

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Thursday 26 March 2009

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

The Speaker read the Prayer and acknowledgement of country.

OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR OF THE INDEPENDENT COMMISSION AGAINST CORRUPTION

Report

Mr Speaker tabled, pursuant to section 78 of the Independent Commission Against Corruption Act 1988, the report entitled "Report of an audit of applications for and execution of search warrants by the Inspector of the Inspector of the Independent Commission Against Corruption", dated March 2009.

Ordered to be printed.

PARKING SPACE LEVY BILL 2009

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

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of Motions

General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) given.

BIOFUEL (ETHANOL CONTENT) AMENDMENT BILL 2009

Agreement in Principle

Debate resumed from 25 March 2009.

Mr GEOFF PROVEST (Tweed) [10.10 a.m.]: I speak on the Biofuel (Ethanol Content) Amendment Bill 2009. The objects of this bill are to triple the volumetric ethanol mandate of New South Wales to 6 per cent in January 2010, phase out regular unleaded petrol by July 2011 and introduce a 2 per cent volumetric biodiesel mandate, which will rise to 5 per cent in 2012 when supply is available. The Liberal-Nationals Coalition does not oppose this legislation. As stated yesterday by the Leader of The Nationals, the bill highlights some critical issues that need to be addressed to achieve those mandates. Ethanol production in Australia has doubled over the past two years. In November 2007 four ethanol plants operated with a capacity total of 245 million litres per year. Current biodiesel capacity is 246 million litres from five plants. I will focus on the failure of the Government to supply funding to investigate further research into the ethanol two-phase production.

Recently, I spoke extensively with Robert Quirk, who is a colleague of mine. Robert is the Australian representative on the Roundtable for Sustainable Sugar Cane Production and has just been reappointed to that board. He has just returned from Brazil. Brazil uses a large volume of ethanol in its fuel system. Robert informed me that Holden exports its Statesman vehicles to Brazil, but they require changes to the carburettor and fuel lines because of corrosion caused by ethanol. Brazil produces just one litre of ethanol from which it gets six to eight litres of a deoxygenated liquid known as vanass. Currently, Brazil ships deoxygenated liquid through open canals for storage in certain areas in that region. Under current New South Wales environmental proposals the North Coast sugar industry could not participate in ethanol production due to the large amount of vanass it would create. There is no safe way to dispose of it.

Queensland has only one plant at Sarina, which spends large amounts of money to store this deoxygenated liquid before it goes through a rehabilitation process. The Sarina plant has produced ethanol since 1945. This is the big difference between our production of ethanol and the rest of the world. Brazil disposes of

this product into many of its rivers. We all know that deoxygenated water in rivers results in large fish kills. The United States Government currently is spending large amounts of money to investigate the manufacture of ethanol through using plants such as switchgrass, which is virtually a weed. The United States is trying to harvest that plant to create ethanol from it.

New South Wales currently uses two methods to produce ethanol. For the first method, sugar crops or starch are grown and ethanol is produced from the fermentation process. For the second method, plants are grown that naturally produce oils like *Jatropha* and algae. These oils are heated to reduce their viscosity, after which they are used directly as fuel for diesel engines. The problem for the Tweed electorate is that sugarcane production at Condong and Broadwater has invested heavily in partnership with the New South Wales Government and Federal Government in cogeneration. Currently all of our biogas is used in cogeneration. Production at Condong currently supplies electricity for around 45,000 homes. It is a very environmentally friendly process. We also use our tertiary sewage effluent for cooling.

No jobs will be created in northern New South Wales through the increased demand for ethanol. However, within our area is Southern Cross University, which has set up a biofuel cooperative research centre. It is an extraordinarily important centre, but after discussions with key personnel it was revealed that the centre lacks funding for further research because sugarcane is not a viable alternative for ethanol production, as it is in many other countries. We need money for biomass research and for the development of dedicated energy crops and waste stream utilisation. The Feedlot Association opposes the increase to the ethanol mandate because it believes the 10 per cent mandate will divert 45 per cent of New South Wales grain away from food production in time of drought. The last thing we want to do is force up food prices.

A similar thing is occurring in America with much of its corn product being diverted into ethanol. There has been a steep increase of nearly 100 per cent in corn exports to Mexico. That has had a negative effect for the United States. The ethanol mandate is good for the environment, and we need to build up this industry. Members have spoken highly of the positive effect for the environment. We need to ensure the supply of product to enable ethanol production. I live very close to the Queensland border. Similar initiatives have been undertaken in Queensland. The Queensland Government has handled this issue far better by applying a number of resources. Ethanol maidens at petrol stations hand out stickers to patrons. Acceptance by the driving fraternity and users of ethanol in Queensland is far greater than in New South Wales. It has been done in Queensland; it is not hard.

We must increase our research into turning other food or plant products, such as cellulose, into ethanol. The Brazilian example is a clear indicator that we need to research the issue properly and move away from using only sugarcane. We have no spare sugarcane within New South Wales, particularly in the northern region and in my electorate because the biomass generator is used for electricity. While I do not oppose this legislation, I would like the Government to provide proper funding and infrastructure so the industry can be developed in a sustainable way and promote market acceptance. That is what Queensland did. A number of players in the industry have expressed these views to me, mostly from the cane industry, which has experienced fairly hard times recently. In conclusion, I reiterate that further funding must be allocated to research. Otherwise, this process will result in dire consequences for the future of New South Wales.

Mr FRANK TERENCEZINI (Maitland) [10.19 a.m.]: I support the Biofuel (Ethanol Content) Amendment Bill 2009. The bill implements the second phase of the Government's strategy to promote the production and use of renewable biofuels in New South Wales. This second phase mandates a sustainable level of production of first-generation biofuels that is optimal for use in the current vehicle fleet. It will establish competitive ethanol and biodiesel markets that will provide the stable base on which New South Wales can build to become a leader in the rapidly developing second-generation technologies and feedstocks.

In my electorate of Maitland a local company, Biodiesel Industries Australia [BIA] at Rutherford, makes a substantial contribution to the supply of biodiesel in New South Wales. The BIA site has been operating for the past five years to become a leader in this technology. It has a current capacity for 20 million litres per annum and employs up to 32 people, both directly and indirectly. I have visited the site. It is an excellent operation and it has also gained approval from many stakeholders in the industry. The company is continually working on developing new processes and products, and works with both rural and academic communities.

The volumes of ethanol and biodiesel that the bill mandates can be delivered sustainably because their production can be totally integrated with food production. These biofuels will be produced sustainably, because

at current oil and biofuel feedstock prices no biofuel producer can afford to waste any of the energy or nutritional value of the feedstock—it will all be transformed into energy, food, livestock feed or other valuable products. And these biofuels must be produced sustainably. The bill also introduces a new requirement that to be counted under the mandate the biofuels must meet a sustainability standard. The sustainability standards will be detailed in the regulations so they can be kept up to date. I will address this issue further later.

The Manildra Group's Nowra plant is the largest ethanol plant in Australia and is part of an integrated grain processing facility that produces gluten, starch, glucose and liquid carbon dioxide, as well as ethanol for fuel industrial and beverage use. The proposed National Biofuels Group soy processing plant at Port Kembla will produce not only biodiesel but also soy meal to replace the hundreds of thousands of tonnes that are imported annually for poultry and pig food. All other plants that are currently being considered for development in New South Wales integrate food and fuel production to derive the maximum value from the feedstocks used.

A number of environmental benefits will flow from increased biofuels usage. Biofuels will reduce greenhouse emissions by replacing fossil fuel with renewable fuel produced from biomass. The greenhouse benefits of biofuels are highly project dependent. The actual greenhouse outcomes depend on the feedstocks used, the processing technology and energy sources, the allocation of greenhouse impacts between the various co-products, and the transport distances and modes involved in the movement of inputs and product. However, based on research done by the CSIRO it is estimated that replacing all unleaded petrol with E10 will reduce the total greenhouse emissions from all petrol-engine vehicles by about 2 per cent. Replacing 5 per cent of our diesel with biodiesel will reduce the total greenhouse emissions from diesel-fuelled vehicles by around 1.3 per cent. The proposed mandates will together reduce carbon dioxide emissions by about 450,000 tonnes per year—that is equivalent to taking 1,900 buses and trucks and 77,000 light vehicles off our roads.

Biofuels also burn cleaner than petroleum fuels, reducing toxic emissions, especially carbon monoxide and particulates. Fine particles are a major cause of illness and death and are responsible for 97 per cent of the health impacts of emissions from vehicles. Federal Government trials have recently demonstrated that E10 petrol will reduce fine particle emissions from petrol-engine vehicles by an average of 33 per cent. Five per cent or B5 blend biodiesel will reduce particle emissions from diesel-engine vehicles by 4 per cent. These reductions are estimated to produce health benefits worth at least \$22 million per annum in Sydney alone. The fuel companies can also gain approval for higher biodiesel blends such as a 20 per cent or B20 blend. If much of the volumetric biodiesel mandate requirement is delivered by blending B20 for use in buses and trucks in the metropolitan areas, the reductions in particulate emissions and the consequent health benefits will be much greater again.

I return to sustainability standards. To be eligible to be counted under the mandate the biofuels will be required to comply with sustainability standards. The details of the sustainability standards will be promulgated in the regulations to permit them to be kept up to date with community expectations and international standards. The details of these sustainability standards will be finalised in consultation with stakeholders, including the Federal Government because of international trade issues. Our preferred position is to recognise that the sustainability of Australian biofuels plants is fully assessed during the environmental assessment processes. Domestic producers operating in accordance with the conditions of their approval and any environmental licences should be considered sustainable. Other countries may not apply the same rigorous environmental protections. Imported biofuels will be required to be certified as sustainable in accordance with international standards.

The Roundtable on Sustainable Biofuels is a Swiss-based international initiative bringing together farmers, companies non-government organisations, experts, governments and intergovernmental agencies concerned with ensuring the sustainability of biofuels production and processing. The roundtable's statement of principles and criteria, scheduled to be finalised by June this year, will provide a comprehensive, internationally accepted standard for sustainable biofuels covering legality; consultation, planning and monitoring; climate change and greenhouse gas; human and labour rights; rural and social development; food security; conservation and biodiversity; soil; water; air pollution; economic efficiency, technology and continuous improvement; and land rights. Subject to satisfactory finalisation, these principles and criteria of the Roundtable on Sustainable Biofuels will provide a suitable standard to be met by imported biofuels. The proposed standards are not in any way intended to impede international trade, but simply recognise that Australian biofuels projects are already subjected to rigorous assessment.

With regard to the long-term strategy, we are positioning New South Wales to lead the development of second-generation biofuels in this country. Through the Office of Biofuels and departments such as State and

Regional Development, Primary Industries, and Environment and Climate Change, we continue to work with stakeholders in the industry developing proposals for sustainable production using current technology as well as pursuing new technologies and feedstocks. The New South Wales Government already funds research into cellulosic ethanol technologies at a number of tertiary institutions in the State. These technologies will permit any plant matter, agricultural and forestry residues, and even municipal green waste to be converted into ethanol.

We have assisted Ethanol Technologies Limited to establish a cellulosic ethanol pilot plant at Harwood, on the North Coast. We are working with Southern Cross University, in Lismore, to develop a cooperative research centre for bioenergy. We are assisting a number of companies investigating sites adjacent to coal-fired power stations where there is potential to capture the carbon dioxide emissions and use them to grow algae for biodiesel and aviation fuel. This technology has the potential to capture the carbon dioxide emissions at one-tenth of the cost of geosequestration. We will develop a 10-year biofuels strategy to continue to pursue these second and subsequent generation technologies, and will review the strategy every three years to ensure that it remains abreast of current developments and global conditions.

The Biofuel (Ethanol Content) Amendment Bill 2009 builds on what the Government has achieved since 2007. It takes us to an optimal level of biofuels for the current vehicle fleet and first-generation biofuels technologies, and positions us to lead in the development of second-generation biofuels technologies and feedstocks. Through this bill the Rees Government is delivering on its commitment to drive the development of a long-term, sustainable biofuels industry in New South Wales by generating investment and jobs in regional areas such as the Hunter and my electorate of Maitland. The new mandate sends a strong signal to current and potential biofuel producers and investors, and to the fuel industry that the Government is serious about promoting sustainable transport fuels in New South Wales. I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK (South Coast) [10.29 a.m.]: I will speak briefly about the Biofuel (Ethanol Content) Amendment Bill 2009, which seeks to triple New South Wales volumetric ethanol mandate to 6 per cent in January 2010, with the phasing out of regular unleaded petrol by July 2011, and to introduce a 2 per cent volumetric biodiesel mandate that will be increased to 5 per cent in 2012 when supply is available. On 22 June 2007 I spoke in this House in support of the Biofuel (Ethanol Content) Bill 2007 and in particular outlined the benefits to the environment of seeking alternative renewable and sustainable fuel sources, such as ethanol.

This morning I will not add to those remarks because we know the benefits to the environment of ethanol, and I do not wish to delay further the passage of this bill. However, the object of the 2007 bill was to mandate a minimum 2 per cent ethanol content for total petrol sales in New South Wales by requiring primary wholesalers of petrol to ensure that the volume of ethanol sold by them in the form of petrol-ethanol blend is at least 2 per cent of the volume of all petrol sold. At that time there was a threat to name and shame those who did not comply, but we find that the Government is not committed to its own 2007 legislation. Indeed, under freedom of information we have discovered that the Government, despite its spin and rhetoric about ethanol, has failed to ensure that its own targets have been met. They could not be met, and the Government should have known that. No investigators have been appointed, nor have penalty notices been served for breaches of the mandate. Therefore, how can we have any faith that this bill before the House will be enacted, or can be enacted?

Obviously the original legislation was rushed through, but not thought through. Its mandates could not be reached due to some supply issues, and those supply issues can be traced to the Manildra plant in Bomaderry. The plant was part of my electorate in 2003, but the boundaries changed and it is now in the electorate of Kiama. The member for Kiama started to talk about the issues concerning Manildra at approximately the same time he discovered that the boundaries were about to change, and, surprisingly, he became an advocate for ethanol! Notwithstanding some supply issues that occurred in 2008, in reality the Government has done very little to ensure that ethanol is promoted or to ensure that its own mandates, when possible, are achieved.

It should be noted that the Queensland Government has allocated funds to promote the use of ethanol, including the appointment of an ethanol ambassador. Obviously the Queensland Government regards ethanol as an important issue. Queensland is the State that is leading the country in ethanol promotion at the moment. In contrast, the New South Wales Government has been pretty half-hearted in its attempts to promote ethanol and to build a sustainable ethanol industry in New South Wales. In particular, the member for Kiama must be feeling a little embarrassed today. I noted that during his speech last night he was not too embarrassed to continue the self-promotion regarding ethanol while pretending to be its champion. The mandated targets of the 2007 bill,

about which the member for Kiama spoke so stridently and strongly, have not been met. Some of the comments made by the member in 2007 should be noted because they are pertinent to the debate. There is no doubt that some of his comments were very pertinent:

The Biofuel (Ethanol Content) Bill 2007 is an important step forward in the history of the biofuel initiative. New South Wales is now leading the nation when it comes to promoting renewable alternative fuels.

We now know that that is not the case. Queensland is leading the country in the promotion of ethanol; New South Wales never did. The member for Kiama was incorrect. He went on to state:

The bill fulfils the Premier's election commitment—a commitment I well remember—when he visited Bomaderry and promised people on the South Coast and the people of New South Wales that the Labor Government was keen and willing to do something about this issue and not just talk about it.

The Government has done only that—talk about it. The Government has done very little to make sure that biofuels is a sustainable industry in New South Wales. The member for Kiama also referred to the 2 per cent mandate being a good start. That is true; it was a good start. He went on to state:

[It is] one that will send a strong signal to investors, producers and motorists alike. The 2 per cent mandate works out to be approximately 125 million litres of fuel sold in New South Wales each year. It is about a fourfold increase from what is sold now.

He then stated:

The supply is there and we are confident that motorists, families and businesses will respond in kind.

Importantly, the mandate is workable.

It turns out that the supply was not there and the mandate was not workable. The legislation passed in 2007 was not workable—far from it. There was no rigour behind the introduction of that legislation in 2007. I have to say I do not have a great deal of confidence in the current legislation before the House, although the Opposition will not oppose the bill. It should be noted that it was the Leader of The Nationals, Andrew Stoner, who introduced an Opposition bill to promote ethanol, but that was opposed by the Government on party political lines. Yet, now the Government certainly is promoting the benefits of ethanol. The member for Kiama also stated:

Coalition members in this Chamber should focus on convincing their Federal colleagues to do more for the Australian ethanol industry.

I wonder what the current Federal Government is doing about promoting the ethanol industry in Australia. I know that the Federal Government has other problems and that those problems certainly are challenging and different from the problems it faced in 2007, but the member for Kiama was being political when he called on the former Federal Coalition Government to do something about the ethanol industry. We now see that the current Federal Labor Government is doing very little, I suspect. I certainly have not heard any mention of its achievements. The member for Kiama continued:

The Government is looking at higher levels of ethanol, and the Premier's E10 task force is investigating this right now.

I call on the member for Kiama and the Premier to give some information about the results of the E10 task force. I have not heard anything about it, and I would like to know what the E10 task force achieved—not much, I suspect. The member for Kiama also said in 2007, "The time for talk about ethanol is over; it is time for action." The Government has been forced to introduce this amending legislation because it was all talk in 2007 and took very little action to promote alternative fuels in New South Wales. The Government's attitude was just to come into this Chamber, introduce legislation, and do very little about it. There is no point in introducing legislation that is not going to work and is not feasible, but that is something that the Labor Government often does. It often happens that legislation has to be amended because it simply was not workable when it was introduced. I hope that is not the case with the bill before the House. I refer to the concluding remarks made by the member for Kiama in 2007:

I commend the bill to the House, and I welcome the Coalition's support—albeit confused ...

Who is confused now? I am sure the member for Kiama is very confused and humiliated. The Coalition has always supported ethanol. I notice the presence in the Chamber of a former Leader of the Opposition who drives a car that runs on E85.

Mr Peter Debnam: Yes.

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK: He has promoted ethanol all along. He, the current Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of The Nationals have been great advocates for this product. The Opposition will not oppose the legislation.

Ms CLOVER MOORE (Sydney) [10.37 a.m.]: I will add briefly to debate on the Biofuel (Ethanol Content) Amendment Bill 2009, which increases the current 2 per cent mandate for ethanol content in total sales to 4 per cent in 2010, 6 per cent in 2011, and provides for increases to reach 10 per cent by July 2011. The bill also introduces a 2 per cent biodiesel mandate, to reach 5 per cent in 2012. I welcome the benefits of biofuels, including the reduced impacts from peak oil, reduced reliance on countries experiencing political instability, new opportunities for New South Wales farmers, air quality improvements, and lower emissions from burning fuel. However, biofuels are associated also with problems that must be addressed if their role in our economy is to increase.

Alarmingly, expansions in the use of biofuels are widely reported to be contributing to reductions in access to food supplies, particularly for the world's poorest communities, as it becomes more profitable to convert food crops to fuel. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations notes that international food prices have been soaring since late 2006. It notes that poor households that spend large parts of their income on food are worst hit by increasing prices of basic food items, with households headed by females being most vulnerable. Last December the organisation identified 33 countries in food crisis that require external assistance. While other factors, such as drought and rising petrol prices, are also driving up food prices, the World Bank notes that researchers agree that the impact of biofuels on food prices is significant. In fact, in a draft paper the World Bank has suggested that biofuels are responsible for 75 per cent of food price increases.

Last year, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called for a comprehensive review of biofuel policies in response to this problem. An International Food Policy Research Institute report states that drastic expansions to biofuel production from maize will increase food prices by 71.8 per cent; from sugar, by 26.6 per cent; and from wheat, by 20 per cent. The problem is so serious that Jean Ziegler, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, has declared biofuels a "crime against humanity" and in 2007 called for a five-year ban on biofuels. Oxfam declared biofuels "another inconvenient truth" and World Vision Australia has called for an end to all biofuel subsidies and incentives pending further research on food price impacts. Oxfam believes that the biofuel policies of rich countries have driven more than 30 million people into poverty.

The agreement in principle speech and a number of media statements by the Minister for Lands refer to using waste starch for biofuels, implying that ethanol will be derived wholly from the by-products of food production. But "waste starch" has not been properly defined and I understand that it can contain components that could be used for food production, including livestock feed. I ask the Minister to clarify this point because the reality of this issue is very important and we need to be quite clear as to what we are doing. Second- and third-generation biofuels, which essentially have no impact on food availability, are yet to be commercially available and I am concerned that we are pursuing an increase in the mandate while still having to rely on first-generation biofuels. The Government should invest in second- and third-generation biofuel research and commit to amending the mandate once they are commercially available, so that first-generation biofuels are excluded.

The environmental benefits of biofuels are also debatable because biofuel production can support deforestation for fuel crops. This has been a major problem in South-East Asia—our region—where I understand biofuels are leading to an increase in land clearing. Deforestation is one of the key drivers of global warming and any land clearing to support an increased ethanol and biodiesel mandate in New South Wales would undermine any environmental benefits from this scheme. While biofuels release less greenhouse gas emissions than regular fuel when burnt, the savings can be offset by energy-intensive production. A recent World Food Program report indicates that ethanol production from corn crops produces large amounts of greenhouse gas emissions, and uses large amounts of water, fertiliser and pesticides. Ethanol production from sugarcane is reported to use high levels of water and fertiliser and medium amounts of pesticides.

The Government has said that all ethanol and biodiesel sold in New South Wales will need to comply with a standard prescribed by the regulations on sustainable manufacturing. These standards must be drafted using the most up-to-date scientific information. They must rule out consumption of biofuels that could have been used for food production, including livestock feed, or that are grown in regions following deforestation.

They must take a holistic approach to the pros and cons of biofuels. We live in a global society and policies adopted in New South Wales can affect communities in the world's poorest nations and, indeed, in our region. I am very concerned about the global implications of expanding biofuel use in New South Wales. I believe we can address global warming, peak oil, and air-quality issues associated with transport through expanding public transport, cycling and pedestrian infrastructure to give people real choice and the option not to drive their cars in our cities—where, of course, the majority of Australians live—and by developing second- and third-generation biofuels that do not support converting food to fuel or deforestation.

Mrs DAWN FARDELL (Dubbo) [10.43 a.m.]: I speak to the Biofuel (Ethanol Content) Amendment Bill 2009. As we saw with the legislation that amalgamated the rural lands protection boards—which I supported at the time—the devil is in the detail. Many of the details that emerged following assent of that bill are abhorrent to my community. I do not fully support some aspects of the Biofuel (Ethanol Content) Amendment Bill 2009, and I wish to raise the concerns of some of the people who have contacted me. Many members of the House have heard of Mr Geoff Ward—I agree with many of his statements—and I place on record some of his comments regarding this bill. He wrote:

Many people would agree with me that the conversion of grains to biofuels, through its impact on world food security, is morally repugnant. To have governments mandating and subsidising the development of this industry, adding to the quantity of the world's grain taken for biofuels, is even worse. These governments are actually helping this industry to outbid the world's poor for food.

I agree with him. He continued:

Many people would know that sugar cane is a much superior ethanol feedstock to grain, both economically and environmentally. The production of sugar cane ethanol has a much lesser impact on world food security than grain ethanol.

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The problem with our State and Federal governmental support for biofuels is easy to see. We have a one policy fits all approach. Mandates and excise rebates do not differentiate between the ... scenarios ... The conversion of grain to biofuel receives the same governmental mandate and excise rebate support as sugar cane, ethanol and second and third generation biofuels. Grain biofuel advocates know that this policy allows for the picking of low hanging fruit. The industry is not new, the apes probably left food to ferment as it made them 'happy' when they ate it. For minimal investment they can tap into mandated, subsidised production, an investors dream.

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The problem can be easily solved. Withdraw governmental support for any further development of the grain biofuel industry and extend the excise rebates and import protection post 2011 for sugar cane ethanol and second and third generation biofuels. The current grain biofuel industry is still small and should not be allowed to hold the development of preferred biofuel options to ransom.

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Those who are advocates for the E10 mandate have been trying to distance the establishment of the grain ethanol industry needed to fill the E10 from the impact it will have on food production. They have gone to extraordinary lengths with Minister Tony Kelly even stating in Parliament that 'ethanol is a by-product from the manufacture of distiller's grain'. Others are saying that using feed grain such as sorghum to produce ethanol does not impact food supply. The area used to grow the sorghum ethanol feedstock could be used to grow food crops so of course converting this sorghum to ethanol impacts food supply. Yet again they are claiming that most of the ethanol to fill the E10 will be made from waste starch. Why has one million tonnes of waste starch suddenly appeared in the agricultural inventory of NSW? It has only appeared because these people are redefining waste starch to suit their purpose. There is very little starch produced in NSW that cannot be used for food or animal feed, therefore very little starch that could be used for ethanol production without impacting food supply.

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The list of misinformed spin from these advocates just goes on and on.

The NSW E10 mandate will cost taxpayers from all States about \$230 million annually in fuel excise forgone. I cannot see Federal Minister ... handing over these millions to NSW without deducting it from other payments to this State. I do not think politicians from other States will let him.

There are two possible scenarios. The \$230 million will be deducted from the NSW budget, impacting our nurses and teachers, or NSW motorists will have to pay it in higher petrol prices.

Finally, with the global economic downturn our governments are going to be strapped for money for years to come. The \$230 million will be able to be spent in much better ways than supporting a useless grain ethanol industry that will be converting grain in the face of decreasing world food security.

In my area there is a large feedlot at Eugowra owned by Andrew and Tess Herbert. Prior to 2007, the Herberts, the Hon. Ian Macdonald, the Hon. Tony Kelly and I lobbied former Minister Debus to have the Herberts' cattle

feedlot licence increased. The Herberts do wonderful work in my area and take in the cattle of other farmers during times of drought. In fact, on one occasion they were fined for feeding another farmer's cattle. The report entitled "Impact of ethanol policies on feedgrain users in Australia", which was prepared on behalf of the Australian beef industry—I have many beef producers in my electorate—addressed the question of what the impact of such a policy regime would be on supply and demand in the Australian feed-grain market, and on livestock producers who compete in world markets. The report states:

Australia's livestock industries are both directly and indirectly dependent on feedgrain security.

- Intensive feeding industries such as cattle lotfeeding—

the Herberts own another large feedlot, in Coonamble in my electorate—

pigs, dairy, chicken meat and eggs directly consume either wholegrain or compound grain products.

- Other livestock industries such as extensive beef, sheep and wool also rely on feedgrains for supplementary feeding through droughts.
- The extensive industries are also linked to the intensive industries through the sale of feeder stock—the most notable being the strong linkage between pasture fed beef and the lotfeeding industry.

The report also states:

Access to affordable grain underpins the capacity of the livestock industries to remain reliable suppliers to global markets, and lotfeeding allows the Australian beef industry to distinguish itself from lower cost beef producers in, for example, South America.

- The lotfeeding sector allows Australia to compete head-to-head with the US in supplying high quality product to the Japanese and local markets.

Many other feedlots in Australia are owned by Japanese companies. The report continued:

- Lotfeeding also allows the finishing of pasture fed cattle, to attain suitable sale weights during drought periods. Experience has shown that the presence of the lotfeeding industry has held up cattle prices in times of drought. Its presence has provided a kind of insurance for the grass fed beef industry.
- A loss of reliability and competitiveness in the grain fed market may have impacts on customer loyalty and confidence in domestic as well as export markets.

Price is not the only aspect of access to grain: the nutritional content is also a key factor. While production of ethanol from grain produces a meal by-product (distillers grain), its energy content is very low. Advice from leading nutritionists suggests that it could only provide 10 to 20 per cent of feeding rations on a dry weight basis, and would need to compete on price with other protein options to meet feedlot requirements.

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If prices rise sufficiently, grain users in metropolitan areas—mainly chicken meat and egg producers—could import grain. Most likely this would be US corn.

- However, this option is not currently available for inland users due to quarantine protocols.

Some grain fed to cattle is made with American corn. The feedlot in Eugowra uses a meter to measure the smell coming from the feedlot. The Herberts are good, community citizens. They use meters to keep the odour level down. However, corn produces a higher odour level; therefore, people such as the Herberts in my area will receive more complaints from neighbours down the road and more fines from the Environment Protection Authority. The Government should have considered that when it introduced the bill. The document continued:

The impact of a sustained increase in demand for feedgrains would especially increase the vulnerability of all other feedgrain users to the impact of drought.

- If grain production fell by 50 per cent in 2010, as it did in 2002-03, total availability of grain would fall to around 14 million tonnes.
- In this situation grain prices could rise as high as \$450 per tonne. This would seriously affect livestock industries that compete directly with other countries on world markets and would have the potential to shut down parts of our leading export oriented industries including beef and dairy.

I have received a letter from the Herberts, who run the Gundmain feedlot, in which they say they have had a good year but they are concerned about the effects of E10. They will not be subsidised, but other feedlots will. The letter states:

It is probably the issue of grain prices that prompts us to write to you. Feed grains are the biggest single cost for a feedlot operation. Usually (in a normal season) 80% of Australia's east coast grain production is used by intensive animal feeding industries. The feedlot sector is in turn the largest user among these, using 3.7 million tones of grain.

The feedlot industry does not however receive Government assistance yet we compete directly with the government assisted ethanol sector for grain—

that is most unjust—

NSW Cabinet has increased its mandate of ethanol content in fuel from 2% to 10%. This will have a significant impact on the feedlotting industry and our two feedlots. These impacts will flow on to our local community. Grain prices will be inflated by 25% if a 10% mandate goes ahead. Our capacity to maintain a viable cattle feeding business is threatened by a 25% increase in costs.

Both Coonamble and Gundmain feedlots each spent over \$5 million dollars on grain last year. Nearly \$11 million dollars went back into these communities with no government assistance for either feedlot. If the mandated ethanol is implemented 21% of the grain supply will be immediately removed from the market. The competition for the remaining grain would be intensified and prices would rise significantly as a result. In a dry year with less grain production a higher proportion would be removed, having a potentially greater negative impact on feedlots. Feedlots are a method of drought proofing—to an extent they can survive the ups and downs of normal seasonal fluctuations. The introduction of ethanol plants into the grain buying market will distort the grain market and lead to the closure of numbers of feedlots.

Gundmain Feedlot is the largest employer in Eugowra. From our association with you, you are aware of the contribution a feedlot can make to a community—direct and indirect employment, grain markets, markets for hay, markets for other commodities (lime, cottonseed, stock feed), markets for cattle, use of local suppliers for fuel, machinery, tools etc. An ethanol plant may provide employment but it is employment subsidized by the taxpayer. You are also aware of our level of community involvement and sponsorship from sporting teams to the local show, local events (Picnic Trots and Draught Horse Society) and community institutions like both local schools, Preschool, Pony Club and Swimming Pool.

There will always be a market, both domestic and export, for high quality, consistent beef and grain-fed beef is best situated to supply these markets. Feedlots are a sustainable and long term industry while ethanol plants across the United States have been rapidly closing, the environmental cost of producing ethanol is significantly greater than the environmental cost of replacing conventional fuel.

We would like you to consider the impact of the ethanol mandate on existing successful independent industries—

I do not believe that issue has been addressed in this House—

We hope that the NSW Government appreciates the long term effect the mandate will have on the larger agricultural picture and reconsiders its decision to increase the ethanol mandate.

Mr PETER DEBNAM (Vaucluse) [10.54 a.m.]: I must say at the outset that I think I am depressed; listening to the member for Sydney and the member for Dubbo took me back to 1991 to 1995, when New South Wales started going backwards. We had a hung Parliament and it was run by the Independents—it is no wonder nothing happened! Talk about a lot of whinging, whining and carping! Wow! The member for Tamworth is probably about to get up and say the same things. I hope not. When I conceded defeat on election night two years ago I told the Government that our policies, which had been laid out, would fix the problems in New South Wales. When the Labor Government adopts Coalition policies I congratulate it. I am here to congratulate the Government. There are some problems. My colleague the Leader of The Nationals laid out the problems with this legislation. I suppose in the end we do not believe the Government will follow through on its press releases.

Mr Robert Coombs: We'll follow through.

Mr PETER DEBNAM: If the Government does follow through, good on it! It is not the first time the Government has adopted some of the Coalition's policies, and it is important to acknowledge that.

Ms Angela D'Amore: Name them!

Mr PETER DEBNAM: I will give the member for Drummoyne a couple of examples. In a speech I made recently I said the Government had adopted a few Coalition policies on policing, including increasing police numbers, changing the name of the police service back to Police Force—that was a significant change—and confiscating hoon's cars. Thirteen years ago in 1996 I said hoon's should have their cars confiscated, and the Government finally adopted my legislation on that in late 1996. For a long time—at least a couple of years—the Government also fought against establishing a Middle Eastern crime squad but then it did establish such a squad. Since the election the Government has started to use rhetoric about the bureaucrat recruitment freeze, and that is good. However, I have not seen the Government do anything about it.

Ms Angela D'Amore: Point of order: My point of order relates to relevance. I ask you to draw the member for Vaucluse back to the content of the bill. We would like to hear his comments on the bill, rather than irrelevant rhetoric.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! I will listen further to the member for Vaucluse. I remind him to refer to the bill in his future comments.

Mr PETER DEBNAM: My point is that it is great to see a bill introduced that implements Coalition policy—although we do not believe the Government will fulfil the policy. But at least the Government is headed in the right direction. That is something we heard a lot about previously. It is great that the Government is encouraging ethanol use. The Government is looking at offloading lazy assets, such as NSW Lotteries and waste services. Good on you! We put that policy to the people of New South Wales and they embraced it; now the Government is talking about doing it. It is great that the V8 Supercars will use ethanol. Where did that event come from? It came from the Coalition before the election. The Government, before the election, refused to adopt that major event strategy but now it has adopted it. Part of that strategy included the V8 Supercars using ethanol, and it is good to see that that will happen. It is great that the Government is starting to adopt at least the headlines of Coalition policies. The question is: Will the Government follow through on it and implement it? We hope that the Government's strategy will be consistent and that it will do something about the whole policy. The overview of the bill states:

The object of this Bill is to amend the *Biofuel (Ethanol Content) Act 2007* ... as follows:

- (a) to provide for increases to the mandated minimum ethanol content for total petrol sales in NSW (currently 2%),
- (b) to make provision for a mandated minimum biodiesel content for total diesel fuel sales in NSW,
- (c) to provide that such mandates will apply to major retailers, in addition to primary wholesalers, of petrol and diesel fuel,
- (d) to provide that from July 2011 regular unleaded petrol sold in NSW by primary wholesalers must contain 10% ethanol.

Importantly, it renames the Biofuel (Ethanol Content) Act the Biofuels Act. The point I make again: Where did all this come from? We just have to go back a couple of years. On 20 July 2006, nine months before the election, the Leader of The Nationals, Andrew Stoner, and I held a conference in Parliament House to basically heavy the oil industry. We invited the oil industry and Morris Iemma, as Premier, to talk about establishing a biofuel strategy in New South Wales. We were well aware that the oil companies were very reluctant to get involved and embrace the idea. But we made it very plain to them at the conference that if they did not come back with a viable strategy in August 2006, when we had convened a second conference, we would mandate and force them to get on with it.

At the conference on 20 July 2006 we talked with the oil industry, service stations, ethanol producers and the NRMA about all aspects of the strategy, and we had a very productive meeting. We then announced that the second conference would be held on 24 August 2006. Lo and behold, one day before 24 August 2006 Morris Iemma woke up and realised that he had better do something. He made an announcement that day that he was going to move on an ethanol strategy. As I indicated at the outset, we congratulated Morris Iemma on his late awakening on ethanol. The following day, 24 August 2006, we held an extremely productive meeting with the oil industry, the service stations and the NRMA. We talked about the stepped plan—2 per cent in 2007, 4 per cent in 2008, all the way up to 10 per cent in 2011. We talked about upgrading the production and distribution infrastructure. We talked about the sale of E10 at up to 500 service stations across New South Wales. As the Leader of The Nationals emphasised yesterday, and a number of my colleagues have indicated, we talked about a strong marketing plan. The Labor Party and one or two media outlets had undermined ethanol for some years, and there was reluctance in the community to embrace it. It required a very strong marketing plan to increase the demand for ethanol. We talked about the State taking a leadership role in alternative fuels.

That was the plan laid out at the conference and, to some extent, implemented in the legislation of 2007 and further in this bill. The concern remains whether the Government is serious about this issue or is just putting the bill through the House for theatrics and will not follow up with political commitment. It is very important that the Government is committed to this strategy. In 2006 we noted that one of the Government's own reports focused on air quality in Sydney and its impacts, not only the financial costs in health but also the death rate. Sydney has a huge air pollution problem. Ethanol is a significant relief for the air pollution problem. Using the Government's own documents three years ago, we highlighted a very significant health reason to get on with this strategy.

If the Government is serious, as it has indicated today—and that will become apparent over the next six months—then I applaud it. It will be one of the first things it has done to produce a result from a consistent policy, albeit it has taken three years for the Government to adopt most of our policies. I say to the Government, make sure it works. There will always be critics, whether it is to refine the bill or to argue, as the member for Sydney and the member for Dubbo have, that philosophically it does not make sense. New South Wales is suffering. The Government has to get on with it and make it successful. This is one policy that can become

successful within the next six to 12 months. Then the Government should look at the rest of our policies. I applaud the Government for adopting the policy. But the Government should not just adopt the headline; it should adopt the whole thing.

Mr PETER DRAPER (Tamworth) [11.04 a.m.]: I support the Biofuel (Ethanol Content) Amendment Bill 2009, as it is an important step forward in promoting renewable biofuels in New South Wales. The Biofuel (Ethanol Content) Act 2007 has seen a 2 per cent mandate successfully implemented, despite the predictions and campaigns by vested interests that ethanol would cause massive damage to people's vehicles. Hopefully we have seen the last of that scare campaign. However, I am aware that there are many different points of view on this subject. By way of compromise, we can score a lot of positives. As can be seen from my inaugural speech in this place on 7 May 2003, the introduction of a biofuels industry has been a passion of mine. In that first speech I noted that during my doorknocking campaign in Gunnedah I learned the potentials of a biofuels industry to our farming communities and the local economy.

I do not apologise for having a strong view supporting the development of a biofuels industry and encouraging its development within the electorate of Tamworth because I can see many benefits for the region that I believe far outweigh the arguments I have heard against it. There have been many arguments for and against a biofuels industry in Australia over the years. Yet we appear to be a long way behind much of the rest of the world in developing a renewable biofuels industry that has environmental pluses and can help break our dependence on foreign energy resources. I acknowledge that even within the farming community in the electorate of Tamworth there are differing opinions. For example, feedlot operators have concerns about a market where they have to compete for feed grain. There are implications involving the world food chain in the development of a biofuels industry. These issues have to be addressed from both a local and world perspective. However, they should not prevent Australia from being realistic in looking after our interests.

I note the policy of the New South Wales Farmers Federation on this issue. While I dispute its failure to support a mandatory percentage target for biofuels in liquid fuel, the rest of its policy deserves careful consideration and can help to address some of the concerns. Although I believe we need a mandatory percentage, it would be sensible to consider a simple mandate for alternative fuels to be available if it allowed the possible use of E20 or E30 blends, or even higher. I agree with the New South Wales Farmers Federation that we need to encourage the development of biodiesel products by way of tax concessions and other incentives. I would encourage State and Federal authorities to ensure they work in partnerships towards those objectives. The suggestion to establish a biofuels co-operative research centre to research the development of biofuel-specific crops to maximise yield potential and fuel production efficiency should be adopted. Research and development are essential if we are to be world leaders rather than followers, and this initiative is an opportunity to proactively address some of the concerns in relation to the world food chain.

There is also merit in the proposal to rationalise the legislation so that biodiesel produced for individuals' off-road use is exempt from the payment and rebate of excise so they can develop a cottage industry that supports environmental concerns. In June 2003 I spoke about a proposal by Primary Energy to develop an ethanol plant in north-west New South Wales. The initial impetus for the proposal started a year earlier when plans were first unveiled for a \$55 million ethanol plant in Gunnedah, which had been selected as the preferred site. Following many proactive talks and high hopes throughout the electorate, the council provided land free of charge for the plant's development. By mid-2003 the developers announced they were looking at building a bigger plant than they had originally planned. The plan was upgraded to a \$70 million facility, almost triple the size of the first proposal. It would create about 50 permanent jobs in Gunnedah and around the district. On top of that, there is scope for 180 indirect jobs and 450 jobs during construction. For a town like Gunnedah, this is a very attractive proposition.

The proposal attracted \$1.1 million in Federal funding as part of the Namoi Valley Structural Adjustment Package. However, there was still not enough whole-of-government support to enable the proponents to gain the necessary financial backing to get the project off the ground. I am hopeful that this legislation, which will increase the volumetric ethanol mandate to 4 per cent by the end of 2009, then 6 per cent by the end of 2010, as well as the requirement for all regular grade unleaded petrol to be blended with ethanol by 1 July 2011, will give further impetus to the project. Earlier this week I spoke to Primary Energy's Matthew Kelley, who said:

If you can support this bill it is tremendous. It is a gutsy stance being taken, it has been well thought through and it is really going to benefit regional areas.

I agree with him. Mr Kelley said there had been many technological advances since the plan was first mooted, allowing for a more efficient and environmentally friendly facility. He said that the multistage facility would produce a range of human consumption products and produce ethanol as a by-product of that process. The proposed development in Gunnedah will combine Delta-T ethanol plant technology as stage one with anaerobic digester technology and green electricity production as stage two. Stages one and two will result in the processing of up to 220,000 tonnes of grain per year to produce 80 million litres of fuel grade ethanol annually, 43,000 tonnes of fertiliser, 5,000 tonnes of aqueous ammonia and approximately 100 gigawatt hours of green electricity.

I mentioned that an increased use of biofuels could have a positive impact for the economy. The CSIRO has undertaken a life-cycle analysis of the greenhouse gas emissions associated with the production of ethanol, green electricity, fertiliser and ammonia from the proposed bio-refinery. The life-cycle analysis included growth, harvest and transport of raw materials required for the production of ethanol, the manufacture of ethanol, green electricity, fertiliser and ammonia, the transport of the products off-site and the use of ethanol in a 10 per cent fuel blend with petrol, or E10. The greenhouse assessment provided by the CSIRO indicates that the proposed development will be a negative greenhouse gas emitter.

The proposed ethanol bio-refinery will result in a net greenhouse gas reduction compared with the use of regular unleaded petrol of approximately 200,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent per annum. This indicates that there will be negligible environmental risk associated with greenhouse and energy, and to my mind it is a win-win situation. The proposed development will have significant beneficial socioeconomic impacts for both the town of Gunnedah and the local region. I have already mentioned the potential for employment. The production of human consumption products with 80 megalitres of fuel grade ethanol as a by-product at the proposed development will also benefit the suppliers of raw materials by opening up additional markets and sources of income.

Statistics show the world's ethanol production will pass 75 billion litres in 2012 and that Australia ranks very lowly on the world scale. The United States of America and Brazil are leading the world in the production of ethanol, while there is an emergence of new ethanol producers in Asia and Latin America. Factors driving ethanol markets include high oil prices, national energy security considerations, ethanol tax incentives, improved technology allowing lower costs of ethanol production, and climate change concerns. We have a long way to go to catch up with other parts of the world on this important issue.

Production of ethanol from raw materials is renewable, unlike petroleum products from crude oil, which is a finite resource and is linked to the global marketplace. Increased ethanol production will extend and supplement our declining crude oil reserves. The Centre for Agricultural and Regional Economics has undertaken studies on regional impacts of ethanol production. With ethanol being a renewable resource, the centre found that where there is a ready availability of raw material, communities could establish a plant and gain economic benefits, with potentially some 30 plants able to be established in regional areas of New South Wales.

From a health perspective, using ethanol-blended petrol reduces vehicular tailpipe emissions of carbon monoxide, total hydrocarbons, 1,3-butadiene, benzene, toluene, xylenes and, in some cases, nitrogen oxides. Associate Professor Ray Kearney from the University of Sydney stated in a paper that long-term particulate matter exposure is proven to be associated with respiratory and cardiovascular disease, as well as 20 per cent of lung cancer cases. That is an enormous public health impact. To think that we can achieve a 30 per cent reduction in these cancer-causing particulates by blending ethanol and petrol makes the current moves even more important.

Professor Kearney has developed images of the lungs of non-smokers in the city versus the country, and it really is startling to see the difference in a normal lung of a healthy rural resident compared with the lung of a Sydney city resident, which of course is exposed to pollutants from many motor vehicles. If these pollutants can be reduced by 30 per cent there will be a significant saving for our public health system and diminished suffering for people with lung cancer and other lung diseases. Adding ethanol to petrol enables the particulates to be completely burned because it assists the combustion process and substantially reduces the particles in the emissions from motor vehicles.

It should be noted that government agencies around the world are taking action to reduce the particle emissions from fossil fuels, especially from motor vehicles, and introducing more ethanol into fossil fuels will enhance progress in that direction. Foreign car manufacturers are now producing motor vehicles that can be

computed automatically to run efficiently on biofuel with a blend as high as 85 per cent ethanol. I mentioned Brazil before as a major biofuels producer. In the mid-1970s, the Government of Brazil launched the National Fuel Alcohol Program, or PROALCOOL, which aimed at increasing the share of domestically produced fuels in the country's fuel pool. Employing various forms of support, the program proved to be spectacularly successful.

By 1980 ethanol had a larger market share in the transportation sector than gasoline. Even though the lead has been lost since then, ethanol has managed to keep a significant market share in this segment until today. In fact, due to the high gasoline prices in recent years, the market share of ethanol has increased further and is likely to continue to do so. Over the period from 1975 to 2002 fuel ethanol use helped to replace around 210 billion litres of gasoline, saving Brazil around \$US52 billion. The attractive price of ethanol from Brazil has resulted in the country becoming the largest exporter of this commodity. The second largest exporter of ethanol is the United States of America. Ethanol producers in the United States distilled a record quantity of more than 10.6 billion litres in 2003, mostly derived from corn. At the Federal level there is a tax incentive in place, which aims at promoting fuel ethanol production. Additionally, a number of ethanol producing States have introduced incentives of their own.

The various tax incentives have certainly helped the ethanol industry in the United States to get off the ground. However, the real boost came with the introduction of mandated or captive markets in the early 1990s. The Clean Air Act mandated the use of cleaner burning fuels in the dirtiest cities in the United States. In order to achieve that, the legislation enforces the addition of oxygen to gasoline. For a long time petrol derived methyl tert-butyl ether [MTBE], a flammable liquid which is used as an additive in unleaded gasoline, was the oxygenate of choice, but this is changing now and explains the amazing growth in ethanol use in recent years. Starting in January 2004, California banned MTBE from its fuel pool, as did the States of New York and Connecticut. That opened the way for ethanol. There are several other States in the United States planning to ban MTBE.

In Canada prospects for the ethanol industry improved substantially after the government in Ottawa pledged financial support to the tune of \$CAD100 million for the sector in the framework of its Kyoto commitments. Under the plan, E10 blends are to achieve a 35 per cent market penetration by 2010, a figure that represents 1.33 billion litres per year. With a carbon dioxide reduction of 40 per cent for grain ethanol, this equates to the replacement of 532 million litres of gasoline or 1.33 megatonnes of carbon dioxide—just over one-half of 1 per cent of the 240 megatonnes of greenhouse gases Canada is committed to achieve.

In the European Union fuel ethanol production has not really taken off to the same extent, although it is likely to do so, with the main drivers being two biofuel directives by the European Commission. Member states will now have to try to achieve a 5.75 per cent share for renewables by the end of 2010. The basis for reference will be the energy content of all gasoline for transport placed on the market. Nearer to home, Thailand's interest in establishing a large-scale bioethanol industry using feedstock such as cassava, sugar cane and rice started in 2000 and reflected the nation's rising import bill for oil. Thailand is 90 per cent reliant on imports, so high-energy prices were adversely impacting the economy at that time.

At the same time low prices for commodities such as sugar and cassava were a matter of concern for the Government. The Thai Government moved swiftly to support the ethanol opportunity, with the rising oil import bill as the swaying reason for pursuing the bio-ethanol program. More recently, the role of ethanol in replacing MTBE has been offered as another justification for the ethanol program. The National Ethanol Development Committee has estimated that if 10 per cent ethanol were blended with petrol or diesel to replace MTBE, about 2 million litres of ethanol would be required on a daily basis.

China is now home to the world's largest fuel ethanol plant. The Jilin Tianhe Ethanol Distillery has an initial capacity of 600,000 tonnes a year, or 2.5 million litres per day. Potential final capacity can be raised to 800,000 tonnes per year. A plant designed to produce 300,000 tonnes of fuel ethanol annually was constructed also in Nanyang, Henan Province. The project, built by the Tianguan Ethanol Chemical Group Co. Ltd. [TICG], combined with the company's existing facility, saw TICG's total fuel ethanol capacity reach 500,000 tonnes a year. Fuel ethanol has already been in trial use in China for some time. Many provinces have been experimenting with using ethanol as a vehicle fuel. China has promoted ethanol-based fuel on a pilot basis in five cities in its central and north-eastern regions, a move designed to create a new market for its surplus grain and to reduce oil consumption.

Despite many controversies about biofuel production, the outlook for fuel ethanol is bright, and strong rates of growth in both production and trade can be expected over the next few years. As can be seen, Australia

has played only a small role in this process worldwide, which is why I strongly support the Biofuel (Ethanol Content) Amendment Bill 2009 as a step in the right direction. Its benefits to rural communities such as Gunnedah cannot be understated, and tied with economic, environmental and public health benefits it is a course we should pursue vigorously. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr ROB STOKES (Pittwater) [11.18 a.m.]: I speak on the Biofuel (Ethanol Content) Amendment Bill 2009. The objects of the bill are to provide for increases to the mandated minimum ethanol content for total petrol sales and the biodiesel content for total diesel fuel sales in New South Wales, and to ensure that these minimums apply not just to primary wholesalers but also to major retailers of petroleum. There is nothing new about ethanol, or ethyl alcohol; it has been around for a very long time. In fact, the use of ethanol in motor vehicles has been around as long as motor vehicles. Henry Ford's first car was designed to run on pure ethanol and his Model T could run on petrol, ethanol or a combination of both.

It has been demonstrated in research that the overwhelming majority of petrol engines work well with mixtures of 10 per cent ethanol and that is why legislation in this country imposes a 10 per cent cap on the concentration of fuel ethanol blends. There is much to commend the use of ethanol in petrol-driven vehicles and vehicles powered by other fuels. That is because it is a renewable fuel source in that feedstocks or even algae are used as raw materials. The processing of ethanol will inevitably result in the release of greenhouse gases. However, when compared with petroleum processing, ethanol processing produces fewer greenhouse emissions. The member for Tamworth spoke at length about the fact that, unlike burning petrol, burning ethanol does not release particulate matter, which causes air pollution. Given the release of statistics about the dangers of air pollution in western Sydney, the use of ethanol is surely to be encouraged.

The food versus fuel debate has been ongoing and some leaders in South American and Central American countries—Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez, in particular—claim that the diversion of croplands to produce feedstock for ethanol will lead to higher food prices and could exacerbate climate change. While these claims may be worth debating in that context, they have no bearing on the situation in New South Wales, where ethanol production does not involve land clearing and does not impact on the production of cereals for human consumption. It is worth considering the role of ethanol in the context of global use of fuel. World oil consumption is about 4 billion tonnes per annum compared with ethanol consumption of about 13 million tonnes per annum. It is a tiny drop in the ocean compared to the use of oil, but the use of ethanol is increasing.

The member for Tamworth talked about the United States and Brazil as leading producers of ethanol. I understand that the United States has recently overtaken Brazil. Nevertheless, Brazil and the United States account for three-quarters of total global ethanol production, followed by China and India, which, as the member for Tamworth also said, are aggressively looking for new opportunities to develop ethanol processing. Australia does not even rate in the top 15 countries for ethanol production. We clearly have a long way to go. Australia has only three commercial producers of fuel ethanol, all based in either New South Wales or Queensland. The only new South Wales plant is at Nowra. The combined capacity of all the ethanol processing facilities in Australia has been estimated at less than 150 million litres per annum.

That compares interestingly with the Federal Government's voluntary target of 350 million litres per annum of biofuels to be used by 2010. Clearly there is a long way to go before that target is reached. In that context, I note the comments made previously by the member for Vacluse, who is a passionate supporter of the use of ethanol as a renewable fuel alternative. His comments relate to the fact that it is all very well to legislate targets for ethanol use in motor vehicles, but legislation by itself does not constitute leadership. It is all very well to legislate a target, but it is another thing to provide the support necessary to encourage investment in continuing sources of production. My community is concerned about the use of ethanol and biofuels in petrol and diesel-powered boats. My electorate has a huge number of moorings. In fact, I understand that it has more moorings than Sydney Harbour. It is certainly a major recreational boating port.

Mr Barry Collier: Bring back the caravan park.

Mr ROB STOKES: Bring back the caravan park at North Palm Beach is the cry from the other side. Without commenting on that—

Mr Barry Collier: You just have.

Mr ROB STOKES: Back to biofuels. A number of issues have been raised with me by members of the boating industry, including the Boating Industry Association of New South Wales and the Boat Owners'

Association of New South Wales, relating to the use of biofuels in boats. In fact, it has been confirmed by both Caltex and BP that biodiesel is not recommended for marine applications. Therefore, we have real concerns about mandating the level of biofuel usage in petrol and diesel-powered engines and the impact that could have on the boating industry. The concerns are twofold and they both relate to the special qualities of ethanol. First, because ethanol is an excellent solvent it can do a great job of cleaning out the entire fuel system of a boat. That is a great quality in many ways, but it can also clean out all the rubbish in the bottom of a fuel tank and any residue stuck in the lines and filters. Ultimately, all that mucky soup can find its way into the injectors or the carburettors. If that occurs, unsurprisingly the engine stops working. That is a real problem in the boating context because we do not want boat engines to stop working out at sea.

Ethanol's special solvent qualities also mean that it can be corrosive. If left in fuel lines, it can cause corrosion and fuel leaks can occur. My brother-in-law and sister-in-law's boat exploded at Booker Bay a couple of years ago. There was a leak in the fuel line and they had to jump overboard with their two toddlers at the last moment. I am very well aware of the dangers of corrosion in fuel lines, so that is a real concern. The hygroscopic qualities of ethanol also mean that it attracts water; that is, it absorbs moisture. Again, that is not a problem in cars, but in boats—particularly when they are not used everyday—it can lead to a phase separation. The water will separate from the fuel as a non-combustible layer of liquid in the bottom of the tank. When that is sucked into the motor the engine can stop, which is a real risk in the boating environment. Similar concerns relate to both ethanol-blended petrol and biodiesel-blended diesel. I note that these concerns are indirectly addressed by clause 16, which provides:

- (2) An E10 exemption entitles the person to be sold regular unleaded petrol that is not E10 and, accordingly, a primary wholesaler does not commit an offence under section 8 by selling regular unleaded petrol that is not E10 to the holder of an E10 exemption in accordance with any conditions of the exemption.

That also relates to clause 16 (1) (b), which provides:

- (b) a person who sells petrol by retail in the course of carrying on a business if the Minister is satisfied that the person sells petrol wholly or predominantly for the fuelling of vessels or watercraft (such as at a marina).

If primary wholesalers are required to supply a certain amount of E10 blended petrol, will that impose additional costs? Because that is such a small market, will the wholesaler incur extra costs to provide such a small amount and will that have an impact on the cost of fuel for boat owners? I am concerned about that. I am also concerned that it is a bureaucratic process whereby marina operators will have to apply for an exemption. That application will have to be considered by the Minister. I note the Minister has to send it to the expert panel—this Government loves panels, there are panels everywhere now—but there is nothing expert about the panel itself. New section 24 provides that the expert panel will consist of a number of departmental heads, but nothing suggests those departmental heads are experts in the use of ethanol. I raise that as a concern, and I seek clarification in the Minister's reply about any impacts this might have on the cost of fuel for boat owners.

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

SURVEILLANCE DEVICES AMENDMENT (VALIDATION) BILL 2009

Bill introduced on motion by Mr Barry Collier, on behalf of Mr David Campbell.

Agreement in Principle

Mr BARRY COLLIER (Miranda—Parliamentary Secretary) [11.31 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

The Government is pleased to introduce the Surveillance Devices Amendment (Validation) Bill 2009. This very brief bill remedies a technical defect in certain warrants issued under the former Listening Devices Act 1984 by a Supreme Court judge during the period immediately before she was declared an eligible judge by the Attorney General. Before its repeal by the Surveillance Devices Act 2007, the Listening Devices Act 1984 prohibited the use of listening devices to record private conversations—except in circumstances set out in the Act—without the use of a warrant granted by an eligible judge. An eligible judge was a judge of the Supreme Court who had consented to being involved in the grant of warrants and in respect of whom a declaration was in force declaring the judge to be an eligible judge for the purposes of that Act.

The object of this bill is to amend the Surveillance Devices Act 2007 to validate certain warrants purporting to have been granted between 3 March 2008 and 7 March 2008 under the 1984 Act by an eligible judge when the judge concerned had given the requisite consent but in respect of whom a declaration was not yet in force. The validation puts beyond doubt the use of listening devices pursuant to the warrants granted in that period and ensures that evidence obtained under them by the use of the listening devices will not be inadmissible solely on the ground of any technical invalidity. It is not appropriate to go into specifics as to the prosecutions affected by the invalid warrants. In the interests of certainty, the Government proposes to remedy the technical defect in the affected warrants by a legislative amendment.

This bill makes a very specific amendment to the principal Act, which confines its effect to the warrants issued by one judge during a specific period. It does not validate any other warrants on any other grounds, or seek in any way to enlarge generally the scope to issue warrants or the bases on which they may be valid. In addition, it does not validate the warrants in issue in any respect other than that relating to the fact that the judge had consented but not yet been declared eligible. There is no suggestion that the technical invalidity in any way affected the level of scrutiny given to the warrant applications or the ultimate decision to grant them. Nor is there any suggestion that the applications were not made in good faith, or anything other than the mistaken belief that the judge was an eligible judge for the purposes of the Act. I commend the bill to the House.

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

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! Government business having concluded, the House will now proceed to Notices of Motions (General Notices).

HORNSBY AREA HAEMODIALYSIS

Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [11.35 a.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) notes the continuing public opinion, including over 1,000 petition signatures, that Hornsby urgently needs a centre where local residents can attend to undergo haemodialysis;
- (2) expresses concern that Hornsby area residents are expected to travel to Concord or Royal Prince Alfred hospitals to undergo haemodialysis, spending extremely long hours away from their families;
- (3) acknowledges the outcry in the Hornsby electorate for the establishment of a public haemodialysis centre in the Hornsby area; and
- (4) urges the Government to immediately allocate funding to establish such a centre to alleviate the suffering of people who require regular haemodialysis.

I have been waiting a long time to move this motion. In fact, it is almost one year since I gave notice of this motion. Matters have not improved in my area. Despite statements that the New South Wales Government is bringing health closer to people, it is having great difficulty in doing so. I place on record my condolences to Mr Len Smart, whose wife, Joan Smart, died on 15 March in Concord hospital. I pay great tribute to Mr and Mrs Smart, who led the charge to establish the need for a haemodialysis unit at Hornsby hospital where local people could attend to have their haemodialysis treatment. Unfortunately, Mrs Smart succumbed to a kidney infection and died in Concord hospital on 15 March, leaving behind a very sad husband and a strong message for this Government.

The message is: Do people have to die to get the message across or is the Government waiting for people to die so the demand is lessened? I am appalled to think that when Mrs Joan Smart died on 15 March she was no closer to having a local haemodialysis facility than when she started having to go to Concord hospital and then to Royal Prince Alfred Hospital. I call on the Government to immediately allocate the funding to establish such a centre. I call on the Government to not just talk about future prospects, but to do it in 3D. The unit should be called the Joan Smart Haemodialysis Unit, in honour of a very brave woman—in fact, a very brave couple—for having raised this issue. Mr Smart came to my office in February 2007. He was very concerned about his wife having to travel to Concord hospital from Mt Colah three days a week for dialysis treatment.

Mr Smart believed there was a demand and need for a dialysis unit at Hornsby hospital. He stated that it is appalling that the sick and elderly have to travel more than 45 minutes each way to a life-saving medical

procedure three times a week. He felt that the then new accident and emergency building at Hornsby hospital provided unused and available space. We agreed the old accident and emergency unit would be perfect for a renal dialysis unit. Mr Smart was also instrumental in getting many petition sheets signed by concerned local people, some of whom were travelling to Concord hospital at that time but were not brave enough to state their names. Representations to the Northern Sydney Central Coast Area Health Service did not produce much hope. A letter dated 22 March 2007 from Dr Stephen Crissley stated:

Northern Sydney Central Coast Area Health Service is committed to providing the best possible care for patients with renal disease—

which I would call into account—

and a priority plan to enhance Renal Dialysis Services has been developed ... The Renal Services Plan is based on current and projected data in relation to the demand for renal services across the Area Health Service.

I will refer to my questions on notice shortly. Mr and Mrs Smart were very vocal and leading up to 2009 I raised this matter a number of times. Indeed, the local media also took up the matter. On 13 March 2008 an article in the *Hornsby and Upper North Shore Advocate*, written by Danielle Long, stated:

"Alone, pining

Once-inseparable couple torn apart by a lack of medical service.

Before Joan Smart went on dialysis, she and her loving husband Len worked side by side for at least 22 hours a day.

Now the 78-year-olds of Mt Colah are lucky if they spend a few waking hours together on some days.

The separation is heartbreaking for the couple, who have been married for 55 years. Mr Smart says it is "no life at all".

Because there is no public renal dialysis centre near Hornsby.

The Smarts are not alone. Another article in the *Hornsby and Upper North Shore Advocate* of 24 April 2008 by Danielle Long states:

Dialysis trip just got an hour longer.

A decision to move dialysis services from Concord Hospital to Royal Prince Alfred will force an elderly Mt Colah woman to travel up to four hours, three days a week for the essential treatment.

There is no public renal dialysis centre near Hornsby, so Joan Smart, 78, currently travels 90 minutes from her home, three times a week by ambulance to Concord Hospital.

She would have to extend that to travel to Royal Prince Alfred. An article in the *Hornsby and Upper North Shore Advocate* of 2 October 2008 by Julie Huffer states:

Dialysis unit considered

Mrs Smart needs renal dialysis three times a week.

[Mr Smart said] I wait and I wait and I wait, but it's too long. And this is our retirement.

She is one of at least 17 patients known to travel from the Upper North Shore to other areas of Sydney for dialysis.

Another article by the *Monthly Chronicle* in 2008 under the headline "Corridor Care" states:

Mrs Florence Smart was left in a corridor on Thursday, July 10 as staff frantically tried to pin down an ambulance to transport after her regular dialysis treatment.

It just goes from bad to worse. The Ambulance Service is involved in this as well. I asked a number of questions in relation to haemodialysis. On 23 October 2008 I asked:

In all my postcodes how many people attend at regular times per week haemodialysis at central Sydney haemodialysis units from the following postcodes listed?

The answer I received was appalling. It hedged around the issue. I did not receive any numbers, which tells me that a number of people from the postcodes I listed in my electorate are forced to go from their homes in the Hornsby electorate to central Sydney outside their area health service for this vital service. Leanne Houlcroft sent an email to me in October 2007 as follows:

My mother had renal failure for the past 5 to 6 and travelled by ambulance 3 times weekly to Concord Hospital. The need for a renal unit at Hornsby is imperative. Renal failure is on the increase and services must be put in place before it too late.

She referred to the fob-off answers relating to the "plan". She wrote again on 24 April 2008 and stated:

My late mother, Norma Pope utilised Concord Hospital for dialysis. My mother did peritoneal dialysis at home for 6 years before going onto Haemodialysis, travelling to and fro 3 times a week from Mt Kuring-gai to Concord for 4 years before the toll of everything took her away from us.

That is basically the story of many of these people. Miss Robyne Sutton also wrote to me, concerned about the inability for transport to be provided to take seriously ill people from their homes for dialysis. That would be unnecessary if there was a unit at Hornsby hospital. John Lee, a volunteer at 2HHH FM, is expected to travel to Concord Hospital for his long-term use of haemodialysis. Last year during Kidney Week we highlighted the need for increased funding and resources for the treatment of chronic kidney disease and placing focus on the need for a haemodialysis unit at Hornsby hospital. I implore the Government to take the plan forward in a real sense, not to just make promises into the future. I ask you to give this facility to the people of the Hornsby electorate and the surrounding area, which includes 250,000 people, many of whom require haemodialysis. [*Time expired.*]

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields—Parliamentary Secretary) [11.45 a.m.]: Renal dialysis is a life-saving treatment for people in end-stage kidney failure. In recognition of the importance of this service NSW Health has been working with specialists and area health services to plan and implement expansion of renal dialysis services across the State. This will respond to the projected increasing demand for these services. There is a worldwide increase in the demand for haemodialysis, one of the major drivers being the diabetes epidemic. Enhancement funding in New South Wales has increased from \$2.5 million allocated in 2002-03 to the present level of recurrent enhancement of \$25 million per annum, a tenfold increase. This funding has extensively supported both the establishment and expansion of dialysis services across the State.

For example, I recently visited the excellent dialysis unit at Sutherland Hospital. Mr Matthew Daly, Chief Executive, Northern Sydney Central Coast Area Health Service, advises me that public renal dialysis services are provided within the area health service at Royal Shore Hospital, as well as two sites on the Central Coast. Recently a renal medicine clinic to manage patients with renal disease before they need dialysis has been established at Hornsby Ku-ring-gai Hospital. Improved control of risk factors, such as improved control of diabetes and blood pressure, can reduce the need for dialysis or delay the onset of end-stage kidney failure.

The dialysis services within Northern Sydney Central Coast Area Health Service have been developed to accommodate residents from the area health service at the nearest public dialysis unit. However, there may be circumstances where patients receive dialysis outside the area health service. For example, this may be due to the hospital affiliation of the patient's renal physician and which dialysis service they are referred to by that physician. I am further advised that the area health service has established an area renal services network, which is comprised of senior clinicians across the relevant disciplines, such as medical, nursing and allied health. One of the roles of the network is to develop service goals and undertake planning for the development of renal services for the area health service. This includes the planning of dialysis services.

It has been recognised that there will be increasing demand for dialysis services and, as such, planning is being undertaken at both State and area health service level for a staged increase in dialysis services to meet this projected demand. As part of this process the network will consider the distribution of dialysis chairs across the area health service to ensure equity of services in appropriate locations to meet the projected growth in demand. There are some selected patients who can do home haemodialysis. However, there will always be some who will need the support, either in the short or long term, of in-hospital dialysis services. The location and development of services is undertaken according to population need for services because it is important to note that a core number of patients and activity is required to ensure that such a service is viable.

Planning for dialysis services is a priority area, and these factors underpin the planning and decision making process. Patient transport for dialysis patients is also an important consideration in planning processes. The New South Wales Renal Dialysis Service Plan to 2011 also identifies areas for further work: importantly, the prevention of renal disease, and improved training and support for people on home-based dialysis. Expert groups are working to develop effective strategies to address these issues. Our long-term vision includes the prevention of end-stage kidney failure and, for those who require dialysis, a better quality of life through better-supported home-based services.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS (Murray-Darling) [11.50 a.m.]: I thank the member for Hornsby for moving this important motion. With a growing sense of depression and an ever-increasing financial burden, Ray "Rocky" Shamroze faces another round of dialysis. He has been in Adelaide for months now, away from his

family and friends and his much-loved dog, but he has no choice. Rocky has renal failure, a chronic disease that will remain with him for the rest of his life. And he is only one of an ever-increasing number of people who will be struck down by this disease. The number of patients in New South Wales requiring dialysis over the last decade has grown significantly, and this increase in demand is projected to continue. It is estimated that the demand for renal dialysis in New South Wales will increase from 2,464 patients in 2001 to 4,274 patients in 2011, a growth rate of just over 5 per cent per annum.

As at June 2006 there were 489 centre-based haemodialysis machines in New South Wales. In June 2007 the Government tried to make itself look good by announcing it would create 176 additional places in six new renal dialysis centres for patients with kidney failure in need of treatment. However, the Government did not give a time frame. In 2003 Professor Robert Gibberd from the Health Services Research Group at the University of Newcastle developed projections for renal dialysis in New South Wales on behalf of the New South Wales Department of Health. Professor Gibberd found that the number of patients expected to be on dialysis in 2016 is 5,431. That figure is more than double that of 15 years previously. In 2005 approximately 59 per cent of dialysis in New South Wales was in-centre haemodialysis, of which about half took place in hospital and half in satellite centres. Approximately 16 per cent was home haemodialysis.

Renal dialysis is serious business. Haemodialysis is one treatment for end-state renal failure, in which the function of the kidneys to remove substances from the blood is replaced by a machine. Treatment requires the patient to undergo dialysis for three to six hours per day, three days every week. Currently Rocky Shamroze is spending vast chunks of his waking hours undergoing in-centre haemodialysis. Rocky, however, is not alone in his battle with renal failure. There is such a demand for renal dialysis chairs at Broken Hill Base Hospital that newly diagnosed patients are told someone will have to die for them to get their chance in the chair. Alternatively, they have to do just as Rocky has, and leave everything familiar to them to spend time in Adelaide for treatment. How can spending time away from those you love be conducive to making the best of a bad situation? How can being separated from all that is familiar to you be conducive to keeping your chin up when you are going through intensive medical treatment? How can the New South Wales Department of Health force people into that situation?

Previously in this House I have spoken about the need for greater renal dialysis provision at Broken Hill Base Hospital. I have also spoken about the need for extra chairs to be put in place sooner rather than later. But I am yet to see any positive action taken by this Government. Last year I had personal dealings with the Greater Western Area Health Service and was provided with an assurance that Broken Hill Base Hospital would have a bank of six renal dialysis chairs in the near future—the current two, and two by the end of last year, and an additional two as soon as resources were available. That has not happened. This week I approached Minister John Della Bosca's office to ask for a time frame in which the additional chairs would be in place. A spokesperson for the Minister said, "We want to do it properly, so it will take time." This is bureaucratic-speak for: This Government has no money.

The Government can make all the promises it wants to try to keep people quiet, but it cannot come through on its promises. Rocky Shamroze is spending \$700 a week on accommodation while he is in Adelaide getting his renal dialysis treatment. He is severely depressed because he misses his dog and his family as they are all in Broken Hill. He is just one man, but he is a prime example of how this Government is putting people through unnecessary pain and suffering, simply because it cannot keep its promises. Rocky Shamroze is just one man among more than 3,000 New South Wales residents who need renal dialysis. He is just one man among many in my electorate who feel this Government has let them down. Broken Hill needs additional renal dialysis chairs—that is not a want; it is a desperate need. I call on the Government to provide what is desperately needed.

Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [11.55 a.m.], in reply: I thank the member for Murray-Darling for assisting me with raising arguments on this important motion. I acknowledge the contribution of the member for Macquarie Fields, who I believe would really want to help patients who are desperately in need of haemodialysis at centres closer to their homes. Unfortunately, however, he has the terrible job of having to speak on behalf of a government that obviously does not care. Words are really not good enough. They mean absolutely zero to those who have to travel to Royal Prince Alfred Hospital and other hospitals that are distant from their homes. Thousands of people have spoken out about the issue, but obviously the Government has not heeded their concerns and will continue in relation to its financial mismanagement and not meeting the people's needs by bringing health services closer to them, which is supposed to be its aim.

I express my great disappointment with regard to the contribution of the member for Macquarie Fields. The speech was obviously prepared for him, which is a copout. Indeed, it sounded like the standard letter that

many people have been receiving in response to their calls and representations to the health Minister, the Department of Health and the area health service for better haemodialysis services closer to their homes. It may well be, as the member for Macquarie Fields said, that such services are available at Royal North Shore Hospital and on the Central Coast. However, Mrs Smart could not get into Royal North Shore Hospital; she had to go to Concord hospital and then on to Royal Prince Alfred. Mr Smart was totally opposed to taking his wife going to Gosford Hospital because that would have meant a trip up the F3. As we all know, there are many traffic problems on the F3. More importantly, however, a person needing haemodialysis should not be expected to travel to the Central Coast to access the service.

The Opposition is very concerned about the fact that not enough haemodialysis services are available. Again I urge the Government to immediately allocate funding to establish a haemodialysis centre at Hornsby Hospital and to call it the Joan Smart Haemodialysis Unit. I do so on behalf of the very brave people who called for a haemodialysis unit to be established at that hospital site. I refer to Len and Joan Smart—as I said, sadly Joan died earlier this month—Mr John Lee; Mrs Sutton, who speaks out on behalf of her father; Mrs Houlcroft, who speaks out on behalf of her mother; and the many hundreds of people who signed the petition I have presented in this House and will continue to present.

It is not good enough to have simply a renal medicine clinic at Hornsby Hospital. There are renal physicians based at the hospital and the establishment of a haemodialysis unit is appropriate. The incidence of diabetes in the community is increasing, and therefore the need for dialysis will also increase. I have already spoken about the need to establish a one-stop shop for patients with diabetes at Hornsby Hospital. I do not know what is to happen with the vacant area that was formerly occupied by the maternity unit. I have heard that it might be demolished to make way for a child and adolescent mental health facility, which I welcome. However, the Hornsby community also needs access to haemodialysis services, and the vacant area that was formerly occupied by the accident and emergency department would be a perfect place to establish that service.

The member for Macquarie Fields merely cited research already in existence as to the assessment that there must be a core number. If the core number was not met, why did the Minister for Health choose not to answer question No. 4121 about haemodialysis patients that I put on the *Notice Paper* on 23 October 2008, in which I called on the Minister to tell me per postcode how many patients were leaving my area to go to central Sydney haemodialysis units. Obviously he could not answer it, or perhaps he did not want to expose the fact that there are many such patients. Instead, the Minister gave me a rather interesting answer—which formed part of the speech of the member for Macquarie Fields—in relation to enhancement funding. The fact is words are cheap. The people of my electorate want increased access to haemodialysis and they want a haemodialysis facility at Hornsby Hospital. My constituents, the *Advocate*, the *Bush Telegraph*, the *Monthly Chronicle (Hornsby)*, and I will not rest until such time as we have that facility.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 39

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

Noes, 48

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

Pair

Mr Stoner

Mr Koperberg

Question resolved in the negative.**Motion negatived.****DISTINGUISHED VISITORS**

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): On behalf of the House I acknowledge the presence of Councillor Ray Longfellow, Mayor of Central Darling Shire; Tim Hazell, General Manager of Central Darling Shire; and Kym Fuller, Tourist and Development Officer of Central Darling Shire. They are guests of the member for Murray-Darling.

AUTISM EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.12 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) congratulates the Premier on the \$6 million package for the expansion of early intervention services for children with autism, including an autism-specific childcare centre in western Sydney;
- (2) notes that the number of children diagnosed with autism in New South Wales is on the rise;
- (3) notes that the earlier intervention in a child's life is provided, the bigger the difference that intervention can make to help children with autism reach their full potential; and
- (4) acknowledges that the \$6 million package addresses these issues and will provide a welcome boost to early intervention services.

The diagnosis of autism is a devastating one for families. It often comes after much delay, heartache and uncertainty. Once a diagnosis is made, parents then want to do whatever it takes to help their much-loved child. We are in the midst of a worldwide increase in the diagnosis of autism. There are now more children diagnosed with autism—one in 160 children—than with cancer. These children will need increased support in our school system for many years to come. I note that 2 April 2009 is World Autism Awareness Day. Research indicates that providing the earliest possible intervention for children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders and their families results in the most positive outcomes. The three early childhood programs that have been funded through the Government's \$6 million package will add to the range of programs provided by the many organisations that give support and intervention to families with a child with an autism spectrum disorder.

Two organisations, Autism Spectrum Disorders Australia [Aspect] and Autism Behavioural Intervention NSW Incorporated [ABI], have received \$2.06 million each to expand their current early childhood

intervention programs across metropolitan, regional and rural areas. The Autism Spectrum Disorders Australia Building Blocks Program for preschool-age children with autism spectrum disorders is a well-established early childhood intervention program that provides families with support through special education teachers and therapists. This program involves teachers and therapists in both centre-based and home-based settings for 120 hours and 60 hours per year respectively. Building Blocks, which often runs over two terms, is a best-practice intervention. This program provides support to families in managing behaviour, preparing for preschool, and teaching play, communication, self-help and fine and gross motor skills. It also provides practical solutions for day-to-day difficulties, such as tantrums, toileting and communication.

The new funding is enabling Autism Spectrum Disorders Australia to provide the Building Blocks Program, which started in July 2008, across three locations. The program is located at Ashfield and Lapstone and in the second to fourth years of funding will also be on the far North Coast. The number of families accessing the established Building Blocks Program at Ashfield Infants Home will total 16—12 in two centre-based programs and four in home-based settings. A new Building Blocks Program at Lapstone Preschool will cater for 16 children also—12 in two centre-based programs and four in home-based settings. The New South Government will provide the 30 Building Blocks places located on the far North Coast at centres in Lismore, Casino, Ballina, Byron Bay and Tweed Heads in July 2009, when the current Australian Government funding for these programs under Invest to Grow ends.

Further, the first year of funding—July 2008 to June 2009—has allowed families to access AutismPro, an innovative web-based program designed to complement and enhance other early childhood intervention services, including Building Blocks. AutismPro is based on the knowledge and experience of leading international autism educational researchers and practitioners with backgrounds in major autism educational models. It provides detailed activity plans for parents to choose from in order to help their child progress. These activity plans cover social, emotional, communication, receptive language, expressive language, cognitive and academic skills, independence, and fine and gross motor skills. Parents select the areas of greatest need and are able to track their child's progress to match their developmental needs.

Priority for AutismPro is being given to families in rural, remote and regional areas, as they have limited opportunity to access centre-based and home-based early intervention programs. In the first six months of this program 50 families statewide have been issued licences to access AutismPro. The 20-week pilot program provided by Autism Behavioural Intervention NSW for preschool children aims to reduce challenging behaviours and to enhance positive social behaviours at home or in community-based preschool and childcare centres. Autism Behavioural Intervention NSW was funded by the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care in 2006 to trial this program in its metropolitan north and metropolitan south regions during 2007-08. An external evaluation of the program late in 2007 showed that families reported positive experiences and results for their children. The program will continue in the metropolitan north and metropolitan south regions and will be extended into the department's southern region in 2009.

It is expected that up to 300 children with autism and their families will benefit from Autism Behavioural Intervention NSW programs over the four-year funding period. This will include 120 in the metropolitan south region, 120 in the metropolitan north region and 60 in the southern region. The two programs outlined will have a significant impact on the supports provided for families with a child with autism spectrum disorder. What we learn from these programs will help us to continue to develop interventions and supports that work for children with autism spectrum disorders and their families. The Rudd Government has now provided Federal funding to help families. Families can now receive \$6,000 worth of therapy for two years for early intervention—identical to Building Blocks—once a diagnosis of autism is confirmed. This is usually provided by a multidisciplinary-specific autism clinic. Autism Spectrum Disorders Australia manages both the Autism Advisor Program and Building Blocks. I recommend to all members the CD produced for the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care last year on autism. I note in my electorate that the Kids of Macarthur Health Foundation provided this CD free of charge to all families in Macarthur.

As has been indicated previously, the third organisation to receive funding under this initiative is experiencing difficulties in relation to identifying suitable premises in which to establish an autism-specific childcare centre. This is a different issue from the other programs, which integrate into the home or existing preschool centres. Should this prevent the organisation from delivering the funded program, the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care has indicated that it will identify an alternative provider to deliver the program. Some things should be above politics. The care of children with autism is one such issue. One of the difficulties with autism is that every child is different and the diagnostic work-up for every child with autism is time consuming and very difficult to do; it requires the significant expertise of a multidisciplinary team.

Similarly, every child requires individualised therapy. The therapy requires considerable training to administer, and while there are large numbers of therapists there is always a shortage of people who are able to treat and diagnose autism well. The epidemic of autism is said to be multifactorial. There are significant improvements in the diagnostic phase of children with autism, and that is one of the reasons why there is such a demand for places. The therapy can specifically target autism now, but the diagnostic work-up is very complicated and requires extensive multidisciplinary assessment. As I said before, the care of autism should be above politics. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE (Bega) [12.22 p.m.]: Mr Acting-Speaker, I acknowledge that you and I visited a family with an autistic child in the electorate of Baulkham Hills and we saw firsthand the difficulties that that family is facing in finding services and support for their child. A motion similar to this was brought before the House 12 months ago. Back then, Morris Iemma was the Premier and an announcement was made in relation to \$6 million in funding—which the New South Wales Liberals and The Nationals supported. At that time, as the shadow Minister for Disability Services, I issued a statement on behalf of the Coalition supporting the additional funding that the Government had made available. I also pointed out that much more needed to be done.

Certainly that funding was a start. However, it really only scratches the surface in terms of assisting families in western Sydney and around New South Wales. The Premier said at the time that the funding would assist 165 children each year. The reality is that every year 300 children are diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder. In 2007 the first major research into the prevalence of autism spectrum disorders found that one in 160 Australian children aged between six and 12 years has an autism spectrum disorder—that is in the order of 10,000 children in that age group nationwide.

As the shadow Minister for Disability Services, I have travelled around the State to places such as Broken Hill, Lismore, Bega and elsewhere and met many families who are struggling with autism. They struggle in the first instance to have their child diagnosed—in some cases a diagnosis takes 24 months. Then, following diagnosis, the provision of therapy and early intervention services to support that child are often sadly lacking. Last year the shadow Minister for Health and I held an autism roundtable. It established that there is a greater need for research, policy and resourcing from government at both Federal and State levels, but it must be provided in a coordinated way. The State Government must do more to reduce the waiting period between diagnosis and early intervention. Again, I call on the State Government—as I did last year—to ensure that this year's State budget addresses that issue. I note the upcoming launch of the autism awareness campaign, which is run every year in conjunction with Autism Week, and I urge the State Government to allocate more funds in the budget to autism services.

Whilst the Parliamentary Secretary is the sponsor of this motion, as the shadow Minister for Disability Services I place on record my disappointment that the Minister for Disability Services is not in the House. People in the disabilities sector are scratching their heads about the performance of the Minister. Nowhere has he been seen or heard making relevant noises in relation to disability services, particularly autism. He is absent. He is very quick to issue a press release and shoot it around the sector, but he is showing no leadership—

Mr Paul Lynch: Telling more lies, are we?

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: The Minister has just rushed down to the Chamber. That is terrific. He is more interested in being the State Minister for Foreign Affairs and running off with the Green Left.

Mr Paul Lynch: Point of order: The member for Bega, as is his want, is telling this House untruths. More than that, he is demeaning what is a very substantive issue about disability policy.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! What is the member's point of order?

Mr Paul Lynch: He is trying to devolve this debate into matters that have nothing to do with the motion before the House. Under Standing Order 76 his rant is not only irrelevant but an insult to those people whose children suffer from autism.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! I think the Minister for Ageing, Minister for Disability Services, and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs has made his point. The member for Bega has the call.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: You really are a sensitive soul, aren't you? You came in here yesterday and parroted a load of nonsense when your department has gone to the police in relation to drug concerns in a group home—

[Interruption]

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! The Minister for Disability Services is usually a very tolerant and patient man. The member for Bega has the call. The Minister will allow him to continue.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: I am glad that you have turned up because I will be holding you accountable in relation to the level of funding that is allocated to autism in this year's budget. You are a sensitive little soul and you are not showing the leadership that the sector expects of you. You are not holding roundtables to discuss important issues, unlike the New South Wales Coalition, which held a parliamentary roundtable in relation to autism. Maybe you should start to pay some attention to the concerns the sector has about your performance. The Minister has demonstrated time and time again a lack of thought—

Mr David Harris: Point of order: The member for Bega is directing his comments to the Minister and he should be directing them through the Chair.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! The member for Bega will direct his comments through the Chair.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: Through you, Mr Acting-Speaker, you might convey to the Minister the fact that—

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! I do not convey messages.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: The Minister is running a department in which 219 bureaucrats are earning more than \$100,000 a year, yet all he has seen fit to do in the two years since the release of the relevant study on autism—

Mr Paul Lynch: Point of order—

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! I hope the Minister for Disability Services is taking a substantive point of order.

Mr Paul Lynch: It is a substantive point of order. It is three minutes since the member for Bega has mentioned autism. He seems to have completely forgotten the motion before the House.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! That is not a point of order. However, I remind the member for Bega that the motion is about autism.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: I was making the point—as the Minister would know if he had been listening—that it is two years since a significant study into autism released its findings. The only response the Minister has made in that time—despite the fact that each year 300 children in this State are diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder—is to allocate \$6 million. I pointed out that the Minister has 219 bureaucrats earning more than \$100,000 a year and that his funding priorities are all wrong—just as his political priorities are all wrong when he spends his time running off with the Green Left. It is high time the Minister started to dedicate himself to autism-related issues. I will spell out some of the issues that came out of the autism roundtable that we held in Parliament and some of the concerns in the sector. All representatives of the sector were present at the roundtable conference and many of the issues raised related to early diagnosis and the resourcing of therapy services.

The fact of the matter is—not that the Minister would know this—that in many areas around the State the waiting list for basic therapy services, such as speech therapy, occupational therapy and the like, has blown out to 18 months. To that end, the Minister is not doing his job. We will sit back and wait to see what funding goes to autism in this year's budget. Morris Iemma showed some interest in disability services when he was Premier. Nathan Rees has not mentioned the word "disabilities" once since he became Premier. He has appointed a loopy, lunatic, left-winger as the Minister responsible for the Disability Services portfolio and we are now seeing the results of that. That means that the sector is not getting the support—

Mr Paul Lynch: He is a bit sensitive about yesterday.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: The Minister is a bit sensitive about yesterday, too. That is exactly right. He is the person who had to confirm in the House that the police had entered one of his group home properties at the department's request and that the department—

Dr Andrew McDonald: Point of order: I will have to bring him back to the topic of the debate, which is autism.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! I am sure the member for Bega will refer to the motion.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: The Minister keeps interjecting. He has all of a sudden shown an interest in disability services because I mentioned his name. He has rushed downstairs into the Chamber—

Mr Paul Lynch: He was actually outside listening.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: You are so toxic, Paul! The Minister should get the message from the sector. It wants better work force capacity to deal with resourcing and better integration of service systems. It has been clearly stated that services in rural New South Wales are inadequate. Many families are missing out, which is leading to significant problems, including family breakdown, depression and so on. The Minister has shown no interest in the issue. I urge him to wake up to himself and to show an interest in the portfolio for which he is responsible.

Mr PAUL LYNCH (Liverpool—Minister for Ageing, Minister for Disability Services, and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs) [12.32 p.m.]: I commence by congratulating the Parliamentary Secretary on moving this motion. The shadow Minister for Disability Services' contribution has revealed why he is so inadequate in his role. He has spent 10 minutes indulging in a political diatribe against me, not dealing with the substantive motion before the House. He is undoubtedly sensitive—

Mr Andrew Constance: Point of order: The Minister has now about been speaking for 30 seconds and he has not mentioned the word "autism" once.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! I will listen further to the Minister.

Mr Andrew Constance: I urge you to speak—

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! I will not make a ruling when the Minister has been speaking for only 30 seconds. I will allow him to make some introductory remarks.

Mr PAUL LYNCH: Indeed, if the member who took the point of order had the slightest acquaintance with the standing orders—and I concede that he does not—he would understand that they allow speakers to respond to comments already made in the debate. I have not only a better understanding of the standing orders than the member for Bega but also a far better understanding of the substance of these policy issues. His failure to address them in his 10-minute contribution is eloquent testament to his inability to deal with these issues. We heard a political attack but no substantive policy discussion.

Mr Andrew Constance: Point of order: It has now been a minute since I raised my last point of order about the Minister not mentioning the word "autism", which is the subject of this debate.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! The Minister is aware of the topic of the debate.

Mr Andrew Constance: He obviously does not understand the motion.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! There is no point of order. I am certain the Minister will direct his attention immediately to the word "autism".

Mr PAUL LYNCH: I am directing my comments precisely in accordance with the standing orders. The shadow Minister brought this into the debate as an issue. It is typical of his cowardice that he wants to raise this issue and then run away.

Mr Jonathan O'Dea: Point of order: Clearly there has been an attack on an individual member of this House in that he has been accused of cowardice. There was an element of retort on this side, but this place is not served by such personal attacks.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! There is no point of order. This is a robust Chamber. The Minister has the call. Let us move this debate along.

Mr PAUL LYNCH: I have been trying to, but the points of order have slowed it down a bit.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! Members are entitled to take points of order. Let us move along.

Mr PAUL LYNCH: I am not disputing that. I responded to your comment about moving along.

Mr Richard Amery: They are in a bit of hurry because the mother ship leaves soon.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! The Minister does not need the assistance of the member for Mount Druitt.

Mr Andrew Constance: He does not know what planet he is on.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! The member for Bega will cease interjecting. The Minister has the call.

Mr PAUL LYNCH: The member for Bega not only does not know anything about this issue but he is also personally offensive. He just cannot get his head around the issues.

Mr Andrew Constance: Point of order: Mr Acting Speaker, I draw your attention to the fact that the Minister has now been speaking for three minutes and 15 seconds and has not mentioned the word "autism".

Mr PAUL LYNCH: If the member stopped interjecting I might have a chance.

Mr Andrew Constance: He is just slinging mud at me, which is true to form for him. Mr Acting Speaker, I ask you to bring the Minister back to the leave of the debate, which relates to the autism.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! I appreciate the timekeeping of the member for Bega. The Minister has the call.

Mr PAUL LYNCH: The Parliamentary Secretary should be congratulated for moving this motion. The funding that he refers to in the motion is an indication of the Government's continued commitment to addressing the needs of families who have a child with an autism spectrum disorder and to finding ways to improve the quality of life of children and young people with this disorder. That funding and the related programs are clearly provided in the context of Stronger Together, which is the Government's 10-year plan for dealing with disability services and the needs of those with disabilities, their families and carers. That inevitably includes autism spectrum disorders.

I confirm the point made by the Parliamentary Secretary—which is probably the most substantive ongoing issue in this sector but was completely ignored by the shadow Minister—that the agency involved in the child-care centre is having difficulties delivering the project. As the Parliamentary Secretary said, if that agency cannot complete it, the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care will fund another agency to do so.

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA (Davidson) [12.37 p.m.]: It is pleasing that the Parliamentary Secretary has moved this motion. It is also pleasing that much-needed funding is being provided for autism programs. Autism is a brain development disorder characterised by impaired social interaction and communication and by restricted and repetitive behaviour. The signs of autism begin before a child is three years old. Autism spectrum disorders include related conditions, such as Asperger's syndrome, that have milder signs and symptoms. Autism has a strong genetic base. Other potential causes, such as childhood vaccines, are controversial. However, people with autism have social impairments and often lack the intuition about others that many of us take for granted.

While obviously the Opposition and the shadow Minister have welcomed the funding allocated to autism services, we note—as indeed the motion notes—that the number of children diagnosed with autism in New South Wales is on the rise, and has been for the past 14 years. I point out the obvious, that it took this Government 13 years to do something. As the shadow Minister pointed out, waiting times for diagnosis are still causing problems.

I have within my electorate a number of people whose children have autism. In fact, my family lived next door to a family with a young boy who had autism, so I have personal experience of it. A constituent of mine, Mr Sam Loricco, is a director of the Autism Behavioural Intervention Association of New South Wales. I am pleased that that organisation has received \$2 million in funding. However, in our discussions, Mr Loricco raised the methodology for determining the number places funded. While his organisation is receiving funding for a certain number of places, Autism Spectrum Australia, or Aspect—which I do not criticise in any way—is receiving a similar amount to fund fewer places. I am interested in the methodology used to determine the number of places to be funded and the amount provided.

Sam and his organisation are undertaking projects in the metropolitan north and south regions of the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care, and he is going to Wollongong tomorrow with a view to setting up a service from 1 July this year for families in the Wollongong region. He raises the important issue that, because it has taken so long for funding to be put in place, many school-age children now cannot be helped with early intervention. On behalf of Sam and all those children, we would like to know how can early intervention programs, as great as they might be, be adapted to school-age children. A lot of children have missed out on early intervention over the past 13 or 14 years because the Government did not introduce this package years ago.

So, in addition to the questions the member for Bega and the shadow Minister for Disability Services posed about funding in this year's budget, I would like to know what additional funding will now be provided to organisations like Autism Behavioural Intervention or Aspect to work in the school environment, where additional money is definitely needed? By the Government's own admission, the numbers of children diagnosed have been rising for quite some time. Many children have missed out because those programs, which both sides of the House admit are much needed, were not in place. What is the Government going to do for the children who have missed out and who are now in the schooling system?

In the sense that the motion acknowledges that a \$6 million package for expansion of early intervention services for children with autism in a number of areas in Sydney is a good thing, we do not oppose the motion. In the sense that the motion acknowledges that the number of children diagnosed with autism in New South Wales is on the rise, we agree. However, we do not agree that the Government has done its duty in waiting 13 years to provide this funding. The Government needs to address the holes it has left behind.

Mr DAVID HARRIS (Wyang) [12.42 p.m.]: Today I am pleased to support this excellent motion from the member for Macquarie Fields. As a person who worked in the education system for 20 years, I certainly understand the complications and stresses for families with children who are diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. Schools and teachers are getting better at working with children with autism. This is especially so for those children who are diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome. Better use of visual aids, music and specialist teacher's aides have enabled these children to better access mainstream classrooms.

I would like to mention the incredible work being done by the Central Coast Autism School. It provides educational services in conjunction with mainstream schools. In partnership with the Department of Education and Training, Wamberal Public School hosts two kindergarten to year 6 satellite classes. The aim of these classes is to prepare the children for inclusion in their own local school or support class. In partnership with the Catholic Education Office and the Diocese of Broken Bay they operate two satellite classes—one at St Brendan's Catholic Primary School, Lake Munmorah, and one for secondary students at St Peter's College, Tuggerah. The total enrolment across the Central Coast for children with autism school community is 58 students.

This morning I would like to build on what the member for Macquarie Fields talked about—two projects funded under the \$6 million package involving Aspect and the University of Newcastle that will also make important contributions in the areas of information for families and staff training in relation to autism. The first project is the information kit for families. Aspect was funded in 2007 by the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care to develop an information kit for families titled "Building Foundations, Autism: Your Child, Your Family". The kit provides information about autism to families of young children with autism and to the people who work with them. It has been well received by families across the State.

In order to ensure that schools and childcare agencies are made aware of the availability of the kit, Aspect has received a further \$200,000 under the \$6 million autism initiative to extend its distribution. This funding has enabled Aspect to print a further 10,000 copies. These copies have already been distributed free of charge to Department of Education and Training schools, Catholic Education schools, schools represented by

the Association of Independent Schools, long day care centres, Department of Community Services funded preschools, family day care scheme and mobile services. This initiative will ensure that these schools and agencies are made aware of the availability of this resource from Aspect by parents wishing to benefit from its availability.

The second project is the Early Childhood Intervention Professional Development scheme. The Centre for Special Education and Disability Studies at the University of Newcastle received \$500,000 for the further training of front-line staff working with young children who have challenging behaviours. In the 2007-08 financial year, the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care provided the university with a grant of \$153,300 to develop, trial and implement an early childhood intervention professional development course, titled "Preventing and reducing challenging behaviour in young children using functional assessment: Social and communication supports". This course has been well received by the 379 staff members working in early childhood settings across the State who participated between July 2007 and December 2008.

An evaluation of the course indicated that the training workshops were effective in increasing the knowledge, skills and confidence of participants in the provision of behaviour support, and the use of communication approaches to reduce and prevent challenging behaviour. The current funding is enabling the university to revise the course, incorporate an autism component, develop a DVD to accompany the course and consider the possibility of accreditation of the course as a module towards further tertiary study. The first course under the new funding is scheduled for May this year, and it is expected that approximately 120 to 150 participants will enrol. The course workshops are planned to be held at Tamworth, Newcastle, Hornsby, Canterbury, Bega and Bathurst. These areas cover all DADHC regions.

Mr Brad Hazzard: What about the North Coast?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I have already talked about the North Coast. These initiatives will also help us to continue to develop interventions and supports that work for children with autism spectrum disorders and their families into the future.

Mr THOMAS GEORGE (Lismore) [12.47 p.m.]: I am disappointed the Minister has left the Chamber, because this has been a very good debate and it brings home the issue of autism. I refer to a lady, a dedicated mother, Traci-Ann Garrad, who made representations to me where she said in her letter to me that her family had suffered great hardship after 2½ years of fighting. It took a long time for them to find out what their child's problem was. The diagnosis came as a relief to them, as she and her husband were often left wondering what had happened to their little boy. He was enjoying life and suddenly they did not know what happened to him. He was diagnosed with autism.

That is where the problems started. She rejected that her child's life could be dictated to, and when the child was two, and services were not available to them, they set about trying a behavioural therapy program for the child at home. That program ran for about 2½ years and cost the family \$1,000 a week for two therapists, the behavioural analyst and therapy items and toys that were required for the 30-hours-a-week program to be achieved. Their son also went on a gluten-free diet and underwent biomedical treatment and chiropractic care. Costs were more than they could ever afford on the single parents pension, and after selling every asset they had, including furniture and personal items, they realised they needed to borrow money to continue the program to ensure the future of their son and to build on his progress.

Halfway through the program they ran out of options and were unable to secure personal finance. Under the pressure of trying to create a future for their son, they decided to borrow money using business finance through their company, the Clever Little Secretary. Over the next year the business overdraft would exceed \$40,000. The program continued until May 2007 when the funds ran out. During those 2½ years their son kept the family going and for one year Xander did not sleep more than three hours in any 24-hour period. The family was completely run down and had to seek support by writing to the Minister and making representations to the Director General of the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care and to me.

I am pleased that the shadow Minister for Disability Services is in the Chamber, although the Minister is not present. In March last year the shadow Minister acknowledged that funding was a start. Indeed, he complimented the Minister on the announcement to provide funding but stated it did not go far enough. The shadow Minister, like all of us, has met families with autistic children throughout Broken Hill and Lismore. In recent weeks he has met people in my own office to talk about this issue. Although the announcement is welcomed by the sector, it does not address the difficulties facing many families, particularly those who live

outside metropolitan areas, those in country and regional New South Wales. We need to support people such as Traci-Ann Garrad because they do not have the same facilities as those in the city. It is important that more funding and programs are made available to people in country areas.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.52 p.m.], in reply: I thank the Minister for Ageing, and Minister for Disability Services, the member for Bega, the member for Wyong, the member for Wyong, the member for Davidson and the member for Lismore for their contributions to this debate. Despite the disagreements, it was heartening to see the passion that every member of this place has for those families whose child is diagnosed with autism. We all agree on the need for funding from all levels of government for the diagnostic treatment and educational and support services for autism, for life.

From my own personal experience over the last 13 years in south-western Sydney, there has been a revolution in the diagnosis, assessment and treatment of children with autism. We now have four community paediatricians, all of whom make multidisciplinary assessments, which are world's best practice, all set up by the Labor Government. The \$6 million is further evidence of the commitment that this Government has for those families whose child is diagnosed with autism. The school system has increased, and is continuing to increase, places for children with autism, as mentioned by the member for Wyong, and there is also greater support for inclusion of children with autism and Asperger's syndrome in mainstream schools.

For example, recently one of the community paediatricians from Campbelltown spoke at length with teachers from primary and high schools in my electorate. My final question is a simple one. We all agree that the need for autism services is going to increase, but why have we not yet seen any policy discussion of any sort from members opposite? We all identify the problem but what the people of New South Wales want to know is what members opposite actually plan to do. How will they be able to run a budget in surplus and increase services without cutting other services?

Mr Andrew Constance: Point of order: The member for Macquarie Fields is well and truly outside the leave of the debate. He is now embarking on a discussion about Liberal Party and Nationals policy when the debate is clearly about autism. I ask that you to draw him back to the leave of the debate.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! The member for Macquarie Fields will address his remarks to the leave of the motion.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: I thank the member for Bega for his interjection because, as he said, the debate is about autism, not about their policy. I do not think they have a policy on autism. For them, I do not think the two words can actually go together. That is probably why he took a point of order. Returning to the leave of the motion, autism should be above politics. This is going to be a problem for every government in the First World. Everybody needs to know exactly what any government plans to do. We have yet to hear from members opposite about their plans for the future of our children as the alternative government. The disinvestment by the former Howard Government is typical of their talking the talk but when it comes to walking the walk, they are found wanting. I commend this motion to the House.

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

Motion agreed to.

WAGGA WAGGA COUNTRYLINK SERVICE

Mr DARYL MAGUIRE (Wagga Wagga) [12.57 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) calls on the Minister for Transport to investigate deficiencies in the CountryLink timetables in the electorate of Wagga Wagga, particularly the CountryLink service providing transport to and from Batlow and Tumut; and
- (2) notes the current timetable is not meeting the community's needs and that the community seeks to have the current service terminate at Wagga Wagga.

This motion has been on the business paper for quite some time. In fact, I gave notice of it on 1 April 2008. In that time I have worked hard with the community to ensure that its voice was heard, and adjustments were made, I am pleased to report that we have been successful in some respects but other concerns need to be addressed, which is why I have moved the motion. Transport is a critical issue for regional and rural

communities. As communities age, as the cost of fuel increases and as centralised health services become the norm rather than the exception, there is an increased need for people in regional and remote communities to travel to places such as Wagga Wagga, Yass, Canberra and Sydney to access many services. However, many of these services have been run in a particular way for many years and have not been adjusted to suit community needs. In this simple motion I ask the Minister to investigate the matter and hold a brief inquiry, with community consultation, to ascertain whether the timetables are meeting community needs and, if not, to ensure that a policy is implemented to achieve that aim.

CountryLink previously operated a bus service from Batlow to Tumut, then to Gundagai and Cootamundra, where the service terminated. The problem was that constituents had to wait for up to three hours to catch the connecting XPT service to Sydney. After I raised the issue in Parliament and in other forums CountryLink, to its great credit, heeded our calls and adjusted the timetable. As a result, on three days a week the bus service now leaves from Tumbarumba and travels through Batlow, Tumut, Gundagai and down to Wagga Wagga. On the other days the service travels to Young and Cootamundra, where it terminates. The community appreciates that change to the service. It means they have an hour's grace in Wagga Wagga, which allows them to attend to appointments. Ideally, they would like the timetable to be adjusted slightly so they could have two or three hours in Wagga Wagga. That would allow the people of Tumbarumba, Tumut, Batlow, Gundagai and other towns in the area to attend to their important medical appointments and access the services they need.

The people of Boorowa and Young have also highlighted the need to get to Sydney and Canberra. Many constituents have written to me expressing their concerns about transport services to those areas, as they have to the member for Burrinjuck, who will inform members of her community's needs in that regard. We want to consider their needs in this debate and we call on the Minister to address them in his response. What we need is a service to replace the Grasshopper service, which was owned by Fearnese and transported passengers from Wagga Wagga to Sydney and return via Gundagai. People from the mountains area as well as people from Wagga Wagga city were able to access that service. Recently Busabout purchased the Fearnese company and subsequently cancelled that service. I met with the Busabout management and discussed the problems that arose when the new owners cancelled the service. The company gave a number of reasons why the service was cancelled, and of course they were financial. The CountryLink network did not support the service.

I ask the Minister to consider implementing a CountryLink-supported service that would allow a couple of options. Many options emerge once an inquiry is undertaken and consultation occurs with the community. One option is to have a bus service operating from Wagga Wagga to Tumut, Gundagai, Yass and terminating in Canberra, perhaps connecting with a connecting service that would allow people to travel on to Sydney. On alternate days the service could operate from Wagga Wagga to Boorowa, Young and Yass, and either go direct to Sydney or to Canberra to travel on a connecting service.

I ask for innovation and flexibility with regard to the way in which passengers are transported. I do not ask for a great deal, but I ask that communities be consulted so that we can encourage the Minister to put in place a plan that will allow people basic transport access. If we walk out onto Macquarie Street there is plenty of transport. Although we complain about timetables and the difficulties that are experienced, city people have easier access to transport. But pensioners who have lost their licence because of the new regulations that have been brought in—for example, because they are aged or have impaired eyesight—have many difficulties gaining access to transport. These people may need to get to Wagga Wagga for their medical appointments or may want to travel to Sydney to visit relatives and friends. They need a transport service that is cost-efficient, flexible and reliable.

I have received many emails and correspondence about this issue. There have been letters to the editor, and letters to me from the Country Women's Association. I acknowledge Mrs Barbara Johnston of Currawarna, who has campaigned hard to have the former bus service reinstated, supported by CountryLink—directly to Sydney or via Canberra, whatever the option, so long as the service is implemented. I understand that private organisations provide similar bus services, but the services are very difficult to access. For example, the services travel through the city of Wagga Wagga in the middle of the night or at times that are not convenient for people. Many of the people who use these bus services are aged or disabled, and they prefer the Fearnese service. The drivers and staff are just wonderful. They help them with their luggage, and quite often they will even drop them at their exact destination rather than have them struggle with their luggage.

I have received correspondence from Mrs Gwen Tunks, Mrs Rhonda Miller, Mrs Ruth Tyrell and Mrs Barbara York, to name just a few. All of them say they used the service, they have read about the concerns that

have been raised in the *Daily Advertiser*, and they have asked that the Minister and those in authority in CountryLink consider their plight. Some say they used the service up to 16 times. Others say they were very disappointed to hear about the loss of the service and that they regularly travelled to Canberra on Fearnies coaches for medical appointments. The community was shocked when they heard the service was cancelled. However, when one understands the financial difficulties that the service was operating under, without government support, one realises that the company had to make a decision. I do not condemn Busabout at all; it has to make money, otherwise we would not have the important services we have in our city and indeed in western Sydney, where the company also provides services. However, with regard to some of these services there is a strong case to put to the Minister that a community service obligation should be put in place.

This motion is not designed to be divisive; it is not designed to inflame. The motion is designed to highlight to the House and to the people of New South Wales the concerns of the community in the south-western region of the State, including the electorates of Burrinjuck and Wagga Wagga, and other people who use the service that we need such a service and we want that need met. We want it met in the form of a brief inquiry involving community consultation. We ask for delivery of a service, supported by CountryLink, that will address our needs and replace the former Fearnies Grasshopper service. We also ask for adjustment of the timetable for the bus service—which we are very grateful for—that was provided between Tumbarumba, Tumut, Gundagai, Batlow and Wagga Wagga.

Mr NINOS KHOSHABA (Smithfield) [1.07 p.m.]: Each year CountryLink's XPT and XPLOER trains carry around 1.6 million passengers to around 360 destinations in New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory, Victoria and Queensland. CountryLink provides long-distance rail and coach services connecting people to metropolitan cities, and rural and regional centres in New South Wales and along the east coast of the country. The XPT fleet links Sydney with destinations as far south as Melbourne, as far north as Grafton, Casino and Brisbane, and as far west as Dubbo. The XPLOER fleet links Sydney with Canberra, Tamworth, Armidale, Moree, Griffith and Broken Hill.

With a current complement of approximately 60 XPT carriages, 19 power cars and 23 XPLOER carriages, CountryLink presently operates 144 rail services each week. CountryLink's rail services are complemented by its bus fleet, which operates 560 road coach services each week to a total of 363 destinations. The CountryLink coach fleet links with the XPT or XPLOER services to connect passengers with destinations such as Surfers Paradise, Byron Bay, the New South Wales Far South Coast, Lightning Ridge, the Great Lakes and south-western New South Wales. Each week the CountryLink call centre handles approximately 23,000 calls about its services, whilst CountryLink's website averages around 140,000 visitors per month.

In the Wagga Wagga electorate CountryLink services the towns of Adelong, Batlow, Coolamon, Ganmain, Henty, Matong, The Rock, Tumut, Wondalga and Wagga Wagga. Until recently, CountryLink provided two daily CountryLink coach services—the 723 and 724—to and from Batlow and Tumut. Both of these services connected with CountryLink XPT services at Cootamundra, enabling customers to travel to Wagga Wagga. CountryLink's timetable for New South Wales is devised to incorporate current demand by CountryLink customers, taking into account availability of rolling stock and timetable paths on main rail corridors.

I understand that, following feedback from the local community in Tumut, RailCorp investigated the feasibility of implementing changes to services for communities located between Tumbarumba and Cootamundra. RailCorp has since approved an alteration to the 723 and 724 coach services. Since 4 August 2008 these coach services operate in both directions between Tumbarumba and Wagga Wagga on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. The coach services will connect with the 1.54 p.m. Sydney to Melbourne XPT service and the 1.09 p.m. Melbourne to Sydney XPT service at Wagga Wagga. The 723 and 724 coach services will continue to operate in both directions between Tumbarumba and Cootamundra on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday. These services will connect with the 12.47 p.m. Sydney to Melbourne XPT service and the 2.37 p.m. Melbourne to Sydney service at Cootamundra.

The new timetable can be downloaded from the CountryLink website at www.countrylink.info. Residents of Tumut and Batlow will now have six weekly services to and from Wagga Wagga. The New South Wales Government is committed to the retention of CountryLink rail and coach services and to ensuring its long-term sustainability. Making minimal changes to the opening hours of regional booking offices and introducing new booking services to increase convenience to passengers have achieved this.

New South Wales residents and tourists are also reaping the benefits of the Government's \$42 million upgrade of the iconic XPT fleet, with works on all passenger carriages now complete. The comprehensive

refurbishment has included improvements to the safety and condition of seats, fitting of new toilets and carpets, upgraded air-conditioning and installation of new food service equipment inside buffet carriages. Stage two of the \$42 million make over is an overhaul of the 19 XPT power cars due for completion in 2011. The newly refurbished trains offer families and individuals a comfortable and affordable way to visit the culturally and historically rich towns of New South Wales. For those of us feeling the pinch from the ever-increasing cost of living, the affordable travel options provided by CountryLink are greatly welcomed.

CountryLink remains the most affordable way for pensioners to travel; they can also take advantage of the \$2.50 CountryLink pensioner excursion ticket for travel outside the CityRail network. In fact cheaper fares are now the norm for seniors, students, apprentices and pensioners living in regional and country New South Wales. The new regional excursion daily [RED] ticket is available for travel on local, non-CountryLink bus services in regional centres, country towns and villages, which means that pensioners and seniors can enjoy access to all-day travel for \$2.50. Half-fare concessions for full-time tertiary and senior secondary students have been extended to all bus travel, not just journeys to and from university, school and college. Apprentices and trainees also enjoy half-fare concession benefits. Cheaper travel means that pensioners, students, apprentices and seniors on tight budgets will be able to afford to travel for pleasure, not just necessity.

This is a significant improvement in the quality of life for many people. The pensioner excursion ticket is a popular product in metropolitan areas and I am confident that its popularity will continue with pensioners and seniors as a result of its extension to regular route bus services in rural and regional areas. It is also vital that we support our young people and facilitate their access to training and educational facilities. Now that the CountryLink XPT carriage works are finished, a \$27 million program to refurbish the 23 CountryLink XPLOER and 28 CityRail Endeavour railcars will begin. Already one XPLOER and eight Endeavour railcars have been refurbished.

The XPLOER and Endeavour fleets service Canberra, Southern Highlands, Hunter Valley, South Coast, Armidale, Moree, Griffith and Broken Hill. They have been operating largely unchanged for the past 12 to 14 years. The upgrade of this fleet will help make passenger journeys more comfortable and will be welcomed by XPLOER and Endeavour passengers throughout regional New South Wales. The refurbishment will see new seats, curtains, carpets and upgraded toilet facilities installed. At the same time the luggage capacity on each carriage will be increased to provide better on-board facilities for tourists and commuters. It is expected that the work on the XPLOER and Endeavour railcars will be finalised by 2010. The Government remains committed to providing long-term sustainable transport options to the people of rural and regional New South Wales.

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck) [1.15 p.m.]: I support the important motion moved by the member for Wagga Wagga. I have discussed this matter with him on several occasions: Fearnies Coaches used to travel between Wagga Wagga and Sydney, through the electorates of Wagga Wagga and Burrinjuck. We are both calling for an investigation into rural timetables and public transport services to meet the needs of the rural communities of southern and south-eastern New South Wales. It is no secret that the Government has a phenomenally poor record in addressing the needs of rural communities, particularly in public transport.

On 25 February this year, after 21 years service, Fearnies Coaches stopped bus travel through my electorate. I will highlight the situation that has arisen as a result of the closure of the bus route from Wagga Wagga to Junee, Cootamundra, Harden, Young, Yass, Canberra and Sydney. Fearnies said it had become uneconomical for a private bus company to operate this route, as passenger numbers rarely exceeded double digits, except during the fruit-picking season. Since the closure announcement my office—and the office of the member for Wagga Wagga—has been inundated with phone calls, letters, emails and all sorts of communications from constituents who were perhaps not frequent users of the service but certainly regular users of it. I can throw my mother into the equation as well—she was a regular user of Fearnies but perhaps not a weekly user. It has become a huge inconvenience for the people who used that service.

One point that repeats itself in the many calls I have received is that the Fearnies route allowed patients seeking medical treatment in Canberra or Sydney to attend an appointment in the middle of the day and return home the same day. That is an important requirement because a lot of patients cannot afford to pay for overnight accommodation in Canberra or Sydney. Many of the travellers to Canberra were either ineligible for assistance from the Isolated Patient Transport and Accommodation Assistance Scheme [IPTAAS] or they were too close to the 100-kilometre radius involved for the personal contribution required by the Minister for Health, which cancelled out any financial assistance they might have otherwise have been able to claim.

One such person who needs the service is Margaret Luff from Young, a frequent visitor to Sydney for breast cancer treatment. Irene Dowsett from the Young travel agency told me that travellers from Young will have only the CountryLink service to Sydney, which does not arrive until 8.00 p.m.—when it is on time. That is not suitable for elderly people who are out by themselves walking the streets of Sydney after dark. Margaret Malone expressed her concerns to me. Noelene Hazell from Bookham, zone representative for the Red Cross, spoke of the convenience of single-day travel to and from Sydney. Marie Lindley, Gundagai tourism manager, said she was shocked by the news of the closure. Cecily Porter from Gundagai, a recent heart transplant recipient, expressed her concern about being unable to travel to medical appointments. William Hogarth from Harden also expressed his concerns.

Joy and Barry Coogan of Jugion are concerned about the closure of the service. Their 32-year-old disabled daughter, Carmel, who has travelled the route for 12 years now has no way of getting to Wagga Wagga unless her family drives her 41 kilometres each way to catch the closest bus, which is at Gundagai. Carmel also wrote to me and told me that her only option is to catch the Greyhound bus, which would pick her up at 3.00 a.m. Is that any way for disabled adults, particularly those living in country communities, to access services? The answer has to be no! Brian and Penny Millet of Yass have also expressed concern about the closure of the run. Senator Fiona Nash, who has an office in Young, raised with me the concerns of Maurice and Leonie Eastlake of Young.

In February, following the Fearnese announcement, I wrote to the Minister for Transport putting forward a proposal by another bus company to replace the Fearnese run on a 12-month trial basis, contingent on its being included as a CountryLink service. The proposed service will attract increased patronage, particularly from pensioners. I suggest that the route include Boorowa, which has no public transport connections and will attract additional passengers. The residents of the electorate of Burrinjuck wait with bated breath for the Minister to make a decision. I strongly suggest to the Minister that the only decision he can make in good conscience is to support this trial. It is a most significant issue for the electorates of Wagga Wagga and Burrinjuck. I implore departmental officers working within the Department of Transport to come up with a solution to this crisis facing our electorates. It is a matter of extreme concern for everyone who uses public transport in our electorates.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN (Willoughby) [1.20 p.m.]: I am very pleased to support this motion. I commend the member for Wagga Wagga, who moved the motion, and the member for Burrinjuck, who has supported it. I have experienced firsthand the difficulties faced by people in south-west New South Wales in accessing public transport. Last year I visited the area using CountryLink services. As the members for Wagga Wagga and Burrinjuck said, the Sunday evening train from Central gets into Wagga Wagga at about 3 o'clock in the morning. Wagga Wagga is the largest inland city in New South Wales, yet travellers cannot access it by train unless they are prepared to alight at Wagga Wagga at 3.00 a.m. On that occasion I travelled on the sleeper all the way to Albury. The train arrived at Albury at about five past four in the morning. Again, Albury is a major township in New South Wales. Yet people who travel by CountryLink rail services to those areas have to disembark in the early hours of the morning.

The issues raised by the members for Wagga Wagga and Burrinjuck relate not only to rail services but also to bus services. Mobility is a problem for people who live in country areas, especially if they do not have access to a motor vehicle. It is extremely difficult in rural and regional New South Wales to access public transport and, in particular, meet connections, whether they are bus connections or bus and rail connections. The Government must address the timetabling issue. On previous occasions when I have raised timetabling in this place and in other forums, the Government's response has been that it has always been this way and it always will be. That is not an adequate response. I am disappointed at the Government's response to this motion. I am pleased that improvements have been made in the electorate of Wagga Wagga, as the member for Wagga Wagga highlighted. That demonstrates the need for the Government to address community concerns. The additional issues that have been raised in today's debate highlight the need for a closer examination of the timetable.

Missing a connection in the country often means that travellers have to wait hours before the next connection, whether it is by bus or train. Many commuters have told me that it causes them enormous angst, particularly when they are being met at their destination and they are unable to communicate that they have missed their connection and that they will be late. They are also upset because of the wasted time and late hour at which they reach their destination. Public transport services must be better coordinated. The Government must enhance CountryLink bus and rail services. The Government has a responsibility to provide appropriate and adequate public transport services.

I listened closely to the member for Smithfield, who spoke about discounts for pensioners on CountryLink services. As the member would know, the Coalition has a bill that seeks to abolish the booking tax on CountryLink services, which pensioners must pay. This tax was introduced three years ago. I hope the member's comments this morning mean that Government members will support the Coalition's bill. I will return to the specific issues raised by the members for Wagga Wagga and Burrinjuck. I was honoured last year to use CountryLink services when I visited south-west New South Wales. I made my way to Wagga Wagga and then slowly back to Sydney visiting townships in the electorates of Wagga Wagga and Burrinjuck. I listened to the concerns of local commuters about transport services. Their main concerns, as have been highlighted today, were access to public transport, appropriate timetabling, and ensuring connections were met.

I again commend both the member for Wagga Wagga and the member for Burrinjuck for the views they have expressed this morning. They are the views that were expressed to me by the local community when I attended community meetings and met with local councils and community transport organisations. It was a great learning experience for me to hear firsthand from residents how important public transport is to them and how timetables, which are dictated by the Government, can make an enormous difference to local communities. We must remember that point. Governments have a responsibility to provide efficient and timely public transport services. I am pleased to support this motion.

Mr GERARD MARTIN (Bathurst) [1.25 p.m.]: The Government will not oppose this motion. Having said that, I indicate that bus and rail scheduling is an ongoing process: we are happy to examine timetables. I refer to the comments of the member for Smithfield, who elucidated the funding and upgrades being provided to CountryLink services in a \$42 million refurbishment project. I know that the Minister for Tourism, who is present in the Chamber, is well aware of the importance to tourism of upgrading services, such as the XPT. In the Central West, this service links Sydney with towns such as Lithgow, Orange, Bathurst and Dubbo—which has major tourism infrastructure, such as the Old Dubbo Gaol and the Western Plains Zoo. The Government is very conscious of the importance of keeping CountryLink services up to scratch. The Minister also recognises that changes occur and timetables need finetuning. That is why we are happy to examine the matter brought forward by the member for Wagga Wagga.

As the member for Smithfield said, as well as upgrading the fleet the Government has made sure that CountryLink and all other regional train services are affordable. The list of concessions is long. People in my electorate and further west, particularly seniors, enjoy the \$2.50 excursion fare. They are able to travel to the city and keep in touch with their relatives. We now have added bus concessions that link with CountryLink through coach services. The Government provides a comprehensive service. All members would agree that services can be improved and should be finetuned. That is why we are happy to look at the matters raised by the member for Wagga Wagga: Government members may have suggestions that have escaped his attention. We are always happy to help out. As the Opposition knows, that is one of the hallmarks of this Government.

Mr DARYL MAGUIRE (Wagga Wagga) [1.27 p.m.], in reply: I thank the members for Smithfield, Burrinjuck, Willoughby and Bathurst for their contributions. I acknowledge the comment by the member for Bathurst that the Government will not oppose this motion. As I said, the motion was not designed to divide or cause undue concern; it was to highlight an issue that our community needs addressed. As the member for Smithfield said in his contribution, some adjustments were made to the run from Tumbarumba through Batlow, Tumut and Gundagai to Wagga Wagga. We are appreciative of that because it is helping to meet community expectations. The suggestion is that it would be beneficial if the window could be made broader for the stopover in Wagga Wagga, and that is why I have asked for the Minister to inquire into the timetables.

It was also mentioned by the member for Burrinjuck that Boorowa does not have a service. Some of those small communities are still disadvantaged, and I hope that those small communities will have the opportunity to have their say in the mini-inquiry that the Government has agreed to. I do not know what form these investigations will take, but I certainly will be keen to suggest to those community members that they make submissions to ensure that their needs are met. There is a slight problem with the \$2.50 fare, which results in a booking fee of \$10 or 15 per cent, whichever is the greater. As was suggested, that is having an added impact on communities with the drought and the cost of living. These kinds of fees are affecting the most vulnerable in our community who use and appreciate that service.

In closing, I acknowledge the staff at CountryLink. I hear nothing but praise for the people at the booking office. They are the most genuine, helpful people we have had dealings with. I acknowledge that and put on record that sentiment from the people who have written to me. The 723 and 724 six-weekly services to Cootamundra and Wagga Wagga have increased in patronage. Since the changes were made more people have

been using that service; it is meeting their needs. That was the critical point. That is why I raised it some time ago and sought the intervention of the Minister and CountryLink to adjust the timetables. What I am suggesting now is that this new service exit Wagga Wagga via either Tumut or Gundagai and perhaps terminate at Canberra. An alternative service could then connect to Sydney or there could be a direct service to Sydney. On alternate days the new service could go through Boorowa and Young to Yass, and then connect to either Sydney or Canberra. These are just some suggestions for flexibility.

The timetabling of all of those services should be left to the experts, and I think that is the right way to go. However, if there are no ideas in this forum and if there is not a willingness to discuss and look at alternatives, those services will never improve—none of us wants that. We all want better services. I can be very critical about the timetable of some CountryLink services—we can all criticise and find fault with the Government. However, it is very encouraging to have a forum like this and to have members support this motion to have the Minister add some refinement to the timetables and to encourage him to support, with the CountryLink funding, a service that will meet our community expectations. I thank members for their support and commend the motion to the House.

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

Motion agreed to.

[The Assistant-Speaker (Mr Grant McBride) left the chair at 1.31 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER: I acknowledge in the Speaker's gallery members of the Legislative Council of Victoria: John Lenders, David Davis, Matt Viney, Richard Dalla-Riva and Sue Pennicuik, who are accompanied by the Clerk of the Legislative Council of Victoria, Wayne Tunnicliffe. I welcome them to the Parliament in New South Wales.

NEIGHBOUR DAY

The SPEAKER: I draw the attention of members to the fact that Sunday 29 March 2009 is Neighbour Day, which is an annual Australia-wide celebration of community that has been responsible for better relationships between neighbours since its foundation in Melbourne in 2003. Amongst other things, the Neighbour Day celebration aims to strengthen communities, to create safer and more vibrant suburbs and towns, and to promote tolerance, respect and understanding within communities. Members can get more information about Neighbour Day from my office. I encourage all members to get involved with this very worthy event.

REPRESENTATION OF MINISTER ABSENT DURING QUESTIONS

Mr NATHAN REES: I advise the House that the Minister for Community Services is away today attending a funeral. In her absence, the Minister for Disability Services will take questions on her behalf.

QUESTION TIME

JOBS SUMMIT

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: I direct my question to the Premier. Given his promise to release a "full response" to his jobs summit within a month—yet one month later he has still not done so despite the loss of 200 jobs a day across New South Wales since he became Premier—when will he finally start taking action to protect jobs in this State?

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. The Minister for Finance will come to order.

Mr NATHAN REES: It is a bit rich that the Leader of the Opposition is complaining about a delay in that response when he bagged the jobs summit. The summit was held on 26 and 27 February, so today is a month since it was held. A response will be delivered on 2 April. The summit gathered 250 key business and community leaders, major employers, and education and training experts to consider actions that government

and industry can take to support jobs. We are in the midst of unprecedented economic circumstances and the combined effort of government, business, peak bodies and employees is required to face the challenges ahead. More than 300 recommendations were put forward over two days and the Government has been actively preparing a very robust response to all 12 industry roundtables.

The Government understands that in these challenging circumstances it is important to respond swiftly and responsibly. As such, it will deliver its response next week. All recommendations will be fully considered by my Government and all summit participants have been invited to the release of the response. This Government is taking action now to support jobs, to create new jobs and to invest in the future of this State. It is driving skills development and creating new cadetships and apprenticeships. The 150,000 jobs that will be created each year over the next four years are underpinned by the \$56 billion that this Government will spend.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Terrigal will come to order.

Mr NATHAN REES: I point out to the Leader of the Opposition that 57,000 jobs will be created in the transport sector, 42,000 jobs in the electricity sector, 18,000 jobs in the sewerage sector, 6,000 jobs in the health sector, 6,000 jobs in the health sector, and 8,000 jobs in the education sector. In addition, 21,000 miscellaneous jobs will be created.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: Policy confusion reined in Opposition ranks yesterday. The shadow Treasurer effectively said that the Coalition would either increase taxes or cut services. That is the reality of what he said on the radio yesterday morning when he refused to follow his leader. They are not singing from the same song sheet.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will come to order.

Mr NATHAN REES: Members of the business community in New South Wales have been particularly perplexed by the shadow Treasurer's approach. Coming after the fiasco that was the Opposition's energy policy, now he does not know whether he is going to enter into a deficit or maintain a surplus. He will not commit—

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

Mr NATHAN REES: The Leader of the Opposition should bring the shadow Treasurer up to speed, because 24 hours ago he had no idea. It is a very clear choice for the Opposition, given the shadow Treasurer's comments yesterday. It will either raise taxes or cut services. Which one is it?

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

ECONOMIC INITIATIVES

Mr BARRY COLLIER: My question is to the Premier. What is the latest information on how the Government is investing in a better future for New South Wales?

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Wakehurst will come to order. The Leader of The Nationals will come to order. The Minister for Finance will come to order.

Mr NATHAN REES: Earlier today the Government announced a new apprenticeships program, investing in a better future—

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

Mr NATHAN REES: If the member for Terrigal had the good grace to sit tight for a moment he would hear the detail. There might even be something good for his electorate. He is all ears now! As I was saying, the Government announced a new apprenticeship program, investing in a better future for young apprentices—part of our response to the downturn in the economy caused by the global financial crisis. The Minister for Education and Training and I announced more assistance to help apprentices who have had their apprenticeships disrupted by the global downturn and trainees to find a new job.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will come to order.

Mr NATHAN REES: We have set up a register of apprentices and trainees who have lost their jobs. Anyone on this register will get the assistance of staff dedicated to placing them in new positions. If that means relocating to another town, we will also provide a one-off payment of up to \$2,500.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: That payment will contribute to moving costs, rental bond and rent for the first two weeks. Today's announcement comes on top of the plan I announced to invest \$370 million to create 4,000 new government apprenticeships and 2,000 cadetships, as well as the lifting of the school leaving age to a minimum of School Certificate standard and guaranteeing a TAFE place for all young people aged up to 18 who are yet to find a job. In country New South Wales there are 60 new Country Energy apprenticeships across its 40 field offices—three extra for Bathurst, Griffith, Narrabri, Orange, Tamworth and Wagga Wagga; two new apprentices for Bega, Bourke, Dungog, Goulburn, Leeton, Parkes, Queanbeyan and Walgett; and a new apprentice for each of the stations at Albury, Armidale, Barraba, Blayney, Bonalbo, Broken Hill, Coffs Harbour, Cooma, Coonabarabran, Coonamble, Deniliquin, Dunedoo, Dungog, Gunnedah, Junee, Kyogle, Moree, Narrandera, Port Macquarie, Quirindi, Tenterfield—

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order. The member for Lismore will not sing in the Chamber.

Mr NATHAN REES: —Tumut, Wialda, Wellington, Yass and Young. These apprenticeships will give workers a strong start to a good career as well as a secure job in a vital industry. Advertisements are already appearing in country newspapers and applications for many of those jobs will close on 3 April. Apprentices are expected to be set to work by 9 June this year. The economy depends on the supply of skilled workers, and we have put measures in place to underpin that supply of skilled workers.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is too much audible conversation in the Chamber. Members will come to order.

Mr NATHAN REES: We have put measures in place to underpin that skilled labour supply. That is how the Government marks the midpoint of this electoral term: focusing on investing for a better future in jobs, investment and security. The Leader of the Opposition has had two years and we are yet to hear his plans for training our workforce. The only position members opposite have had is to oppose the Rudd Government's stimulus package—this stings because they are on the record so many times. They are against jobs; it is as straightforward as that. The Opposition will vote against the package that will see the New South Wales Government deliver new libraries, gyms, science labs and halls to every school in the State. It is a package that will create jobs and improve schools. The Opposition refuses to support it

Members opposite have not a single tangible reason to refuse to support jobs and investment, given the global downturn. It is just that the Opposition leader cannot manage to get his frontbench to agree. He has marked two years in the job with what he claimed yesterday was a transport policy. This is what the Opposition leader said: He will not fund "a city metro to Rozelle". Let us be perfectly clear: The Opposition's plan to improve public transport means cutting metro rail, no CBD Metro. Given the opportunity to come up with a policy, the Coalition's instinctive response is to stop construction.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Willoughby will come to order.

Mr NATHAN REES: No CBD Metro—

Mr Adrian Piccoli: No billion dollars on the Opera House.

Mr NATHAN REES: That was never going to happen, and the member knows it. As I was saying, no CBD Metro and, as a consequence, no western metro. Without a CBD Metro, there will be no western metro either. The Coalition would cut the CBD Metro in half or scrap it altogether; it would not build the western metro.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member Willoughby to order. There is too much audible conversation in the Chamber.

Mr NATHAN REES: I turn now to the economic management of the Leader of the Opposition. Yesterday the Leader of the Opposition revealed a new economic indicator. He told ABC radio:

I think our dogs are doing it tough.

The report went on to say:

The Opposition Leader claimed that the sale of dog bones were down.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: He claimed—and I can only assume he meant what he said—

It's the new indicator of economic conditions in New South Wales.

We can forget about numbers for housing starts, private sector lending and measures of business confidence—the Coalition now wants economists to rely on the dog bone index! I could not believe what I was hearing.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: After the shambles of its radio performance yesterday, the Opposition's economic credentials are a dog's breakfast.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: Members should remember what the member for Manly said yesterday:

We would never deliver a budget where expense growth grows faster than revenue growth.

In the current economic climate there are only two things one can do to achieve that: cut services or raise taxes.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: Will the Coalition slash spending on nurses, police, teachers and transport or raise taxes? The Government has provided \$56 billion in infrastructure, supporting more than 150,000 jobs each year; it has cut \$1.9 billion in payroll tax. Further, it has provided additional support for first homebuyers by increasing the grant from \$3,000 to \$10,000. Between 11 November 2008 and 28 February 2009 more than 800 people have taken advantage of the maximum grant. The Government is maintaining the State's triple-A credit rating. This has been confirmed again by two credit rating agencies, Standard and Poor's and Moody's. If the Coalition were ever to gain control of the Treasury benches, the State would have a triple-C rating. There would be no capital spending, no more infrastructure, no more hospitals, roads or trains, and higher taxes. Two years into the term and the choice is clear: the Government, builders; the Coalition, wreckers.

SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE RENOVATION

ROAD PROJECTS

Mr ANDREW STONER: My question is directed to the Premier. In view of his promise when he became Premier to fix issues that directly impact on people's lives, can he explain why the Government has gone cold on widening the M5 and M2 and has cut funding to the Pacific Highway, but is still pursuing a \$1 billion interior renovation of the Sydney Opera House?

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

Mr NATHAN REES: I again state for the record that the capital works priorities in New South Wales are the bread and butter items of hospitals, schools, roads and so on. The refurbishment of the interior of the Sydney Opera House, whilst a legitimate bid, is simply going to be considered in a budget context. Our priorities—

Mr Andrew Stoner: Not the M5 and the M2.

Mr NATHAN REES: I will get to that.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: This is how budgets work. One cannot run around spending like a drunken sailor.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the Leader of the Nationals to order for the second time. I call the member for Bega to order.

Mr NATHAN REES: One cannot have economic credibility without being prepared to take the hard decisions.

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order. I call the member for Upper Hunter to order for the second time.

Mr NATHAN REES: The toughest decision that Leader of the Opposition had to make was to elevate his nemesis—and isn't that paying dividends?

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

Mr NATHAN REES: We are in negotiations with the owners of those roads regarding the widening, but I will not commit at this time. Negotiations continue and that is appropriate.

TRANSPORT INITIATIVES

Mr NINOS KHOSHABA: My question is addressed to the Minister for Transport. What is the latest information on the Government's achievements in transport?

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

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: I am delighted to update the House on what the Government has delivered over the past two years. We have been very busy delivering better transport services for the people of New South Wales.

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

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: I will have to provide the House with only an overview of delivery of transport services because I would take up the whole question time if I were to go through them item by item. Since I became the Minister for Transport I have signed off on an additional 300 buses for Sydney commuters and expedited the delivery of 150 new bendy buses.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will come to order, including the member for Epping and the member for Willoughby. I call the member for Epping to order.

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: I am pleased to inform the House that the first 8 of those 300 buses have been delivered in the Illawarra. Just last week the Premier, the member for Wollongong and I had the pleasure of riding on one of those buses. The Government has also introduced a free shuttle bus in the Sydney central business district, and it is proving very popular. We have opened the \$2.3 billion Epping to Chatswood rail link, which around 10,000 people are using every day. The Government has delivered a customer charter for CityRail commuters so they can see our improvements to things that matter most to them. The Government has allocated \$56 million for an additional 3,000 commuter car parking spaces across metropolitan and outer-metropolitan Sydney.

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

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: The Government has responded to the Walker inquiry and started a market-testing exercise for Sydney ferry services. It has allocated \$856 million for stage one of the south-west rail link. The Government introduced a new regional excursion daily ticket for pensioners and seniors, and a \$2.50 Sunday Funday ticket for families. The Government has fought hard for rail commuters for a fairer price determination from the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal. The Government has continued to push for the implementation of bus reforms, and taken back control of RailCorp and Sydney Ferries. It has also announced a \$4.8 billion CBD Metro, a first for Australia, with construction set to begin next year.

Over the past two years the Government has also worked to improve on-time running on the CityRail network, purchased and delivered 122 new OSCar train carriages and commenced bus services on the north-west transitway. The Government is also looking ahead, with a \$56 billion infrastructure plan in place over the next four years, the biggest in the State's history. We will be delivering more train carriages, more buses, more station upgrades and better services for commuters. We are certainly busy. There is no time for us to be driving around in a scratched black Honda. While we have been busy delivering, members opposite have been whingeing, whining and complaining. They have no vision, no ideas and certainly no policy. We should not be surprised, though. This is the same Coalition that went to the last election without a single transport policy.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Willoughby to order for the third time.

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: Hold the presses! Last night the Leader of the Opposition made a transport pronouncement, and wasn't it a doozy? He committed to scrapping metro rail, not just the CBD Metro but any metro rail, the future of transport in Sydney—no metro rail in Sydney, never, ever. Last night the Coalition laid a plan on the table to Channel 9 that would jeopardise Sydney's status as a global city and put the brakes on the future development of our transport system. I advise members that 45 of the world's 50 global cities have metro rail. The Rees Government is getting on with the job of modernising transport in Sydney and making sure we remain a global city. Even the member for Willoughby said in this House on 26 November last year:

There is no doubt that there is a place for metro in an overall integrated transport solution for Sydney.

Gladys obviously lost that argument last night! Did the Leader of the Opposition even consult with his shadow transport Minister, or the rest of his party who supported the metro rail bill in this place last year? Even more concerning is that the Opposition leader's heavy rail pronouncement does not add up.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129. I know the Minister is, embarrassingly, not across his brief so he is required to read his answer, but it is in no way relevant and it is indeed wrong. The Coalition made an announcement yesterday that it will support metro but not the Rozelle metro and he can't mislead—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murrumbidgee will resume his seat. I will listen further to the Minister.

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: As usual, Barry has left us with a whole lot of unanswered questions. He says he will kill off metros and build a north west and a south west heavy rail link. As I said, we are investing \$800 million in the south west rail link.

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

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: Barry wants to bury metros for a politically expedient \$4.8 billion to fund a plan that will cost, conservatively, as much as \$14.8 billion and leave Sydney behind the rest of the world. Let us add up how Barry would spend the \$4.8 billion from axing the CBD metro—

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

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129. The Minister is, embarrassingly, not across his portfolio: he has to read every word of his answer. The question was about what the Government is doing with transport—an answer I think the rest of New South Wales would love to hear, not just this Chamber. The Minister is substantially digressing from the question.

The SPEAKER: Order! I draw the Minister's attention to the question asked.

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: Let us have a look at how Barry would spend the \$4.8 billion from axing the CBD metro. He wants to spend about \$1 billion to finish the south west rail link. That leaves \$3.8 billion. For the north west heavy rail link he will need about \$8.3 billion to get from Central to Chatswood. But guess what? At the moment he has only enough money to get to Luna Park! Just for fun! Maybe he undertook some consultation and spoke to George Souris, the expert on Luna Park. So which part of the north west rail link does the Leader of the Opposition plan to build?

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: Apart from the fact that the Minister is canvassing your ruling, Mr Speaker, he is substantially off track from the question. There is only one political party in New South Wales that is going to build the north west rail link—and it is not Labor!

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

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: I shall do that, Mr Speaker. So their numbers do not add up. It brings me to that famous quote from the shadow Treasurer yesterday: "We would never deliver a budget where expense growth grows faster than revenue growth." The question is: Where will the money come from, and what services will be cut or what new taxes will be put in place to fund this folly that Barry trotted out yesterday? Two years out from the next election and the Barry spendometer has already blown through the roof. In front of Speaker Murray a few years ago Barry threw a tantrum on the floor of this Parliament—

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129. The Minister is again canvassing your ruling. Apart from the fact that his answer has been going on for ages, the Minister has not even attempted to answer the question. I say to the people in the gallery, who are wondering what is happening with public transport: Now you know what is wrong with it; the Minister has nothing to say—

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

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: In front of Speaker Aquilina, Barry O'Farrell was busted for using four-letter words in this Chamber and was chastised for it. And a fortnight ago Barry O'Farrell lost his temper in this place—

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order. The Minister will conclude his answer.

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: I will conclude my answer, Mr Speaker. Barry O'Farrell is reckless, he loses control of himself, he has cut the metros, he has lost control of his budget, and he has lost the plot!

Mr Barry O'Farrell: Point of order: Mr Speaker, I know that last Thursday you had a constructive meeting about the standing orders of this place. We are happy to engage in that process, but not when the current standing orders are applied only to this side of the House.

The SPEAKER: Order!

INFRASTRUCTURE SPENDING

Mr MIKE BAIRD: My question is directed to the Premier. Did the Premier cut infrastructure spending in his November 2008 mini-budget? Yes or no?

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

Mr NATHAN REES: I'll come to that in a moment. On 9 March 2008 the *Sunday Telegraph* had this to report: "There is a view that Mike Baird is still underdone", from a Liberal MP.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: The member for Manly puts together—

Mr Mike Baird: Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129. How can we take any economic measures from a Premier who does not even do maths?

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Manly will resume his seat. That is not a point of order. I call the member for Murray-Darling to order for the second time. The Premier has the call.

Mr NATHAN REES: Notwithstanding the confected outrage from those in opposition, I can reveal a very useful document. It is called "Manly Matters" and is put together by the member for Manly.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of The Nationals will cease interjecting.

Mr NATHAN REES: In the November 2008 issue of "Manly Matters" these are the initiatives that the member for Manly reported on—initiatives from our Government:

Welcome to the five new probationary constables who joined the Manly police command in September! Dee Why police station also has eight new recruits, which brings a much-needed boost to the police presence on the Northern Beaches ... the new police station [for Manly] will commence before 2011.

On transport the member for Manly had this to say:

There are now far more ways for people to get home safely and quickly after enjoying Manly's nightlife. As part of the Manly After Midnight policy, led by local police commander Dave Darcy, pubs are now closing voluntarily at 2.30 a.m. ... Sydney Buses—

Mr Andrew Stoner: Point of order: I refer again to Standing Order 129. The Premier was asked a very simple question requiring a yes or no answer. Thus far the Premier's answer has had absolutely nothing to do with the question asked. In the interests of those who are observing question time today, I ask the Premier to stop boring us and answer the question.

The SPEAKER: Order! I will listen further to the Premier.

Mr NATHAN REES: The member for Manly went on to talk about services that our Government is providing in his electorate. He said:

Sydney Water will begin its \$70 million project next year to improve water quality in Manly and Curl Curl lagoons. A 3.6 kilometre tunnel will be built between Fairlight and Brookvale to capture sewerage overflows and feed it to the Northside Storage Tunnel ...

The member for Manly went on:

Teachers and students at Balgowlah North Public School proudly showed off their new classrooms—

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

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: Again I refer to Standing Order 129. The Government is clearly turning question time today into an absurdity. I say again to the people in the gallery: If you wonder why New South Wales is in the state it is in, have a look at the answers you get here today.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murrumbidgee will resume his seat. The member for Murrumbidgee knows the appropriate way in which to take a point of order. The Premier has the call.

Mr NATHAN REES: The member for Manly went on:

Four new permanent classrooms have been built ... The school looks terrific ...

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Manly will come to order.

Mr NATHAN REES: All of that is happening on our watch. I now turn directly to the question. There were two changes to the purchase of information technology infrastructure and fleet replacement, from memory. The change was that instead of purchasing we would lease. That is a much better deal for taxpayers as we reprioritise our capital works program. It puts us in a position to deliver 150,000 jobs each year. That is what we are doing. A triple-A rating, recently confirmed by Moody's, with 150,000 jobs each year being delivered by the Government's \$56 billion infrastructure program—that is the record of the Government and we stand by it. It is a proper plan for the people of New South Wales in the face of the global downturn.

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

EDUCATION INITIATIVES

Mr FRANK TERENCE: I address my question to the Minister for Education and Training. What is the latest information on the Government's achievements in education?

Ms VERITY FIRTH: I thank the member for Maitland for his question and his interest in this issue.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Upper Hunter will cease interjecting. I call the member for Upper Hunter to order for the third time.

Ms VERITY FIRTH: The Rees Government is preparing our young people for the future. The last six months in the education portfolio have been a very busy time. Following community consultation last year, in January the Premier announced that the minimum school leaving age would be raised. Where formerly students could leave school the day they turned 15 years, they will now complete year 10. This will ensure that they

achieve a minimum educational qualification and a solid foundation for their working lives. Beyond year 10 the Government is asking students to remain in school, vocational training or an apprenticeship until the age of 17 years, unless they have a concrete full-time job. Research indicates that each year of education increases an individual's income by as much as 10 per cent.

The Government recognises that the success of this measure will rely on education being relevant to today's students. That is why the Rees Government is investing heavily to expand vocational options, both within schools themselves and within the training sector. Already this year four new trade schools have been opened, schools with industry-standard facilities to teach vocational subjects, at Sutherland, south Penrith, Griffith and Shell Harbour. That brings to 13 the number of trade schools that have been opened since the last election, with another 12 to be opened by 2011. On top of this New South Wales investment, the Government has recently secured funding from the Commonwealth Government to build industry-standard vocational education facilities to serve another 86 high schools in New South Wales. The range of vocational subjects on offer has also been expanded. In fact, today more than one-third of New South Wales students take a vocational subject in the Higher School Certificate.

The Government is also working to make sure there are options for students beyond school, with 175,000 new training places for jobseekers, school leavers and underskilled workers in New South Wales, as well as 6,000 new apprenticeships and cadetships over the next four years. To better cater for more academically minded students, the Government this year has established 630 new selective school places, including the first virtual selective places to allow access for children in rural and remote areas. The Rees Government is providing the new and upgraded facilities our kids need to achieve their best. Three new schools have been opened to serve the growing communities of western and south-western Sydney: Elderslie Public, Middleton Grange Public and Rouse Hill High. That means the Government has now built and opened all eight of the new schools that Labor promised at the last State election.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members who wish to conduct private conversations will do so outside the Chamber.

Ms VERITY FIRTH: Mr Speaker, I think all members would be interested in this. All eight of the new schools that Labor promised at the last State election have now been delivered and completed. A further \$150 million for extra maintenance works was announced in the mini-budget—works that principals nominated as their priorities. And now, in partnership with the Federal Government, the Rees Government is delivering the biggest ever school infrastructure upgrade in the history of New South Wales, with more than \$3 billion worth of new halls, libraries, science laboratories and classrooms over the next 24 months. New South Wales has submitted nominations for the first tranche of projects to the Commonwealth, which will allow works to start at 1,400 schools. It is not only those on this side of House saying that. Heather Ridout, Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Industry Group, told the *7.30 Report*:

So far the roll out is going well in New South Wales. A number of our members are telling me that the New South Wales Government is really handling this roll out of infrastructure in New South Wales around schools very well.

Those are not comments from this side of the House, but from Heather Ridout! The Government is also working with the Federal Government to connect all our public high schools to wireless broadband and provide a specialised laptop to all senior secondary students. These laptops will be the toolboxes of the 21st century and all 25,000 New South Wales public high school teachers will be provided with identical laptops. The teachers will begin receiving their laptops in time to familiarise themselves with the technology before year 9 students start receiving theirs in term three.

The SPEAKER: Order!

Ms VERITY FIRTH: It is funny that those on the other side of the House like to heckle. While Labor is working on a number of fronts to further improve the already world-class education system we have in New South Wales, we have heard scant detail from the Opposition about its plans for education. In fact, the House will be interested to know that the Opposition is currently conducting an online education survey. If members go to the website of the member for Murrumbidgee, they will see the survey—a promising development. It is promising that after 14 years the Opposition has at least finally decided to talk to the community about what interests them in education.

I do not have to remind the House that the last time that we had Liberal-National Government in New South Wales it had spectacular success in uniting the New South Wales education community. The problem was

it united everyone against the Government. Hundreds of thousands of parents, teachers and students marched through the streets of Sydney in the largest demonstration ever seen at that time. It was a singular achievement and the name "Metherell" still has a special place in the education history of New South Wales. It did unite everyone, but it united everyone against the Government—a singular achievement. Its record in office is not the only thing we have by which to judge the alternative Government's education stance. Even more reprehensible is the abject failure of those opposite to defend public schools in New South Wales from the attacks of their Federal counterparts over the last decade.

Mr Greg Smith: Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129. The question is about the Government's endeavours in education. We do not need a perjurious history lesson. The Minister knows it is false but she is maintaining the clowning that the Minister for Transport started.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Epping will resume his seat. The Minister has the call.

Ms VERITY FIRTH: From 1996 to 2006 the Opposition sat quietly through 10 straight Howard Government budgets, where there were no real increases for Government schools beyond indexation. It is Labor that delivers on education. Throughout its history, Labor has delivered on education.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129. I cannot allow the misleading of the House by the Minister to continue. Julia Gillard has not changed the formula.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murrumbidgee will resume his seat. That is not a point of order. The member for Murrumbidgee knows the appropriate way in which to raise matters in the House.

Ms VERITY FIRTH: That is a bizarre point of order when the Federal Government is prepared to give substantial support to New South Wales schools, including the \$14.7 billion school infrastructure package, and members opposite lack the courage to openly back it while their Federal leader says, "We do not want that sort of money spent in our schools. We do not want anywhere near that amount of money spent. We are going to vote against the entire thing." When the Howard Government attacked schools for a decade, members opposite remained silent. But when the Labor Government provides unprecedented funding for our schools, the Liberal-Nationals Coalition attacks it. The Rees Government will continue to develop and implement new ideas to ensure our students are getting the best education possible and are ready for everything that confronts them when they leave school.

TILLEGRA DAM CONSTRUCTION

STATE TRIPLE-A CREDIT RATING

Mr GEORGE SOURIS: Now that the proposed Tillegra Dam project has blown out by more than 30 per cent, or \$100 million, before the first sod has been turned, will the Premier admit that the real reason New South Wales stands to lose its triple-A credit rating is that he once again has confirmed Standard and Poor's opinion that under his Government New South Wales has "a history of difficulty with cost control"?

Mr NATHAN REES: It is a bit rich to be lectured by the member for Upper Hunter, who was intimately involved with Eastern Creek, Luna Park and the airport rail link.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members from both sides will come to order.

Mr NATHAN REES: I am glad the member for Upper Hunter has asked a question about water. I am advised that there has been an increase in the cost of Tillegra Dam, because we are building more roads in and around Tillegra Dam. More than two years ago the member for Vacluse took a bold plan to the people of New South Wales to secure its water supply.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Barwon will come to order.

Mr NATHAN REES: I give him points for boldness. Ultimately his plan was rejected.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: That means that the Opposition has a complete absence of policy on the delivery of water to the people of New South Wales. It has no plan to put fresh drinking water into the homes

and businesses of New South Wales. It has no plan to deal with increased population growth in the Illawarra, on the Central Coast or in the Upper Hunter. It has no plan to deliver water to the people of greater metropolitan Sydney, despite more than one million people coming to our great city over the next 20 years. It has no plan at all. The Leader of the Opposition has had two years to come up with a fundamental policy, that is, the provision of a water supply. The Opposition does not have a plan or a policy to deliver water. The Opposition does not have a plan or a policy to deliver electricity. As I said before, if they were ever on the Treasury benches the people of New South Wales would be sitting around in the dark and the dust.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: I am sorry to take this point of order again.

[Interruption]

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

Mr Adrian Piccoli: I refer to Standing Order 129, relevance. I am trying to help the Premier because the Hon. John Della Bosca is up there watching him.

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

Mr Adrian Piccoli: He is at 26 to one—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murrumbidgee will resume his seat. There is no point of order.

ROAD PROJECTS

Mr DAVID HARRIS: My question is addressed to the Minister for Roads. What is the latest information on Government achievements in roads?

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: I thank the member for Wyong for his question.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Baulkham Hills will come to order.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: The member for Wyong has taken great interest in the fact that the \$300 million set aside for roadworks on the Central Coast was preserved in the mini-budget and that the Government, unlike the Opposition, will continue to provide infrastructure for the people of New South Wales, particularly in the Roads portfolio. The member for Coffs Harbour was delighted when in the first week of my ministry I visited his electorate and opened the Bonville bypass.

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

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: It is 9.6 kilometres of brand-new dual carriageway, jointly funded by the State and Federal Governments at a cost of \$245 million.

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

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: Just say thank you, Andrew. The member now has 17.5 kilometres of uninterrupted dual carriageway in his electorate from Urunga to Coffs Harbour. In addition, the Government recently opened the Princes Highway safety upgrade from Falls Creek to south Nowra. Last week I was in the Illawarra for a community Cabinet meeting. The people of the Illawarra are very thankful for that upgrade, amongst other upgrades on the Princes Highway.

Mr Andrew Stoner: What about the M2 and M5 upgrades?

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: The Government has also opened the F5 freeway between Brooks Road and Camden Valley Way. I was there a couple of weeks ago, together with the member for Camden, and the Minister for Water who is the member for Wollondilly. The people in their electorates are very thankful for those upgrades. In response to the interjection by the Leader of The Nationals, we are talking to the concession holder of the M5 about the widening of that road, which I have made several comments about today. In addition,

Infrastructure Australia is considering our proposal to widen the M5 East. Last month, with the Minister for Transport, who is the member for Keira, and with the Minister for Water, who is the member for Wollondilly, I announced a \$12 million safety upgrade of Picton Road.

Mr David Campbell: Hear! Hear!

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: "Hear! Hear!" says the Minister for Transport.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of The Nationals will cease interjecting.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: The people in his electorate of Keira will benefit greatly from his lobbying for that proposal. In the Shoalhaven the Government has recently announced another \$15 million to complete the \$95 million upgrade of Main Road 92, by 2010. In fact, the Federal member for Gilmore, the Hon. Joanna Gash, was so pleased with this announcement that she took the time to issue a press release, which states:

Gilmore MP Joanna Gash has commended the New South Wales Government on its contribution of an additional \$15 million—

That is \$15 million on top of the money we have already put in—

for the completion of Main Road 92.

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

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: The Federal member described it as a responsible and welcomed gesture. The press release went on to say:

Ms Gash said, "The announcement was a total surprise", and commended Premier Nathan Rees and Roads Minister Michael Daley for putting aside politics for the greater good.

[Interruption]

Stop interjecting, Shelly.

[Interruption]

A ringing endorsement indeed.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister for Transport will come to order.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: The member for South Coast should put aside politics for the greater good. All she does is continue to whinge and bleat to such an extent that she is starting to make the member for Willoughby look positive.

[Interruption]

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for South Coast will come to order. The Minister will make his contribution through the Chair.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: The member for the greater south coast, the Hon. Matt Brown, has expressed his view about how valuable this project is. As the Premier said: We are the builders, they are the complainers.

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

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: This is not simply about the building of new roads and the provision of new infrastructure.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for South Coast to order for the second time. I call the member for Cessnock to order.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: This is also about increasing the efficiency of the existing network. This year we made the Harbour Bridge cashless, the first time a road in New South Wales has gone from cash tolling to completely cashless. It is Australia's busiest road, taking 160,000 cars a day. We took it into the twenty-first century.

Mr Andrew Stoner: How many motorbikes?

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: I could speak a bit louder for the Leader of The Nationals. He has a very bad case of swimmer's ear. He picked it up in his car.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: In addition, the Government has introduced new tolling products, such as short-term tags, no-deposit tags and a new licence plate recognition system that allows people from the Leader of The Nationals' electorate and other country electorates to pay their tolls with a simple phone call.

[Interruption]

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Lismore will come to order.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: As to the interjection that we are increasing the tolls, I remind the Leader of The Nationals that for 80 per cent of the day on Australia's busiest road corridor in New South Wales people pay lower tolls. It was \$3; it is now \$2.50. That is down, not up. On 27 January this year we introduced time-of-day tolling for the bridge and tunnel.

Mr Andrew Stoner: A congestion tax.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: What is your plan?

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

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: The Opposition holds most of the seats on the North Shore. They have not come up with a single policy, not one roads policy to help people on the North Shore or people in the electorate of the member for Manly.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Terrigal to order for the third time.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: I note that the member for Manly is out today doing a bit of work, and we have been working together on The Spit and Military roads corridor. The Leader of the Opposition can nod his head, yet the Opposition has not a single policy for the people who live in that neck of the woods. With respect to time-of-day tolling, it is early days but it is working, and we hope that those results continue. It is encouraging that there is no evidence whatsoever of a shift in traffic movements on Victoria Road. Every cent that is raised from increasing the peak-hour toll on the harbour crossings will be used to purchase 300 new buses.

The Government is rightly proud not only of its record on infrastructure but also of its road safety record—something the Leader of The Nationals should note. This is the only State in Australia that has had six consecutive years of falling road tolls. On New Year's Day I announced that last year there had been 395 fatalities on our roads—the lowest number since the war. We have rolled out flashing lights in 291 school zones. Earlier this month I announced a demerit point review that will put fairness back into the system.

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

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: The Leader of The Nationals has been particularly interested to know if the review will be retrospective. Does he have anything to tell us about the state of his licence? This Government's achievements in the past six months are there for the entire world to see: we are making the roads safer, we are making the system fairer, and we are reducing road congestion.

PORT MACQUARIE TRAFFIC ARRANGEMENTS

Mr PETER BESSELING: My question is directed to the Minister for Roads. Given the safety concerns over the Coopers Creek-Harrington intersection of the Pacific Highway, what is the status of the planned service road between Hannam Vale Road and Forest Road at Moorland?

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: The member for Port Macquarie had been a member for only a day or two—I do not think he had even made his inaugural speech—when he grabbed me in this Chamber, wanting to talk about several issues in his electorate.

[*Interruption*]

Doesn't it hurt The Nationals to hear what a good job the member for Port Macquarie, the member for Tamworth and the member for Dubbo are doing? Their seats used to be held by members of The Nationals. What happened? Perhaps The Nationals have been comprehensively outperformed on the ground. In the first week after his election the member for Port Macquarie approached me about some important issues, one of which was the pedestrian crossing at Hastings Public School. I went to see that crossing following a very successful Country Labor conference in Port Macquarie this year, and my office, the member's office and Port Macquarie council worked together to get a result on that issue. I have given an undertaking to the member for Port Macquarie that in a few weeks I will visit his electorate to talk to him about local traffic issues. I can update the House in respect of the Coopernook to Herons Creek upgrade. It is an extremely big project: 33 kilometres of brand-new dual carriageway costing \$540 million, which will create 1,500 direct and almost 5,000 indirect jobs in the electorate of Port Macquarie.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of The Nationals will cease interjecting.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: We are also installing a camera on the very intersection that the member for Port Macquarie has asked about—Harrington Road and the Pacific Highway—to look at the behaviour of motorists and to make that intersection safer.

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

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: As to the second part of the question from the member for Port Macquarie relating to the service road, the current upgrade for that intersection has incorporated in its design a service road at Hannam Vale at Moorland because those sorts of facilities are important for local residents. I assure the member for Port Macquarie that I will be happy to talk to him about that and other issues when I visit his electorate in a couple of weeks.

INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS AND JOBS

Ms LYLEA McMAHON: My question is addressed to the Minister for Infrastructure. What action is the Government taking to support jobs by building infrastructure?

Mr JOSEPH TRIPODI: The Opposition announced its new fiscal policy yesterday, and it is very important that we remember these words:

We would never deliver a budget where expense growth grows faster than revenue growth.

That is the policy of the Opposition. Interestingly, we learned today that the Leader of the Opposition has decided to roll out a program of heavy rail in the north and south-west, adding \$14.8 billion to the budget—that is the rough, early estimate.

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

Mr JOSEPH TRIPODI: Before we detail the successes of this Government on infrastructure spending, we want to know where that money will come from. What taxes will the Opposition increase? What services will the Opposition cut? Give us an answer.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: I refer to Standing Order 129. Again, the Minister is, embarrassingly, not across his brief; he has to read his answer word for word. He cannot even answer a question from someone on his own side without getting stuck into the Opposition.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murrumbidgee will state his point of order.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: He has nothing to say.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murrumbidgee will resume his seat. I remind the Minister of the question before the House.

Mr JOSEPH TRIPODI: It is quite clear on day one that the new fiscal policy of the Opposition has got it into trouble already. The question for Opposition members is: How quickly can they dump the shadow Treasurer's policy? Or will they tell us what taxes will increase in New South Wales or what services they will cut? Those are questions we want answered by the Opposition.

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

Mr JOSEPH TRIPODI: Day one of its new fiscal policy and the Opposition is in trouble already. This Government has an enviable record when it comes to the delivery of infrastructure. Since our re-election we have spent record amounts on infrastructure to reinforce our economy and support jobs. This means record investment in our roads, buses, hospitals and schools—the front-line services that our communities need.

The SPEAKER: Order! All members who are on a call to order are now deemed to be on three calls to order. There is too much interjection in the Chamber. The Minister has the call.

Mr JOSEPH TRIPODI: The numbers speak for themselves. In 2007-08 the total spend on infrastructure was \$11.2 billion—a 14 per cent increase on the previous year. In 2008-09 the total spend on infrastructure is estimated to be \$13.9 billion—a 24 per cent increase over 2007-08 and 42 per cent higher than 2006-07. Total expenditure on infrastructure is more than double that of the 1990s in real terms. We are committed to real growth in infrastructure spending and setting up this State for a great, prosperous future. That is our commitment, and we will do it without Baird's new super taxes that are going to fund \$14.8 billion of rail rollout. Or will the Opposition cut services?

Is the Opposition going to bring back its old Department of Community Services policy? Remember that policy, where the Opposition was going to scrap the Department of Community Services altogether? Is that the secret answer to the Opposition's new fiscal position? The Opposition clearly has a very big problem with its new policy—and this is day one! This Government has a record of being fiscally responsible and being able to deliver the infrastructure that we need to grow this State. It is about time the Opposition recognised that.

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind the member for Coffs Harbour that he is on three calls to order.

Question time concluded.

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 5

Government Response to Report

Ms Carmel Tebbutt tabled the Government's response to report No. 28 entitled "The Former Uranium Smelter Site at Hunters Hill".

PETITIONS

Drink Container Deposit Levy

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

National Parks Commercial Developments

Petition opposing the construction of commercial developments in national parks, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Schofields Railway Station

Petition praying that Schofields Railway Station remain on its current site, received from **Ms Gladys Berejiklian**.

Rural Rail Branch Lines Closure

Petition opposing the closure of certain rural rail branch lines, received from **Ms Katrina Hodgkinson**.

Pensioner Travel Voucher Booking Fee

Petition requesting the removal of the \$10 booking fee on pensioner travel vouchers, received from **Ms Katrina Hodgkinson**.

Bus Service 311

Petition praying that the Government urgently improve bus service 311 to make it more frequent and more reliable, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

TAFE Fees

Petition seeking support for a community-driven campaign to freeze TAFE fees at the 2007 level, received from **Ms Katrina Hodgkinson**.

Gaden Trout Hatchery

Petition opposing the closure of the Gaden Trout Hatchery, received from **Ms Katrina Hodgkinson**.

Caged Birds Trade

Petition requesting that legislation be introduced to stop the trade of caged birds, and ban trading and selling of Australian native birds, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Pet Shops

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

Sow Stalls

Petition requesting a total ban on sow stalls, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Cowra Policing

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

Iron Cove Bridge Project

Petition opposing the construction of an additional bridge over Iron Cove, received from **Ms Gladys Berejiklian**.

Barton Highway

Petition asking that priority be given to Federal AusLink funding for upgrading of the Barton Highway to dual carriageway, received from **Ms Katrina Hodgkinson**.

Hornsby Electorate Homeless

Petition requesting funding and resources to map homes people in the Hornsby electorate, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

CONSIDERATION OF MOTIONS TO BE ACCORDED PRIORITY**Federal Stimulus Package and Jobs**

Ms CHERIE BURTON (Kogarah) [3.21 p.m.]: My motion should be accorded priority because in the current economic crisis it is imperative that we have not only a bipartisan approach but also an Opposition that will support the Government in delivering services, creating jobs and looking after New South Wales.

State Economy

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai—Leader of the Opposition) [3.22 p.m.]: This will be a short debate. The Opposition would be happy to support the motion of the member for Kogarah if she would back it up with a State stimulus package to project jobs, to support business and to bolster the economy. We have heard

many Labor lies for more than 14 years. They cover this State like litter. We have been promised improved services and more infrastructure from the north-west of New South Wales down to Albury. We have been promised rail links to the south-west, new hospitals, upgraded roads and fast rail links, but none of them has come to fruition.

Ms Cherie Burton: Point of order: A debate about priority should be about—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Kogarah is aware that I extend a degree of latitude during these debates.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: While this bloke has been Premier, 31,400 jobs have been lost in New South Wales, which means 200 families a day have lost their income. What has this bloke done? It took five months before he sat down with businesses to ask what they needed to maintain their workforces. That was a month after the Coalition presented its plan for payroll tax reductions, infrastructure investment and measures to ensure that businesses could create and maintain jobs during these difficult times.

Ms Cherie Burton: Point of order: My point of order relates to relevance. If members opposite were serious, why have they voted against the Rudd Government's stimulus package eight times?

The SPEAKER: Order! That is not a point of order. The member for Kogarah will resume her seat.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: I point out for the benefit of the three people in the gallery who stayed when the member for Kogarah got to her feet that nothing this House does will affect the Rudd Government's package, which was passed in February and which is delivering benefits across this State and this nation. However, this House can put up its hand to help battling families and struggling businesses across the State during these difficult times. We need a State stimulus package. Ours is the only State in the country that does not have a State government with backbone, vision and understanding. This is the only State Government that has not recognised that families and businesses are doing it tough. That is a disgrace.

It is also a disgrace that members opposite hide behind working families during every election campaign. It is a disgraceful performance by a bloke who says that he is in touch with the people and that he will deal directly with them. I repeat: 200 families a day are losing their income. All this bloke offers in compensation are endless promises about infrastructure investment and 150,000 jobs being created over the next year, two years or perhaps even the next decade. All I know is that working families in western Sydney and western New South Wales cannot live on those promises. They have bills to pay, kids to feed and mortgages to service. Jobs in the future are no substitute for maintaining and protecting jobs now. That is why the Opposition will continue to argue inside and outside this place that it is time this Government put people first.

Members opposite must understand that government is about the public and not the politicians, and that the purpose of being Premier is not to cling to office and to maintain power but to use that power to assist families to improve their lives. We on this side of the House stand for the opportunities that this State once provided. We on this side of the House stand for supporting families and businesses as they seek to engage in enterprise, to get ahead and to cope with these difficult times. Members opposite want to dictate and direct people's lives and drag people down. They will do nothing at times like this.

Members could be forgiven for believing that Kevin Rudd is the Premier of New South Wales, because he has done more in the time Nathan Rees has been Premier to influence and affect the lives of people in this State than that mob opposite. What is the point of them being in office if they are not going to use the resources of government to assist people in times like this? They can play their political games, they can move other motions congratulating the Government for its inaction and they can try to pretend that the Opposition opposes the Rudd Government's stimulus package. However, nothing that happens in this Chamber can stop that package going forward and none of that will assist families in the electorates of Kogarah, The Entrance or East Hills. *[Time expired.]*

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

The House divided.

Ayes, 48

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

Noes, 40

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'Dea	Mr R. W. Turner
Mr Draper	Mr O'Farrell	Mr R. C. Williams
Mrs Fardell	Mr Page	
Mr Fraser	Mr Piccoli	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Goward	Mr Piper	Mr George
Mrs Hancock	Mr Provest	Mr Maguire

Pair

Ms Burney

Mr J. D. Williams

Question resolved in the affirmative.**FEDERAL STIMULUS PACKAGE AND JOBS****Motion Accorded Priority****Ms CHERIE BURTON** (Kogarah) [3.34 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) congratulates the Government on its recent initiatives to deliver services and support jobs for the New South Wales people;
- (2) notes the Opposition has failed the New South Wales people in its lack of policy over the past two years; and
- (3) calls on the Opposition to support the Government's initiatives in education and transport, which are vital to supporting jobs in New South Wales.

The New South Wales Government is providing services and supporting jobs for the people of New South Wales. We understand the tough times we are facing and, unlike members on the other side of the House, we have stepped up to the challenge. I will inform the House of just a few of our achievements in the past

six months. We have brought in new Metro-style buses for Sydney, providing faster, cleaner, more efficient services, and at the same time we have been able to ease traffic congestion. Just this week we announced a major expansion of the Metrobus routes across Sydney, to a total of five routes.

We introduced a trial of night-vision technology on Sydney ferries to improve safety, and we installed black boxes on all Sydney ferries. We have taken back control of RailCorp and introduced reforms to rail maintenance to make services more efficient. We have announced 300 new buses, fast-tracked the delivery of 150 articulated buses and created 100,000 jobs for Newcastle to build new OSCar train carriages. We announced a new commuter car park for Emu Plains; a new commuter car park for Quakers Hill, providing an extra 200 places; and a new 250-space car park for Wollongong station.

Mr Ray Williams: Point of order: The member is misleading the House. The car park—

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarrity): Order! That is not a point of order. The member for Hawkesbury will resume his seat.

Ms CHERIE BURTON: An investment in infrastructure is an investment in jobs. We introduced the \$1 CountryLink fares for children over summer and family Sunday, which allows families to travel anywhere in Sydney by bus, ferry or train on a \$2.50 ticket, and launched a new \$2.50 bus ticket for rural and regional pensioners. We also opened the \$2.3 billion Epping to Chatswood rail link, with 100 days free travel. We have awarded a contract to Bass and Flinders to deliver the fast ferry services from Manly, and established a free shuttle bus that runs every 10 minutes, seven days a week, to get people around the city quickly. We have announced the start of construction of a \$1.8 million bus factory in the Hunter that will build 150 new buses, creating 250 new jobs in the region. We have unveiled the new Gong shuttle—a free bus service for Wollongong that runs every day of the week—and created jobs for 10 bus drivers. And that is just transport.

In education, we have introduced 630 new selective school places and the first-ever virtual selective class, 30 Chifley trade scholarships for country apprentices, and scholarships for 12 students to visit Gallipoli on Anzac Day. There is an extra \$150 million for school buildings and improvements. Again, that is a \$100 million investment in jobs. We have launched the \$11.5 million transition to high school program and we are delivering 200,000 laptops to New South Wales senior students and 25,000 laptops to public high school students. We have raised the school-leaving age to year 10 and we will require all students aged under 17 and who want to leave school to be either in vocational training or employed. We have announced 6,000 new government apprenticeships and cadetships over four years as part of a \$370 million boost to jobs for young people.

The Premier joined the Deputy Prime Minister to announce funding for an extra 175,000 training places for job seekers, school leavers and underskilled workers, and \$76.5 million for 25 trade centre projects at 71 government high schools. The Premier joined the Deputy Prime Minister again to announce \$93.9 million to build or refurbish trade or vocational education and training facilities in 86 schools as part of the Rudd Government's trade training centres in schools program. The Government announced 60 pre-constructed permanent school libraries to replace demountables in government schools as part of the Rudd Government's stimulus package, an initiative that is supporting jobs in western Sydney.

The Government has also invested \$250,000 to establish the Fulbright scholarship to boost the clever State and give our young people the best possible chance to go ahead in life. The Government has done this because it understands that the people of New South Wales deserve a Government that is working for them to deliver services and support jobs. What has the Opposition done for the people of New South Wales? I hear members opposite mumbling, snoozing, and snoring, I see them with wet hair at midday after they get out of the shower, and when some of them realise the sun has come up they say, "Oh no, I missed the ferry so I will stay home today."

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarrity): Order! There is too much audible conversation in the Chamber.

Ms CHERIE BURTON: The only contribution of Opposition members, when they finally come into the House, is to vote against the Rudd Government's stimulus package—a grand total of eight times now. What a ridiculous position the Federal Opposition took. State Opposition members, as usual, are puppets on a string, with no thoughts of their own; they just jump on the bandwagon. The Opposition has voted against the provision of 6,000 new affordable housing sites and upgrades to 3,000 schools across the State. That is why the Coalition is in opposition. The people of New South Wales deserve much better than the Opposition is dishing out, which is a big fat zero.

Mr MALCOLM KERR (Cronulla) [3.41 p.m.]: The member for Kogarah is very sensitive and she has a right to be so. Opposition members were shocked when they read about her service delivery as outlined by Alex Mitchell on www.crikey.com.au.

Ms Cherie Burton: Point of order: I draw to the attention of the House the front page of the *St George and Sutherland Shire Leader*. Only the member for Cronulla would have time to read www.crikey.com.au.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarritty): Order! There is no point of order. The member for Cronulla has the call.

Mr MALCOLM KERR: The member for Kogarah knows as much about service delivery as she does about points of order. The only remark I heard that was coherent was that she missed the ferry. Opposition members would have preferred that she did not give that speech so we could have missed the ferry tales, which came frequently.

Mr Grant McBride: You have become a fairytale.

Mr MALCOLM KERR: What does he know—a mobile Government grant! It is extraordinary the sort of Government we have in New South Wales. Members should look at this Liberal-Nationals folder and its pages and pages of strong, detailed policy. But let us turn to examine the Government's last two years in office.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarritty): Order! The member for The Entrance will resume his seat.

Mr MALCOLM KERR: As the Speaker reminded us: it is Neighbour Day next Sunday. Who is the neighbour of the member for Kogarah? It is Morris Iemma. Morris Iemma said he was heading in the right direction but there was a lot more to do, particularly the privatisation of electricity. When the member for Kogarah speaks in reply she should tell the House the support she gave her neighbour when he tried to fund the State's infrastructure by selling the power and what she did at the Labor Party conference to her neighbour. She probably will not celebrate Neighbour Day on Sunday when she remembers good neighbour Morris.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarritty): Order! I remind the member for Cronulla that props are not permitted in the Chamber.

Mr MALCOLM KERR: That is why I put it down.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarritty): Order! The Chair appreciates that. The member for The Entrance will resume his seat.

Mr MALCOLM KERR: The member for Kogarah referred to education and tried to claim selective schools. A Coalition Government introduced selective schools. Caringah High School is a selective school.

Mr Rob Stokes: A very good school.

Mr MALCOLM KERR: It is a very good school, as the member for Pittwater says. Labor opposed selective schools during its dark days of government. The Government should talk to the Teachers Federation—Labor supporter—about what it thinks of selective schools. The member for Kogarah mentioned rail reform. Labor undid reforms and centralised rail, after Mr Costa had broken up the rail corporation. With respect to public transport, Gavin Gatenby, co-conveyor of public transport advocacy group EcoTransport stated:

I was in Perth recently, so I took a ride down to Mandurah on the city's new southern rail line. It's a 72 kilometre, 45 minute trip to the coastal growth centre where the trains are met by specially fitted shuttle buses that whisk you to the waterfront precinct in five minutes. It was all very nicely done and the engineering standards are high.

The cost was \$1.2 billion. He said:

That was a revelation. I was reminded of a remark by former NSW Transport Minister John Watkins—

who no longer has a job, I regret to say, and this Government is so popular that he was replaced by the excellent member for Ryde. The remark by Mr Watkins was:

"One thing I've learned in this job is that everything to do with rail is a lot more expensive than you think it's going to be."

Indeed. When the go-ahead for NSW RailCorp's proposed 13 kilometre line to Sydney's south-west growth centre was announced in June last year (characteristically, it's since been indefinitely deferred) the estimated cost was \$1.36 billion—more than the price of the Mandurah line. How could a simple 13 kilometre project over unchallenging greenfield terrain with just two new stations, a stabling yard, reconstruction of Glenfield station and connections to the Southern Line possibly set the taxpayer back \$106 million per kilometre?

It is incredible. The Minister for Planning should look at the duplication in the area, a duplication that is pure duplicity. A Coalition Government built that rail line during the Second World War. The Minister for Transport under a Coalition government announced it and completed it, yet a number of Labor Premiers and transport Ministers cannot finish the line. Once again the project is over budget and over time. A headline in today's *Daily Telegraph* reads, "Carpark vow falls in hole". The article states:

This is emblematic of the way my government will do things"

That is right. The article continues:

More than six months after Premier Nathan Rees personally kick-started the Wentworthville commuter car park project in his own electorate, it is an unfinished waterlogged construction site.

The member for Kogarah talks about initiatives and support. The Government cannot even build a car park. That is an outrage. Anyone who suggests that roads are less congested today than two years ago has no idea and is completely out of touch. It is an absolute scandal for the member to move this motion. [*Time expired.*]

Mr GRANT McBRIDE (The Entrance) [3.48 p.m.]: I have to make a reflection on the performance of the member for Cronulla. I said earlier in the week that he was going through a difficult preselection process. I said also that I could not find him in the coloured photos of members of Parliament; I had to go to the sepia ones—he has been here that long. It is clear that the member for Cronulla's time is up within his party. This is the second speech in one week from him. He is probably absolutely exhausted. I would say he has missed his afternoon nap. Having said that, the member for Cronulla made a great speech.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarrity): Order! The member for Hawkesbury will resume his seat.

Mr GRANT McBRIDE: If he was auditioning for *Fawlty Towers*, it was fantastic. If he was auditioning for a role as Mr Bean—

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarrity): Order! The member for Hawkesbury will resume his seat now.

Mr GRANT McBRIDE: The performance of the member for Cronulla's was good, and I hope it works for him.

Mr Malcolm Kerr: Point of order: My point of order is relevance. The member for The Entrance has not yet addressed the motion. What he has said would be relevant only if I were impersonating the motion.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarrity): Order! There is no point of order. I distinctly heard the member for The Entrance addressing the motion.

Mr GRANT McBRIDE: I would like to caution the member for Cronulla with regard to the use of props. The Parliament has rules about that. The member for Cronulla has been here for so long, he would know more about the rules than possibly anyone else. In the time remaining for this debate I want to talk briefly about the achievements of our Government. Specifically, I want to talk about the educational initiatives we have achieved during the brief period the new Premier has been in office and about the tremendous changes and improvements we are making in education. We are preparing our young people for the future. Education and training is the most important investment any government can make in its young people and their future.

On the first day of this school year, following extensive consultation, the Premier announced that the minimum school leaving age would be raised. Formerly students could leave school on the day they turned 15. When my children went through school we realised that many young people leave school early and unless they have a trade or they are signed up for some sort of future training they disadvantage themselves—for their entire lives. In conclusion, I want to say: Malcolm, good luck. Keep up your good efforts. I hope you make it. But that woman, she will knock you over for sure.

Mr ROB STOKES (Pittwater) [3.51 p.m.]: I would like to congratulate the New South Wales Government—I really would. I am a charitable sort of person, and I really would like to congratulate the Government on its initiatives to deliver services and to support jobs. The only problem is that it is all talk and no delivery. Talk is cheap. This is a government that on infrastructure project after infrastructure project has cried wolf. No-one believes what the Government says anymore. In fact, when I went to do some research on this motion in the Parliamentary Library I looked for the Government's media releases on infrastructure strategy and I found that they were all filed in the fiction section. Australian Labor Party policy is right there next to Alice in Wonderland!

It is offensive, though, that we are talking about a government that is saying it supports jobs when the reality is that we are losing 200 jobs a day in this State. It is all very well for the Government to talk loudly about how many jobs it is going to provide, but it is not worth the air involved in making those sorts of pronouncements if the Government is doing nothing to secure the jobs we have right now. I note that the second part of the motion suggests that the New South Wales Opposition does not have any policies. My colleague the member for Cronulla has amply demonstrated, and physically demonstrated, that that is not the case. However, when I go to the New South Wales Australian Labor Party website and I note that it is okay to refer to electronic devices—

Mr Grant McBride: Point of order: I am not sure whether there is a ruling about members using a mobile phone to receive messages, but I query whether that is permissible.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarrity): Order! Acting-Speaker Merton has ruled members may use their Blackberrys and mobile phones for reference purposes, in the same way that they may refer to copious notes. However, members may not use such devices as a means of communication.

Mr ROB STOKES: A very good ruling by the member for Baulkham Hills. I note that on the Australian Labor Party website, which is titled "Help Us Make a Difference", the scroll bar at the top has the following tabs: About Us, Campaigns, Media, Get Involved and Donate—that is a big one. But there is nothing about policy. In fact, when I scroll through the entire website, there is no policy. The New South Wales Australian Labor Party does not have any policies on its website. If we go to www.barryofarrell.com there are policies on everything. Yet, if we go to the Australian Labor Party website, there is not a single policy.

Mr Grant McBride: Point of order: If ever there was a misrepresentation, that was it. Why don't you go to the Government website?

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarrity): Order! There is no point of order. The member for The Entrance will resume his seat.

Mr GERARD MARTIN (Bathurst) [3.54 p.m.]: I am happy to support the motion of the member for Kogarah. It goes to show how serious Opposition members are when we see the team they have sent to the Chamber for this debate. We have the member for Cronulla, who is making a comeback after 20 years on the back bench. We have the kid from Pittwater, who is a nice bloke but sloppy on research: he does not know the difference between the Australian Labor Party and the Government. I do not think the member for Lakemba is involved in the debate; he still has his training wheels on.

Members opposite talk about delivering on infrastructure projects. Let us talk about—and the shadow Treasurer's father was involved in this—the airport rail link. Some \$850 million in government money was poured down the drain. Then the former Coalition Government went to privatisation in health. Three times it had to buy back Port Macquarie Hospital—

Ms Cherie Burton: How many did you close?

Mr GERARD MARTIN: Exactly. The member for Upper Hunter was one of the Opposition's shadow Ministers who today asked a question about fiscal responsibility. He is the bloke who poured \$90 million down the drain at Eastern Creek and another \$50 million at Luna Park. If the Opposition wants to talk about education infrastructure, we all know what happened in the Metherell years when the former Coalition Government sacked teachers and closed schools: there was a holus-bolus uproar in education. If we are talking about builders and worrying about creating jobs, those opposite will not do it.

While they were at it, the former Coalition Government gave away the State Bank. It sold it for something like \$300 million and then someone on-sold it a few months later for \$4 billion. What a mob of

financial geniuses they are! They came bristling into the Chamber. We have the shadow Treasurer, who is a merchant banker. Wouldn't we like to have a merchant banker running the place! If we have a look at what is happening around the world today, we can see that merchant bankers have run us into the ground. Perhaps the shadow Treasurer is a lawyer—

Ms Cherie Burton: A town planner.

Mr GERARD MARTIN: A town planner! This Government has a fantastic record when it comes to infrastructure. In this four-year period starting from the last budget \$56 billion was rolled out—

[Interruption]

You just worry about Maria, Malcolm. Maria is coming to get you. And what a fearsome sight that will be as she chases you down the corridor. Her voice is deeper than his. She will say, "You are gone." If this is the member for Cronulla's swansong, I am happy to be here to listen to it. The Opposition is obviously not serious about this motion because they have sent dumb, dumber and dumbest down to do the deal.

Mr Victor Dominello: Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 72, which refers to offensive language.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarrity): Order! What language do you consider to be offensive?

Mr Victor Dominello: The member for Bathurst accused certain members of being dumb, dumber and dumbest. Robust debate is good and fun, particularly when there is a large crowd, but we should not sink to that level.

Ms Cherie Burton: To the point of order: There are mechanisms in the Parliament's procedures to address that. If members opposite need to make a personal explanation about why they are not dumb, dumber or dumbest, there are opportunities for them to do that.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarrity): Order! I have heard sufficient from both sides. I refer to the Speaker's ruling yesterday about robust debate. I think he also said that members should refrain from being too thin skinned. In the event that foul language had been used, I could call on the member for Bathurst to withdraw those remarks. But in this case I do not think he has impugned the character of the member for Ryde.

Mr Victor Dominello: By way of clarification: If the Opposition accuses the Government of being dumb, is that acceptable?

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarrity): Order! I have heard that said by members of this House. That concludes the consideration of the point of order.

Ms CHERIE BURTON (Kogarah) [3.57 p.m.], in reply: I would like to thank dumb, dumber and dumbest for their contributions, but I thank the member for the Entrance and the member for Bathurst for their important contributions to the debate.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarrity): Order! The member for the Entrance will resume his seat.

Ms CHERIE BURTON: It was quite a spectacle to watch the member for Cronulla wave around a pretty little folder with nothing in it. I am sure I saw some moths fly out of that folder. He claims there is a bit of policy in the folder but we will see.

Ms Kristina Keneally: Two years worth.

Ms CHERIE BURTON: That is right. Two years worth! The rest of his speech was absolute drivel. It was given by someone who obviously sleeps most of the time and when he is awake he gets a little grumpy because he wants to go back to sleep. The member for Pittwater was very special. I have never really seen that member perform in this Chamber. I have to say he had a lot of trouble remembering what motion he was

debating and what he was talking about. I think he thought he was talking on last week's legislation or something. The Government gave the member for Pittwater a bit of latitude and went with him but he does not even know the difference between the Australian Labor Party and the Government—that is quite sad. Not only that, he did not understand what motion was being debated. His response was absolutely appalling. I really feel sorry for the electors of Pittwater. Hopefully at some stage soon he will be exposed for the fraud that he is.

Mr Rob Stokes: Point of order: The member for Kogarah has called me a fraud.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarritty): Order! Is the member for Kogarah prepared to withdraw that comment?

Ms CHERIE BURTON: No, not at all.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarritty): Order! The convention is that the member for Kogarah rephrases her remark.

Mr Victor Dominello: Withdraw!

Ms CHERIE BURTON: No, I am not going to withdraw. I refuse to withdraw.

Mr Rob Stokes: I would again seek the member for Kogarah to withdraw. It is a very serious allegation to suggest that someone is a fraud. The member has produced no evidence to support that allegation.

Ms CHERIE BURTON: A fraudulent member of Parliament. The member is masquerading as one—that is all. I did not mean to upset his feelings.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarritty): Order! The member for Kogarah is rephrasing her comment to "masquerading", is that correct?

Ms CHERIE BURTON: I do not withdraw the comment but if it is upsetting to the member for Pittwater then I am very sorry that I have upset him.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarritty): Order! I need to clarify whether the member will withdraw her remark.

Mr Victor Dominello: Withdraw it from *Hansard*.

Ms CHERIE BURTON: I do not have to withdraw it all.

Mr Victor Dominello: Well, you should.

Ms CHERIE BURTON: No. It was part of the debate. I am not withdrawing it.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarritty): Order! This matter needs to be resolved. Does the member for Kogarah choose to rephrase the statement?

Ms CHERIE BURTON: What I would say is, I feel very sorry for the electors of the member for Pittwater. Hopefully over the next few years the lack of effective representation they are getting in this place will come to light.

Mr Rob Stokes: Further to the point of order: I want the suggestion that I am a fraud withdrawn.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarritty): Order! I ask the member for Kogarah to withdraw that word in favour of another word.

Ms CHERIE BURTON: To withdraw the fact that he is a fraud?

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarritty): Order! I ask the member for Kogarah to withdraw the word "fraud" and replace it with the subsequent words that she used.

Ms CHERIE BURTON: I will withdraw the word "fraud".

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 47

Mr Amery	Mr Gibson	Ms Megarrity
Ms Andrews	Mr Greene	Mr Morris
Mr Aquilina	Mr Harris	Mrs Paluzzano
Ms Beamer	Mr Hickey	Mr Pearce
Mr Brown	Ms Hornery	Mrs Perry
Ms Burton	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>
Mr Furolo	Mr McLeay	Mr Ashton
Ms Gadiel	Ms McMahon	Mr Martin

Noes, 39

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 J. H. Turner
Mr Debnam	Ms Moore	Mr R. W. 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 Piper	Mr Maguire
Mrs Hancock	Mr Provest	

Pair

Ms Burney

Mr J. D. Williams

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

The SPEAKER: Order! The motion accorded priority having concluded, the House will now consider General Business Orders of the Day (for Bills).

HURLSTONE AGRICULTURAL HIGH SCHOOL SITE BILL 2009

Agreement in Principle

Debate resumed from 13 March 2009.

Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO (Penrith—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.10 p.m.]: The Minister for Education and Training has announced a wide-ranging inquiry to inform any decisions on the Hurlstone

Agricultural High School site. The inquiry will consider a range of issues, including the needs of current and future students, the needs of the agricultural sector and the needs of the surrounding community. The inquiry has not yet begun. It is appropriate that the House gives the inquiry a chance to do its work and make its recommendations about the school's needs. This bill seeks to preclude any change whatsoever at the school and maintain the status quo.

The Government does not accept that is in the best interest of the school's students. Many schools in New South Wales have implemented change and there have been new developments in education because it is in the best interests of school students. For example, Nepean High School has an agricultural faculty, but in recent years the school implemented the No Dole program, which is run by the Beacon Foundation. Previously students were not involved with the program, but Beacon Foundation negotiated with the school and the program has been running now for four years. To preclude any change whatsoever at schools is not advisable.

In last year's mini-budget the Government announced its intention to reprioritise spending. The Premier made it clear he wanted as much of the State's resources as possible moved into front-line services—the services the community wants and relies on. The Department of Education and Training administers more than \$28 billion worth of land and buildings on behalf of New South Wales taxpayers. Not all the land is currently occupied by schools and TAFE colleges. For example, the department regularly reserves land in population growth areas where projections show that a school is likely to be needed in the future. Land is purchased and reserved before the development of an area, to ensure the best value. In cases where the need for a school does not eventuate, the department sells the land to acquire new sites of projected growth.

As part of the mini-budget process, the Department of Education and Training was asked to review the land it held and identify property that was not being used for the benefit of students. Any such land identified would be sold, with the proceeds shared between the school system and other front-line services. The department has responsibility for transferring assets, as required, to ensure that they are allocated fairly across the State so as to maximise the educational outcomes of all school students. Through the mini-budget process, the department was called on to identify sites that were not being used currently for the benefit of students and were not likely to be needed in the future. The advice received by the Minister for Education and Training was that land on the Hurlstone Agricultural High School site fell into this category.

The department advised that not all the 160 hectares the school sits on was being used to the maximum benefit of students and that it would benefit the school if some of that land were sold and part of the proceeds reinvested in new and upgraded facilities for the school. There is a good argument to support this view. The agricultural sector has changed substantially since the school was established on its present site in 1926. Agriculture today is as much about the smart application of modern tools and technology as it is about the size of the plot that an agricultural enterprise has at its disposal. Related disciplines in animal sciences, genetic technology, soil studies and even work around climate change—fields in which the Hurlstone alumni excel—demand a far more sophisticated scientific understanding of natural processes than the school can impart with its current resources.

The Minister has made it clear that that is the view of the Department of Education and Training. However, the Minister has accepted that it is not a view that is shared by many in the community. That is why the Minister has called an independent inquiry to determine which parts, if any, of the site should be sold and how any available proceeds should be invested. For members who may not have heard my opening remarks, I repeat: This bill seeks to preclude any change whatsoever to the school site and seeks to maintain the status quo. The Minister has called an independent inquiry and it is appropriate that the inquiry is allowed to do its work. The inquiry, which has not yet begun, will consider a range of issues, including the needs of current and future students, the needs of the agricultural sector, and the needs of the surrounding community.

Mr THOMAS GEORGE (Lismore) [4.17 p.m.]: I speak to the Hurlstone Agricultural High School Site Bill 2009. The objects of the bill are:

- (a) to ensure that the Hurlstone Agricultural High School site remains in public ownership, and
- (b) to limit the use of the site to that of a government school.

We have just heard the Government's response to the bill. I cannot believe the line the Government is peddling. Together with the Leader of the Opposition, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, the shadow Minister for Education and Training, the shadow Minister for Western New South Wales and the member for Clarence, I visited Hurlstone Agricultural High School this morning. As someone who comes from a rural background,

I was very impressed with what I saw. I saw young students in their school uniforms at 7.30 a.m. working in the dairy milking cows. One young girl told us that she gets up every morning at 4.00 a.m. and travels to school to work in the dairy before commencing her schoolwork. It has to be seen to be believed: young people so dedicated to their work and studies at school.

Yet the Government is going to take that opportunity away from them. There are 200 boarders at the school and close to 700 day students. Those students go to Hurlstone Agricultural High School because they do not have access to the same opportunities anywhere else in Sydney or even close to Sydney. I believe the closest facility would be Farrer Memorial Agricultural High School, a boys school at Tamworth, and Yanco Agricultural High School. Hurlstone Agricultural High School gives students from all around country and regional New South Wales, as well as the Newcastle-Sydney-Wollongong areas, the opportunity to attend and learn about agriculture. There is a shortfall of around 800 graduates each year that are needed to go into this industry.

The agricultural industry underwrites the economy of this State. Hurlstone Agricultural High School is giving its students, at the grassroots level, the opportunity to enter this wonderful industry and to explore further a career in agriculture in this State. At this morning's visit to the school I learnt that it has one of the very few Ayrshire studs still operating as a dairy farm, with the Ayrshire stud providing the nucleus of the milking herd. Some Friesian cows support it also, of course. I even saw a Jersey cow there. The school has a good cross-section of dairy cows, which looked to be in magnificent condition and were well presented. You could even go and drink the milk straight out of the vat. The students do a wonderful job: the place was very clean—I walked through the dairy right up to where the cows were being milked in the suit I am wearing now.

Mrs Karyn Paluzzano: There's a milking dairy in Penrith.

Mr THOMAS GEORGE: Yes, I know that; there is one in Penrith too. We also saw what they are doing with pigs and poultry, and how they are teaching the children to grow vegetables—showing them what agriculture is all about. But this Government is going to take away that opportunity for the children to learn about agriculture. The Government believes it can sell the bulk of the land and leave the school with just 35 acres. There are problems all around the State with people trying to farm on 35 acres; it is just not viable. Yet, here we have 200 students who board at this school because they want to learn about agriculture in a practical way. The day students attend the school for the same reason.

Many people who are leaders in agriculture right across this country went to Hurlstone Agricultural High School. In my electorate Peter Carlill has just retired as chairman of the board of the Northern Cooperative Meat Company at Casino, which employs 1,000 people and exports meat and hides to countries around the world. Peter was elected the year after I was elected to the board in 1981. His interest in agriculture came from attending Hurlstone Agricultural High School. The practical experience that he received while studying at the school gave him the grounding to follow a successful career in agriculture. He was awarded the 1962 Star Junior Farmer Award. Peter went on to be a leader in the pig industry, the soya bean industry—I would say he was a pioneer in the soya bean industry on the coast—and the beef industry in the Northern Rivers area. He was chairman of the Northern Cooperative Meat Company for some nine years before he retired.

At the school visit this morning my colleagues and I felt considerable pride in the school when we saw the names of leaders in agriculture listed on the honour boards. Those people would feel much pride in being graduates of Hurlstone. Hurlstone Agricultural High School has been able to introduce many students to agriculture through hands-on experience gained from the farm. To sell the farm would be to deny its future students this opportunity. As I said earlier, Hurlstone is one of only two agricultural public schools in Sydney and one of only four in New South Wales. Although I do not want to scare people, I heard recently that the Government might have been looking to sell off land at Farrer Memorial Agricultural High School and Yanco Agricultural High School also. I hope that information is incorrect, but it came from a very reliable source.

If that is on the cards this Government will have a revolt on its hands not only from Hurlstone Agricultural High School but also from country and regional New South Wales. I cannot understand why the Government wants to sell 140 hectares of land and reduce the school site to only 20 hectares as part of the accelerated sale of surplus education land outlined in the mini-budget. There has been widespread opposition to this, not only in this Parliament but also from many people in country and regional New South Wales who have brought it to my attention. I received an email from a past graduate of the school, Robert Holman, who has a Bachelor of Science in agriculture and a diploma in education. He cannot believe what the Government is proposing to do with Hurlstone Agricultural High School. He states in his email:

HAHS is the only public boarding school in Sydney. It provides opportunities for children from country NSW to undertake quality education ...

It is recognised by the community and by the State that this school is providing quality education, and that is something of which we can all be proud. However, it is also affordable education, giving many people an opportunity to enter the agricultural industry. Mr Holman points out that city kids want to learn about agriculture. Hurlstone provides that opportunity and bridges the gap between the city and the country. The Government was a little taken aback when it realised, after the announcement was made about the sale, that a memorial forest that is an important part of Australia's military heritage is on the property. We are told now that the forest will not be part of the sale. Robert Holman pleads with the Government, as I do:

Please reverse the decision to sell HAHS land. It is a strong public school with ties to all areas of the state and is one of the last remaining institutional links between city and country life in NSW. Furthermore, the school has a proud patriotic history displayed by the school motto "Pro Patria" that will be forever damaged if this decision is not reversed.

How could anyone disagree with Robert's words? In this Parliament we talk about a stimulus package and we talk about jobs every day, yet we are doing this to an industry in this State that needs considerable support in encouraging young people into the so-called apprenticeships the Government keeps talking about. We are taking away a school that provides an initiative for people to go into the agricultural sector in this State. It is something students can learn from year 7 and it encourages them to expand their thoughts and experience the agricultural world.

This morning we were informed also that because Hurlstone Agricultural High School is strategically placed near the railway station many primary school students travel by train to visit the school because they have the opportunity to see cows being milked. They also see poultry, pigs and calves being reared. That is a rare experience for many primary school students. It is wonderful that that facility is on the doorstep of schools in the region. If it is removed it will affect not only the students at Hurlstone but also students at surrounding education facilities because they will no longer have easy access to learning about agriculture and what we produce in this State.

I was also very impressed with the enthusiasm of some of the students who accompanied us on the bus tour of the property, including Iain MacLennan and Emma Ludington. Iain, who is from Orange, could not speak highly enough of the school. It meant an enormous amount to him to have the opportunity to attend Hurlstone Agricultural High School, to further his agriculture interests and to board with his mates. This Government intends to rob him and other young people of the opportunity to maintain that interest. It is good to see the member for East Hills in the Chamber. I am sure that he, like the member for Macquarie Fields and the member for Penrith, will speak on this bill because it will affect their electorates. I am also sure that they will support this bill because they do not realise how angry people are about this issue. The anger of parents, former students and current students—

Mr Steve Cansdell: It will grow over the next two years.

Mr THOMAS GEORGE: It will more than grow over the next two years. Members opposite do not realise that the ramifications of this decision will be more dramatic than the ramifications of the bus subsidies saga. The member for East Hills and the member for Macquarie Fields should remember that. The Government reversed its decision to remove that subsidy once it realised it was the wrong thing to do. As Robert Holman said, the school's motto will be forever damaged if this decision is not reversed. [*Time expired.*]

Mr ALAN ASHTON (East Hills) [4.32 p.m.]: Opposition members should recognise that the Minister for Education and Training has called for a far-reaching inquiry so that she is more informed about any decision to sell land at Hurlstone Agricultural High School. The member for Lismore made some good points during his contribution to the debate this afternoon, but I will be a little more specific. I congratulate the Government and the Minister on the decision to conduct an inquiry. It would not be controversial to say that the November mini-budget was not the best mini-budget to be handed down in Australia. I have no problem saying that. It was introduced when indicators suggested that the world economy was heading for a disaster and that triple-A credit ratings were at risk. All these things were very important. However, the briefing document produced by the boffins at the Department of Education and Training justifying the sale of a large portion of land at Hurlstone Agricultural High School contained inaccurate figures.

One would not convict a criminal based on the quality of the information in the document provided to the Minister. If the Minister received inaccurate information, so too did the Government. It therefore follows that local members who decided to support the mini-budget also received inaccurate information. Since my days working as an adviser to Rodney Cavalier I have gone on the record and said that selling off government high school sites or part thereof is anathema. Members interested in history would remember the sale of the Bass

High School site in the electorate of Bankstown. Under advice, once again from the department, the Government decided to sell a school site to a company that proposed to erect hundreds of houses. Within a short time the company sold the site to a Muslim society that decided to build a school, halls and other facilities. Of course, the locals were in uproar because they had been told that the land was being sold for residential development. That has resulted in Bankstown City Council spending hundreds of thousands of dollars in an attempt to have the decision overturned. That case is still before the courts today.

I congratulate the Government because it has heard what the people have been saying. Without intending any disrespect to the member for Lismore, I point out that the Government has heard what Government members have been saying, particularly the member for Macquarie Fields and members like me. I did not attend Hurlstone Agricultural High School, but some of my constituents have attended it and some still do. I have not had a chance to make copious notes in preparation for this debate, but I remember that the departmental briefing said something about Farrer Memorial Agricultural High School, Yanco Agricultural High School and other school sites having small amounts of land and that they do a wonderful job with the kids and the animals. However, it also said that Hurlstone Agricultural High School has a vast amount of land but virtually no animals. It gave the impression that one could fire a shotgun through the place and not hit an alpaca, a goat, a chicken or a sheep. That seemed incredible to me.

Mr Ludington and his daughter Emma, whom the member for Lismore mentioned, also visited me. I have rarely met two more impressive, informed, intelligent and decent people. Emma, who was at that stage in year 9 at Hurlstone Agricultural High School, made the point that the school has 130 cattle. She virtually knew all their names. She also said that there were sheep, alpacas, goats, pigs and chickens. The departmental brief did not even mention the alpacas. Emma knew that these animals existed and that they roamed about, and classes involving them were important for her. She wants to get a job in the country or to work in the animal husbandry or agricultural industries.

The departmental brief also stated that James Ruse Agricultural High School is vital and the leading agricultural high school in New South Wales. I was a teacher for 23 or 24 years and I know how the system works. James Ruse Agricultural High School has a very small site and very few students study agriculture after year 10. It also has a huge number of students from an Asian background. I am not being politically incorrect when I say that they are not interested in studying agriculture. They study four unit maths and science and languages. There is no point in comparing James Ruse Agricultural High School, which gets the best Higher School Certificate results in the State—good luck to it—with Hurlstone Agricultural High School, which also has excellent students, but more of its students continue to study agriculture. They do the subjects that will help them to get work in the country.

Emma was able to present me with accurate statistics because she was a student at the school. She had counted all the animals on the site. I could have passed the information that she provided to me to the member for Macquarie Fields, because the school is not in my electorate. However, I did pay him the courtesy of telling him what I thought and that I would support any campaign to have the proposal revisited, which we are doing today. I also spoke to a few other people who sent me emails. Of course, some people took the ideological view that it is a criminal decision and typical of a bad Labor government. It was easy to work out which emails had been written at the Liberal Party headquarters. However, some people were very genuine and said that they were not against the Government or me. In fact, they said that they know I have done a great job as their local member and that is why they approached me to help them.

I told the Minister on day one that I would take up this issue and ask some tricky questions. As we all have at times, I have trusted bureaucratic advice. However, I later established that it misnamed a site that could be used or did not allow for the fact that some buildings on a site were vital. We cannot look at a site and simply decide to chop bits off, sell them and bank the money. That is especially so with the Bass Hill exercise. Since that went wrong covenants have been introduced to say there must be legal guarantees on sales, so one has to worry.

I congratulate the two constituents who came to see me, as well as the people who sent me emails. Wayne Ludington and Emma are impressive people. I do not doubt that they met also with the member for Macquarie Fields. I am happy that the Government is prepared to revisit this decision. We do not say the decision will change. However, any decision taken will not be based on a brief that was knocked together virtually overnight, ignoring the truth about the site. The decision will not ignore the number of animals or how many courses are taught. A comparison was made with James Ruse Agricultural High School, where kids are getting better results, not in agriculture but in languages, four unit maths and other subjects. The Government has come to the right decision: hold a proper inquiry.

The Opposition can have some fun and say, "Here we are again, having to revisit something", but I would much rather be part of a government that is prepared to revisit decisions and have independent inquiries than a government that goes full steam ahead, damn the torpedoes. Again, I congratulate the member for Macquarie Fields and other members who represent electorates in the area. I know this issue means a lot to the member for Camden, to the member for Campbelltown and to the member for Wollondilly, but it also means a lot to me as the member for East Hills. My constituents can board a train at East Hills and travel to Glenfield and Holsworthy to attend the school. It is about probity; it is about getting the right advice and making a decision—tough or otherwise. The Government has to base that decision on timely, accurate information, not on facts that people present conveniently when much of the site is suggested for sale.

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES (Barwon) [4.41 p.m.]: It is with pleasure that I speak on the Hurlstone Agricultural High School Site Bill 2009. I emphasise the word "site" because The Nationals and the Liberals are pushing to maintain the integrity of Hurlstone Agricultural High School and to ensure that the site remains in public ownership. More than 100 years ago our forefathers had a vision not only for New South Wales but also for western Sydney. Hurlstone Agricultural High School is not just a site; it is a precinct. It was established to provide education and training—it is not a single facility but co-located facilities—in agriculture and other subjects. The site was developed as a precinct in perpetuity, and the community is reminding us of that today.

The member the East Hills is correct: there are two other educational facilities on the site. One is a behavioural school and the other is an indigenous-based school, which is close to my heart and which I visited this morning. There are also other facilities that belong to the Department of Education and Training. The behavioural school was established in the area because it was recognised that students and young people who experience difficulties in life respond far better when they are surrounded by open space. Those schools and that site did not evolve by accident. The co-location of the facilities is no accident. The indigenous school also did not develop by accident; we made a commitment to indigenous issues. As time goes on the community responds to change to a certain extent, but the open space at the Hurlstone Agricultural High School precinct must be preserved.

The member for Penrith spoke about the interests of the 900 students. This bill is not just about the interests of the students—many of whom we met this morning, as the member for Lismore pointed out—who come from Orange, Griffith, Mudgee and pretty well throughout the whole central west, as well as from my town of Moree. It was a privilege to meet the students who come from Sydney. The member for Lismore spoke about the young girl who gets up at four o'clock every morning to join the staff—who love the place—in milking the cows. Another young student who comes from near East Hills was offered a scholarship to a different school but chose to attend Hurlstone Agricultural High School because she wants to pursue animal husbandry studies at the University of New England and to work in the agriculture sector, particularly in livestock management. These are Sydney-based kids who want to connect with country areas, and to the agricultural industry generally.

Comparing Hurlstone Agricultural High School to James Ruse Agricultural High School is like comparing apples to oranges. I recognise that James Ruse does a good job catering for the higher achievers, but Hurlstone Agricultural High School is about getting your hands dirty. Agriculture is about getting your hands dirty. It is refreshing to see young city people wanting to engage in food and fibre production, and we want encourage and maintain their interest. Why? There has been a fundamental disconnect from agriculture in the past generation—particularly under this Government—and now our increasingly urbanised society fails to understand what sustains it and where its basic needs, such as food, water and clothing, come from.

It is a concern when young people in urban areas think milk comes out of a carton and meat comes from Coles, Woolworths or the local butcher. Our highly urbanised communities are disconnected from what sustains them, and where it comes from. If places such as Hurlstone Agricultural High School start to disappear from our community—it could be a benchmark, and I will talk about that in a moment—we will lose a visible connection between our highly urbanised community and the communities that sustain us through food production.

The problem for the Government is that global warming and all its purported effects have superseded and overtaken the food security issue. As civilisations become more urbanised over time, attention strays from agricultural production and that leads eventually to their demise. We are reaching that point in this country. Not only are we exporting our jobs, but we are exporting agriculture. We are sending a clear message not only to the people of western Sydney but also to all of Sydney and New South Wales that we do not think agricultural food production is important. How do I know that? We watch for trends. Eight agricultural research stations in New

South Wales are currently under threat from this Government. While we are on the subject of job losses in New South Wales, potentially another 20 jobs will go from Condobolin. We were at a rally there last Friday with more than 500 people who do not want to lose their jobs. They do not want to see agriculture and food production put on the backburner.

This debate reaches further than Hurlstone Agricultural High School. The Government seems committed to this course of action, and it is a worrying trend. The push came through the mini-budget—which the member for East Hills acknowledged was probably the worst mini-budget ever to be delivered in this country. Did the Government seek advice? It should have sought and taken advice on the matter. The Premier is constantly taking advice but he refuses to make decisions. The Government should not blame the Education bureaucrats by suggesting that they give poor advice when it is not doing its homework properly—something of a trend, it seems.

The Coalition has heard complaints that the decision is bordering on environmental and social vandalism. The Government is continuing its urbanised push at the expense of open space. Today a year 11 student—who will be a voter in two years—said that last week senior students and friends of Hurlstone Agricultural High School did a letterbox drop in the electorate of Macquarie Fields. I acknowledge the good work of the member for Macquarie Fields. Those same people will campaign in at least the five electorates of Macquarie Fields, Campbelltown, Camden, Wollondilly and Balmain to ensure that the decision is reversed.

Decisions can be reversed. The mini-budget was disastrous; it was a shocker. I am aware of two Government decisions that were reversed: the bus subsidy that created angst in some outer western Sydney suburbs and in rural New South Wales; and the staffing decision made by the Department of Education and Training. It was disingenuous of the Government to establish an inquiry simply to protect Labor members who represent electorates in the western suburbs. The Government was seeking to protect the member for Macquarie Fields and Labor members in the neighbouring electorates of Campbelltown, Camden and Wollondilly. That was evident from documents that we obtained under freedom of information. The Opposition has been researching this issue for some time because we feel strongly about it, as do the locals.

The inquiry announcement was prompted by local grassroots pressure—an indication that the Government is out of touch. The Government should get up to speed with the views of the people of Hurlstone and the surrounding areas. They are not necessarily angry with individual members but they will vote with their feet at the next election. The decision is social and environmental vandalism and it will undermine food security. Significant infrastructure runs through the 600-acre property, including many powerlines and grids, particularly on the ridge. Any areas that are sold off for residential development will need to be buffered because a large proportion of the site is not suitable for housing. I do not know whether the people who made the residential development recommendation visited the site.

Sewer infrastructure also runs through the property. Hurlstone Agricultural High School has some environmentally sensitive areas, particularly on the floodplain. The property maintains and propagates animals such as beef and dairy cattle, and goats. It has one of the oldest Ayrshire dairy cattle studs in New South Wales. Children learn to raise pigs and chickens, and get their hands dirty growing sorghum, forage and vegetables. A self-sustaining farm on this scale must be retained. The area is the lungs of western and south-western Sydney. People who live in that part of the world are far healthier because of the open space, clean water and lack of traffic congestion. There is a whole host of reasons why that part of the world is a good place to live. If Hurlstone Agricultural High School loses its character, identity and uniqueness it will become a generic school, and this will be a retrograde step for the community.

I had the pleasure of meeting some of the staff—even though they have supposedly been gagged. They corroborated some of our information—for example, the department has considered selling agricultural high school land in other parts of the State, namely at Yanco and Farrer. It is incorrect to suggest that land sales in other parts of the State have not been considered. Staff, parents, students—who are the future of our State and our country—and the community do not want this decision. Hurlstone Agricultural High School should be a showcase for Sydney. Every primary school student should have the opportunity to visit Hurlstone Agricultural High School to see where food and fibre comes from, and how food is produced. We need more of these schools, not fewer. We certainly must retain Hurlstone Agricultural High School in its entirety and in its current form.

Mr PAUL McLEAY (Heathcote) [4.56 p.m.]: I agreed with the last sentiment expressed by the member for Barwon, when he said that we should listen to the community and involve the people. However, he

then said it was disingenuous for the Government to establish a review when this bill has been introduced to stop it. His arguments are contradictory. If the community wants a review and the Government agrees to it, the bill should not proceed. If the Government is serious about having a fair dinkum review we should await its outcome, not debate a bill that prevents the review from occurring. If the community and many residents in the area—graduates, milk drinkers and others—want the Government to review the decision, that is what should happen.

Ms Katrina Hodgkinson: Milk drinkers?

Mr PAUL McLEAY: The member for Barwon said that people do not know how cows are milked, or even where milk comes from. If the member for Burrinjuck had been present for the debate she would understand my point.

Ms Katrina Hodgkinson: I've been watching the debate upstairs.

Mr PAUL McLEAY: My point is that many people do not know the details of the decision. We should have a review and not pre-empt its outcome by supporting the bill. The needs of the agricultural sector in New South Wales are changing. Today, agriculture is as much about the smart application of tools and technology as anything else. Our farmers and scientists are developing new, cutting-edge ways to farm more sustainably, as well as contributing to debates on land management, water conservation and climate change. Hurlstone Agricultural High School has played an important part in training young people to lead this work, and I hope that it will continue to do so. The Minister has already announced that part of the inquiry will be to investigate the current needs of the agricultural sector. It is appropriate that we ask the sector what skills it needs from graduates of our education system, especially graduates of specialised schools such as Hurlstone and other agricultural schools such as Yanco and Farrer.

At Hurlstone, agriculture is still an important impetus. The subject is compulsory until year 10, with a proportion of students continuing to study it to Higher School Certificate level. The school has more to offer than just academics. Students can develop skills in a wide range of sports, including rugby union, hockey and others, through a sporting zone and State knock-out championships in which the school participates. Other activities available to students include public speaking and debating, as well as the creative and performing arts through one of the school's art clubs, bands, vocal ensembles or drama groups. There is also an emphasis on school and community service through membership of the school's Interact Club and its involvement in several charity drives and environment improvement projects. The school's reputation creates strong competition for places, and current application rates remain high.

The Government is committed to ensuring that Hurlstone Agricultural High School's long and proud traditions of service and excellence are continued and maintained. The Government has said that Hurlstone Agricultural High School will maintain its status as a selective, agricultural high school with boarding facilities. The Government has said that up to a maximum of 140 hectares should be considered for sale, but that the amount of land to be retained at the school will depend on the needs of a modern agricultural high school and on the views of the school community and the surrounding community. Within these parameters there is scope for much to be done that could benefit the school.

If the inquiry finds, as the Department of Education and Training believes, that some of the 160 hectares on which Hurlstone Agricultural High School sits is not being used to the maximum benefit of students, the sale of even a small part of the land could provide substantial new resources for teachers and students at the school. It is now time for the inquiry to do its work and see whether that kind of trade is justified. It is time for this House to allow the inquiry to do its work, rather than closing off the possibility of any change at the site and burying our heads in the sand as to any evidence that may emerge. That is what the bill seeks to do.

Mr STEVE CANSDELL (Clarence) [5.01 p.m.]: I support the Hurlstone Agricultural High School Site Bill 2009. It brings a smile to my face to hear Labor Party members reveal their knowledge of agriculture, farming and the rural sector. One of them referred to dairy farmers as "milk drinkers". The member for East Hills spoke about alpaca goats! I thought that was very interesting.

Mr Alan Ashton: Point of order: There was a comma between "alpaca" and "goats". I was also under severe pressure at the time from the member for Clarence, who interjected continually during my speech.

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

Mr STEVE CANSDELL: It was interesting for me to visit Hurlstone Agricultural High School today together with the Leader of The Nationals, the shadow Minister for education and member for Murrumbidgee, the member for Barwon, the Member for Lismore and the Hon. Rick Colless. It was also great to meet the students there. It brought back memories. As a youngster I went to an orphanage at Molong that had yards very similar to those at Hurlstone. The orphanage had a piggery, laying hens, and a dairy. It was great to see the modern equipment that is used today. It was also great to see the keenness of the students. I am sure the people who work in dairies today are a lot keener than the dairy workers when I was a kid!

This is a serious issue. I know that some Government members also take it seriously and have real concerns about the Labor Party going ahead and flogging off the family farm or the family silver. The proposal is nothing more than a money grab in a disastrous mini-budget. It is by no means an outcome from an excellence-in-education forum. As I said, it is nothing more than trying to get some money by selling off the family farm—or, in this case, the State farm. If the sale goes ahead without proper consideration and concern not just for Hurlstone Agricultural High School but for the future of agriculture in New South Wales, sadly the only inquiry that Government members will face—I acknowledge that there are some good ones—is on 26 March 2011, two years from today.

As has already been said, each year we have a shortage of 800 qualified, skilled agricultural and rural workers in New South Wales—not Australia, just New South Wales. There are four agricultural schools in New South Wales, and Hurlstone is only one of two in Sydney. The other two agricultural high schools are Farrer, in Tamworth, and Yanco, in the Riverina. There is concern—and rightly so—that they may be next on the chopping block as far as the sale of land is concerned. Government members—not the local members who obviously have been to Hurlstone, but the members who have the gall to speak about something they know nothing about—should at least visit the school and look around. They should talk to the students, the teachers and the farm workers and ask them to explain what is there and why it is needed.

As has been said in this debate, the school has an Ayshire and Friesian dairy comprising around 40 head of cattle. But the school also has a breeding program through which it breeds dairy cattle for sale. It also has a bore goat breeding program, which has a big future because that is where the money is these days. These breeding programs not only enhance the education of students but also generate income for the school, which it can reinvest in much-needed equipment. The school also has a merino sheep breeding program. It has shearing sheds with two shearing bays in which the students learn to shear. The students also learn wool classing, a skill that is gradually dying out in the agricultural sector. Young people who want to become shearers or wool classers need to start somewhere, so getting that education at school is a bonus. It is not just a matter of leaving school and starting in the shearing sheds.

On our visit to the school I met a young lady named Emma, who is from either Orange or Griffith. It is compulsory to do agricultural studies between years 7 and 10. Emma is now in year 10. She is going to continue her agricultural studies through to years 11 and 12, and then she wants to go to university in Armidale to do an animal husbandry or cattle breeding degree. When Emma qualifies she will be able to contribute to agricultural pursuits and excellence in New South Wales.

This is a serious issue. There is no way in the world that an agricultural college can operate successfully on 40 hectares of land. It might be possible to run a strawberry farm on that amount of land, but it is not adequate to cater for laying hens, which generate produce not only for the school but to sell to the markets—which in turn raises money to help run the college. As I said, the school also has a piggery. It is used for student education but it also makes money for the school and ensures that it is partly self-sustainable. It also allows the school to buy extra equipment that normally it could not afford. The school also has a vegetable patch. It contains rows of nashi pears, and their cultivation is a real passion among the students. The students are taught about growing native trees as farm wind breaks, to help make their farms more environmentally sustainable, to achieve better productivity and to protect their crops.

Members who have been to country shows will know that there is always an emphasis on caged birds. The school also has a caged birds breeding program. Purebred poultry are bred in different ways to show the students what breeds are available and how they can be raised. The school has different areas for laying hens—in one area they might have 20 grams per whatever while the others have 22 grams—to highlight the different results that can be achieved. Slight differences in feeding—for example, heavier or better feeding with better quality protein—can produce much bigger hens. Such factors are important. It is possible to have batteries for chooks in a small area of under 40 hectares, but it is not possible to run breeding programs for beef cattle, dairy cattle, bore goats, and merino sheep, and at the same time grow sorghum and other crops for livestock feed.

When we inspected the dairy we saw a young girl in a school uniform. That girl gets up at 4 o'clock each morning and travels by train to school from East Hills to work in the dairy. Why she would want to be part of that I do not understand. It is like working in a corner store seven days a week. The girl loves the idea of working in the dairy; she has been doing it for 12 months and wants to continue in that field. That is an example of the passion of these kids. Of the 900 schoolchildren that attend Hurlstone each year, 200 are live-in boarders from across country New South Wales. While the parents of the live-in boarders may not be voters in the area, all the parents are passionate about maintaining the grounds of the school.

The impediments to breaking up the area for housing have been mentioned. For instance, the high-voltage powerline through the top of the property has a 30-metre exclusion zone around it that needs to be maintained; a major sewer line from a new estate is connected to a holding tank that also has a protection zone; the gully runoff water—there was a trade-off years earlier for the subdivision—goes into two dams because there are no stormwater drains; and there is swamp area down the back. This is just a money grab following a disastrous mini-budget. This is a bad decision that will sell out western Sydney and compromise the future of agricultural education in New South Wales. The sale of the land will be an irreversible decision. More land cannot be purchased in the future to try to keep things going the way they are. The reduction of the farming land will hinder the ability of the school to provide quality agricultural education. These basic facts cannot be argued against. The object of the legislation is to ensure that the Hurlstone Agricultural High School remains in public ownership and to limit the use of the site to that of a government school.

We also visited Campbell House next door. Campbell House is a school for kids with special needs and behavioural problems. What a great place to have that school. There is room for the children to move, room to let their frustrations out and calm down, by getting back to nature, playing with animals whilst supervised, and observing the real things that happen in country New South Wales. The alternative is to stick them in a concrete block in inner Sydney where everyone screams and yells, cars go past, and they are stuck in a small, confined space. That prospect alone is an excellent reason to keep the school's farmland. An indigenous school is also around the corner. Cottages are located on the site for the parents of the live-in boarders to stay in when they come to visit. Three or four of these cottages have been converted into overnight or weekly accommodation with their own kitchens—

Ms Katrina Hodgkinson: Very practical.

Mr STEVE CANSDELL: My word it is practical. Some of those kids get homesick and miss their families. Mum and dad can stay and spend time with the children instead of visiting for a day and saying, "Here is a bag of lollies. See you later." The children can appreciate where they are and that their parents love them. This school has the heart to want to save that accommodation for parents to come and spend time with their kids. Thirty or forty hectares are not enough for an agricultural school. I support the bill. I am very disappointed by some of the comments of Government members. I am very disappointed that the Government would throw this up as a short-term fix for its fiscal incompetence and flog off this family farm to try to cover its backside.

Mr DAVID HARRIS (Wyang) [5.14 p.m.]: I have listened carefully to the debate. As someone who has been involved in education for 20 years, I have never heard so much scaremongering in all my life. According to the members opposite it is the end of agriculture in New South Wales, there is no other school in the State that offers agriculture, and they went on and on. But we are here today to talk about the fact that the hardworking member for Macquarie Fields has gone out and sought an inquiry to ensure the best possible outcome for the community. We all know that over time education changes and the Government is constantly reviewing the way business is done in schools. Sometimes change is difficult. Change management is extremely difficult but through change the Government does try to make things better. No-one is talking about closing the school.

Everyone recognises the school's long and valuable record. According to the Opposition all these great programs will no longer run and agriculture will no longer be done at the school. That is simply not true. In debates we need sensible discussion to achieve good outcomes. We do not need scaremongering about the end of the world as we know it. Communities are concerned about change but that does not mean issues should not be confronted from time to time. The inquiry will consider the relevant issues and an informed decision will be made based on the facts. Proceeds from the sale of school property are sometimes returned to a school to improve facilities, purchase equipment and increase the curriculum. I am sure the inquiry process will result in some of the land being sold off but the school as a whole being strengthened.

Whilst residential agricultural high schools have a long and proud history, many of the State's high schools run excellent agricultural programs. A school in Wyong has an agriculture program and in recent times

won an award at the Easter show for cattle. The school breeds the cattle on limited land. The review will seek to achieve the best outcome for Hurlstone and at the end of the process school facilities and programs will be strengthened. Hurlstone has been through change over a long period. John Kinloch originally opened the school as a private establishment in 1878 but it quickly ran into financial problems. The Government then became involved with the land and buildings. It then became the Hurlstone Training College for female teachers. With the creation of a new teacher's college within the University of Sydney, the school was again redirected.

Hurlstone Agricultural Continuation School came into being in 1907. The establishment of an agricultural school in that period was deemed to be appropriate since it was believed that the future of Australia lay in agricultural development. The school was much smaller than it is today, comprising 11 hectares with buildings and classrooms. Over time additions were made to the school and changes were made in its method of operation. In 1926 the school moved from its old site at Summer Hill to its current site at Glenfield. Throughout that time the school's reputation and tradition have been strengthened, and other speakers have referred to that. We should not be under the misapprehension that the school's strong history will be wiped or will not continue to operate. That type of scaremongering is not fair on the community and it is not fair on the students and people involved with the school. We need sensible discussion about the best outcome.

I congratulate the member for Macquarie Fields, who was instrumental in the establishment of the inquiry. It would be difficult to find a member who has a better understanding of his local community than the member for Macquarie Fields. He has fought very hard on behalf of his community to ensure that the inquiry takes place. As members know, economic decisions can be difficult. The member for Macquarie Fields stood up for his community and got a good outcome. It may be that some of the land will be sold. The Government has set a maximum amount that can be sold. As I said, the inquiry will examine all the issues and look at the activities carried on at the school and will make a decision based on those facts.

As a school principal one of the hardest things I had to deal with was change of management. We fear change. As soon change is mentioned, we get an innate feeling of uncertainty. We do not know whether it will be good for us. We do know that change is necessary. It maintains vibrancy and ensures that people retain an interest. It renews old programs and introduces new ones. Schools are about improving educational outcomes for children at all levels. New South Wales schools have a good tradition in this regard. I believe that we lead the way in Australia. The figures show that we are one of the top performers in the world. That is because we continually renew and change. We are always looking at new programs, the operation of our schools and staffing.

We are seeing that currently in education. The Government is introducing vocational education and training [VET] programs because we recognise the skill shortage, which was helped by the former Howard Government. In New South Wales we are putting in place strong VET programs and trade schools to meet the deficit. We are training young people in a wide range of industries. That means a lot of change. Schools have had to look at their operations, timetabling, staffing and budget. In my electorate, Wyong High School has a strong, proud agricultural history. It is also a selective school in information technology. Next door the TAFE has a trade school. The school has been able to incorporate all those facilities, whilst maintaining its programs and improving the delivery of education to students across all levels.

We must let the inquiry do its work, take evidence and make a decision. By introducing this bill, the Opposition is not interested in examining the issues. It does not want to know about them. It is happy with the way things are and does not want to ever change. That is sticking your head in the sand. It is hard for people who are part of an organisation to understand the need for change. The issues are not always clear. But sticking your head in the sand is not in the best interest of students, teachers or the community. No matter the industry, people must look at change and the way an enterprise operates. Again, I congratulate the member for Macquarie Fields on ensuring the inquiry examines all the issues so that his community can be heard. Members should wait for the decision of the inquiry and then debate the merits. At the moment, it is far too early to tell.

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck) [5.23 p.m.]: There is an old saying: If it ain't broke, don't fix it. I speak to the Hurlstone Agricultural High School Site Bill 2009. I have listened with interest to Government members, who seem to have made up their minds that much of this site will be sold. They have established an inquiry to take the heat off local members who will be impacted by the sale. We have seen that all before. Some members, who do not necessarily have a direct relationship with an agricultural high school, make 160 hectares sound like a large space. It is not. I would argue that the area could easily be expanded, when one considers the activities undertaken by students at this agricultural high school. We heard the excellent presentation this evening by the member for Clarence. The school has breeding programs for domesticated

animals, such as merino sheep, cattle, boer goats and poultry, and it teaches cropping skills. The school would not be able to undertake those programs in an area of 20 hectares, or even slightly more. It is insane to propose that so much of this land could be sold.

When I saw a copy of the Department of Education and Training memorandum on the Hurlstone Agricultural High School asset sales—which was released on Thursday 20 November 2008, a bit over a week after the announcement of the mini-budget—I nearly fell over. I could not believe that the Government actually contemplated selling off this land, which is so important to many students and families across New South Wales. The skills of agricultural enterprise have never been more complicated than they are now, particularly with eight years of drought. I recognise the Minister for Water, and Minister for Regional Development is in the chamber. He understands that students wanting to learn about agriculture and pursue careers in agriculture will have to be able to cope with all sorts of demands. As we face the impacts of climate change, they will need incredible skills and hands-on experience if they are going to make it into the future and continue to produce the goods for consumers in this State.

Some may believe it is okay to have our vegetables grown in China and cropping done overseas. It is not. This State has some of the best agricultural areas in the world. We also have some of the brightest minds coming through our system. We must do whatever we can to make sure our students get the best possible agricultural education available. They do now, at Hurlstone. We need every single one of those 160 hectares on that site. Not one hectare can be relinquished. I have received many strong representations on this issue from people who would not generally get involved in the political process. I have received many letters from constituents and former students. Prue Martin from Stoney Creek, Kenyo Road, Boorowa, wrote several letters. She was very disturbed at the proposed sale of this land. In February 2009 she wrote:

Surely the events in Victoria in the last few weeks and the world economic events would have highlighted the need for the urgent and effective environmental education of our children. Those of us from rural areas can't help but wonder how suburban politicians and planners think they can educate children growing up in suburban areas in these essential skills in a 6 hectare playground. And we can't help but wonder why they won't listen to those of us from rural areas who might actually know how it can be done.

Prue Martin wrote a series of letters like that. In a letter to the Minister for Primary Industries she said:

The School is in a very strategic location. It has the ability to educate and influence such a large number of children from the area in the key elements necessary for Australia's survival. It might not be making a profit ... but is this important or even worth mentioning in the argument for selling the land? The argument for the education of local children in Agriculture and sustainability is one that is hard to place a value on.

I also received a letter from Bruce and Narelle Nixon from "Clovelly" at Boorowa expressing their alarm about the proposed sale. They said, as did so many others:

Hurlstone is a 100 year old day, boarding, selective agricultural school with an excellent academic and agriculture reputation. It was Australia's first of its kind.

They wrote a very strong and emotional letter. They said:

We are very grateful to Hurlstone for the opportunities it offers our 3 children. The Labor Government has shown little priority in maintaining a high standard of public education during its time in government, especially in rural schools.

I have forwarded their very strongly worded letter to the Minister responsible. I also received a letter from Aleksandra Warianka from Glenfield, who is also a proud ex-Hurlstonian with very fond memories of her time at the school. She wrote a very strong letter in which she said:

Hurlstone is not just a selective school catering for the kids of western Sydney. It is a strong, well-respected, public agricultural boarding school with ties across NSW.

The boarding students in her year were from as far as Norfolk Island, Forbes, Narromine, Muswellbrook, Dubbo, Narooma, Narrabri and Gunnedah, not to mention ones from outlying farming properties who otherwise would have been attending the School of the Air. She writes:

Hurlstone is one of the last remaining institutional links between city and country life. It has a proud, patriotic and practical 100 year old agricultural history that the Government's decision puts at risk.

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

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

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

BANKSTOWN LOCAL AREA COMMAND

Mr ALAN ASHTON (East Hills) [5.30 p.m.]: Today I congratulate the policemen and policewomen in the Bankstown Local Area Command on their success in driving down crime in that area. I acknowledge the leadership shown by the local area commander Stuart Wilkins and the Detective Inspector, Crime Manager, Ian Pryde, and Inspector Mark Smith, who is the duty officer at Bankstown command. I also pay tribute to Constable Glen Halloran, who coordinates the Community Safety Precinct Committee meetings that are held with a large group of representatives from the Bankstown community.

The committee gives everybody a chance to air any issues they have and for the police to take them on board, and it is working very well. I have not missed a meeting and I have been able to make somewhat of a contribution. As you know, Madam Assistant-Speaker, from the former Police and Community Training organisation, it is a good opportunity not just for members of Parliament to speak on issues—we have fairly direct lines of communication through to our police service—but for other groups to be represented and to air issues.

Some figures have come out of the precinct committee meetings. It should be noted that in the first quarter of this year there has been a decrease in motor vehicle theft, malicious damage and steal from motor vehicle offences. This decrease has followed a proactive response, which has allowed the police to target identified crime categories and to better deploy police in areas of greatest need. Police are involved in an ongoing process of tuning their responses to specific areas and being proactive about crime in specific areas.

Some recent examples of that include the removal of drug-related activity in the Bankstown central business district to the point where drug detection dogs, which have been operating throughout Bankstown for quite some time, were not identifying many people who had drugs on them. That is not because the crooks have got smarter, because they have not; it just means the crooks are not there, they have moved on, and the drug detection dogs have been deployed to other areas of greatest need. Of course, that does not mean they will not turn up again in our areas. If they do we will obviously deal with it again.

There has been a drop also in legal action rates in regard to robbery offences, with one in three robberies being cleared by a charge being laid. In Bankstown between 2007 and 2008 there was a reduction in robbery offences of 28 per cent and a reduction in break and enters of 22 per cent—good figures. The figures for stolen vehicles are stable, which is not bad for Bankstown, given that, unfortunately, it is the biggest area in Sydney for spare parts shops and factories, and for panel beaters, especially in the Condell Park-Milperra area of Bankstown. Unfortunately, sometimes cars are stolen and end up being stripped and rebirthed. However, those figures are down historically over the past few years.

There has been a reduction of 7 per cent in alcohol-related crime. It certainly would have been good if Senator Fielding had got on board the issue because we could have done even more to stop alcohol-related crime. Domestic assaults, which we talked about in the House yesterday, are down 14 per cent. There has been a 34 per cent increase in drug detection—so we are catching more people; an 80 per cent increase in move-ons, which is nearly double the amount of actions police are taking in Bankstown and shows they are proactive and not standing around observing; and a 71 per cent increase in person-knife searches.

The reduction in crime is largely due to the formation of a 40-strong proactive policing team, a dedicated robbery strike force—Strike Force Halstead—and a significant increase in proactive policing interventions. The combination of these measures has had a significant impact on crime reduction across the region. We have had great success also on an issue I raised at the last precinct meeting in November last year—graffiti in Panania, on which the council spends \$600,000 a year—with the arrest of 13 young white Anglo-Saxon males, who thought it was their duty to deface all of Picnic Point and Panania.

DRIVER LICENCE DEMERIT POINTS

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER (Terrigal) [5.35 p.m.]: A resident of the Central Coast, Michael Mills, along with 60,000 others last year, has had his driver licence suspended due to running out of demerit points. For 37 years Mr Mills had an excellent driving record, until May 2007 when his ex-wife, the mother of his four

children, was involved in a serious motor vehicle accident. She was in a coma at Royal North Shore Hospital for just over six weeks, and spent a further six weeks in hospital after coming out of the coma. During this time Mr Mills travelled to and from the hospital every day with his children and his mother-in-law.

Mr Mills was first picked up speeding while collecting his daughter to go to the hospital in an area where the speed limits were confusing. On receipt of the first penalty notice he paid it immediately, but at the end of that week he received another speeding fine, for the same area in the same week as the first. Each offence carried a six-point penalty, so consequently his licence was suspended with a right of appeal. Mr Mills appealed to the Roads and Traffic Authority and signed a good behaviour bond, thus reinstating his driver licence and committing to incur no more than two points in the 12-month good behaviour period, which extended from December 2007 to December 2008.

In late November 2008 Mr Mills was picked up driving under 15 kilometres per hour over the speed limit. He paid the fine, which carried a three-point penalty, thinking his good behaviour period had lapsed. However, shortly thereafter he discovered he was a mere 11 days short. Consequently, as of 20 January 2009, his licence was suspended for six months. This is a massive inconvenience for Mr Mills, whose job requires him to travel to Canberra. In the words of Miranda Devine, a columnist for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, on 19 March 2009:

We all breathed a sigh of relief when the Roads Minister, Michael Daley, announced last November he would reform the draconian demerits points system. No longer would good drivers fear losing their licences for being snapped keeping up with the traffic flow but here we are, four months later, and nothing has happened.

On 2 March the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that the new "fairer" demerit points system had been unveiled but would not be implemented until September, a whole 10 months after it was first announced. Despite this, the changes will not be retrospective. However, this is not the only reigning issue with this system. After receiving a response to my representation to the Minister, Mr Mills is understandably upset that he has no right of appeal against his suspended licence. The response from the Minister's office said:

While I can appreciate the difficulties the suspension of Mr Mills' licence will cause, neither the Minister for Roads nor the RTA are able to consider lifting the suspension, even on the basis of issuing a restricted licence, because the suspension is required by law. Accordingly, the suspension must stand.

The Road Transport (Driver Licensing) Act 1998 states in section 16 (8) that:

... a person who incurs at least 12 demerit points within the 3 year period ... may elect to be of good behaviour for a period of 12 months ...

Subsection (9) continues on to say:

... if a person who makes an election in accordance with subsection (8) incurs 2 or more demerit points during the 12 months' good behaviour period, the Authority must give the person a notice suspending all driver licences held by the person ...

As the Minister's office stated, clearly there is no avenue of appeal for ordinary licence holders against the suspension of his or her licence as a result of an accumulation of demerit points. Yet it is interesting to find that in the case of a provisional licence holder exceeding the allowable four points, Section 17 (1) of the Act states:

... the Authority may suspend or cancel the driver licence of the holder of a provisional licence ...

This is blatantly inequitable. The use of the word "may" in Section 17 effectively allows a provisional licence holder to have a right of appeal on a licence suspension due to an accumulation of points, yet the use of the word "must" in Section 16 removes any right of appeal for others. In the process of restructuring the demerit points system to make it fairer and more equitable, it cannot be overlooked that the 60,000-plus drivers who had their licences suspended last year have no means to appeal their suspensions, regardless of their circumstances. Mr Mills sums up in his letter:

The current law appears to be overkill with no appeal. Considering the circumstances of my case I should be fined, but I should not have my licence suspended. Losing three points for doing under 15km/hr over the speed limit when the speed limit varies from 60-70km/hr is too high a point loss. If I had lost only one or two points, my licence would not have been suspended.

Countless New South Wales citizens who have had their licences suspended find themselves relying on an ineffectual public transport system or, as on the Central Coast, almost no transport system; many cannot sustain their jobs because of this enormous inconvenience. As Mr Mills says in his letter:

I have a job that involves travelling to Canberra. I am now forced to travel by train or plane, and hire taxis to get to and from my job. Shopping for my family will now involve buses and taxis.

If Minister Daley wants to play fair, he must look at reviewing the ability for a right of appeal on a suspension of licence, and not simply review the points allocation. This is a matter of enormous importance, not just to Mr Mills but to thousands of people throughout New South Wales. The system urgently needs to be reviewed. I call on the Minister to reply and to review the situation.

WHEELCHAIR SPORTS NSW

Mr PAUL GIBSON (Blacktown) [5.40 p.m.]: Blacktown is like most other cities, suburbs and towns in New South Wales and across Australia. We all know of people with disabilities. In many cases these people are very active in our communities and in recent years we have witnessed major changes in their aspirations. Hope springs eternal: many people with disabilities today really are looked upon not as people with disabilities but people with different abilities. Many organisations have contributed to giving people with disabilities a better future. We have witnessed changes that once were never thought or dreamt of. One such organisation is Wheelchair Sports NSW led by a very good chief executive officer, Jim O'Brien. Wheelchair Sports NSW changes people's lives: it is in the business of shaping, enriching and fulfilling individual lives through sport.

Sport is a great panacea for many things in our community and has been for many wheelchair bound people. Wheelchair Sports NSW was established in 1961 and has grown to serve thousands of children and adults with disabilities. Wheelchair Sports NSW is the national leader in providing sporting opportunities for people with a disability. In 2007 at the elite international level it hosted four successful major events: the Sydney International Wheelchair Tennis Open; the Summer Down Under Road and Track Racing Series; the Day of Difference Junior Games for Athletes with a Disability; and the Oceania Wheelchair Rugby Championships, which was a qualifying competition for the Beijing Paralympics. With our help Wheelchair Sports NSW will continue to provide opportunities for thousands of children and adults with a disability to enjoy the many benefits of sport. The patron of Wheelchair Sports NSW is someone most of us know and love dearly, Louise Sauvage, OAM, who simply said:

Sport has provided me with a career and experiences that I may never have had if it wasn't for those early days competing for my State Wheelchair Sports Association. I have traveled the world and established great friendships, many of which are still an integral part of my life today.

There are many other similar sports people. Kurt Fearnley, OAM, is a 27-year-old who was born without the lower part of his spine. His sport is wheelchair track and road racing. In 2007 he had a phenomenal year winning eight marathons. In 2008 he won the Oz Day 10K in Sydney's Rocks area and was placed second in the London and Osaka marathons. He was Australia's highest profile Paralympic athlete at the Beijing Paralympics. Tina McKenzie was left in a wheelchair as a result of falling from a building in 1994. She says that she was lucky to be alive because she was not found for 40 minutes. Three years later Tina joined her first women's wheelchair basketball team. In 1999 Tina was selected for the Australian Women's Wheelchair Basketball team, which she described as a pretty cool event. She said:

I believe organisations like Wheelchair Sports NSW are so necessary to support people with disabilities, otherwise they can get "lost". They create a community.

Of course, there are also people such as Ben Weekes, who is a 23-year-old and is the number one ranked wheelchair tennis player in Australia. Ben suffered an accident in his early teens. As a result he is classified as an incomplete paraplegic. Today Ben is ranked number 13 in the world in singles wheelchair tennis and number 16 in wheelchair tennis doubles. Along with his twin brother, Scott, he composes music and gives occasional recitals. These artists are some of the people who, through Wheelchair Sports NSW, have created a new life. Not only have they faced hurdles most of us would never have dreamt of; they have overcome those hurdles and turned their lives around because of Wheelchair Sports NSW and similar associations. Wheelchair Sports NSW says:

Because so many people with disabilities depend on the sports programs we provide to help them improve both physically and psychologically, it is good management to ensure funding for these programs is secure well into the future.

These organisations receive no ongoing funding. It would be great if the State and Federal governments and corporate Australia were to get on side and support these people who have a new outlook and have given us much enjoyment through their wheelchair sports.

MOLONG GELATO FACTORY

Mr RUSSELL TURNER (Orange) [5.45 p.m.]: Once again I refer to the Molong gelato factory, which is situated just outside Orange. On 27 November last year I raised in this House the damage from hail,

snow, wind and rain to the majority of orchards around Orange. The next day I had another opportunity to present a private member's statement in which I raised the concern of Giovanni Di Francesca and his family. Giovanni rang me because the hail damage in Orange was reported in the local media. He said that he thought he might have an opportunity to take some second-quality fruit and produce a viable product. He took some cherries to his gelato factory to make some paste to compare to the paste he made from frozen cherries he imported from Yugoslavia or Turkey.

A few days later I visited his factory. The first batch he removed did not have enough air through the fruit and most of it was thrown out. Another batch of cherries was more successful. Since then Giovanni has also made paste from second-quality peaches. Invariably, local fruit is damaged through the vagaries of nature and his confidence in being able to take second-quality fruit and add value to it was rewarded. Last Saturday I spoke once again to Giovanni at the Cumnock show. He was quite excited because the paste he had made from the second-quality cherries was so superior to the paste he had been making from the imported frozen cherries. He insisted that on my way home I call into his gelato factory to check the quality of the cherry ice cream.

He is making nougat ice cream and gelato from the cherries. He is now planning to expand the factory after opening it only last year. I acknowledge the support of the Department of State and Regional Development and its Federal counterparts in supporting his move from Newtown. The Newtown factory has since been sold. To my knowledge Giovanni is the only gelato paste manufacturer in Australia. It is fantastic that he has chosen Molong in which to set up his factory. He plans now to expand his facility to install more freezers so that he can make bulk loads of concentrate when the cherries are available. Most people would realise that cherries, peaches and most stone fruit cannot be stored in the way that pome fruit can. The cherries must be picked and processed within a couple of weeks.

Giovanni intends to expand the facility to increase production of the paste, and when that eventuates more people will be employed. Each time I visit his facility I am amazed at how many people work there. The complex is located on the edge of town and includes a very modern shop. Giovanni not only sells approximately 40 varieties of gelato, but also distributes to the central western areas of the State, to Sydney, and to worldwide outlets. He can market the paste very competitively. I again congratulate Giovanni and his wife, Josephine, as well as their son Robbie and Robbie's wife, who moved from Newtown to Molong. Production of the paste is a wonderful way of adding value to second-quality fruit. It assists orchardists to remain viable because they can obtain a return on second-quality fruit after the first-quality fruit has been sent to market. I call on the State Government to consider favourably any submission to increase the capacity and diversity of the Gelato Ingredients Manufacturers of Australia factory at Molong.

BELMONT NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRE

Mr ROBERT COOMBS (Swansea) [5.50 p.m.]: I draw to the attention of the House the Belmont Neighbourhood Centre, a wonderful centre that provides a number of services and activities to ensure connection between the community and overall prosperity. Like all neighbourhood centres, it is especially focussed on empowering the most disadvantaged and least-powerful groups in our community. The Belmont centre offers a range of activities including dancing, computer lessons, peer support groups, youth drop-in programs, mums groups, a number of counselling forums, playgroups, digital photography classes, financial counselling, masseur classes, craft groups, language courses, and more. It also provides an important elementary stage of intervention for recognising difficulty among our peers ranging from depression, alcohol and/or drug abuse, gambling problems and economic despair.

The centre is staffed by two part-time persons, Lynda Little and Cheryl Goulden, who work with a number of dedicated volunteers to ensure the success of the centre. The work of both Lynda and Cheryl must be recognised by the House for its significance: it includes a number of volunteer hours to ensure that tasks are completed. When people face problems, they first turn to family, friends and neighbours. Neighbourhood centres are an extension of the local and familiar support, and aid networks. They aim to be friendly places where consumers and community members are treated integrally and holistically, and know that they are welcome. Self-help, mutual support, community education and collective action are all strategies that are utilised in the long and short term to assist in the overall wellbeing of both the individual and the community.

Neighbourhood centres have operated in New South Wales since 1961. The Local Community Service Association [LCSA] was founded in 1974 and is the peak body for neighbourhood centres across the State. It acts as a coordinating body for the 294 centres that operate in New South Wales, including 24 centres in the Hunter region, and specialises in assisting community organisations with community management and

community development strategies. The association's philosophy is described in three broad categories—affirmative action towards disadvantaged people and groups, local participation and control, and community development. Neighbourhood centres follow those principles according to the skills and resources that are available. For a broader understanding of the Local Community Service Association, its history and its approach and work, I commend to members the "LCSA Neighbourhood Centre Policy", which was produced in April 2003 and is available on the association's website.

Neighbourhood centres, like many of our community-based and not-for-profit organisations, depend on a variety of donations and contributions to maintain financial viability. From a State Government perspective, the Department of Community Services, through the Community Services Grants Program, forms a large part of financial contributions to ensure that neighbourhood and community centres are able to financially support the many programs they organise and run. The Belmont Neighbourhood Centre has asked me to make representations on the centre's behalf to ensure that the Community Services Grants Program is adequately funded so that the centre's work in early intervention for child protection is able to continue. I intend to discuss the issue with our excellent Minister for Community Services, the Hon. Linda Burney. I am sure the Government will promote community and neighbourhood centres across the State. I commend to the House the work of the Belmont Neighbourhood Centre.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT RATE VARIATIONS

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE (Bega) [5.55 p.m.]: I draw to the attention of the House an issue that no doubt many members of the House have been contacted about: community opposition to proposed rate variations of councils. Numerous letters have been sent to my electorate office expressing concern. My particular concern is that during the current economic environment many people who are on a fixed income will suffer increased financial pressure. I strongly urge the Minister for Local Government, who has the final say, to consider carefully the impact of rate variations on senior citizens in the Bega electorate.

That said we must examine some of the underlying causes of the proposed rate variations. I will refer to one in particular, which is the Local Government Superannuation Scheme. The state of play of the Local Government Superannuation Scheme and oversight by its board are unacceptable. Recently the board wrote to local councils throughout the State indicating that they must increase their annual contributions to the defined benefits fund. Mr Peter Lambert, who is the Chief Executive Officer of the Local Government Superannuation Scheme, wrote to councils throughout New South Wales informing them of the requirements of each council to contribute more to the scheme. His letter stated:

At the end of September 2008, the Scheme's surplus was effectively zero ... based on the Actuary's advice, write to Councils in March to give them as much notice as possible of the Scheme contribution requirements for the coming financial year. Unfortunately the notification I must pass on to you for the coming year is not good news.

I am advised that the scheme could be in deficit to the tune of approximately \$300 million. The only way forward from the board's perspective is to increase the compulsory employee contribution by effectively 240 per cent in the hope that over a five-year period the deficit will be redressed. That suggestion is based upon investment returns bouncing back to the expectation of 7 per cent in 2009-10. It does not take a genius to work out that a five-year funding program such as that is too short over the life of the fund, particularly given that many staff have 15 to 20 years of service and there is no way of knowing what future impact the global economic downturn will have on the fund.

In the Bega electorate alone, ratepayers will be expected to fund a contribution to the scheme of approximately \$2.1 million, which equates to an increase of 240 per cent. Councils will be forced to fund this compulsory employer contribution by seeking approval for rate variations from the State Government. That will hugely burden the Bega Valley and Eurobodalla shires in managing council affairs, and creates a dark cloud over jobs in our region for the next 12 months. The bottom line is that there must be a full investigation into the decision of the Local Government Superannuation Scheme's board requiring councils in my region to compulsorily contribute more funds to the scheme. The Minister should undertake the inquiry, given the major impact if councils impose large rate variations on ratepayers.

As I stated, this development will create a cloud over jobs. Councils will be forced to apply for rate variations and potentially will have to cut valuable services that are provided to the community, such as child care; library services; maintenance of parks, beaches and sporting fields; community centres; waste collection;

recycling programs; road maintenance; and the allocation of community grants, all of which may be necessary to meet the contribution that has been requested by the managing board of the Local Government Superannuation Scheme.

I must also highlight that the State Government is continually putting enormous pressure on councils through cost shifting, the cost of elections, fire brigade levies and payroll tax. It has left councils, and therefore ratepayers, in a very difficult position. It is clear that the State Government is allowing the board to hit ratepayers to cover up its own poor management. The Rees Government should be investigating the operations of the board and its past management. Why was there no surplus at the end of September 2008 when the full effect of the financial crisis hit and why did it lose 8 per cent in 2007?

CESSNOCK CORRECTIONAL CENTRE PRIVATISATION

Mr KERRY HICKEY (Cessnock) [6.00 p.m.]: I bring to the attention of the House the issue of correctional services and the impact that the privatisation of the Cessnock Correctional Centre will have on the local community both economically and socially. Economically, privatisation will have a negative impact on spending within the community. If the Government continues down this privatisation path, jobs will be lost and staff members and their families will not have the purchasing power they now have. In social terms, there will be massive dislocation of families because officers who wish to remain in the government sector will not be able to be placed in facilities within reasonable travelling time. The closest facility is at St Heliers at Muswellbrook. The rest are in Sydney or in the west. Already families are upset and expressing serious concerns to me about the impact that this move is having on their family life, the distress it is having on their loved ones and the unfairness of decisions being made by the commissioner, the Minister and other Government members. This is having a dramatic impact on their lives.

Another issue that must be examined is the responsibilities involved in incarceration of prisoners. The Government sets the rules and regulations of this State and given that it is in control of incarceration it is only moral that it also be in control of the reform processes designed to rehabilitate the perpetrators of crimes. It has been said that privatisation of Cessnock Correctional Centre and Parklea Correctional Complex will save the Government \$16 million in addition to the savings expected as a result of the Way Forward initiative. Ron Woodham has said that privatised jails cost more than the jails that have implemented the Way Forward initiative. If Ron Woodham is as credible as some people think he is, why are we not implementing the Way Forward at Cessnock? It has been said that the union would not implement the initiative.

As the local member I have met with many employees at the correctional centre at Cessnock who have categorically stated that they have never had the opportunity to discuss the Way Forward or to negotiate its implementation. It is hard to negotiate with people who have the opinion that the only way forward is their way or the highway. If people are not willing to negotiate and move forward in a constructive manner, the only ones who suffer are the workers, their families and the local community. In the last budget, the Government promised a further 250 beds at the Cessnock Correctional Centre. If that were to happen it would generate more spending in the community. It would be a huge boost for the community of Cessnock. I have been reliably informed that after privatisation the same number of prison officers will be employed as are currently employed.

One must question why, with another 250 beds, more staff would not be employed. I have been told that that is a positive outcome for the centre. The privatisation process has already brought out the best in management. Under the cloak of darkness, the department's executive management team came in, took control of the facility and whisked away 100 prisoners, one of whom had a heart attack and had to be rushed to hospital as a result of the extreme fear he was suffering about what would happen to him. All of that was done under the Government's watch. Many in the community compared that exercise with the takeover of the wharfs by Peter Reith and the Howard Government. Not surprisingly, many of my constituents are upset and furious about what has happened at the Cessnock Correctional Centre. Union members across many sectors are also upset. They are concerned about the ramifications of this across government services.

One must wonder why the Government is going down this path to save \$16 million given the size of the New South Wales budget. The Public Service Association openly said that it would negotiate the implementation of the Way Forward initiative at Cessnock if the department would cooperate. Thus far that has not occurred. There have been arguments about whether the association really wants to negotiate an outcome for the prison officers at Cessnock or whether this is just a stalling tactic. As the local member, I hope that everyone who is affected on both sides of this argument will sit down and negotiate a sensible outcome. That would be beneficial for all prison workers and the community at large. The Cessnock community expects and demands

answers from those in authority. It also expects people to sit down and negotiate outcomes. That would be in the best interests of the community. I sincerely hope that we arrive at a positive solution that is acceptable to the workers and the community at Cessnock.

SEXTON HILL PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADE

Mr GEOFF PROVEST (Tweed) [6.05 p.m.]: Once again, I am 100 per cent for the Tweed. Yet again I bring to the attention of the House the problems being experienced with the Sexton Hill and Banora Point upgrade. Yesterday the Minister for Roads and the Federal member for Richmond, Justine Elliot, announced that funding has now been secured for the construction of the 2.5 kilometre dual carriageway from the northern end of Barneys Point Bridge through to the southern end of the Tweed Heads bypass. I am deeply concerned that once again the Roads and Traffic Authority seems to be headstrong about option B. The local community and I have campaigned for many years for the adoption of option C, which caters for local traffic. Both options cater for the B-doubles that continually use that road. However, we have some serious problems with yesterday's announcement. We do not oppose the upgrade; we simply want the right solution.

Yesterday's press release clearly states that significant planning and designing will take place. The Government has argued that option C is far more expensive—some \$50 million more than option B. The Minister announced that the Government's preferred option would include a southern interchange. That is not costed in the Roads and Traffic Authority documents. We believe that both option B and option C would cost the same amount. Well over 50,000 of the vehicles travelling north on Sexton Hill each day are local traffic and turn off into Minjungbal Drive. Just over 35 per cent of the traffic heading south turns off towards Chindera. It is beyond belief that the Roads and Traffic Authority continues to persist with option B.

We have costed the Kirkwood Road interchange into option C, but the Government has not costed it into option B. That is crucial to the viability of the whole area. There are 3,500 local businesses in the Tweed and they will be marooned if the Government pursues option B. The Roads and Traffic Authority claimed that it conducted an economic impact statement. Rather than consult those 3,500 businesses, it consulted a corner fruit shop and a butcher shop on top of the hill nearly one kilometre away from the central business district. It claimed that that was a proper economic impact statement. We do not believe that. The authority must consult all the businesses involved. Option B also incorporates what is virtually a dam across the Banora Point valley. We experienced very heavy rain about two years ago and that area flooded. The new wall that is part of option B will effectively drown the valley in the next heavy rain.

The Roads and Traffic Authority also factored in the traffic from Minjungbal Drive and Shallow Bay Drive. That is half a kilometre from the central business district, which has well over 50,000 vehicles travelling through it. We do not want to witness any more carnage on Sexton Hill. Last year I did a 16-hour shift with local ambulance officers. I stood on Sexton Hill at 3.00 a.m. holding a drip while officers cut a young driver out of a car. I saw the pain on his face and the fear on the faces of his mum and dad when they arrived at the site of the accident. We needed something done a long time ago. Why will the Government not look at option C? It will cost the same amount as option B. There are significant flaws in option B but the Roads and Traffic Authority is displaying arrogance and will not shift. We will end up with an option that caters for through traffic but has no respect for all the businesses and locals of Tweed Heads. That is totally unacceptable but it should come as no surprise.

I was the only New South Wales politician invited to attend the opening of the Tugun bypass recently—I stood shoulder to shoulder with Anna Bligh and we cut the ribbon—because the Roads and Traffic Authority and the New South Wales Government refused to contribute any funds. So Queensland taxpayers funded five kilometres of the bypass in New South Wales. It has been a great plus. Queensland did it right. We should continue to campaign for option C. I will not let this one go by because are talking about the future viability of the whole of the Tweed. Once again, I am 100 per cent committed to the Tweed.

MAITLAND, CITY ON THE HUNTER: FIGHTING FLOODS OR LIVING WITH THEM?

Mr FRANK TERENCE (Maitland) [6.10 p.m.]: On 10 December 2008 I had the pleasure of attending Maitland Town Hall to launch a book about Maitland—not just any book, but the end result of many years of work and commitment by many members of the Maitland community and all those associated with this very special publication. This book, titled *Maitland, city on the Hunter: fighting floods or living with them?*, was written by Chas Keys and published by the Hunter Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority. It is a unique production and will truly serve the community well. The book is unique because we now have in one

book information on all records and measurements about our past floods going back to 1820, the science of flooding, a flood safe tool kit for the use of our residents in case of an event, and perhaps most importantly it has set out and recorded real life histories, accounts and photographs of those people who experienced and endured these floods—the human story of our past tragedies.

Over the past 200 years Maitland has had many flood events, and more than 12 of them have been major events. As far back as 1869 accounts and reports have been made about how best to deal with these events. Numerous proposals had been put forward on how to mitigate the waters to make the town a safer place. The 1955 flood provided the final impetus to put into effect all past reports and proposals about how to deal with the problem and thereby was born the Maitland flood mitigation system. Today we have a world-class flood mitigation system that has well and truly proven itself on several occasions, some of which were in 1971, 1998 and of course the June 2007 event. Readers of this book will read about how high the Hunter River rose in all those past events. They will also learn a great deal about the basic science of hydrology and the movement of water.

They will benefit greatly from the flood safe tool kit that will show them how the mitigation system has been planned, designed and implemented; how it works and what it has been designed to do and what it cannot do. The kit sets out what to do in case of a flood and provides an excellent resource to use in these events. Maitland has grown enormously over the past 10 or so years and many people who experienced the 2007 flood were not in Maitland in 1971, when we had our last significant event. It is therefore important that this information is provided to our community so we know what to expect and what to do. However, the part of the book that makes it so special in my view is the human side—the stories, the firsthand accounts, the experiences, the tragic losses, and the heroic and courageous stories that so often come out of these events.

The photographs show yards, streets, railway lines and parks, all of which are totally under water. Other photographs show similar sites after the water has left, depicting the damage and devastation left behind and the size of the task needed to return the town to normal. These stories are so often forgotten and, of course, are not known by many of the modern Maitland community. First, I congratulate our very own renowned author Chas Keys on writing the book. I also congratulate Glen Evans and the Hunter Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority on making this publication possible. Perhaps most importantly, I congratulate all those members of the Maitland community who provided the information, the stories, the photographs and the firsthand accounts of what it was like to experience these tragedies—the pain, the heartache, the great losses that they endured. There are far too many people to mention in the time available, but their names have all been acknowledged in the foreword and acknowledgement section of the book.

This publication is certainly not the first book written about the Maitland floods. However, as far as I am aware, it is the first of its kind. It is informative, historical and practical, and in my view there should be one in every Maitland household. On behalf of the people of Maitland, our thanks and appreciation go to all those concerned with this fine work, and I commend it to all Maitland residents. When I launched the book in Maitland town hall I proposed that the book should be compulsory for every new family that moves into the Maitland area. I got a run on that in the local paper, but I have not heard that Maitland council has taken up the proposal. I commend full consideration of that proposal to the council.

SOUTH COAST ROAD PROJECTS

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK (South Coast) [6.15 p.m.]: I support the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] plans for an upgrade of the Princes Highway to four lanes between Kinghorne Street and Forest Road at South Nowra. This section of the Princes Highway is approximately 6.3 kilometres in length and its upgrading would link the existing four-lane sections of the highway through Nowra to the north and the recently completed section to the south to Jervis Bay Road. According to the RTA, the proposed upgrade would improve traffic conditions and road safety through South Nowra and the busy commercial area of South Nowra, which has been under significant stress for some time in relation to traffic volumes and road safety.

The section of the Princes Highway proposed to be upgraded is severely congested every day of the week. On weekends, public holidays and school holidays it is subject to traffic gridlock, which is a serious disincentive to tourists travelling south to the popular destinations in the South Coast electorate and further south in the Bega electorate. The journey from Nowra to Jervis Bay Road can take an hour or more—and sometimes up to two hours. It should take no more than 15 or 20 minutes. The delay is due to this particular section of the road.

The RTA notes that the proposal would have significant benefits, including improved road safety by reducing conflicts between through traffic and local traffic accessing commercial premises, improved road safety by providing more opportunities to safely overtake slower vehicles, improved travel times and reduced vehicle operating costs through increased road and intersection capacity, and improved access to many business properties. The justification for this proposal is obvious, and it should be supported by the Government and funded urgently. The community of Nowra will benefit from these proposals, as will the many thousands of tourists who visit the area each year. Shoalhaven City Council strongly supports the proposed upgrades and recently initiated a public information session to inform the public and indicate to the RTA some concerns regarding aspects of the proposal.

I believe that the project has not provided any significant areas of controversy or opposition except for the proposal to ban access of southbound traffic to Flinders Road. This has been universally opposed both by the local council and businesses in the Flinders industrial estate, but currently the RTA is working cooperatively with Shoalhaven City Council engineers and the community to provide a more acceptable alternative. I give praise to the RTA representatives involved in this project. It should be noted that the Princes Highway in this location is the major road servicing the South Coast, providing access to the many business in the South Nowra area. There has been significant growth and commercial development along the Princes Highway at South Nowra. As the RTA stated, this section of the highway has a poor crash history and experiences significant traffic congestion. Currently the RTA is considering submissions and will then finalise its concept design, undertake environment assessments and, hopefully with Government support and funding, commence construction as soon as possible.

The section of the Princes Highway to which I have referred is an important project in terms of road safety and reduction of traffic volumes, and in my view is achievable within a two-year period, unlike other proposed upgrades such as Gerringong to Bomaderry, which poses a few more challenges. Whilst the Gerringong to Bomaderry upgrade will be welcomed, I believe there are many issues to resolve before the project can begin. In particular, the new proposals for the entry to the township of Gerringong at Fern Street and Belinda Street are causing considerable concern to farmers in the area. Although this was not in my electorate, I was invited to attend a meeting last week with the RTA and farmers with a view to raising with the RTA the potential detrimental effect on their farms of the most recent proposal for entry into the village of Gerringong. I was impressed by the RTA personnel who attended the meeting. They are sincerely endeavouring to resolve issues relating to entry to Gerringong.

While I am talking about the Princes Highway, I note that this afternoon the Minister announced, for the third time, an additional \$15 million for Main Road 92. That is welcomed. However, I must point out that if the State Government had not delayed the project for three years by prevaricating on the route over Bulee Gap—I think it made a mistake in terms of Bulee Gap—there would not be a funding shortfall of \$15 million for the project. The project could have been completed much earlier, but it is proceeding. I welcome the funding and hope that it is completed. On the weekend I travelled along Main Road 92 to see how the project was progressing. At this stage it should be noted that the project was an initiative of John Howard, who declared the road to be a road of national importance. Of course, this was following sincere lobbying by the Federal member for Gilmore, Joanna Gash, for this project to go ahead.

BIRABAN PUBLIC SCHOOL

Mr GREG PIPER (Lake Macquarie) [6.20 p.m.]: I draw the attention of the House to Biraban Public School, at Toronto West, which is on Awabakal land and is in a priority location under the Government's Aboriginal affairs plan, Two Ways Together. This 10-year plan, which started in 2003, targets improvements for health, housing, education, culture and heritage, justice, economic development, families and young people. Over recent years on average 22 per cent of the students attending the school have been Aborigines. Biraban Public School was funded from 2006 to 2009 by the New South Wales Department of Education and Training as a target school for the Schools in Partnership [SIP] initiative.

Partnerships with the Koombahtoo local Aboriginal land council, Lake Macquarie City Council and Eraring Energy have led to many environmental improvement projects, with students, teachers, parents, the local community, businesses and agencies working together to look after the school grounds. The principal, Ms Gail Cornford, describes the grounds as beautiful and informs me that the school has been recognised for its environmental management programs. Community members are welcome to bring their experiences to the school and add to the education of students. Parents and other members of the community visit regularly,

sharing a leading role with teachers and contributing to governance through school advisory committees. Aboriginal culture is strongly referenced around the school with many art projects, led by the local Aboriginal community, on display.

All Aboriginal students have personalised learning plans and are achieving their goals in those plans. Over the past two years the growth in literacy and numeracy has been outstanding as a result of programs developed under the Schools in Partnership umbrella. Teacher development has been focused on literacy, numeracy, cultural awareness, community building and effective use of technology. Students have developed a commitment to attendance, and in 2008 the school achieved all targets with an overall attendance rate of 93.9 per cent. The attendance rate of Aboriginal students was 96.7 per cent. There has been a marked improvement in days lost due to suspensions: from 365 days in 2006 to 170 in 2007 and 56 in 2008—fantastic results by any measure. There is good reason to expect that the core business of Biraban Public School will continue to achieve great things if the achievements of the past three years in the Schools in Partnership program are built upon.

There are also great successes in the way the school integrates with community life. In 2007 the Biraban Community Centre was developed in unused classrooms and a refurbished preschool building. This centre is now the site for playgroups, preschool sessions, parent support and education programs and community programs run by various government and interagency groups. The running of the centre is similar to the School as a Community Centre model, although the coordinator of the centre is a community liaison officer funded separately through the Priority Schools Program. The role of this community liaison officer is integral to the success of the community centre.

The school has developed many partnerships with agencies to provide community support, with particular focus on programs supporting children's learning, health and nutrition and cultural awareness. Partnerships include those with Newcastle University Family Action Centre, the Heart Foundation, the Sport Commission, family support groups, TAFE, Family Insight, the YMCA, the Koombahtoo Local Aboriginal Land Council, the Awabakal Pre-School Cooperative, the Department of Community Services, and the Hunter Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority. Playgroups are provided on three days per week through partnerships with TAFE, YMCA, the Family Action Centre, Family Support and Family Insight.

The Awabakal Pre-School Cooperative uses the community centre to operate a preschool approved by the Department of Community Services and which operates two days per week for 20 children funded by Families New South Wales and the Department of Community Services. Aboriginal children have first priority for this preschool and 10 Aboriginal students are currently supported there. The cooperative and the school have a strong transition program that has seen students better prepared for school since 2008. The preschool project will finish at the end of 2009 unless further funding or partnerships are developed. The Awabakal cooperative is actively seeking ongoing support for the continuation of the preschool.

Currently, 54 families and 59 children are supported through the playgroups and preschool, indicating the great demand in the community. Of these, 12 families and 18 children are Aboriginal. All playgroups are currently full and other partners are being sought to offer more support. Parent education programs are also run in the centre and these are well attended by community members. Building on the success of the projects and programs initiated at the school is essential to ensure sustainable support for the people of this area. Development of new partnerships has been continuous and I expect that it will continue for so long as the school is supported in its efforts. This school is very successful in integrating so many aspects of community life. I strongly support a whole-of-government approach to strategic planning, with agencies being funded to continue the support for the Toronto West community through the Biraban Public School and its community centre.

NOISE POLLUTION

Ms CLOVER MOORE (Sydney) [6.25 p.m.]: Tonight I speak about an issue of great importance to inner-city residents—noise pollution. It affects quality of life and health, and can contribute to hearing loss or life-threatening health problems such as cardiovascular disease and suppressed immune systems, associated with stress, sleep disturbance and sleep deprivation. Inner-city residents experience significant and prolonged exposure to intrusive noise from vehicles, construction, neighbours, business operations, entertainment activities and aircraft noise. Noise in the inner city must be managed sensitively, as the cumulative impacts affect a large number of people living in high density and or in close proximity. However, noise controls are confusing and a wide range of local, State and Federal agencies have authority, with diffused responsibility—and many believe that buck-passing takes place.

The system fails to recognise the cumulative impacts to or adapt to twenty-first century changes, and it needs to be updated to coordinate funding and complaints management, to improve enforcement and to provide community education, prevention strategies and alternative dispute resolution. Late-night and 24-hour entertainment areas, including Kings Cross, Oxford Street, Taylor Square, George Street, the Moore Park Entertainment Quarter and The Rocks have ongoing issues. Thousands of people visit these areas every weekend and create noise impacts compounded by alcohol and other drug use. Many residents say that some areas are at saturation. I welcome the Premier's commitment to work with the city to develop policy to manage cumulative impacts of entertainment areas and to develop controls to protect people living in adjacent densely populated residential areas.

Another concern relates to car enthusiasts who congregate in these areas with vehicles modified to increase noise or with excessively powerful sound systems. While local police and the city are helping people to report noisy vehicles, and police officers regularly issue infringement notices to drivers, only Department of Environment and Climate Change officers can test cars for compliance. I welcome the investment in joint operations in the inner city, and have called for increased penalties for persistent offenders. Vehicle sound system sales should be restricted, based on noise regulations. Aged buses continue to create noise impacts in narrow residential streets, where houses and apartments are built to the footpath. Affected residents are frequently told that unacceptable noise is within guidelines. I call for stronger controls and timely replacement of the older fleet.

There is little protection for residents from increasing cumulative traffic noise, particularly on main roads. The Roads and Traffic Authority responded to residents' concerns about serious traffic noise in Moore Park Road by providing a quieter open-grade road surface, and the Government needs to develop a policy to identify and treat heavily trafficked, densely populated residential roads. Inner-city residents continue to experience noise impacts from helicopters because military and police aircraft are exempt from regulation and there are no regulations to stop helicopters hovering in one location. Sydney airport proposes massive growth in flight movements that will cause significant noise impacts for inner-Sydney residents, and I continue to call for a replacement airport outside the Sydney Basin connected to fast mass transportation that would address air traffic needs as well as community amenity.

Residents regularly contact me about noise from neighbours' properties, particularly in multilevel units where sound travels between apartments. There have been some improvements to the building code but more is needed and many older apartments have limited acoustic separation. Low-frequency bass from subwoofer speakers can be extremely intrusive and annoying. Councils and police are limited in responding due to measurement and assessment difficulties. Existing noise standards are not helpful, and I ask the Government to research and address this problem. Many residents complain about noisy parties, particularly loud talking, laughing and singing outdoors on balconies and patios late into the night. However, there are no enforceable restrictions for noise that is not amplified music.

We must balance protecting peace and neighbourhood amenity with allowing apartment residents to live as they choose. Legislation should address ongoing and persistent problems such as backpacker hostels. Education campaigns are also needed to promote respect among neighbours. Noise from leaf blowers remains a problem, and I share widespread concern about their use in the inner city. Leaf blowers emit a shrill tonal noise that can cause disturbance beyond noise levels. Current time limits fail to protect residents, and tighter restrictions such as the City of Sydney limits of 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. should be in place. The City of Sydney is replacing existing blowers with quieter models and the Government must commit to labelling laws and model restrictions to provide reduced noise impacts over time. All residents have the right to the quiet enjoyment of their homes, and addressing noise needs to be an ongoing priority to respond to changing technologies and trends.

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

Private members' statements noted.

**The House adjourned, pursuant to sessional orders, at 6.30 p.m. until
Friday 27 March 2009 at 10.00 a.m.**
