recruits need advice, support or a quiet word, their senior colleagues are there. These workers have seen more sadness and suffering than many people will ever see. However, they continue to be committed and passionate about the safety of children.

One of the staff members I met at the ceremony was Helen Freeland, who is now Executive Director of Statewide Services. She started as a cadet 30 years ago and has worked throughout the department on its many programs. She said, "There is nothing to compare with the feeling of knowing that what you did made a real difference to the life chances of a little baby, or that you were able to support a teenager trying to find their way through adolescence." We should thank Helen and the hundreds like her on behalf of the children who cannot do so themselves. Caseworkers attract a great deal of criticism from some sectors of the community and that they are a convenient and easy target. I ask those who are quick to criticise to understand and appreciate the services these officers provide to children in this State.

The Government has made it clear that Justice Wood's report will be a catalyst for change. I reinforce that commitment today. I know from feedback that I have received this week that the need for change is not confined to one department. As I have said in this place before, child protection cannot be divorced from underlying issues such as poverty, abuse of alcohol and drugs, and domestic violence. The Department of Community Services is a central player, but so are the police, health, education, disability services and other agencies, including oversight bodies such as the Ombudsman. That is why all these agencies will be part of the Government's response. Change is needed in the community too. Parents must accept responsibility for meeting their children's needs. Justice Wood's report followed the deaths of two children in the most tragic circumstances. The memory of those children and the many others who have been harmed, abused or neglected will be at the forefront of our minds when we formulate our response.

GARLING REPORT INTO ACUTE CARE SERVICES IN NEW SOUTH WALES PUBLIC HOSPITALS

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: My question is directed to the Premier. Given that Commissioner Garling recommends the complete overhaul of reporting of hospital performance figures and today's revelation that the Government has been manipulating health performance data, when will the Premier stop the spin and start telling the truth about what is really happening in our hospitals?

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

Mr NATHAN REES: Yesterday New South Wales Health released a triage benchmark review that highlights the health system's commitment to improving processes. New South Wales Health commissioned the review after its own internal auditing revealed that two hospitals had altered some emergency reporting numbers so that their performance looked better. The review focused on the methods used to capture emergency department triage data, its accuracy, consistency in the processing of the data and reporting. The review highlighted that our hospitals were extremely accurate in their collection of data.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Mr NATHAN REES: The review revealed that the number of inaccurate reports was 1,189 out of a total of almost 500,000 that were audited. That means 0.24 per cent of the data was inaccurate. That is an extremely small figure. We can always improve and the Government will be responding to Commissioner Garling's recommendations about transparency of reporting and the collection of clinical data before the formal response is delivered in March.

TIMBER BRIDGES PROGRAM

Mr STEVE WHAN: My question is directed to the Minister for Roads. What action is the Government taking to improve timber bridges in New South Wales, and are there any alternative policies?

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order. I call the Leader of The Nationals to order for the second time.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: I can answer the second part of the question of the member for Monaro comprehensively by saying: No, and not in any portfolio area. Not only do I thank the member for his question, but I also thank Country Labor members for raising this important issue.

The SPEAKER: Order! Opposition members will cease assisting the Minister.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: This important issue was raised with me at the recent Country Labor conference at Port Macquarie—unlike The Nationals' conference, which was held at Kirribilli. Champagne and prawns for you lot; we go to Port Macquarie, into the heart of regional New South Wales.

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

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: Why do The Nationals get so excited when I speak?

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

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: This Government is delivering on its commitment to improve infrastructure and road safety, particularly in regional and rural New South Wales. I remind the House that in the 2008-09 financial year 75 per cent of the entire roads budget is going to regional and rural New South Wales. That is \$3.1 billion, an increase of 19 per cent on last year. I see the member for Gosford, our favourite Terrigal, is excited about that prospect. The Roads and Traffic Authority, with the help of local councils, has been active in the management of timber bridges over the past five years. The Country Timber Bridge Program—completed in 2003—saw the replacement of 126 timber bridges on important routes across the State at a cost of \$151 million. In October 2006 the current timber bridge partnership was announced, with funding of \$60 million over three years from 2006-07, to assist councils to upgrade the 285 timber bridges on regional roads.

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

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: We have now extended this program for a fourth year. So far 157 timber bridges on regional roads have been included for repair or replacement as part of the timber bridge partnership. I am pleased to inform the House that 42 of these bridges have been completed and a further 24 are currently under construction. Following the recent extension of the timber bridge partnership by 12 months, councils were invited to submit further proposals for consideration as part of this program. Today I am pleased to inform the House that a further 20 timber bridges will be upgraded as part of this important partnership with local councils.

Mr Wayne Merton: Name them.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: I will, and I thank the member for Baulkham Hills for his timely interjection.

The SPEAKER: That might teach members not to interject!

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: I am happy to inform the House and the member for Monaro that the timber bridge at Jembaicumbene Creek in his electorate is one of these new bridges. Four bridges in the electorate of the member for Lismore will be upgraded. We on this side of the House govern for all. The member for Burrinjuck will be pleased that four timber bridges are being upgraded in her electorate. Even though the member for Burrinjuck sees fit to no longer reside in her electorate, we are still helping her out. She has moved into the Federal electorate of Hume—she thinks she is on her way to Canberra! If the Leader of The Nationals does not blindfold and shoot Alby Schultz first, the member for Burrinjuck will take him out in a preselection. Members on that side of the House are full of love for each other.

Five bridges in the electorate of the member for Barwon will be upgraded. While I am announcing bridges in Coalition electorates, there will be new bridges for the members for Oxley, Upper Hunter,

Hawkesbury, Dubbo and Orange. That is not all. Mr Speaker, as the member for Northern Tablelands, you will be pleased to know that the Maitland Bridge over Rocky River has been included in the program. Funding for the timber bridge program is provided on a dollar-for-dollar basis with local councils. I thank councils for their assistance and cooperation with this important program. In addition to the \$211 million already spent, the Government has allocated a further \$7 million for these 20 additional bridges to be upgraded.

This program will keep local families and primary producers connected while improving safety and reducing maintenance costs for councils. The timber bridge program is an important partnership between the New South Wales Government and local councils. As I have said, and as we all acknowledge, these bridges are vital for our rural and regional communities and to their economies. Each bridge on this program has been identified for inclusion on the basis of sound criteria, including safety and the condition of the bridge, the amount of use by heavy vehicles and the importance to the local economy in areas including freight and tourism.

Importantly, many of the bridges we are replacing in rural areas are used as school bus routes. In fact, 148 of the now 177 bridges announced are on school bus routes. Of the 20 bridges I have announced today, at least 18 are on school bus routes. The Government has listened to representations from members across the State, particularly those from Country Labor, as well as from regional mayors, and we are now making real progress in delivering improved timber bridges across New South Wales. The timber bridge partnership is a great example of State and local governments working together to improve local infrastructure and boost the services rural communities rely on.

MANNING BASE HOSPITAL QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT

Mr JOHN TURNER: My question is directed to the Premier. Given that the hospital performance measures in June showed that Manning Base Hospital could not treat more than a third of patients with potentially life-threatening conditions within the recommended half hour, why were these specific figures removed from the latest quarterly performance report in September?

Mr NATHAN REES: I will obtain a response to the detail of that question, but I draw the member's attention to recommendation 1.210 of Commissioner Garling's report. It reads:

NSW Health will not be able to move forward to embrace system wide reforms without the support of the community.

So far, so good. It went on:

This necessitates leadership from all involved in the political process to accept that the good of all citizens in NSW, and the provision of health care in an orderly and systematic way, must prevail over individual, sectional or geographical interests whose motivation is largely—

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

Mr NATHAN REES: I repeat:

This necessitates leadership from all involved in the political process to accept—

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Clarence to order for the third time. The member is on his final warning.

Mr NATHAN REES: The recommendation stated:

This necessitates leadership from all involved in the political process ... and the provision of health care in an orderly and systematic way, must prevail over individual, sectional or geographical interests whose motivation is largely, if not entirely, self interest.

RENTAL BOND GRANTS PROGRAM

Mr KERRY HICKEY: My question is addressed to the Minister for Fair Trading. Will the Minister update the House on how the Rental Bond Grants Program is being used to help people seeking accommodation in New South Wales?

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE: I thank the member for Cessnock for his keen interest in these matters of social justice. It is just sad that members opposite are not interested in social justice. The Rees Government is

committed to ensuring low-income and disadvantaged people receive advice and assistance when it comes to the most basic of human rights—shelter. While the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Flip Flop O'Farrell, is busy looking over his shoulder at the member for Manly, the Rees Government is taking decisive action.

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order. I understand that question time on Thursdays can be a little robust, but members will cease interjecting. Question time will be concluded in the appropriate way.

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE: The Leader of the Opposition is walking a tightrope, with one leg dangling over the edge, with the member for Manly smiling up at him, holding that safety net ever so lightly—or should I say tightly?

Mr Andrew Stoner: Point of order: My point of order is relevance under Standing Order 129. This the end of the week and we will get through question time much quicker if the Minister answers the question, which was about homelessness, not about the Leader of the Opposition or the member for Manly.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of The Nationals will resume his seat.

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE: Why don't you tell the Leader of The Nationals to stop throwing his toys out of the pram and listen because this is a very important issue?

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister will resume her seat. The House will come to order. All members are now deemed to be on three calls to order. If a member is thrown out today, he or she may be out of the Chamber for a fair time. The Minister has the call. She will direct her remarks through the Chair.

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE: Our clear objective is to make funding available to organisations that help us fight homelessness and empower tenants. The Rental Bond Board Grants Program does exactly that. Grants can be applied for and made at any time. This morning I had the great pleasure of opening the Residential Parks Forum in the Parliamentary Theatre and after question time will hold discussions with a delegation from the peak bodies. The Leader of the Opposition was not present. I do not know why he keeps interrupting if he thinks he is so hot on this issue. I am pleased to advise members, particularly the hardworking members for Wollongong, Shellharbour, Swansea and Wyong, who were present at the forum and were given a rousing reception—

Mr Barry O'Farrell: Whatever she's on, share it.

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

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE: He should wait for Father Christmas. The reason I speak so strongly is because Government members feel passionately about these issues and when one feels passionately one is energetic about getting something done. The board approved, on my recommendation, \$5,000 funding to the Affiliated Residential Park Residents Association to help with travel costs for park residents who attended today's meeting. I think one is giving me a gentle wave from the gallery. I advise also that the board has approved a grant of \$45,000 for the Energy and Water Ombudsman of New South Wales to help support the Ombudsman's work on tenancy-related issues.

[Interruption]

It is tragic that members opposite are demeaning this Chamber, this hallowed seat of democracy, singing songs when they should be interested in looking after the good citizens of New South Wales. It is a shame; it is a tragedy. But I will not be deterred because it is an important message that all residents in this State have a right to hear.

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

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE: More than \$200,000 is funded for the Park and Village Service to provide information, community education and resource material of people living in New South Wales residential parks and more than \$300,000 to the Aged-Care Rights Service to provide advice and information to older people in supported accommodation, such as nursing homes, hostels, retirement villages and boarding houses. It will also fund more than \$2,200,000 to the Tenancy Advice and Advocacy Program, which supports non-profit organisations that provide information, advice and advocacy services to public and private tenants in New South Wales.

It will also fund more than \$1,784,112 to the Credit Counselling Program, one of the funding sources for the Financial Counselling Services Program, which allocates funding for financial counselling, training in financial counselling and education in personal finance management. Current total funding for the Financial Counselling Service Program is \$3.8 million a year and \$756,000 of the administration costs for the National Australia Bank's No Interest Loans Scheme Program. This is a community-managed, statewide micro-credit program, providing interest-free loans of up to \$1,200 to low-income earners for the purchase of essential household goods such as washing machines, refrigerators and medical or dental services.

On 30 June 2007 approximately \$40 million was contributed from Rental Bond Board funds towards the Department of Housing affordable housing innovations project. This funding will go towards the construction of affordable rental housing dwellings in western Sydney and for the establishment of an independent affordable housing developer and broker for non-government housing projects. I know that the Opposition would think this initiative is a waste of money because the shadow spokesman for Fair Trading stated:

... the 'affordable housing project' ... will create just 70 low cost dwelling ... can't be justified.

I am disappointed by this mean-spirited attitude. I am very sure that the 70 western Sydney families who will make their homes through this project will think it is worthwhile. I notice the Minister for Housing is nodding because he supports putting a roof over people's heads. I would like to believe that the shadow Minister for Housing would think it is worthwhile also and would have a quiet word in his colleague's ear. I do not want the shadow Minister to feel left out. I must have a good spirit now that Christmas is approaching. While he is at it, he might want her to reconsider labelling this funding program a "splurge" and a "rip off" at a time when affordable housing is a national priority. It keeps getting worse, and I hope there is some light at the end of the tunnel. For this reason the Rental Bond Board has approved the allocation of up to \$19 million from the Affordable Housing Innovations Fund.

The SPEAKER: Order! Government members will cease interjecting. I remind all members that they are on three calls to order.

Mr Wayne Merton: Point of order: My point of order relates to the length of the Minister's answer. She has been speaking for some minutes and has had more than adequate time to answer what was a simple question. I ask you to direct her to complete her answer, as amusing and entertaining as it purports to be.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Baulkham Hills will resume his seat. I ask the Minister to commence concluding her answer.

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE: Help is still at hand for families in mortgage stress and if people are finding it difficult to meet loan repayments, they should speak first with their lender. Lenders are often willing to work with homeowners to keep them from falling into further debt. If the lender is not cooperative, they should contact the Office of Fair Trading on 13 32 20. Fair Trading may be able to negotiate with the lender on their behalf, advise them on how to seek a hardship variation or refer them to other available services. The New South Wales Government has also significantly increased funding for financial counselling. Over the past 12 months the Financial Counselling Services Program funding has been increased from \$2 million in 2007 to \$3.8 million in 2008. I urge anyone in financial difficulty to call the credit and debt hotline on 1800 808 488. This is a clear, concise and forthright example of the kind of decisive action required of governments and the compassion and fairness that would be lost if members opposite had their way.

DRIVER LICENCE DEMERIT POINTS: ROADS AND TRAFFIC AUTHORITY POWERS

Mr GREG PIPER: My question is addressed to the Premier. Does the Government believe it reasonable that when a magistrate dismisses a traffic infringement, the Roads and Traffic Authority imposes penalty points regardless of what may have been truly exceptional circumstances? Should not the authority to determine this be returned to the judiciary?

Mr NATHAN REES: I thank the member for Lake Macquarie for his interest in this matter. Judicial discretion—under section 10 of the Crimes Act—for traffic offences needs review, and the Minister for Roads has said publicly he will do that. There will always be cases of exceptional circumstances, and therefore it is proper for the law to be flexible. That is why, in some cases, defences are available to motorists. For instance, a motorist may wind up in a bus lane because he or she moved out of the way of an ambulance or other emergency vehicle. In such cases a motorist can be found not guilty, and no points will be applied. But we acknowledge that this is something we should look at, and the Minister for Roads will do that in the coming months.

PROBLEM GAMBLING

Mr GEOFF CORRIGAN: My question is addressed to the Minister for Gaming and Racing, and Minister for Sport and Recreation. What is the latest information on Government efforts to curb problem gambling in New South Wales?

Mr KEVIN GREENE: Before I answer the question asked by the member for Camden—

[Interruption]

I am sure the member for Terrigal will indulge me as I put on my other hat as Minister for Sport and Recreation and also join you, Mr Speaker, and the House in welcoming Glenn McGrath to the House today. In February this year I had the pleasure of attending a function at which the Sutherland Cricket Club, with which Glenn had a very distinguished career, provided a testimonial for Glenn, with funds raised going to the McGrath Foundation. Most appropriately, the next day, with the support of Sutherland Shire Council, Sutherland Cricket Club renamed the Caringbah Oval the Glenn McGrath Oval. I thought it was important and appropriate that Glenn's grade cricket club in Sydney recognise his contribution to the club and to Australian cricket.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: What are you doing at the SCG for him?

Mr KEVIN GREENE: That is not my responsibility.

[Interruption]

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Wakehurst has not been called to order for the past three days, which is a special mention for him. I ask him not to ruin it.

Mr KEVIN GREENE: I thank the member for Wakehurst. Tempted as I was, I was not going to put on my St George District Cricket Club cap. Providing support for those affected by problem gambling is a high priority for this Government. Problem gambling can have devastating impacts on individuals and their loved ones, leading to depression, anxiety, financial and legal trouble, and even family breakdown. In New South Wales 0.8 per cent of the adult population are problem gamblers. Over the next four years the Government will spend \$44 million funding 49 problem gambling counselling and support services operating from more than 200 locations across New South Wales.

Today I announce a specialist counselling program. The Rees Government will spend \$6 million over the next three years on eight specialist problem gambling counselling and support services. Six of these services will support ethnic communities, to ensure that those from non-English speaking backgrounds can access help for gambling problems from people who are familiar not only with their language but also their culture and customs. The remaining two services will provide training and legal advice to counsellors working at all New South Wales Government-funded problem gambling services across the State.

We know that problem gambling can provoke feelings of shame and embarrassment. With this stigma, it can be difficult to encourage people with gambling problems, especially those from some non-English speaking backgrounds, to seek help. The Responsible Gambling Fund recently completed a needs analysis into the most effective way to engage problem gamblers from non-English speaking backgrounds. This \$6 million specialist counselling program is based on the results of that research. Of these eight specialist services, a service will be provided for each of the Arabic, Chinese, Greek, Vietnamese and, for the first time, Italian communities. Another service will offer statewide counselling and education programs in a range of languages, including Korean, Turkish, Serbian, Thai, Croatian, Macedonian and Spanish.

Applications for funding will close on 19 January and it is expected that the successful applicants will be announced in April. The Government has also introduced an internet-based data collection system, to ensure counselling services are available where they are needed most. We know from this information that our counselling services work. In fact, a recent survey revealed that 92 per cent of clients felt better able to manage their gambling three months after receiving help.

This Government is committed to reducing problem gambling. We have introduced a wide range of responsible gambling initiatives consistent with the National Framework on Problem Gambling 2004-2008, and last night Parliament passed a package of reforms to gaming machine laws to reduce poker machine numbers

and introduce new harm-minimisation measures to protect local communities from problem gambling. In closing, I encourage all members of this place to support and help promote our services for problem gamblers, including our G-line service, which can be contacted at any time on 1800 633 635.

MANNING BASE HOSPITAL QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT

Mr NATHAN REES: Earlier in question time the member for Myall Lakes asked me about data on the Manning Base Hospital, asserting that some of it had not been put on a website and so on. I can inform the member that the July to September quarterly hospital performance report is available on the New South Wales Health website.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will allow the Premier to answer the question.

Mr NATHAN REES: I have been advised that the report has been on the New South Wales Health website for a week.

Mrs Jillian Skinner: But there are no figures.

Mr NATHAN REES: I am coming to the figures. The report shows Manning Base Hospital's emergency department activity, with more than 5,400 attendances. It also shows that 100 per cent of category 1 patients—

Mrs Jillian Skinner: How many patients is that?

Mr NATHAN REES: I advise the member that 100 per cent is 100 per cent.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for North Shore will cease interjecting. Government members will remain silent.

Mr NATHAN REES: The report shows that 100 per cent of category 1 patients were seen in under two minutes and 85 per cent of category 2 patients were seen in the appropriate time—5 per cent above the national benchmark.

[Interruption]

I point out that the real figures show not a lot. The report also shows that 93 per cent of patients were admitted for elective surgery on time. Well done to Manning Base Hospital. It is a pity its local member is attacking its excellent efforts.

Question time concluded.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

Report

Mr Ninos Khoshaba, as Chair, tabled the report entitled, "Report into Local Government Private Partnerships for Asset Redevelopment", dated November 2008, together with submissions to the inquiry and transcripts of evidence taken before the Committee.

Report ordered to be printed on motion by Mr Ninos Khosaba.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

Report

Mr Paul McLeay, as Chair, tabled report No. 4/54 (167) entitled, "Report on State Plan Reporting", dated November 2008, together with extracts of minutes relating to the report and evidence taken before the Committee.

Report ordered to be printed on motion by Mr Paul McLeay.

PETITIONS**Sydney Olympic Park V8 Supercar Track**

Petition opposing installation of a V8 Supercar track at Sydney Olympic Park, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

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**.

Ambulance Rescue Function

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

Tumut Renal Dialysis Service

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

Eastwood to West Ryde Train Services

Petition opposing cuts to train services between Eastwood and West Ryde, received from **Mr Victor Dominello**.

CountryLink Pensioner Booking Fee

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

Pensioner Excursion Bus Tickets

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

South Coast Rail Services

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

Hawkesbury River Railway Station Access

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

School Student Transport Scheme

Petition opposing any changes to the School Student Transport Scheme, received from **Mr Daryl Maguire**.

Bus Service 311

Petition requesting improved services on bus route 311, 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**.

Native Forests Conservation

Petition requesting full conservation protection of the native forests of south-east New South Wales, received from **Mr Greg Piper**.

Shoalhaven Local Area Command

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

Shoalhaven Police Station

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

Culburra Policing

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

Cowra Policing

Petition requesting that Cowra police station be staffed 24 hours a day, received from **Ms Katrina Hodgkinson**.

Shipley Rural Fire Station

Petition requesting reinstatement of vehicles, equipment and facilities at Shipley Rural Fire Station, received from **Mr Phil Koperberg**.

Wagga Wagga Police Communications Centre

Petition requesting the retention of the Police Communications Centre in Wagga Wagga, received from **Mr Daryl Maguire**.

Shoalhaven Mental Health Services

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

Shoalhaven City Council Rate Structure

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

Preschool Speed Zones

Petition asking that 40 kilometre per hour speed zones be introduced outside all preschools in New South Wales, received from **Ms Katrina Hodgkinson**.

Licence Laws for Older Drivers

Petition asking for an inquiry into licence laws for older drivers and the implementation of a suitable licensing system for senior citizens, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

YASS TOWNSHIP

Personal Explanation

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON, by leave: I wish to make a personal explanation for the somewhat geographically challenged Minister for Roads. The township of Yass lies both within the state electorate of Burrinjuck and the federal electorate of Hume.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON BROADBAND IN RURAL AND REGIONAL COMMUNITIES

Membership

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

That Peter Edward Besseling be appointed to serve on the Standing Committee on Broadband in Rural and Regional Communities in place of Gregory Michael Piper, discharged.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders: Routine of Business

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

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to permit Government business to be considered during the period in the routine of business set aside for General Business Order of the Day (for Bills) at this sitting.

CONSIDERATION OF MOTION TO BE ACCORDED PRIORITY

Public Transport Fares

Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO (Penrith—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.24 p.m.]: This matter should be accorded priority because of the impact on families of the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal proposals and its detrimental effects on long-distance commuters. The world economic crisis will impact on long-distance commuters as they travel to and from work, meetings and excursions. The Opposition should show its support in this matter instead of carping and whingeing about matters of important public policy. The Opposition should support the proposals and submissions by the Government to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal. Members opposite should also support the proposal of the Government to lower fares for long-distance commuters.

Health System

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER (North Shore—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [3.25 p.m.]: My motion condemning the State Labor Government for its repeated untruths about the New South Wales health system should have priority, particularly given that today Commissioner Garling delivered his report into 13 years of total mismanagement of the health system by this Government. Commissioner Garling clearly identified problems of the Government not telling the truth about how disastrous the health system has become. Indeed, there was evidence of this today in question time when the Premier answered a number of questions. The Premier selectively quoted from the report of Commissioner Garling and tried to present everything in a great light. The Premier also gave a couple of quotes from the report. Commissioner Garling said in the report:

Even the best systems are not immune from crises and the public health system has reached one such period now. The New South Wales health system is on the brink. There are several developments which support this view.

He then went on to list a whole lot of things including:

... the safety of the patient and the good quality of patient care have begun to suffer.

Commissioner Garling said public hospitals are entering a period of crisis.

Mr David Harris: Entering a period.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: We have entered—ERED. Does the member get it? We have entered. He will find it on page 3. I know the Government is not interested in the truth—

The SPEAKER: Order! Government members will cease interjecting.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: The Premier particularly highlighted how incompetent he is and how he does not understand the system when he—

Mr Frank Terenzini: Point of order. My point of order, first, is that it is totally against the standing orders to use this debate as a platform for political speeches and, secondly, the debate should be directed through the Chair.

The SPEAKER: Order! I uphold the second part of the point of order. The member for North Shore will direct her contributions through the Chair. Government members will cease interjecting.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: I am delighted to make these points through the Chair because I know that the Speaker knows that many of the things that have been raised in this report are absolutely true, particularly the section of the report dealing with the failure of the Government to provide accurate information about what is happening in our health system. There was no clearer evidence of that than the supplementary answer by the Premier about Manning Base Hospital. He tried to pretend that figures were in the report—

Mr Gerard Martin: Point of Order: My point of order is that the member for North Shore should be arguing priority, not trawling through the report. The member has to say why her motion should be given priority over the motion of the member for Penrith.

The SPEAKER: Order! As members are aware, I always extend a degree of latitude during these debates. The member for North Shore has the call.

Mr Gerard Martin: Especially for slow learners.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: The slow-learning member for Bathurst should understand that it is an untruth when the Premier comes into this place and pretends that the report currently on the website about Manning Base Hospital provides data that enables us to tell how many patients are being treated in triage: five, four, three, two or one. It is clearly not there. It is an untruth. The House was told this untruth today. This motion is a matter of priority. Government members are generously holding up post it notes and pens, but nurses are unable to get supplies because not enough money is in the system. I have my own pen. This is a matter of priority because the Government is telling lies. Government members take a frivolous approach to matters of patient care and health outcomes. The report from Mr Garling is 1,100 pages long.

Mr Gerard Martin: How can we believe an ex-journalist?

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: How can we believe Mr Garling? Because he went and talked to people at the hospital in the electorate of the member for Bathurst and many others to hear exactly what the problems were.

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

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: The member for Bathurst told untruths about what was happening in that hospital. He lied to the people when he said that there were no problems in the hospital. He failed to reveal that the emergency department resuscitation bay at the hospital was not big enough to take patients. He did not tell the truth when he failed to say that the emergency department resuscitation bay was so badly flawed they had to pull it down and start again. I could pick on every Government member and their untruths about what is happening in our hospital system. In the end it is about patient care and the failure of the Government to come clean about every aspect of healthcare, from waiting lists to emergency department reports.

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

The House divided.

Ayes, 46

Mr Amery	Mr Greene	Mr Morris
Ms Andrews	Mr Harris	Mrs Paluzzano
Mr Aquilina	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 Daley	Mr Lynch	Mr West
Ms D'Amore	Mr McBride	Mr Whan
Ms Firth	Dr McDonald	
Mr Furolo	Ms McKay	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Gadiel	Mr McLeay	Mr Ashton
Mr Gibson	Ms McMahon	Mr Martin

Noes, 38

Mr Aplin	Mr Hartcher	Mr Richardson
Mr Baird	Mr Hazzard	Mr Roberts
Mr Baumann	Ms Hodgkinson	Mrs Skinner
Ms Berejikian	Mrs Hopwood	Mr Smith
Mr Besseling	Mr Humphries	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'Farrell	Mr R. W. Turner
Mr Draper	Mr Page	Mr R. C. Williams
Mr Fraser	Mr Piccoli	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Goward	Mr Piper	Mr George
Mrs Hancock	Mr Provest	Mr Maguire

Pairs

Ms Beamer	Mr O'Dea
Ms Burton	Mr J. D. Williams

Question resolved in the affirmative.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT FARES**Motion Accorded Priority**

Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO (Penrith—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.37 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that in these tough economic times the Government is working hard to ensure that commuters are provided with affordable public transport options;
- (2) notes that the current draft fares determination proposed by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal [IPART] places an unfair burden on long distance travellers; and
- (3) calls on the Coalition to back the Government in its efforts to ensure IPART takes into consideration long distance commuters.

I note that present in the House are my colleagues the member for Wyong and the member for Maitland, who represent rail commuters that travel long distances. When the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal [IPART] handed down its determination on rail fares at the beginning of October the Rees Government made it

clear that it was not pleased with the outcomes of the fare proposal. Of greatest concern is the impact of these increases on commuters travelling to the city from areas such as Penrith, Werrington, Glenbrook, Lapstone, Parramatta, Wyong, Newcastle, Campbelltown, Wollongong, the Central Coast and the Hunter. The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal [IPART] sets rail fares, and the Government understands that its independence is important. We also accept that prices must increase to reflect inflation and the cost of providing rail services. Many people, including the Opposition, said at the time that we should just accept IPART's ruling. But nothing could be further from the truth.

Ms Gladys Berejiklian: Point of order: The member for Penrith well knows that it is inappropriate to mislead the House. I ask the member to either withdraw her statement or apologise.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! What is the member's point of order in reference to? I did not hear anything that suggested the member was misleading the House.

Ms Gladys Berejiklian: The member for Penrith spoke an untruth. She claims the Opposition said something we did not. She knows that because I tried to table a document in the House two days ago and the Government refused to allow me to do that. I will not sit here and allow the member for Penrith to speak mistruths.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! I do not see it as a mistruth.

Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO: The Government decided to take the unusual step of putting forward its own fare proposals to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal. I welcome the Opposition joining me in this debate, considering that IPART's determination will have a detrimental effect on the people of New South Wales, particularly those who travel long distances such as from the Blue Mountains, along the western line, along the Hunter line and along the Illawarra line. It is important that we do more than just front up to cameras and express disgust and then do nothing about it. We need action, and this is about action.

Hundreds of submissions were made to IPART, including the Government's submission, which are now on the IPART website. But the Opposition failed to provide a response; in effect, telling commuters that despite their anger at the fares the Opposition was not going to do anything about it. That is why it is important for all members today to support this motion to reduce some of the fares in the recommendation. The overall effect of the Government's proposal would be to reduce the price increases from 11.7 per cent to 10.5 per cent, including the effects of inflation. But that change is not the significant difference. When comparing IPART's proposal with the Government's alternative proposal, over four years, and including the effects of inflation, the price of a single ticket would rise no more than \$1.40 compared with rises of up to \$5 under IPART's model. The increase in the price of weekly tickets is also much smaller under the Government's model, especially for those catching trains to work, for business or for pleasure and for those travelling further than 25 kilometres, as many people who live in the electorates of Penrith, Wyong and Maitland do.

Commuters in western Sydney rely on trains for reliable and convenient services to get to and from work or to appointments every day. In fact today and yesterday, as I do on most sitting days, I travelled along the western rail line to get to Parliament and took advantage of the reliable and convenient service. It is not a short journey; it takes up to 55 minutes on an express service or over an hour on a non-express service. We have the luxury in Penrith of having inner-city trains and urban trains on the western line. People who travel on the inner-city trains know it is a shorter trip but it is still a long journey. I am pleased to note that the Government has made significant effort to respond to the draft determination by IPART and deliver an alternative proposal that provides a better deal for commuters not only in western Sydney but also in the Hunter and the Illawarra.

While no-one wants to see fares increase, I believe that most would agree that the Government's proposal is much fairer—and it is fairness that is the issue here—because it would ease the burden for those travelling greater distances. We are giving the Opposition a second chance this afternoon, an opportunity to put their money where their mouth is and support the model that will see commuters better off. People would be better off under the Government's alternative fare scheme because, for example, in four years time a single ticket from Parramatta to the city would cost \$6.20 and a weekly ticket \$50 under IPART's proposal compared with \$5.40 for a single ticket and \$43 for a weekly ticket under the Government's proposal. On the south-western line a Campbelltown to the city single ticket would be \$2.80 cheaper under the Government's proposal compared with IPART's four-year increase. Wollongong and the Central Coast to the city single tickets would be \$2.40 cheaper when compared with IPART's proposal and \$13 cheaper for a weekly ticket over the four-year period.

When IPART released its draft proposal I urged people to make submissions. I readily talk to commuters along the western line either in the train carriage or waiting at the station and I urge them to make submissions. But the Government has also had its say now. The Opposition has failed to make a submission, but I urge its members to act in a bipartisan way. We offer the Liberal-National Coalition today the opportunity to support our generous model. I urge them to support this motion and support the travelling public.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN (Willoughby) [3.44 p.m.]: I look forward to contributing to this debate because I find it extremely embarrassing for the member for Penrith that she has even introduced this motion today. We made a submission to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal [IPART] on 18 July in which I stated that we do not support fare increases, full stop. Why should the commuters of New South Wales pay any extra for services that are getting worse? That is our position. We even met with IPART on at least two occasions to convey that position to it. What the member for Penrith demonstrated here today is that members of the Government say one thing in the House but do something else outside Parliament.

If you look closely at the mini-budget under the section "Implement IPART rail fare determinations", under the years 2008-09, 2009-10, 2010-11 and 2011-12 respectively you will see \$12 million, \$46 million, \$65 million and \$79 million budgeted for increases in rail fares. During estimates committee hearings last week I asked the head of the Ministry of Transport on what those figures in relation to fare increases were based and he replied that they were based on IPART's draft fare determinations. Therefore, the figures the Government states in the mini-budget are based on the assumption that the Government will pass on the full IPART fare determinations. That is in black and white.

The member for Penrith and everyone on the other side of the House are quite happy to deceive the people of New South Wales in relation to their position because they are embarrassed to accept the truth. They are either incompetent or highly embarrassed at their position. The bottom line is that the New South Wales Opposition does not support the fare increases. Why should commuters battling it tough day in day out pay more for services that are getting worse? Not only are overcrowding and reliability major issues with our trains, the State Government has slashed a number of infrastructure projects, which means there is no relief for the future.

This is a system that is already bursting at the seams. Commuters have to travel on public transport that is unreliable and overcrowded. Just buying a ticket is a challenge for many people, especially in the electorate of the member for Penrith, as she would know. On Monday mornings the queues to buy tickets at some railway stations are appalling. The Government cancelled the Tcard project and it slashed 416 services in 2005. The proposed timetable is not a patch on bringing those services back, so we are at least 300 services down before we have even begun. On top of that, all the Government reports indicate that overcrowding is the biggest problem on the network. On the face of all this the Government's proposition to the community is to increase rail fares.

Read our lips: We do not support rail fare increases. It is an absolute disgrace that the Minister and the member for Penrith can deny in this House that the Opposition put in a submission. Our submission was accepted and I have a receipt from IPART to say it received it. I met personally with representatives of IPART on two occasions to explain to them how concerned I was about their rationale in going into the cost structure of RailCorp and how I was concerned that, rather than doing the right thing by commuters, the Government is going to make commuters pay for its incompetence.

The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal made 41 recommendations to the State Government about what should be cleaned up in RailCorp. In the past few years RailCorp has wasted nearly \$30 million as a result of corrupt practices. The State Government has not accepted any of those recommendations. Rather than do the hard work and clean up RailCorp, this Government is passing the cost on to commuters. The Opposition cannot accept that position. It does not support any rail fare increases as recommended in the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal's determination. The Opposition has made its position clear on a number of occasions. I will read from the document that the Government ironically refused me permission to read two days ago. I thank members opposite for this opportunity. I made a submission to Dr Michael Keating, Chairman of the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal, stating:

I write in relation to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal's (IPART) review of the structure and level of CityRail fares and how CityRail should be funded in 2009.

The proposal to increase fares by up to 30 per cent over four years is unjustified. Issues with reliability, massive overcrowding, operational performance, safety and security standards and the delivery of infrastructure do not warrant an increase in CityRail fares.

That is in the submission in black and white. It continues:

RailCorp services continue to be unreliable. On-time running figures for suburban services confirm trains ran late 46 per cent of the time in the PM peak, and for intercity services trains ran later 60 per cent of the time in the PM peak since January this year.

While the Government claims patronage has increased by 4.7 per cent from 2006/07 and 2007/08 to March they have only added one additional service to Western Sydney.

The Government has avoided addressing massive overcrowding. In peak times trains are already full, sometimes to crush load.

Also of concern is the State Government's inability to manage major infrastructure projects. The three projects which have been highlighted as improving capacity and overcrowding; Clearways, Chatswood to Epping Rail Link and new rolling stock are all running late and massively over budget.

In September 2005 the Government slashed 416 daily rail services and again, only added one service in the wake of increased patronage due to soaring petrol prices.

Just recently, the State Government removed fleet maintenance figures and vandalism statistics from the CityRail website. This safety and security information should be available to commuters.

The submission concludes:

It is clear that by allowing standards of service to slide and failing to deliver on key infrastructure improvements while at the same time increasing fares, the Transport Minister is doing little to encourage public transport use.

Commuters should not be forced to pay for the State Government's failures. Put simply, until rail services improve, commuters should not be expected to pay higher fares.

That is in black and white. I move:

That the motion be amended by leaving out paragraphs (1) and (3) with a view to inserting instead:

- (1) condemns the Government for supporting fare increases and calls on the Government to adopt Coalition policy to oppose transport fare increases given worsening transport services.

I reiterate that while members opposite say one thing in this place they do something very different outside. Page A-11 of the "Mini-budget 2008-2009" states that the Government will implement the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal rail fare determinations. I asked a question of the head of the Ministry of Transport in the estimates hearing last week. In fact, it was the first question I asked because I am so concerned about this issue. I asked for the basis for the figures and the response was, "IPART's rail fare determination". The Government is being dishonest and it has lost all credibility with the electorate. I cannot believe that the Government has had the gall to introduce this motion today. [*Time expired.*]

Mr DAVID HARRIS (Wyong) [3.51 p.m.]: Mr Assistant-Speaker, like you I have many rail commuters in my electorate. The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal determination is causing great concern and Mr Assistant-Speaker, the member for Gosford, and I are making our opposition to them very clear. However, the train news is not all bad in my electorate. The outer suburban carriages, the OSCARS, are now operating on the Central Coast and better commuter car parking is being provided. Whilst the Government respects the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal's independence and the importance of its price-setting function, it has urged the tribunal to accept that we have a new Premier and a new-look Government that warrants a fresh approach to fare increases.

The community accepts that prices rise over time, but we must ensure that those increases are reasonable. As the Parliamentary Secretary told the House, the cost of a single ticket for travel from Wollongong and the Central Coast to the city would be \$2.40 cheaper under the State Government's submission when compared with the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal's proposal and \$13 cheaper each week for a weekly ticket over four years. When the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal released its draft proposal I urged people to make submissions. The Government has now also had its say by making a submission in response to that draft proposal.

The Opposition has no credibility on rail fare increases. Members opposite made a submission to the original inquiry but when the draft determination was handed down they did not bother to respond. They screamed until they were blue in the face about the increases but they did nothing about them. That is typical of members opposite. They whinge and whine and complain and indulge in rhetoric, but they have been exposed yet again for not doing the hard work. They offered a two-page original submission, but it is not worth the paper it is printed on. They have no policy.

The member for Willoughby must realise that when the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal released its draft determination in October the Opposition did not bother to comment. The member waved around a piece of paper in this Chamber on Tuesday and protested that it was the Opposition's July submission to the tribunal. However, as reported in the *Illawarra Mercury* on the following day, the tribunal clarified the matter and stated that the Opposition's views would not be considered when determining fares because it did not respond to the draft determination, which was released in October.

Ms Gladys Berejiklian: Point of order: What does the Government not understand about the fact that the Opposition does not support rail fare increases? That is our position.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! That is not a point of order.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I call on the Opposition to join with the Government to support its submission because it did the work and made sure that the—*[Time expired.]*

Mr RAY WILLIAMS (Hawkesbury) [5.54 p.m.]: I cannot believe the embarrassment that the Parliamentary Secretary and member for Penrith and the member for Wyong must be suffering today as they speak to a motion about providing affordable transport options for the residents of New South Wales. There is not very much that this Government does well, particularly with regard to public transport. However, it lies and deceives the people of this State very well. For 10 years this Government has promised a rail line to the north-west of Sydney to Rouse Hill and Castle Hill—known as the north-west rail line and then the north-west metro—but the projects have been cancelled.

Mr David Harris: Point of order: The member for Hawkesbury is misleading the House. He is saying that the projects have been cancelled. They have been deferred.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: They have been deferred time and again to the point that we all know that they will never happen under this lying, deceitful State Government. That is all this Government has indulged in for the past 10 years. Members opposite promised a Tcard to provide better outcomes for the people of New South Wales. After wasting \$100 million of New South Wales taxpayers' money we do not even have a ticket roll to show for another broken promise. The New South Wales Government is absolutely dreadful at providing public transport for the residents of this State. Why would the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal not receive hundreds of submissions about increasing fares? I will tell the House why: Because it provides a lousy service. Public transport is hot in summer and cold in winter, it is overcrowded and it is late and hundreds of services have been cancelled over the past year. Why would people not make hundreds of submissions to the Government about fare increases? They have not done so because they have had a gutful of the lies and deceptions of this Government and increasing fares.

Mr David Harris: Point of order: Again the member is misleading the House. The submissions are made to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal, an independent body, not to the Government. The Government took the time to make its own submission.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! I have heard enough on the point of order.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Another lie and deceit is the fact that this measure was factored into the budget. As the shadow Minister for Transport said, the Government has already factored in the full price increase. This is a disgusting, lying, cheating State Government. *[Time expired.]*

Mr FRANK TERENCEZINI (Maitland) [3.57 p.m.]: The member for Hawkesbury has not reminded us that the people have thrown that mob opposite back into the sin bin for the past four elections. Why? Because they do not have a clue how to fix anything. All they do is political manoeuvring. The member for Willoughby waved around a document containing what the Opposition submitted, but when the draft determination came out where is the Opposition? Members opposite are gone. They do not want to put in another submission. Clearly, they are going to play politics. That is what they do with every single issue that comes before Parliament. They carry on and wave papers about but when it comes time to make the real submission they do not get involved. Then they come into the House and complain about the price rise and ask what the Government did about it.

The Government is doing something about it. We put in a submission after the draft determination to say it was no good. The people of New South Wales will accept a rise but they will not accept one to the extent proposed. What did members opposite do? Nothing. That is why, after the past four elections, they remain

sitting on that side of the House. The sanctimonious, imbecilic bunch of losers keep getting sent to that side of the House because they play politics with everything and do not come up with any ideas. The member for Willoughby waved about a bit of paper but the Opposition did not make a submission when it counted—in response to the draft determination—because it wants the price rise to go ahead so it can blame the Government for it. That is what Oppositions do.

This Opposition has no ideas, no fresh approach to anything; it just keeps playing politics. That is what it has not told the people of New South Wales. It must be a lonely job on the Opposition benches these days when members opposite have to resort to that sort of tactic to score political points, to get their five minutes of political fame. What is the next issue going to be? Members opposite will try to score political points but will not come up with any ideas. If that continues they will sit in opposition for a very long time.

Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO (Penrith—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.00 p.m.], in reply: I thank the Opposition for supporting the motion, but its members' contributions were misleading. As outlined by the member for Maitland and the member for Wyong, action by the Government to make decisions and make submissions at the right time will benefit the people of New South Wales, not the carping, whingeing and complaining from members opposite. The only person who should be embarrassed in this Chamber today is the member for Hawkesbury. Not only has he been turfed out of this place for inappropriate behaviour in his first term, not once in his contribution today did he mention a local example.

Mr Ray Williams: Point of order: I certainly did raise an example. The example I raised was the North West Metro.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! That is not a point of order.

Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO: The member for Hawkesbury cannot get a point of order right. Not only did the member for Willoughby mislead the House, the member for Hawkesbury also misled the House. He should speak to Angus Dawson from the Growth Centres Commission. Those who have come into this House with experience, those in the House with a financial background, should be embarrassed, as this is a cost-neutral submission. The budget figures do not change because we restructured our proposal. We have a smarter, cost-neutral proposal. The figures will not change because they are cost-neutral, something members opposite have no idea about. They have misled the House by not acknowledging the increase in services and capacity. The western line has a new afternoon service and new carriages. We have removed the u-stops on the western line so people can get off at Penrith instead of Emu Plains. The removal of the u-stops has increased capacity on the western line. We have introduced payday ticketing. We have introduced 14-day ticketing along the western line and even the Smart Saver ticket trial. [*Time expired.*]

Question—That the words stand—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 45

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

Noes, 38

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

Mrs Hancock
Mr Hartcher
Mr Hazzard
Ms Hodgkinson
Mrs Hopwood
Mr Humphries
Mr Kerr
Mr Merton
Ms Moore
Mr O'Farrell
Mr Page
Mr Piccoli
Mr Piper

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

Pairs

Ms Beamer
Ms Burton
Mr Costa

Mr O'Dea
Mrs Skinner
Mr J. D. Williams

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

Amendment negatived.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

Division called for and Standing Order 185 applied.

The House divided.

Ayes, 45

Mr Amery
Ms Andrews
Mr Aquilina
Mr Borger
Mr Brown
Ms Burney
Mr Campbell
Mr Collier
Mr Coombs
Mr Corrigan
Mr Daley
Ms D'Amore
Ms Firth
Mr Furolo
Mr Gibson
Mr Greene

Mr Harris
Ms Hay
Mr Hickey
Ms Horner
Ms Judge
Ms Keneally
Mr Khoshaba
Mr Koperberg
Mr Lalich
Mr Lynch
Mr McBride
Dr McDonald
Ms McKay
Mr McLeay
Ms McMahan
Mr Morris

Mrs Paluzzano
Mr Pearce
Mrs Perry
Mr Sartor
Mr Shearan
Mr Stewart
Ms Tebbutt
Mr Terenzini
Mr Tripodi
Mr West
Mr Whan

Tellers,
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Ms Hodgkinson
Mrs Hopwood
Mr Humphries
Mr Kerr
Mr Merton
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Mr O'Farrell
Mr Page
Mr Piccoli
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Mr Provest
Mr Richardson
Mr Roberts
Mr Smith
Mr Souris
Mr Stokes
Mr Stoner
Mr J. H. Turner
Mr R. W. Turner
Mr R. C. Williams
Tellers,
Mr George
Mr Maguire

Pairs

Ms Beamer
Ms Burton
Mr Costa

Mr O'Dea
Mrs Skinner
Mr J. D. Williams

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

The SPEAKER: Order! It being before 4.30 p.m., the House will now proceed to Government business.

ADOPTION AMENDMENT BILL 2008

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

RURAL LANDS PROTECTION AMENDMENT BILL 2008**Agreement in Principle**

Debate resumed from an earlier hour.

Mr STEVE WHAN (Monaro—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.17 p.m.], in reply: I am pleased to have the opportunity to complete my reply on the Rural Lands Protection Amendment Bill. It is important that I respond to the claims and comments of Opposition members during their almost three-hour contribution to the debate on the bill. Earlier I alluded to an issue raised by the member for Burrinjuck to which the member for Coffs Harbour also referred but with which he did not agree. The member for Burrinjuck questioned the impact on biosecurity issues of small landholders with only one or two horses or sheep. She suggested that changing the minimum rateable sizes from four hectares to 10 hectares would mean that those landholders would not be properly included in prevention of disease. In fact, they will be.

Perhaps the member for Burrinjuck was not aware that it is not necessary for a landholder to be rated for a board to obtain information about the stock on the land. A non-rateable holding can have a property identification code [PIC]. There is a current project underway that provides PICs to owner-occupiers of non-rateable holdings free of charge up to December this year. This is to promote the PIC to hobby and small area farmers. To date this has been successful, with 650 PICs being assigned as a result of the project.

There is also a dollar incentive for boards to issue PICs to non-rateable holdings. Currently, boards receive a \$25 rebate for each new PIC issued to these landholders. In addition, the IMC report noted the importance of this issue and recommended that consideration be given to collecting livestock information from small landholders. Peak livestock industry bodies support this approach. Discussions are continuing with these bodies about the best approach to be taken. Given that that is the main objection of the member for Burrinjuck to the bill, I assume she may be able to reconsider her position on the bill.

The importance of this provision in the bill is one highlighted by a member of the Opposition. Indeed, I think the Leader of The Nationals highlighted this when he spoke about the fact that many small landholders, those with between four and ten hectares, believe that their properties should not be part of the rural lands protection board rating. This has been a big issue regarding the land surrounding the Australian Capital Territory, particularly the areas that I represent, such as Bywong, Wamboin, Bungendore, Burra and even Cooma. These small landholders turned out in great numbers to the Bull inquiry. They said they did not feel that their properties should be part of the rural lands protection board rating. This legislation implements the Bull inquiry recommendation. So the good news for those landholders is that they will not be paying rates to rural lands protection boards after 2010.

It surprises me that the member for Burrinjuck does not seem to have concern for her constituents on small landholdings around, for instance, Gundaroo, Murrumbateman and Yass, where there are also a lot of people who would be affected by this. The issue has been raised by a number of people in the electorate that I represent, and the Government is now addressing it. A number of other issues were raised during the debate, one of which I very briefly alluded to earlier but I now have the chance to put on record a little more detail.

Landholders in the Bombala area raised with me their concerns about the disease control areas. Currently Bombala is a bovine Johne's disease-free area, which is obviously extremely important to the landowners in that area. The landholders were concerned that their area being included as part of a larger area would break down the boundaries. It seems from comments made in this debate that the member for Murray-Darling also thought that that is what will happen. In fact, that is not what will happen. There will be internal boundaries within the new board areas to deal with issues such as disease control. That is something that is being worked through in preparation for the implementation of these reforms.

The Bombala landholders also raised with me what community of interest they had with coastal farmers. They felt that at times there is not a lot of community interest in the dairy farmers in the Bega Valley. Obviously, there is a transition of types of farming in that area, and no doubt in some other areas. But there are a lot of common issues as well. Most importantly, the reforms give us a bigger area, and a more viable area in the long term. For instance, there is a common issue regarding wild dog control. Farmers on both sides of the parks and forests in that area are affected by the issue, and they have seen the positive results of the extra money that the Government has put in—which is some 20 times more than the former Coalition Government ever provided in funding for wild dog control in our region. One of the great advantages of these reforms will be the ability for the very successful control mechanism that is running in a number of our rural lands protection boards at the moment to be common to the entire region. Currently that is not the case and there have been a couple of issues there.

There is a fundamental point in this. The Opposition has tried, once again, to have it both ways on this. A number of members opposite, in particular the shadow Minister, have basically said, "We agree with a lot of this. We agree with everything you are trying to do. We just don't think you should do it now." The member for Murray-Darling made the point that losing the directors amounted to losing eyes and ears on the ground. At the moment we have 380 directors of rural lands protection boards around the State and about 400 staff. If we need that sort of ratio to keep things operating, then we need another 200,000 members of Parliament in New South Wales. I put to the member for Murray-Darling and other members with large electorates that if they can keep an eye on a large electorate and get an understanding of the issues the six local board members, together with a couple co-opted, can certainly look after areas of the size we are talking about.

The most important thing, though, is that these reforms will make those areas far more viable. The changes will improve corporate governance arrangements, and the appointment of two independent directors will enhance that. As the shadow Minister and a number of other members acknowledged, areas of the board system are financially unstable. A number of members opposite claimed that the boards in their electorates were doing very well. Some members opposite said their boards were doing okay, and some said their boards were definitely not doing okay.

Mr Kevin Humphries: They are doing far better than your Government.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I will go on to talk about the budget, if the member wants me to. In 2006 five boards did not have sufficient cash reserves to cover their employee leave entitlements. In 2006 seven boards had a quick ratio of less than one, which raises questions about the ability of these boards to meet their financial obligations. In 2007, 65 per cent of boards had deficit budgets. Savings will be delivered from these reforms, and those savings will assist with that. It is expected that additional savings will be realised as these reforms are rolled out. Obviously, some of those savings will come down the track. The savings will be achieved by reducing the number of boards from 47 to 14, the use of e-business facilities, savings in bank fees, and a whole range of other measures.

The member for Coffs Harbour raised the impact of the drought on the financial position of boards. There is no doubt that the drought has had an impact on boards financially. One of the main burdens has been maintaining the travelling stock reserves. Income from those reserves has also fallen. However, the financial problems confronting boards are systemic; they are continuing. The bill aims to ensure that boards can continue to carry out their important work in the future. The member for Coffs Harbour and the member for Murray-Darling raised the issue of the fees set in the regulations for permits to graze stock on a public road or a controlled stock reserve. They suggested that the fees are too high and that boards need more flexibility in setting fees for such permits. The members do not seem to be aware that the fees being set are the same as those that already exist in the 2001 regulations; in other words, the fees will not change. The members might also wish to examine the fact that a regulation is being made which effectively retains the existing fee structure.

The member for Coffs Harbour questioned a reference in the bill to "notional carrying capacity". He sought clarification on why the words "notional carrying capacity" are included in item [15] of schedule 5 to the

bill. As the House has already heard, the changes to the rating system will not commence until 2010. This is to give boards time to prepare for the changes. Notional carrying capacity will continue to be the method for assessing rates into 2009. Ensuring that an appropriate appeal mechanism is in place during this period is a sensible approach. Item [15] of schedule 5 will then be repealed by item [7] of schedule 4 to the bill. The member for Barwon suggested that no board in his electorate is in financial trouble. An independent financial analyst reviewed the financial position of the nine Western Division boards in mid 2008 and found that the overall outcome was a deficit in each year.

The analyst also found that income was not growing sufficiently to cover expenditure going forward, and that the only area of income that was growing and helping to keep operating deficits minimal was government grants and funding. The analyst further found that these nine boards as a whole will remain in deficit going forward unless something changes. The Western Division boards have the highest administration costs of any region within the State, with an average of 36 per cent, compared with a State average of 24 per cent. Clearly, Western Division ratepayers are paying too much for the administration of their boards. Western Division boards also have the highest ratio of administration staff to field staff compared with other regions in the State, and they also pay large amounts in accounting fees. Opposition members make grandstanding comments such as, "This is all terrible; it should not happen. But we actually agree with it all." They also make comments about the boards' financial viability. I understand that there are two boards in the Western Division, Milparinka and Wanaaring. Milparinka has 40 ratepayers.

Mr Kevin Humphries: It has 47.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I am told it has 47. I thank the member for Barwon. Wanaaring has about 60 ratepayers. These boards employ one staff member each. I am told that the officers there spend more time dealing with administrative issues than they spend dealing with farm-gate issues that affect farmers. It is a matter of whether we get good service for farmers here. By combining those areas and centralising some of the administrative functions we will be able to do that. The member for Murray-Darling referred to the unregulated movement of stock in the Western Division and the loss of disease-free status.

As I said, amalgamation will have no impact on functions or the way in which the Act regulates these issues. The Western Division Livestock Health and Pest Authority will retain the same functions in relation to monitoring livestock and responding to emergency animal health issues. In addition, as mentioned before, the assignment of property identification codes will continue to assist in monitoring stock. The District Veterinarians of NSW Incorporated wrote to the Minister for Primary Industries, the Hon. Ian Macdonald, and said:

Dear Minister Macdonald,

The District Veterinarians of NSW Incorporated, also known as the District Veterinarians Association, fully supports your endorsement and the implementation of the IMC Review of the Rural Lands Protection (Boards).

There have been very many positives achieved over the last three months, due mostly to your work and that of your staff, which has been greatly appreciated.

I acknowledge that the member for Coffs Harbour read some of this letter on to the record. Consequently, there is no need for me to read it all, but I will conclude with the final paragraph:

In the opinion of the Association, these are great steps forward, and we do not underestimate nor take for granted the work you, Minister, and your staff have dedicated to the RLPB Review. It has been very much appreciated by our Association and we would like to convey our continued support for the RLPB restructure to the betterment of the NSW livestock industries and rural communities.

Several members contributed to the debate of the bill. The member for Bathurst supported the bill and he talked about biosecurity. I have dealt with the issues raised by the member for Murray-Darling. The member for Burrinjuck raised biosecurity, which I have answered. Several members of the Opposition actually seemed to support the bill but then decided to vote against it for political reasons. The member for Bega basically repeated things said by other members. The member for Murrumbidgee seemed to be filling in time. The member for Lismore in speaking about the boards on the North Coast seemed to contradict his shadow Minister, whom I distinctly remember welcoming the boundaries on the North Coast in his speech. I found that a bit odd. The critical thing for members and the public to know is that there are, as I have said, currently 380 directors in the rural lands protection boards and it is absolutely sensible to reduce the number of directors and boards. That number of directors is a total overkill when it comes to the number of staff employed—I referred to 400 staff earlier.

When the Opposition tries to make a bit of grandstanding capital out of existing directors or boards or others, it needs to explain to the community why it thinks it is okay for some rural lands protection boards to spend the bulk of the income they receive from ratepayers on administration rather than on services to those ratepayers. I acknowledge that I have had local farmers from the Bombala area say to me, "It is our choice. If we want to spend it all on administration that is up to us." I do not think anyone would accept it if the State Government ran a program where 40 per cent of the cost of the program was spent on administration, or well over 50 per cent in some cases. It is ludicrous to have that much administration with such few staff. The Opposition suggested that the bill be postponed but that is not sensible—a postponement for what? There was no suggestion on the other side of any alternative whatsoever. That is not unusual—we know the Opposition has no policies. The one policy put forward by the Opposition—

Mr Thomas George: Point of Order. My point of order relates to relevance under standing order 76. How long are we to put up with this? The Opposition clearly indicated that it was for a consultation process. We did not go out to the rural lands protection boards asking the questions—they came to us.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! There is no point of order.

Mr Andrew Constance: If you want to know our policies, call a general election.

Mr STEVE WHAN: The member for Bega says, "If you want to know our policies, call a general election." The Opposition will keep it a secret right up until then. It will just be like all those other coalitions that spring everything on us then. Do people remember the GST and that sort of thing?

Mr Thomas George: Point of Order. I ask the Chair to bring the Parliamentary Secretary back to his reply so we can finish debate on the bill today and not have to wait until next week.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! There is no point of order.

Mr STEVE WHAN: If the member does not want me to respond to his interjections, he should not interject.

Mr Thomas George: We will keep it going until 5.30 p.m.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I will stay as long as the member wants. After the actions of Opposition members earlier today—they attempted to trivialise this matter and acted like children in delaying the bill—I am glad that during a time normally set aside for Opposition bills I am continuing my reply to this debate. The Opposition has no policies or bills to consider. The Opposition needs to explain to the people of New South Wales what its alternative is. A range of Opposition members have said, "Well, we support this but we are not supporting it now." A number of other Opposition members—including the member for Murray-Darling, the member for Bega and the member for Barwon—have said, "No, we do not want to see any consolidation of boards. We have a whole range of other things." But not one alternative policy—

Mr Kevin Humphries: Point of Order. My point of order relates to relevance. I am glad the Parliamentary Secretary has raised that matter. In fact, a number of boards put propositions to the Minister and the State Council, and they are still awaiting a response. The only due diligence was done by a voluntary amalgamation proposal—

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! There is no point of order. I have been tolerant of the member for Barwon. I call the member for Barwon to order.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Clearly, the member for Barwon still cannot cope with the procedures of the House—he should learn them. The Opposition offered one alternative policy: to create another level of regional rural lands protection boards over the existing one—another level of bureaucracy. That was the single policy alternative presented by the Opposition. To his credit, the member for Coffs Harbour did not suggest this. As I have said, there is no justification for the Opposition's suggestion to postpone this bill—that would cost the Government quite a lot of money. The State Council has already made a considerable investment in the reform process. Offers and acceptances have been made for 11 of the proposed 14 general manager positions. Incidentally, the Minister is able to change the boundaries without legislation—that was raised by a number of members opposite.

Offers and acceptances have been made to staff of the proposed centralised administration unit. Some of the information technology infrastructure has been purchased and changes have been made to the information technology network. The cost in delaying the bill would be significant. One of the elements of that cost would be that the financial year of the rural lands protection boards ends on 31 December 2008. If we go through until the beginning of next year there would be an additional cost in changing over partway through the year. A number of boards are suffering considerable financial difficulties—some in areas represented by members who have contributed to the debate. Those difficulties need to be sorted out soon. Almost all Opposition members acknowledged—and I give them credit for that—the need for change, but I say to them, "This is the way to deliver the change. Have the courage to do it." I commend the bill to the House.

Question—That this bill be now agreed to in principle—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 45

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

Noes, 37

Mr Aplin	Mrs Hancock	Mr Richardson
Mr Baird	Mr Hazzard	Mr Roberts
Mr Baumann	Ms Hodgkinson	Mrs Skinner
Ms Berejikian	Mrs Hopwood	Mr Smith
Mr Besseling	Mr Humphries	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. C. Williams
Mr Draper	Mr O'Farrell	
Mrs Fardell	Mr Page	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Fraser	Mr Piccoli	Mr George
Ms Goward	Mr Provest	Mr Maguire

Pairs

Ms Beamer	Mr Hartcher
Ms Burton	Mr R. W. Turner
Mr Costa	Mr J. D. Williams

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Passing of the Bill

Bill declared passed and transmitted to the Legislative Council with a message seeking its concurrence in the bill.

COMBAT SPORTS 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) [4.47 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

The Combat Sports Bill 2008 will establish a broader regulatory coverage of combat sports and will create a Combat Sports Authority to replace the existing Boxing Authority of New South Wales. The definition of "combat sports" used in the new Act will extend the existing regulatory coverage of boxing, kickboxing and wrestling to include a range of other sports that have risen to prominence since the existing Boxing and Wrestling Control Act 1986 was introduced. These include sports with names such as Muay Thai, mixed martial arts and cage fighting. The advent of these sports, while they might not be to everyone's taste, has required a response to ensure that competitors are not exposed to unnecessary risk. Some of these sports have vague and ad hoc sets of rules, which present some concerns regarding the governance of the sports and any discipline that their associations exercise over the conduct of their contests.

A significant change under the new legislation is the removal of the exclusion of women from competing in amateur and professional boxing and kickboxing in New South Wales. We also are increasing significantly the penalties applying to the conduct of illegal contests, that is, those operating without permits. At present, some combat sports simply are not named in the existing legislation and, accordingly, cannot be regulated to ensure the maximum safety possible for the competitors. In 1986 the Wran Government introduced the Boxing and Wrestling Control Act, in the process establishing a new approach to the regulation of those sports.

This approach was aimed at addressing a number of significant issues at that time. To address the health and safety needs of competitors, the Boxing and Wrestling Control Act 1986 established the New South Wales Boxing Authority, with responsibilities including supervising the sport to ensure that boxers were properly medically supervised, both at contests and during intervening periods; that all matches had a doctor in attendance; and that promoters, managers, trainers, seconds and others were included within the coverage of the Act as registered industry participants.

The principles established in the Boxing and Wrestling Control Act 1986 will continue in the new Act. The seven members of the Boxing Authority have managed the sport of professional boxing very effectively. As part of their role, they attend the promotions, check the fitting of the gloves and ensure that all activities relating to the preparation of the boxers, including supervision of activities in the change rooms, are managed properly. By capturing a range of other sports within the legislation, the New South Wales Government will ensure that those same safety standards are maintained across the combat sports industry.

The sport of boxing includes as its primary activity the directing of blows to the head of the opponent. Consequently, this State has had a policy for more than a decade that children younger than 14 years cannot take part in competitive boxing matches. This policy reflects medical advice relating to the development of the brain in young people and the need to protect young competitors. There has been disquiet among some members of the boxing industry regarding this policy. My predecessors in the Sport and Recreation portfolio and I, as well as other Ministers and successive Premiers, have had representations made to us to remove the policy. I can state today that this policy will continue, and that appropriate age rules will be applied to other combat sports in involve significant impacts to the head.

Another issue, which has been contentious at times, concerns the participation of women as competitors in boxing and kickboxing. In 1986 it was a matter of general public agreement that it was not appropriate for women to compete in these sports. Times have moved on and this position is seen as

discriminatory and inconsistent with community attitudes and government policy generally. The Government has had to consider the issues that would arise if we continued to exclude women from the opportunity to compete in boxing and kickboxing. As women are already competing in some of the sports that will fall within the purview of this legislation, it is appropriate to remove all of the gender-based exclusions.

Recent events have highlighted the need for effective management of crowds at contests and for rules of conduct for the entourages that increasingly accompany competitors to the venues for combat sports. The Boxing Authority of New South Wales is currently considering those issues and the new authority, in partnership with the New South Wales Police Force and the Department of Arts, Sport and Recreation, will have to address those issues as one of its first tasks. Through the changes outlined in this legislation, the Combat Sports Authority will have increased powers in addressing a range of breaches. The new authority may refer matters for prosecution where an offender is unregistered. It may also impose penalties on any registered combatants or industry participants who fail to fulfil their obligations to conduct themselves in a professional manner.

For some people currently involved in combat sports the new legislation will represent a change in the way they operate. Previously, in some combat sports there was no legislative requirement for registration, no insistence on proper matching of opponents, no need to ensure the attendance of a doctor at all promotions and no clear understanding of the responsibilities of officials and other participants at contests. This is not to say that the promoters of combat sports events have been operating irresponsibly, but they have previously operated outside the regulatory system and this must be addressed. The Department of the Arts, Sport and Recreation has initiated discussions with industry representatives to advise them of the regulatory requirements and assist them with the transition.

This process will continue over the next 12 months. Those involved in combat sports will be required to register from the beginning of the 2010 calendar year. In the meantime, participants in the industry will be able to work towards fulfilling the requirement for first-aid training, to negotiate with medical practitioners to provide the necessary supervision at contests, and to develop a sound working relationship with the Combat Sports Authority. A feature of this legislation is the permanent registration of combat sport combatants and participants—a matter that has been a longstanding concern of the Boxing Authority. This registration system will operate in a similar way to the system that operates under the greyhound racing legislation to ensure that no loopholes can be found by unscrupulous characters attempting to operate outside the system.

I express my appreciation to past and present members of the Boxing Authority of New South Wales for their professionalism and dedication to managing the sport. I hope that they will seek to continue their involvement in the new regulatory system. I can assure them that we will need their expertise as it develops. Boxing is still the largest combat sport in Australia in terms of numbers of registered combatants, frequency and geographic distribution of contests. New South Wales has the most boxing contests—nearly half the national total per annum.

Our approach will continue to include ensuring the attendance of at least one authority official at each boxing contest. When female combatants are involved, female officials will also be required. Following passage of the legislation, the new Combat Sports Authority will be established with nine members—an additional two over the number currently on the Boxing Authority. The membership of the authority will include at least two members drawn from combat sports outside the realm of boxing and, for the first time, will include female members.

I now turn to some of the transitional arrangements associated with these changes. The authority will continue to receive administrative support from the Department of the Arts, Sport and Recreation. Following passage of the legislation, the department will initiate recruitment and accreditation of officials, initially through seeking expressions of interest. The Combat Sports Regulation will be developed, and will list those sports to be subject to the regulatory system, including sports for which there is currently no government regulation, such as Muay Thai, cage fighting, extreme fighting, mixed martial arts and others.

For women currently involved in any form of combat sports it removes a restriction on their activity, and they may then choose to compete in boxing or kickboxing. Women who reside in New South Wales who currently travel interstate to compete in boxing and kickboxing will be able to register and compete in their home State. Women new to the industry will have a wider range of options to choose from than is currently available. An anomaly will be removed from the combat sports industry: women are currently prevented from competing in boxing and kickboxing in New South Wales, although no government regulation currently applies to their competing in other combat sports.

Some combat sports will be subject to government regulation where none previously existed. Greater scrutiny will be applied to the conduct of those sports, the requirements for supervision of medical issues and the conduct of promotions generally. Female officials will be identified, accredited and trained as necessary. More facilities suitable for women will be required, and only suitably equipped venues will be permitted to stage events that include female combatants. Some issues are expected to arise relating to the conduct of events, including the attire to be worn by women. This will be managed by including requirements consistent with international practice in the conditions of permits applying to such events.

Amendments to the legislation will address a longstanding policy issue for which a number of organisations including Womensport, Recreation New South Wales and individuals, including the former Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner and State members of Parliament have lobbied. This is important legislation that will bring New South Wales into line with the rest of the States and Territories. I commend the bill to the House.

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

STATE REVENUE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (BUDGET MEASURES) BILL 2008

Bill introduced on motion by Mr Joseph Tripodi

Agreement in Principle

Mr JOSEPH TRIPODI (Fairfield—Minister for Finance, Minister for Infrastructure, Minister for Regulatory Reform, and Minister for Ports and Waterways) [5.00 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

On 11 November the Treasurer announced a range of measures to ensure the State's financial position remained strong and to maintain the State's triple-A credit rating. A number of those initiatives will commence on 1 January 2009 and require legislation. This bill implements those measures. This bill also implements some other measures announced in the mini-budget that require legislation, but that will not commence until 1 July 2009.

Schedule 1 to the bill amends the Duties Act 1997 to implement from 1 January 2009 the stamp duty measures announced in the mini-budget. In particular, the schedule defers abolition of stamp duty on unquoted marketable securities from 1 January 2009 to 1 July 2012, defers abolition of mortgage duty on business loans from 1 July 2009 to 1 July 2012, defers abolition of transfer duty on business assets other than real property from 1 July 2011 to 1 July 2012, increases flat rate duties from \$2, \$10 and \$200 to \$10, \$50 and \$500 respectively, and eliminates an unintended consequence under which a liability to duty arose on the termination of strata schemes and community land schemes. Schedule 2 to the bill amends the First Home Owner Grant Act 2000 to authorise retrospectively to 14 October the payment of the \$7,000 first home owner boost payment to first home buyers purchasing an existing home and the \$14,000 first home owner boost payment to first home buyers purchasing or building a new home. The authorisation to make these payments and the first home owner boost scheme will cease on 30 June 2009.

The schedule also amends the Act to provide for the payment of the \$3,000 New South Wales new home buyer supplement, which was announced in the 11 November mini-budget. This payment will be made to first home buyers who contract between 11 November 2008 to 10 November 2009 inclusive to purchase or build a new home. This payment is in addition to the \$7,000 provided by the New South Wales Government under the first home owners scheme and the \$14,000 first home owner boost payment. This means payments of up to \$24,000 will be available to first home buyers purchasing or building a new home. This payment is in addition to the existing stamp duty exemption available to purchasers of first homes up to \$500,000 in value.

Schedule 3 to the bill amends land tax legislation to introduce from the 2009 land tax year a premium land tax rate of 2 per cent that will apply to land tax payers with total taxable landholdings above \$2.25 million. The premium rate will apply only to the value of taxable landholdings in excess of \$2.25 million. The landholdings below \$2.25 million of affected land tax payers will remain subject to land tax at 1.6 per cent. This measure is expected to affect around 8,500 land tax payers, or about 5.6 per cent of all land tax payers. The measure does not involve any broadening of the land tax base. Existing exemptions, including for principal places of residence and for land used for primary production, will remain. Schedule 4 to the bill is designed to

recover the costs of ensuring compliance with quality and safety standards in childcare centres. I note that other States such as Queensland and Victoria have similar fees in place, and in the context of the mini-budget it is important to have such measures, provided they are reasonable and implemented sensitively. That is what the Government intends.

Extensive consultation with industry and parents on how the fees will be applied and costed will occur through the review of the Children's Services Regulation over the next year. The licence fees will not be introduced before 2010 to ensure a thorough discussion. The schedule also will increase the fees for employers of children in the media and entertainment industry. These fees will help to cover the costs of the Children's Guardian conducting site visits and inspections to ensure the welfare of the children. There has been only one increase in fees since 1993, and that was to cover the introduction of GST. We believe that these fees are reasonable and in line with consumer price index increases. An exemption from the fees will be allowed where hardship can be shown. The increase in fees will not have an impact on children or their parents.

Schedule 5 increases the hearing fees payable in the Supreme Court under the Civil Procedure Regulation 2005. The revised fee is to be \$345 for individuals and \$690 for corporations to be levied for each half day of hearing time before a judge. In relation to hearings before an associate judge the hearing fee is to be \$311 per half day for individuals and \$622 for corporations. The fee is to be levied on each half day of hearing time required after the second day until the matter concludes. Taxpayers should not have to subsidise expensive and lengthy civil hearings before the Supreme Court. The massive cost to taxpayers arising from the C7 litigation in the Federal Court has brought into sharp focus the need for Government to ensure that well-resourced and corporate litigants should not be able to rely on taxpayers to fund protracted disputes in publicly funded courts. Litigants that elect to resolve disputes before a court instead of through private arbitration or other dispute resolution processes should contribute to the cost of court hearings.

Schedule 6 to the bill amends the State Emergency Service Act 1989 to provide for a contribution scheme to meet the costs of the State Emergency Service similar to the schemes contained in the Fire Brigades Act 1989 and the Rural Fires Act 1997 for the funding of the New South Wales Fire Brigades and Rural Fire Service, and any other administrative costs incurred under the authority of the Acts. These changes recognise the outstanding work of the State Emergency Service, and the savings to the insurance industry that its work allows through reduced claims. The streamlining and simplifying of back office administrative processes to produce efficiencies and further savings among the three services will accompany the changed funding model. Again, this will not impact on front-line services or operational capabilities.

Schedule 7 to the bill amends the Human Tissue Act 1983 to provide that regulations may be made authorising the recovery of the costs associated with the supply of blood and blood products to approved health providers. Public hospitals in New South Wales already pay the costs associated with being supplied blood and blood products. The cost of providing blood and blood products to private hospitals is currently met by the State. This amendment will allow the Department of Health to recover the costs incurred by the State in supplying blood and blood products to the private health sector. This measure means that all hospitals in New South Wales will share the cost of collecting, processing and distributing blood and blood products and end the current subsidisation of private hospitals for this service. In accordance with the aims of the National Blood Agreement, the amendment is explicit that no patient will be charged for the cost of blood.

Schedule 8 to the bill amends the Management of Waters and Waterside Lands Regulations, New South Wales to increase the annual fees for mooring licences for moorings in eastern Sydney Harbour. Fees will increase from \$111, \$220, \$330 and \$774 to \$138, \$275, \$413 and \$965 respectively. Schedule 9 to the bill amends the Mining Regulation 2003 to increase the rates of royalty for coal. The tiered structure of coal royalties will be maintained under this initiative in recognition of the importance of the mining industry as an employer in rural areas. The measure does not include a super royalty on coal, as has been introduced in other jurisdictions. Royalty rates will increase from 5 per cent, 6 per cent and 7 per cent to 6.2 per cent, 7.2 per cent and 8.2 per cent respectively.

Schedule 10 to the bill amends the Parking Space Levy Act 1992 to increase the parking space levy in category 1 areas from \$950 to \$2,000 a year and in category 2 areas from \$470 to \$710 a year. The parking space levy seeks to reduce congestion and promote the use of public transport. The funds collected will be used for the construction and maintenance of transport infrastructure that encourages public transport use, such as commuter car parks and extra buses. Schedule 11 to the bill amends planning legislation to merge the Growth Centres Commission with the Department of Planning to drive key land supply outcomes across New South

Wales and to make other changes that better reflect roles and responsibilities. The Department of Planning will be restructured to have a stronger focus on the statewide accelerated release of land in greenfield areas and the redevelopment of existing urban areas.

Schedule 12 amends the Private Hospitals Regulation 1996 to increase application fees for licences from \$775 to \$5,320 and to insert a new scale of annual licence fees for private hospitals based on the number of persons licensed to be accommodated. The schedule also increases the fee for transfer of a licence from \$775 to \$2,940. This schedule also amends the Day Procedure Centres Regulation 1996 to increase application fees from \$775 to \$5,320, to increase annual licence fees from \$1,415 to \$4,690 and to increase licence transfer fees from \$775 to \$2,940. Schedule 13 amends the Real Property Regulation 2008 to increase the fee for lodging a transfer of property with the Land Titles Office. This fee will increase from 1 January 2009.

The Victims Support and Rehabilitation Act 1996 requires those persons convicted of an offence punishable by imprisonment to pay a compensation levy. The levy is currently \$70 when the person is convicted on indictment and \$30 otherwise. That money is paid into the Victims Compensation Fund, from which compensation under the Act is paid to the victims of acts of violence. The purpose of the compensation levy is to force those persons committing criminal offences to make a personal contribution to the compensation of victims of crime. Schedule 14 to the bill amends the Victims Support and Rehabilitation Act 1996 to increase the victim compensation levy payable by people convicted of offences punishable by imprisonment from \$30 and \$70 to \$60 and \$140 respectively. It also introduces a provision that indexes these levies to movements in the Sydney consumer price index to ensure these levies maintain their real value. The levies have not increased for 11 years, and in these tough times we are making criminals pay their dues.

Schedule 15 amends waste legislation to increase the waste and environmental levy for the Sydney region and the Hunter, Central Coast and Illawarra by \$10 per tonne per year, indexed to the consumer price index from 1 July 2009 until 2015-16. The \$10 increase will replace the \$7 per tonne increase previously scheduled for 1 July 2009. The amendments set out in the schedule also extend the waste and environmental levy to cover Wollondilly and Blue Mountains local government areas and coastal local government areas from the Hunter to the Queensland border. The levy rate will be \$10 per tonne from 1 July 2009 with increases of \$10 per tonne each year. These increases will be indexed to movements in the Consumer Price Index from 1 July 2010 until 2015-16. I commend the bill to the House.

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

SUPERANNUATION ADMINISTRATION AMENDMENT (CHIEF EXECUTIVE) BILL 2008

Bill introduced on motion by Mr Joseph Tripodi.

Agreement in Principle

Mr JOSEPH TRIPODI (Fairfield—Minister for Finance, Minister for Infrastructure, Minister for Regulatory Reform, and Minister for Ports and Waterways) [5.13 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

The bill amends the Superannuation Administration Act and the Public Sector Employment and Management Act 2002 to remove the position of the chief executive officer of State Super from the Chief Executive Service. Current arrangements for State Super under part 3.1 of the Public Sector Employment and Management Act 2002 are inflexible and operate to the financial disadvantage of the State. State Super has been attempting to recruit, unsuccessfully, a new chief executive officer for more than 12 months. In the current investment environment the State requires the best investment advice available. Current legislation restricts the Government's ability to competitively recruit a suitably qualified chief executive officer for State Super, which is the largest superannuation fund in Australia.

At 30 June 2008 the investment portfolio of State Super was \$34.2 billion, of which \$10.7 billion is member funds, and the remainder, \$23.5 billion, represents the State's employer contributions. The investment performance of State Super materially impacts the value of State sector net financial liabilities. In particular, unfunded superannuation liabilities and the State's ability to meet the fiscal target of fully funding superannuation liabilities by 2030 is the primary long-term focus of State Super's investment performance. Further, if State Super does not meet long-term investment earnings targets additional funding will be required

from the budget to meet superannuation liabilities. For example, if the future investment earnings of STC are 0.1 per cent less than the target rate of return the cash contribution by the budget towards superannuation liabilities would need to be increased by approximately \$800 million over the period to 2030. Within the above context it is critical that State Super be in a position to recruit a suitable chief executive with the ability to manage the State's largest portfolio of financial assets. I commend the bill to the House.

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

CRIMES (DOMESTIC AND PERSONAL VIOLENCE) AMENDMENT BILL 2008

Bill introduced on motion by Ms Verity Firth.

Agreement in Principle

Ms VERITY FIRTH (Balmain—Minister for Education and Training, and Minister for Women) [5.16 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

Addressing domestic and family violence is a top priority for the Rees Government. We recognise that strategies must continue to be developed and refined to stop violence, support victims, help them achieve justice through our legal system and respond to the causes of domestic and family violence. The Government will continue to implement policy and legislative reform in order to minimise the occurrence of domestic violence and to reduce its impact, especially on women and children. In 2007 Parliament passed the Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007, which I will now refer to as the Act. The object of this Act was to repeal and re-enact part 15A of the Crimes Act 1900, which dealt with the issuing of apprehended domestic violence orders and apprehended personal violence orders, and the enforcement of those orders.

This Act is groundbreaking in its capacity to better protect victims of domestic and family violence. It introduced a new specific offence of domestic violence and has made it easier for women and children to obtain apprehended violence orders. It automatically protects victims via an apprehended violence order if their attacker is charged with certain personal violence offences, and it protects children by automatically including them on an apprehended violence order unless there are good reasons for a judge not to do so. In addition, police now have extended powers to apply for provisional apprehended violence orders over the telephone 24 hours a day and can apply for AVOs on behalf of a victim who is reluctant to proceed. These are really important new laws that will make a real difference for victims and give police important new tools to stop perpetrators.

The Act also made a number of amendments to the Law Enforcement (Powers and Responsibilities) Act 2002 to enable a police officer to require a person to disclose his or her identity if the officer reasonably suspected that an apprehended violence order has been made against the person, and expanded the range of dangerous implements that a police officer could search for in a house. The Act commenced on 10 March 2008. Since the Act became operational a number of stakeholders, including the NSW Police Force, the Legal Aid Commission and the Department of Community Services have made some suggestions for further reform in order to improve the effectiveness of the Act and ensure that victims of domestic violence receive the best possible protection.

All these suggestions have been recommended to the Government in consultation with the Apprehended Violence Legal Issues Coordinating Committee [AVLICC], which is an interagency group comprising non-government and government membership. Membership includes representatives from the Attorney General's Department, the NSW Police Force, the Police Ministry, the Office for Women, local courts, the Legal Aid Commission, the Judicial Commission, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and key services such as the Domestic Violence Advocacy Service and the Women's Domestic Violence Court Assistance Scheme. The purpose of the committee is to ensure appropriate coordination of criminal justice system services for people seeking apprehended violence orders [AVOs] and to examine and identify legal, policy and procedural barriers to the provision of adequate criminal justice system services. AVLICC puts forward recommendations to government to improve legislation, policies and procedures, with the needs of women and children experiencing domestic violence given particular attention.

I now turn to the bill in detail. Schedule 1 [1] amends section 4 of the Act to include in the definition of personal violence offence an offence under section 13 of that Act of stalking or intimidating another person with

the intention of causing the other person to fear physical or mental harm. Schedule 1 [2] amends section 31 of the Act to require a provisional order to be served, if practical, on the person whom it was issued to protect. Currently that section only provides for the order to be served on the defendant and it was very important that this anomaly was addressed.

Schedule 1 [3] amends section 35 of the Act to include a power for a court or authorised officer when making an apprehended violence order to prohibit or restrict the possession of prohibited weapons by the defendant. Currently that power covers only firearms. Again, there is no reason why this section should not cover other weapons, and this amendment corrects that irregularity and ensures the best protection is given to victims. Schedule 1 [4] also amends section 35 of the Act to remove the provision that enables a court or an authorised officer when making an AVO that prohibits or restricts the possession of firearms by the defendant to require the disposal of the firearms and the surrender of licences held under the Firearms Act 1996 and the Weapons Prohibition Act 1998.

The reason for this amendment is that we have also amended those two Acts at schedule 2 to provide for the automatic suspension of licences on the making of a provisional AVO by an authorised officer. On suspension of such a licence or permit, the firearms or weapons concerned must be surrendered to the police. Hence, there was no longer a need for section 35 (4) because firearms and weapons must now be automatically surrendered. Schedule 1 [6] amends section 37 of the Act to provide that an ancillary property recovery order may be made by a court or an authorised officer when making an ADV or interim ADV or on the application of a police officer, the protected person or the defendant.

There had been some confusion as to precisely how a property recovery order could be made and upon whose application. Section 37 has been amended to make it clear that an order can be made on an application by a police officer, the protected person or the defendant. Schedule 1 [7] substitutes section 38 of the Act to enable an authorised officer to make an interim AVO, not only for the protection of the person for whom the order is sought but also for the protection of other persons with whom he or she has a domestic relationship. Proposed section 38 provides that an authorised officer making such an order is to include as a protected person under the order any child with whom the person for whose protection the order was sought has a domestic relationship unless satisfied that there are good reasons for not doing so. Reasons for not doing so must be given.

Currently section 38 makes such provision but only in relation to a court making an apprehended violence order. This amendment makes it clear that section 38 does apply in relation to provisional orders and authorised officers, and is not limited to orders made by a court. Schedule 1 [8] makes it clear that a person who applies to a court for an apprehended violence order for his or her own protection may also apply for the order to be made for the protection of another person with whom he or she has a domestic relationship. As a result of the Supreme Court decision of *Peach v Wymer & Ors* in June 2007 there was a question about whether a person applying for an AVO for himself or herself could also make an application for an AVO on behalf of another person with whom he or she had a domestic relationship.

In that case it was found that the individual could not and that only a police officer was authorised to do so. This amendment makes it clear that an individual who is an applicant, as well as a police officer, can make an application for the protection of more than one person, providing that the primary applicant has or has had a domestic relationship with the secondary person in need of protection. Schedule 2.2, 2.3, 2.4 [1] and 2.5 [1] amend the Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998, the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act 1999, the Firearms Act 1996 and the Weapons Prohibition Act 1998 respectively to make it clear that certain references in those Acts to AVOs under the principal Act will include references to apprehended violence orders under repealed part 15A of the Crimes Act 1900.

Schedule 2.4 [2] amends the definition of interim apprehended violence order in section 4 (1) of the Firearms Act 1996 so that the term will mean an interim AVO within the meaning of the principal Act. The result of the amendment is to include provisional orders made by authorised officers in the definition, which will mean that a licence under the Firearms Act 1996 will be suspended automatically under section 23 of that Act on the making of a provisional order against the licence holder. Schedule 2.5 [2] amends the definition of interim apprehended violence order in section 4 (1) of the Weapons Prohibition Act 1998 so that the term will mean an interim apprehended violence order within the meaning of the principal Act. The result of the amendment is to include provisional orders made by authorised officers in the definition, which will mean that a permit under the Weapons Prohibition Act 1998 will be suspended automatically under section 17 of that Act on the making of a provisional order against the permit holder.

These last two amendments are vitally important in order to ensure that protection is provided to victims when they most need it, namely, in the aftermath of the incident that leads to the AVO being applied for. It ensures that the victim is safeguarded against the defendant using his or her firearm or weapon from the earliest stage. This bill is just one more step the Government is taking to ensure that domestic and personal violence is given priority in our legal system. It will assist in ensuring that women and children are adequately protected and feel assured that everything possible is being done to keep them safe. This bill will further strengthen our laws, which protect victims and hold perpetrators to account. I commend the bill to the House.

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

PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYMENT AND MANAGEMENT FURTHER AMENDMENT BILL 2008

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

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! Government business having concluded, the House will now proceed to private members' statements.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

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

CESSNOCK CORRECTIONAL CENTRE PRIVATISATION

GRETA PUBLIC SCHOOL PEDESTRIAN TRAFFIC LIGHTS

Mr KERRY HICKEY (Cessnock) [5.28 p.m.]: I bring two matters to the attention of the House. The first is the privatisation of Cessnock Correctional Centre and the negative impact this will have on the community. The redeployment of the workers is placing them and their families under enormous stress. The guarantee of 12 months wages under the current system is certainly not enough; especially in view of the hundreds of hours of volunteer work correctional centre personnel and their families have contributed to their community. They have worked tirelessly and are the very fabric of the Cessnock community. Correctional officer jobs will be transferred from the public sector to the private sector and, even though the officers have been guaranteed work, if they wish to continue in the public system they will have to travel many miles to work. That is totally unreasonable, and I believe the policy should be seriously looked at.

We have seen the impact of the privatisation of the outside gates area of Long Bay Correctional Centre with one escape already. I am very concerned about the impact on the community of privatising the Cessnock Correctional Centre. We also should look at the programs that are run under the current public system. The programs at Cessnock Correctional Centre are extremely good. The demountable buildings continue to be refurbished. Indeed, in the lead-up to the Olympics thousands of the centre's demountable buildings were refurbished. Cessnock Correctional Centre's rehabilitation programs are extremely good at the moment. However, I am concerned about what will happen with those programs after the centre is privatised. How will rehabilitation take place? If we are to be in control of incarceration in this State we must ensure that our correctional centre reform packages and programs are the best we can possibly have. Ultimately, we are responsible for the reform of these people. By privatising our correctional centres and not being concerned about reform we are turning people against each other in this system.

The privatisation of Cessnock Correctional Centre will have a huge impact on the economy of Cessnock; there is no doubt about that. It will result in a reduction in wages. It is not possible to privatise a correctional centre without having an impact on the economy. The reason for privatising the centre is to make savings for the Government. There are only two ways of making savings: by lowering the standard of the programs already in place or lowering wage levels. We cannot compromise security. If we as a Government are not responsible for those matters, who is? Who is responsible for the reform processes? Who is responsible for the impact on economies? The Cessnock community is totally opposed to the privatisation of Cessnock Correctional Centre.

Secondly, I raise the lack of pedestrian traffic lights at the Greta school. There are pedestrian traffic lights on the New England Highway. The problem is that the New England Highway is constantly congested with traffic and drivers have to push their way through that traffic. As a result the intersection near the school is

becoming quite dangerous. I have already asked the Minister to look at the issue. I hope he will act swiftly to address the problem. Frankly, if one child or one driver is injured at that intersection it will be because of the lack of traffic lights and congestion on the road. The building of the F3 link road should relieve that congestion. That will happen in time, but as a short-term solution we must have a safe intersection for school buses, for mums and dads to pick up their kids, and for children to cross the road safely as pedestrians. I ask the Minister for Roads to look at installing pedestrian traffic lights at that intersection, and I request the Minister for Justice to rethink what he is doing with Cessnock Correctional Centre.

CRONULLA RAIL SERVICE

Mr MALCOLM KERR (Cronulla) [5.33 p.m.]: I raise an issue of concern in my electorate, that is, the rail service from Cronulla. Recently a letter appeared in the *St George & Sutherland Shire Leader* from Hans Stephens of Kirrawee in which he wrote about the "ultra-secure" Cronulla railway station staff car park. Anyone who has seen that car park and the high fence around it would realise why it has been named locally Stalag Cronulla. Mr Stephens stated:

A 30-space car park fenced off from us mere mortals by an eight-foot steel fence adorned on top with spikes.

And then there's 12 ... security cameras.

It also had a 24-hour security guard because the new "state-of-the-art" electronic gates sometimes malfunctioned and stuck in the open position so a guard was needed around the clock to keep out the Cronulla desperadoes.

Mr Steve Whan: Including you?

Mr MALCOLM KERR: I am quite prepared to say that I am not desperate enough to go into that car park. The Parliamentary Secretary can relay that assurance. If that means that the security guard can go off and do other duties we have achieved something. Mr Stephens continued:

I contacted RailCorp querying this seemingly wanton waste of resources and the Transport Minister, Mr David Campbell, informed me that he would get the CEO of RailCorp to answer my questions.

Mr Rob Manson did write to me and said "that like many areas Cronulla railway station has a continuing problem with graffiti, vandalism and theft" ...

Mr Stephens operates a website at www.schoolzonesanta.com. I invite members to have a look at the website. On it he says:

As far as RailCorp is concerned just Google icac railcorp and ask yourself the question, could RailCorp be more diligent in seeing how their budget is spent?

Under this Government's watch the Independent Commission Against Corruption has uncovered something like \$36 million worth of corruption. Mr Stephens said that as he drove past the car park he noticed security cameras, and he noted that all 12 of them were there. He also spoke to the security guard. He has a copy of the letter from Mr Mason in which Mr Mason says that Cronulla railway station has graffiti, vandalism and theft. Of course, those 12 security cameras are not available for mere mortals or the residents to protect their private property. Given that there is a problem with theft and graffiti, as Mr Mason says, I am sure it would be of great assistance if more police were made available for the railway station so that it could be patrolled at all times. The announcement regarding the duplication of the railway was made 6½ years ago. There has been a blow-out in the project of \$106 million, and we are now looking at \$231 million. I fearlessly make the prediction that by the time that duplication—

Mr Steve Whan: Would you rather it wasn't happening?

Mr MALCOLM KERR: I would rather it was happening on time, as the previous Coalition Government's major projects were.

Mr Steve Whan: Including the airport rail link?

Mr MALCOLM KERR: The member for Monaro should read what I have said about the airport rail link, because it was his Government that integrated it, instead of making it a designated airport link. As I said, I fearlessly make the prediction that that duplication will continue to go over budget in terms of taxpayers' money. The Parliamentary Secretary, if he so wishes, can fearlessly deny that that will happen.

ROTARY CITIZENSHIP AWARDS

Mr DAVID HARRIS (Wyang) [5.38 p.m.]: Young people generally cop a bit of a bad wrap in the community. As a school principal I worked on the truism that 10 per cent of kids did the wrong thing, but they took up 90 per cent of your time. It is the same in the general community. The 90 per cent of young people who are good citizens do not attract attention. That is why I was very pleased to attend as special guest the Tenth Annual Rotary Citizenship Awards for 2008. The event is run by Northlakes-Toukley Rotary Club and was held at Halekulani Bowling Club. This is a prestigious event for the youth of this area, acknowledging the students who have displayed outstanding personal qualities in their school communities. Rotary has been around for more than 100 years and the general objectives of Rotary clubs in every country are the same: the development of fellowship and understanding among its members; the promotion of community endeavours; the maintenance of high standards in business and professional practices; and the advancement of international understanding, goodwill, and peace.

Their basic ideal—the ideal of service—is thoughtfulness of and service to others. The Citizenship Awards promote this ideal and it is refreshing to see so many young people in one room at the same time who have already learnt the important value of citizenship in their school community. Seventeen government and non-government primary schools from the area were represented on the night. Each school was able to nominate two year 6 students. These students are outstanding ambassadors not only for their school but also for youth in general. They have the types of qualities at their young age that we as adults often aspire to. They contribute to their school community, they take responsibility for their actions and they genuinely respect fellow students, teachers and the wider community. They are reliable, willing to accept challenges and they are excellent role models.

I am pleased to recognise all the recipients of the Citizenship Awards in the House today: Blue Haven Public School, Nathan Hanneghan and Karly Free; Budgewoi Public School, Jake Summer and Ashlee Faber; Gorokan Public School, Brittney Paki and Ben Cronan, who gave a very good speech on behalf of the other awardees; Gwandalan Public School, Djari Andrews and Amy Bruce, two former students that I worked with who were in year 2 when I knew them and are now in year 6, which is always a bit scary; Kanwal Public School, Jacob Liddle and Jacqueline Garth; Lake Munmorah Public School, Shanaye Flynn and Jason Daniel; Mannering Park Public School, Oliver Twyman and Timbre Olsen; Northlakes Public School, Laura Cox and Sam Keenan; St Brendan's Catholic Primary School, Brittany Koppman and Jade Taylor; St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Andrew Calcagno; Toukley Public School, Tom Best and Isabella Purcell; Tuggerawong Public School, Ben Fox and James Pemberton; Wadalba Community School, Ben Thornton and Ryan Frame; Warnervale Public School, Avril Campbell and Daniel Sylvester; Woongarra Public School, Monique Roussety and Holly Harvey; and Wyee Public School, Logan Salvador and Danika Taylor.

While 11 of those schools are from my electorate, they also share borders with the electorates of Lake Macquarie and Swansea. I also take this opportunity to congratulate the awardees, their families and their teachers who have supported the students in their personal endeavours. Greg Simmonds, the principal of Northlakes Public School, commented on the extremely positive atmosphere of the night. He said the students selected not only demonstrated citizenship qualities but strongly reflected the important values that the New South Wales school system promotes on a daily basis. Greg believes these students are potentially the leaders of the future and the sense of pride displayed by students, their parents and friends who supported them was amazing. I must also mention the choir from St Mary's Catholic Primary School. The choir performed three songs, including a great rendition of *Mamma Mia* and *Hallelujah*—under quite difficult circumstances when their music malfunctioned halfway through the first song. They were so good that the audience and I did not realise that the music had stopped, so sweet were their voices.

It is a pleasure to speak today about the Citizenship Awards organised by Northlakes Toukley Rotary Club, not just because it highlights the exceptional youth in my area but because it recognises the great work the organisation does to serve the local community. I said to the students present on the night that they probably do not understand what getting a Citizenship Award means but it is a great achievement. I said that I hoped they would keep the award and then remember it in 10 or 15 years time. I also told them to look at the eyes of their parents as they received their awards. They would then see the pride of their parents for the good work they had done in raising their children to that point. My last comment was to tell them to always listen to the little voice inside their head called their conscience, to make good decisions and not just follow the rest of the crowd.

GOOD GUYS TWEED COMMUNITY SUPPORT

FIRST FRIDAY EVERY MONTH CLUB TWEED COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Mr GEOFF PROVEST (Tweed) [5.43 p.m.]: Once again, I am 100 per cent for the Tweed. I bring to the attention of the House two organisations in the Tweed that make a remarkable contribution to the local

community. First, I refer to the Good Guys based at Tweed Heads South, who retail a large number of white goods and electrical goods. Good Guys Rory Curtis and his wife, Deb, his marketing manager, Marc Anderson, and his partner, Jenny Perkins, continually support the local community. The Surf Safe Appeal held in Queensland—which is on again this weekend—has been supported by the Good Guys on a statewide basis. The Good Guys recently donated 354 patrol packs to Queensland Surf Live Saving—a great organisation. Over many years the Good Guys have donated around \$9,000 per annum to the Friends of the Pound and another \$9,000 per annum to Tweed Palliative Support Inc. They are now trying to raise \$1.5 million to buy new premises for Tweed Palliative Support Inc.

Last year alone they donated \$5,000 to the Tweed Valley Combined Neighbourhood Watch, of which I am currently the chairman, with 800 active members. The Good Guys donate a percentage of all marking pens sold. They are out there trying to help organisations such as HeartKids, Air Sea Rescue, and Coast Guard Kingscliff, along with every school in the local electorate. Most local kids sports—including football, touch footy, netball, soccer, pony clubs, tennis, cub scouts, et cetera—are supported by them. Rory Curtis and Marc Anderson are always out in the community donating not only money but also their time to a lot of organisations, and I complement them on that. The Good Guys is a small business but they work very hard. It is pleasing to see that organisation do such a wonderful job in support of the community and I hope they continue in the future.

The second organisation I refer to is called the FFEMs—or First Friday Every Month. It is a social club made up of many of the leading ladies of our local community that meets on the first Friday of every month to raise money for local charities. One of the major charities they support is called On Track. Many members would know exactly what On Track is: a community-based support service for people experiencing mental illness, disability, homelessness or extreme disadvantage. FFEMs has around 60 members and some of them are Debbie Conti—the effervescent president of the organisation—Linda Lonsdale, Sharon Tolland, Narrelle Ford, Selina Juratowitch and my lovely wife, Aune Provost. FFEMs work very hard. They often meet on the first Friday of every month at around 11.00 a.m. and are still going at 5.00 p.m. They have done some great things in our area. Apart from the ongoing support of On Track, FFEMs has anonymously donated money to many of the less fortunate people in our community to buy school uniforms. They have no want of their own but look after less fortunate people in the community. For anyone with an injury or anyone who is doing it tough in the Tweed the FFEMs are out there, and I pay tribute to them.

This Christmas FFEMs plan to give away a number of Christmas hampers and start adopting families for Christmas presents. One of the dreams of FFEMs is to spread the good work they do to other areas. They have been talking to a number of community groups on the Gold Coast and in other parts of northern New South Wales. Debbie Conti, Linda Lonsdale and all the others are people from normal walks of life who believe they should give back to the local community. It is very pleasing for me, being 100 per cent committed to the Tweed, to know that two organisations such as the Good Guys and the FFEMs are equally committed to the Tweed. I would go so far as to say that both organisations are 100 per cent for the Tweed. I hope their hard work will continue in the future, particularly that of the FFEMs, because I for one will be supporting them all the way. Once again, I am 100 per cent for the Tweed.

NEWCASTLE INNER CITY BYPASS

Ms SONIA HORNERY (Wallsend—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.48 p.m.]: The twenty-first century techno era is an age of instantaneous gratification. Community expectations have evolved in parallel, and we want a lifestyle of quicker, smoother, faster. I commend the State Labor Government for keeping up with the times with State highway 23, better known as the inner-city bypass stage five from Jesmond to Rankin Park. One way that we try to help members of our community in their techno era quest is by improving our roads. Improved public transport is essential, but we also must recognise that quality roads for commuters are essential for our twenty-first century techno era lifestyles.

Time is precious. How do we ensure that we spend less time commuting and more time doing the things we want to do? We do that by making our roads quieter and safer and of world-class standard, under the custodianship of the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA]. The Government recognises that roads are critical to the State's development. To demonstrate this, we are progressing the inner-city bypass and improving transport links to the Hunter. The bypass is one of the most important long-term projects in the area that the Government has undertaken since the construction of the John Hunter Hospital at Rankin Park. The bypass will ensure improved conductivity between key destinations, such as Bennetts Green, Charlestown, John Hunter Hospital, Jesmond, the University of Newcastle and the Pacific Highway at Sandgate.

John Hunter Hospital is an important landmark in the electorate of Wallsend and the Hunter region and employs thousands of local citizens. Therefore, it must be easily accessible by people in the west who use its services. Car transport or public transport is necessary to attend the hospital and access its services. Newcastle Buses understands the need for greater access and, following a recent review, has added more routes that stop at the hospital. The inner-city bypass provides not only better access to the hospital, but also quicker and less congested access for thousands of students and employees to the University of Newcastle. Recently I was pleased to release an RTA report on community consultation about the preferred route for this section of the bypass. Community consultation achieves the best outcome. I am happy that the RTA took the communication process seriously.

Information sessions were held and the RTA received 38 submissions. Feedback indicated that the community's preferred route is a 3.4 kilometre, four-lane, dual carriageway linking Jesmond to Rankin Park. Through extensive community consultation, the RTA will be able to provide the best outcomes for the whole community. There is no doubt the project will deliver major benefits for our locals, but it poses many challenges in road planning. It will take time to come up with solutions to address the challenges. Those challenges include protecting the local ecology, overcoming difficult terrain and ensuring access to John Hunter Hospital, given that the hospital has the largest regional trauma department in New South Wales.

I make this speech today to keep Hunter residents who are affected by this project abreast of the status of the inner-city bypass. The next step is to finalise the preferred corridor and to assist Newcastle City Council to incorporate the modified route in the local environmental plan. I urge the RTA to continue the community consultation because the community deserves to know what is happening and be involved in the process. I encourage the community to read the report that is available on the RTA's website to gain information about this project. I see strong evidence that Hunter citizens frequently discuss and voice their concerns about this issue when I attend street stalls and meetings of local community groups and read letters to the editor and those sent to my office. My fellow parliamentarians in Hunter electorates—the Minister for the Hunter and the members for Charlestown, for Maitland and for Swansea—acknowledge the infinite contribution that this project will make to their constituents.

KARA YONG, KILLARA HIGH SCHOOL, DAVIDSON ELECTORATE WORK EXPERIENCE

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA (Davidson) [5.53 p.m.]: Kara Yong, a year 10 student from Killara High School, spent this week with our Davidson electorate team as work experience in the demanding world of politics. The Davidson team welcomed her and showed her the basics of political life. Kara has always been interested in history and will study modern history as a year 11 subject. Her love for history sprouted an interest in politics. Kara says:

History is there to document the mistakes or choices made by previous governments and people alike. It is up to us to not repeat the mistakes.

Kara says that is the reason why she studies history as a subject and that history textbooks are like rules books or guidelines to instruct politicians on what they should avoid. On Wednesday morning Kara joined one of my staff members to hand out mini-budget information pamphlets to the general public at Lindfield train station. Kara said:

Many people were rushing off to work with a jacket in one hand, a briefcase in the other and a ticket in their mouth.

Kara said that initially many people were not keen on taking a pamphlet, but once they knew the pamphlet contained political information that was valuable to them they were eager to do so. That exercise also revealed to Kara commonly raised issues and ways in which we can take care of local constituents. Kara learnt that although the Coalition is not in power we still can assist the public in many ways, including making representations to Government. Two days this week Kara attended parliamentary question time. She said that although she had read about the Legislative Assembly in history books and seen it on the news, she still was blown away when she entered the Chamber.

She told me that she loved the participation and the passion shown by so many members about a subject or an issue. Kara has learnt many new things that could only have been experienced first-hand. Kara hopes that one day she can identify and contribute towards solutions to current issues, including environmental, medical and educational issues. At Parliament House Kara met many new people whom she may see in the future if she takes on a political role. She previously thought that being a politician was about making promises you cannot keep, but she now knows that a lot is being done and much good news is unseen and unheard in the media.

When asked about her school, Killara High School, Kara replied that it is a really great school that achieves not only academically but also in extracurricular activities. She tells me that her school, which prospers on the talent and dedication of the students, deserves greater recognition. Just last week Killara High School announced the success of students in the Australia-Asia English competition, with an astounding number of students achieving high distinctions and a ranking in the top 1 per cent of the State. The school also announced that its Stage Concert Band 2 had won a competition involving schools across New South Wales. Kara feels that the school has been bombarded with an increasing number of demountable classrooms as it attracts more students with its high academic record. Kara suggests that the Government allocate more funds for the repair and expansion of the school.

On 26 July the school's theatre suffered significant damage from a fire, which is being treated as suspicious. As investigations continue, students and staff mourn the money that now has to be spent on the repair of the much-loved theatre rather than on a much-needed new building. With two years left at school, Kara is concerned that she will not be attending the school when the Government finally decides to help Killara High School with its new building. I told her that, unfortunately, the Liberal Party will not be in power before 2011, but hopefully something will happen before then. I refer the Minister for Education and Training and the Parliamentary Secretary to previous occasions when matters relating to Killara High School have been raised in the House, and I have sent a letter inviting them to visit the school to gain a better understanding of its resource difficulties. I acknowledge the role that Kara has played in drafting this speech.

COMMUNITY FIRE UNIT PROGRAM

Ms MARIE ANDREWS (Gosford) [5.58 p.m.]: In conjunction with the start of bushfire season on 1 October the NSW Fire Brigades is currently leading a campaign to educate and equip local residents to carry out bushfire preparation activities in their local area. As part of the education campaign, the NSW Fire Brigades identified residential areas that may be at risk. Residents in those areas were advised of the Community Fire Unit [CFU] Program and invited to attend a community information session. Eight information sessions were held at various locations throughout my electorate over the weekends of 15 and 16 November and 22 and 23 November 2008. I was involved in two of those: one held at the north end of the Citadel in Umina Beach on 15 November and the other at Glenrock Parade, Koolewong, on 22 November.

Referring to the sessions held on Saturday 15 November, I mention the attendance of NSW Fire Brigades Director of Specialised Operations, Assistant Commissioner Jim Hamilton; Inspector Brett Davies; Area Commander Metro North, Jim Smith; Deputy Manager Community Fire Units, Terry Munsey; Community Fire Unit Media Officer, Michelle Eager; Community Fire Unit Project Manager, Paula Granelli; and Senior Instructor from the Bushland Urban Interface section of the NSW Fire Brigades, John McNamara, who was the keynote speaker at all the information sessions. I thank the firefighters from Umina station who attended, including station officer Richard Montgomery and firefighters Steve Thomas, Wayne Morris and Darren Hunter.

Special mention must be made also of local residents who were instrumental in calling for a community fire unit to be set up in their local area. I mention particularly Jane Mote, who spearheaded the campaign in the Umina Heights area. I also thank local residents Mike Curley, Judith and Laurie Bennett and their daughter Beverley Airy for their attendance and keen interest. The meeting at Koolewong on 22 November was attended by local NSW Fire Brigades Zone Commander, Superintendent Keith King; Senior Instructor John McNamara; Umina fire station officer Owen O'Boyle; and firefighters from Umina station, Mathew Bull, Shawn Wadeson and William Maclean. A large number of residents also attended, including John Walker, Irma and Fred Beringer, Peter Dewhirst and Stephen Blackett.

The Community Fire Unit Program was established in 1994 following the devastating fires that ravaged New South Wales, and particularly the Central Coast. Today there are 378 community fire units—known as CFUs—with more than 6,250 members across the State. New Year's Day 2006 saw a particularly devastating bushfire rage throughout the bays and Umina areas within my electorate of Gosford. Local residents, supported by both NSW Fire Brigades and the Rural Fire Service, played a vital role in saving numerous properties and ensuring the safety of the community. Unfortunately, despite their very best efforts three homes were lost and one St John Ambulance officer, Mike Rozier, lost his life assisting those with respiratory problems caused by smoke inhalation.

There are currently eight community fire units on the Central Coast, seven of them within the Gosford electorate. There is one in Tascott with 13 members, one in Parkes Bay with 14 members, one in Umina Beach with 20 members and four in Horsfield Bay, making a total of 56 members. Following this latest campaign, the

number of community fire unit members will continue to grow. Zone Commander Superintendent Keith King informs me that there has been an excellent response from the local community, with around 100 people showing an interest in joining a community fire unit over the last two weekends. I extend my congratulations to all those residents for their fine community spirit.

The State Labor Government is committed to the Community Fire Unit Program and provides funding to establish new units and support existing members. This year's budget saw the New South Wales Government commit a record \$578 million to the NSW Fire Brigades. Members of community fire units support local firefighters by putting out spot fires and flying embers in their street, allowing the Fire Brigades and the Rural Fire Service firefighters to concentrate on fighting the intense fire fronts. Community fire units are typically made up of six to 12 local residents who generally live in the same street or within the immediate area.

Each community fire unit is provided with equipment costing approximately \$20,000, which includes a trailer or installed cabinet, firefighting hoses, portable pumps, hydrant standpipes, safety helmets, gloves, smoke masks, goggles, tools, first-aid kits, boots and protective clothing. Members undergo initial training to learn about bushfire behaviour, first aid, water pumping, and using a portable pump, fire hoses and hydrants. Ongoing training is carried out each year to ensure that members' skills are up to date. I would like to thank the NSW Fire Brigades and members of community fire units for their dedication to fire prevention and the protection of homes from bushfires.

DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY INDUSTRIES MURRUMBIDGEE FIELD STATIONS CLOSURES

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI (Murrumbidgee—Deputy Leader of The Nationals) [6.03 p.m.]: This evening I place on the record not just my views but those of the Murrumbidgee electorate with respect to the planned closure of the Department of Primary Industries sites in Murrumbidgee, particularly the Griffith Department of Primary Industries site, Temora and Condobolin. I believe that the decision by the Department of Primary Industries to close these sites is short-sighted, not in the interests of the people who work there and not in the interests of primary industry in New South Wales. After having visited the Condobolin site last week I was informed about the extensive amounts of research they do there. It is the only field station in the semi-arid zone of New South Wales; the only place, therefore, that can do the kind of crop research in that zone with reduced rainfall.

The suggestion that that kind of research can be done elsewhere in places such as Wagga Wagga or Orange is not correct. The climate in those areas is not reflective of what happens in Condobolin and west of Condobolin. The Condobolin site offers a huge amount of research opportunities for a very large section of western New South Wales. At the Department of Primary Industries site the researchers currently have between 7,000 and 8,000 trial plots spanning from Nyngan in the north to Griffith in the south, and everywhere in between. They also have an 800-acre saltbush plot where they are conducting research into the grazing of perennial shrubs. That research site was intended to be used on trials running for decades looking for grazing opportunities in the semi-arid zone of New South Wales as it does not require the use of annual cropping methods. That is the kind of research we need if the climate change we have seen over the past decade continues in New South Wales. Obviously, it is important research that cannot be moved to another site.

It is very important that we keep the Condobolin research station and the staff who are employed there. Condobolin has probably done it tougher than anywhere else in New South Wales after the past 10 years of drought and it is an absolute travesty that the New South Wales Government would take 13 jobs out of there, adding to the jobs that will be lost as part of the rural lands protection boards restructure. The Temora field station has been under pressure for a long time. I have represented Temora for only a short period—the past 18 months—and this is the second time the site has come under pressure of closure. Ian Armstrong, who previously represented Temora in this place, was very successful in getting that closure postponed at least. We hope that the New South Wales Government will reconsider the Temora decision.

The third site that affects my electorate is Griffith. Having visited there and knowing a couple of staff as good friends, I am also very concerned about the proposed changes there. Whilst not a great deal of research is done on the property—the farm itself—important staff are employed in Griffith: three district agronomists, one horticulturist and one irrigation officer, together with regulatory staff, an industry-funded researcher, a technical assistant, and office and site staff. The importance of the work those officers do cannot be understated. I have been given a brief from a couple of the staff about the sort of work they do. They do not just work out of Griffith, they go from Menindee in the west, Lake Cargelligo in the north, Barellan in the east and Jerilderie in

the south—they cover a huge area. They are being asked now, if the Government goes ahead with this plan, to move to Yanco. That is even further away from the areas they service. They have very important roles to play in Hillston, in Colleambally and in the Griffith district.

It is very important that the New South Wales Government changes its mind on this matter. I know that Labor members are concerned about the future of agriculture. We cannot expect our farmers to remain at the cutting edge of agriculture in New South Wales if research is not being done in Condobolin, Temora and other places, or if staff are not readily accessible, as they currently are across those three sites in New South Wales. I again urge the New South Wales Government to change its mind and to keep those stations open.

JUVENILE DIABETES

Mr ALAN ASHTON (East Hills) [6.08 p.m.]: There are things you think you know a fair bit about and there are things you realise you do not know enough about at all. World Diabetes Day was on 14 November and on Tuesday 25 November the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation [JD RF] Kids in the House program took place in the New South Wales Parliament. Children suffering type 1 diabetes came with their parents and met their local members of Parliament to raise awareness of the nature of type 1 diabetes and to seek our support for assistance in finding a cure for this illness.

Before Tuesday's event I had the pleasure of meeting Brad Jones a 15-year-old student at the De La Salle College Revesby Heights and his mother, Pam, who are residents of Panania in my electorate. Brad is an excellent advocate of the need for government and non-government resources to be used to address the desperate need to find a cure for type 1 diabetes. We know that type 2 diabetes can be brought on in middle age by poor diet, excess weight and lack of exercise. However, researchers have yet to find the cause of type 1 diabetes, or juvenile diabetes, and without that a cure cannot be found. We do know that nearly 140,000 Australians have type 1 diabetes. The Premier told the House in question time today about the great advances being made in the treatments and the cures now available in the cardiac, cancer and stroke fields of medicine and many others. It is essential that every effort be made to find the cause and a cure for juvenile diabetes.

What is so upsetting to me about this illness is the title. I am not referring to "type 1" diabetes but to "juvenile" diabetes. This illness attacks young people and their lives are blighted by ongoing and significant health problems. The sacrifice of the parents and carers of diabetic youths must also be acknowledged and appreciated. I have known many sufferers of juvenile diabetes and their determination to live normal, fulfilled lives is an example to all of us who too often complain about the most trivial and inconsequential inconveniences in life. I include myself in that category. I encourage all members to read the commemorative program produced for the 25 November Kids in the House event organised by the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation. The foundation grew out of a dedicated group of parents who joined together to find a cure for type 1 diabetes and its complications through research.

The foundation was established more than 35 years ago and it is now an internationally active organisation. A staggering \$1.3 billion has been directed worldwide to this cause. However, much more money is still needed. In Australia the foundation supports more than 40 research projects, representing a total investment of more than \$60 million. As members know, we are not allowed to use props in the House, but I have with me a picture of Brad Jones, the young advocate who visited me and spoke to me in such moving terms. He asked me to remember him when the House is discussing medical research. He wrote, "I need U to help find a cure for type 1 diabetes." I like the creative way young people use our language. Brad's message to me and other members—printed in his own writing in the commemorative program—is well worth recording in *Hansard*. He wrote:

A cure for me would mean freedom, a new life ... no more needles, no more finger pricks, no longer being different to most other kids my age, no more juggling insulin doses on race days, or trying to manage an insulin pump at the beach.

With one voice these young people have asked us to promise to remember them. I promise Brad Jones, his family and all sufferers of juvenile diabetes that I will remember them, and I am sure I speak for all members in this place when I say that. I congratulate the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation on its initiative in organising Kids in the House to amplify their personal stories about living with type 1 diabetes. It is by telling these personal stories, by reading them and by seeing the photographs of the young people who are affected that we as legislators can far better appreciate the need to do even more than we are already doing. I thank the Speaker, the Hon. Richard Torbay, and the parliamentary staff for their efforts to make Kids in the House such a successful event.

I also thank other members who were involved in the event and who spent as much time as possible with the kids that day. Of course, as Parliamentary Secretary Whan said, members were constrained by some important meetings that were being held at the same time. Given the success of the event, I hope that the Speaker will have the support of all members in making this an annual event and involving more kids, and making it even bigger and more successful. I have taught for many years and helped teachers who have suffered from type 1 diabetes who were not young. Because of that I know about the difficulties they face and the stigma they endured when they had to inject themselves. It was tragic. I encourage all members to support any such event in future and thank all members who supported this one.

MT CANOBOLAS ORCHARDISTS STORM DAMAGE ASSISTANCE

Mr RUSSELL TURNER (Orange) [6.13 p.m.]: I draw to the attention of the House the devastating hail, snow and rain damage that occurred in the orchards around Mount Canobolas on Saturday. Most of the orchardists who were affected had hail netting installed because they were unable to get hail insurance or it was prohibitively expensive. They tried to protect their crops but this freak hail and snowstorm caused a huge weight to build up on the nets, which caused them to tear. Posts were ripped out of the ground and in one case steel cables were snapped. The *Central Western Daily* of Tuesday 25 November carried an article about the storm. It states:

THE damage bill facing local orchardists from the weekend's unexpected snow falls is expected to reach as much as \$7.5 million.

Department of Primary Industries staff yesterday inspected the carnage that the wild weekend weather inflicted on hail netting at the base of Mount Canobolas.

Roughly 150 hectares of the protective netting failed under the weight of 100 millimetres of snow, causing row upon row, acre upon acre, to tear and collapse onto the fruit trees below.

Assuming a replacement cost of around \$50,000 per hectare, the damage bill could reach a staggering \$7.5 million.

Today's *Central Western Daily* states:

THE damage bill facing local orchardists continues to rise as the true extent of the devastation caused by weekend storms becomes more apparent.

Well known local primary producer Guy Gaeta will lose a staggering \$150,000 in income this year after hail and sleet peppered his 14 hectares of cherries and apples.

The fruit, some of which was due to be picked this Monday, is all but worthless thanks to the damage, Mr Gaeta said yesterday.

"The whole district is like it, the more people you talk to the worse it seems to get for everyone," he said.

"In the 22 years I've been here we have had just three years that have been hail-free. The damage this year is enough to make you seriously consider walking away from picking the crop. I've never walked away from a crop before but I'm telling you this time could be different."

Mr Gaeta is one of dozens of orchardists and farmers in a massive area stretching from Mount Canobolas to Lucknow that have been affected by last weekend's unseasonable sleet, snow and hail.

The extent of the financial loss doesn't stop at just \$150,000, with tens of thousands of dollars in wages that would have gone to fruit pickers also now non-existent.

"Everybody loses, it's not just us," Mr Gaeta said.

An application to provide natural disaster assistance to affected orchardists has gained the support of NSW Primary Industries Minister Ian Macdonald.

Mr Macdonald has now forwarded the application to treasury and told NSW Parliament it has his full support.

I hope that is correct. These orchardists, not only those who had hail nets, have suffered enormous damage. One of the issues for those who had hail netting is getting the curtains, wires and posts out of the way so that they can spray the damaged trees to avoid disease getting into the broken limbs and damaged fruit. If they do not they could face further problems next year. I call on the Minister to expedite assistance to the fruit growers devastated by last weekend's hail, snow, rain and wind in the Mount Canobolas area. I call on the Treasurer to make the earliest possible and favourable response to the Minister for Primary Industries' recommendation that disaster relief funding be made available. I call on the Minister for Primary Industries and the Premier to ensure that the widest criteria is used when assessing all applications from fruit growers in the Mount Canobolas area affected by this devastating storm.

Mr STEVE WHAN (Monaro—Parliamentary Secretary) [6.18 p.m.]: I thank the member for Orange for raising this very important issue. I assure him that as Parliamentary Secretary for Primary Industries I will tell the Minister that he has done so. The Hon. Mick Veitch in the other place, who comes from Young, has also mentioned the severe damage that has been inflicted, particularly on cherry crops. Orchardists have had problems with splitting and other damage to the fruit, even though—as the member for Orange pointed out—they had erected netting to protect the crops from hail.

In some cases the netting was not able to withstand the overwhelming pressure caused by the storm. It is tragic to see nature affecting our primary producers in such a way, particularly in areas that have suffered from drought for so long. Producers in the Young area were looking forward to an excellent crop of cherries this year. No doubt that was the case in the Orange area as well. It is terrible that the crops of those primary producers have been so damaged. I will pass on to the Minister the comments of the member for Orange. I am sure the Government will do all it can to assist those producers.

SYDNEY CITY TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms CLOVER MOORE (Sydney) [6.19 p.m.]: Inner Sydney is integral to Australia's economic and environmental sustainability. It is the most dense and active area in Australia, with the highest concentration of employment, the highest number of visitors and a growing residential population. Sydney's central business district produces 8 per cent of Australia's gross domestic product and 25 per cent of that of New South Wales. A few weeks ago a Sydney commuter wrote defiantly in the letters pages of the *Sydney Morning Herald* that, despite global warming and despite dire congestion, he would continue to use his car. He said, "It's better to sit in a traffic jam than tolerate the permanent squalor offered by public transport." The existing network is bulging at the seams: peak-hour crowding at Town Hall station is reaching dangerous levels and buses are arriving at inner-city bus stops already full.

It is predicted that by 2036 Sydney's population will have increased to six million. Well before then Barangaroo will add another 22,000 workers to the central business district, and Green Square in the south will have an extra 7,000 workers and 28,000 residents. If these workers and residents are forced into private cars, the urban congestion of the future does not bear thinking about. Already, avoidable congestion costs us more than \$3.5 billion a year. The Bureau of Transport Economics expects that to rise to \$8 billion per year by 2020 under a do-nothing scenario. Under that same do-nothing scenario, greenhouse emissions in the next two years will be 47 per cent higher than 1990 levels, and 68 per cent higher than 1990 levels by 2030.

We cannot afford not to invest in better transport systems. Substantial investment in public infrastructure must start now to keep us moving in a sustainable way so that Sydney and New South Wales can continue to prosper. We must restructure our economy and the way we build and inhabit our major population centres to better adapt to a low-carbon future. The Commonwealth Government's Infrastructure Australia funding program presents an unprecedented opportunity to provide long-term, sustainable infrastructure to support Sydney's future growth as one of the world's leading green cities. It is urgently needed to help Sydney achieve a shift to public transport, cycling and walking as alternatives to using private cars, which will reduce congestion and greenhouse gas emissions.

In its submission to Infrastructure Australia, the City of Sydney identified three major transport projects that would improve the productivity, sustainability and liveability of the nation's most significant economic asset. The proposed projects would reinvent the central business district and revitalise its forgotten western edge, link the new southern centre of Green Square to key transport interchanges, and develop a network of green corridors linking inner-Sydney villages and hubs. These projects would contribute to a connected pedestrian network and integrated public transport system, and include a city light rail loop, a Green Square light rail service, and an inner-Sydney cycle network. A city light rail loop would link the central business district to the major renewal site, Barangaroo and industry clusters in the south and west of the city. George Street would become a pedestrian, cycle and light rail corridor to reduce the current levels of congestion on this historic street.

Costings show that a city loop could be provided for about \$100 million, costing as little as \$10 million a year to run which, in light of congestion costs, is a very worthwhile investment for Sydney's future. A Green Square light rail service would support the development of Australia's largest urban renewal project—Green Square—by linking it to the key transport interchanges of Redfern and Central as well as the Broadway education precinct and the Surry Hills activity hub. The service would offer high-quality, convenient mobility for residents and workers, and could be progressively expanded to feed other cross-regional transport services.

An inner-Sydney cycle network that is safe enough for children to use, with priority for separated dedicated cycleways would provide a viable alternative to relying on private cars and overcrowded public transport services.

Together with 15 inner-city councils and the Department of the Environment and Climate Change, the city has identified a potential network of 245 kilometres of additional bike lanes within existing road corridors, including 160 kilometres of separated cycleways and 70 kilometres of shared paths. In light of both global warming and the current financial crisis, business as usual is not an option. The world financial crisis marks a real turning point, and the shift to a green economy may be faster than we ever thought possible. If we seize the opportunity now, it will provide a sound foundation for a greener, more sustainable future—and our point of competitive advantage with the rest of the world. I call on both the State and Federal governments to invest in major infrastructure projects for inner Sydney to significantly reduce congestion and transport-related greenhouse gas emissions.

WRITTEN OFF MOTOR VEHICLE FRAUD

Mr GREG PIPER (Lake Macquarie) [6.24 p.m.]: I draw to the attention of the House that some New South Wales car buyers are being tricked into paying full market price for cars that have been written off in other States. Mr Graham Gamer, a resident of Lake Macquarie and past president of the Motor Traders Association, has raised the problem with me. From his description it is easy to conclude that there is a serious problem, and action by the Government is imperative. Car buyers in New South Wales are falling victim to deceptive sales practices on cars that have been written off in other States and subsequently repaired. The problem stems from the fact that the New South Wales Register of Encumbered Vehicles [REVS], which is widely used, is not linked to records kept in other States. The REVS system has no way of knowing when vehicles have been written off interstate.

It is the history of a vehicle that largely influences its resale value, and all too often this vital piece of information has not been disclosed to purchasers. It is possible to avoid this trap, but so far the New South Wales Government has not helped. For \$13.50 a resident can get a REVS report that only shows a car's history in this State. By comparison, it costs \$14.05 to get from a private company in Queensland a V-Check report that shows information from all States. The extra 55¢ would be a good investment for anyone aware of the option, given that it can prevent an error costing many thousands of dollars. Over recent years there have been advertising campaigns for REVS, which is widely known and utilised by the public. With incomplete information leading to costly errors, this can now be seen as an inferior service at best.

An example quoted by Mr Gamer and reported in the *Newcastle Herald* on 14 November is a Toyota four-wheel drive, which was given the all clear in a REVS check and purchased for \$20,000. A subsequent V-Check showed that the vehicle had been written off in Queensland. When revealed, this history reduced the estimated value to about half the purchase price. The owner of this vehicle has potentially lost \$10,000 just for relying on REVS, as the New South Wales Government's advertising has told him to do. According to Mr Gamer, this has happened to thousands of other buyers across the State, including motor dealers as well as private buyers. Mr Gamer reports considerable losses suffered by his own company.

Selling vehicles without disclosing that they have been classified as wrecks is a fraud—one that is costing many people many thousands of dollars. This fraud is aided by the system run by the New South Wales Office of Fair Trading, which does not currently communicate with other State agencies. This flawed system is also supported by the Roads and Traffic Authority, which will issue a new registration for a car from interstate without even checking its history. The Roads and Traffic Authority's stamp duty and transfer fee for this service is 3 per cent of the sale price plus \$26. On a \$20,000 vehicle the Roads and Traffic Authority takes \$626 without investigating the history of the vehicle—not bad for the Roads and Traffic Authority, but not real flash for the owner! This is on top of a registration fee, typically \$383, a blue slip costing \$55, a green slip in the order of \$400 and new number plates for \$36.

Mr Gamer suggests that the Roads and Traffic Authority should perform its own interstate checks on vehicles that it re-registers. Such a check seems inherently sensible and I believe that a failure to do so may well be a breach of the authority's, and hence the Government's, duty of care to the people of New South Wales. One of the numerous costs in re-registering a car is an engineer's report—a blue slip. While this report gives information on whether the vehicle is roadworthy, it is based only on a physical examination. It is not an appropriate method to report on the accident and insurance history of a vehicle. This would best be achieved by government departments using the information available on existing databases.

It was also reported in the Newcastle *Herald* on 14 November that the Roads and Traffic Authority will introduce an improved information system relating to vehicles with New South Wales registration. I am not familiar with the changes to be introduced, but if they are restricted to existing New South Wales registrations they will fall far short of meeting one of the public's greatest needs. The Government is unwittingly operating a system that appears to be subject to fraud affecting too many unwary people. I call on the Minister for Roads and the Minister for Fair Trading to take the minimal effort required to close this loophole.

NO-INTEREST LOAN SCHEME

Ms PRU GOWARD (Goulburn) [6.28 p.m.]: The Highlands Community Centre in Bowral is an oasis for people who are experiencing difficulties in their lives. Nikki McAdoo, staff and volunteers offer support and advocacy. They facilitate emergency housing, emergency relief, youth services and income tax help. They also offer the No-Interest Loan Scheme [NILS]. Many low-income households face a major problem if they need to buy an essential item but do not have savings and cannot obtain unaffordable credit. What do they do when it is the middle of summer and the refrigerator breaks down for the last time? People who can afford to replace the refrigerator do so, but if money is short that is not possible.

That is where NILS comes in. Successful applicants are given a loan that they pay back at a manageable rate of possibly \$40 a fortnight, with no hidden costs or backbreaking interest rates. To be a NILS facilitator, an organisation must first become accredited to operate the scheme and must also secure capital funding. In 2004 the Highlands Community Centre secured funding of \$50,000 from the National Australia Bank and on Christmas Eve of that same year wrote its first NILS cheque, which was used by a local woman with five children to buy a washing machine—for several months she had been doing the family washing in the bath. On Christmas Eve this year, just four years later, the Highlands Community Centre will be forced to close the NILS service.

The Highlands Community Centre has successfully auspiced NILS by securing an area assistance grant over two years to use for necessary administration. When that funding was exhausted, a one-off grant for six months was secured from the Office of Fair Trading and when that ceased, NILS was administered using philanthropic funds. That finishes at the end of this year. In September 2008 the then Minister for Fair Trading, Linda Burney, announced funding of more than \$600,000 over the next two years to organisations across New South Wales to administer NILS. The Highlands Community Centre spent considerable time putting together an application for its share of that funding to enable it to continue administering the scheme. The application was unsuccessful and it is now left high and dry, unable to continue this service to help people in need in the Wingecarribee and Goulburn local government areas.

Ms McAdoo and I understand that the grant cannot be stretched to meet the needs of all existing and would-be NILS providers in New South Wales, but it seems to me to be a gross error in judgement to close down an existing service in favour of starting a new one elsewhere, which seems to be what is happening. In response to a letter from the Highlands Community Centre querying its unsuccessful application, Mr Gavin Blatchford, Manager, Community and Industry Grants Branch for the Commissioner for Fair Trading, listed the priorities for securing funding. They included applications for existing NILS that operate in high-need local government areas. According to Mr Blatchford, successful applicants are categorised as having more than 30 per cent of the local government population reliant on Centrelink payments. The Wingecarribee shire qualifies as such.

Furthermore, of the \$610,000 allocated by the New South Wales Government to administer NILS, \$139,000 has not yet been allocated. Where is that money? Where will it be allocated and how? At a time when more and more families are in financial distress, why is \$139,000 being withheld? Community centres, such as the Highlands Community Centre, run on the smell of an oily rag and the amazing generosity of their employees, who usually work far more hours than they receive payment for. A host of volunteers, who are unstinting with their time and care, operate the phones, do the filing and generally pick up the slack in any way they can. These centres spend endless hours filling out forms and writing submissions for funding to help them limp along, before repeating the process 12 months later.

The Highlands Community Centre has more than proven its worth and its ability to auspice NILS, but still it seems that it is not enough. The need for the scheme has been demonstrated, staff are familiar with the process and the capital funding is secure. Without funding, the local NILS service will be forced to close and another one will start up in another area. It, too, will be forced to beg again in two years and, on what seems like

the luck of the draw, may or may not be successful in gaining additional funding. It is a classic case of robbing Peter to pay Paul. Meanwhile, successful services close, expertise is lost and people who are in most need come away empty handed.

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

Private members' statements noted.

The House adjourned at 6.33 p.m. until Friday 28 November 2008 at 10.00 a.m.
