

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Thursday 10 September 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.

BIRTHS, DEATHS AND MARRIAGES REGISTRATION AMENDMENT (CHANGE OF NAME) 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.

REAL PROPERTY AMENDMENT (LAND TRANSACTIONS) BILL 2009

Bill introduced on motion by Mr Barry Collier, on behalf of Ms Kristina Keneally.

Agreement in Principle

Mr BARRY COLLIER (Miranda—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.06 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

The Real Property Amendment (Land Transactions) Bill 2009 makes a small but significant amendment to the Real Property Act 1900 to enable a notice of sale to be lodged electronically prior to, or in conjunction with, the lodgement of certain land dealings. The amendment will allow for the implementation of a new electronic system, developed by Land and Property Information, a division of the Land Property Management Authority, and will provide benefits for the authority, rating agencies and the conveyancing industry. By way of background, I will give members of the House some information relating to the history and purpose of the notice of sale.

A notice of sale form, known as an NOS form, is required to accompany all transfers and other dealings that change the ownership of land. The notice of sale form contains details of the transaction, such as the settlement date and any sale price, and provides an updated address for service of notices on the new owner. The information is used by rating agencies, such as local councils, water authorities, and the Livestock Health Protection Authority, as well as the Office of State Revenue and the Valuer-General. Given the importance of this data for the proper assessment and collection of rates and taxes it is vitally important to ensure that the information collected is accurate and that it can be disseminated in a timely manner.

Prior to 1992 a purchaser's solicitor was required to give written notice of a change of ownership to each of the various rating agencies following the sale or transfer of a parcel of land. The rating agencies would use this information to update their records to ensure that rate notices were sent to the current owner of the land. As a consequence of improvements in technology and a desire to receive the information from a single source, a centralised system commenced in 1992 and the notice of sale form was introduced. The system was administered by the then Land Titles Office, now Land and Property Information.

Whilst the current notice of sale system is a vast improvement on the previous ad hoc procedure, it is still a manual system. The present form cannot be downloaded from the website as it contains shaded areas for data capture and scanning purposes. Therefore, information has to be inserted manually, often by hand, increasing the chance of error. Land and Property Information has developed an innovative new product that will enable electronic preparation and lodgement of the notice of sale. The system has a number of

enhancements that will assist with the accuracy of data. Once a user inserts an address or title reference into the form, further information on the form can be prepopulated with data from information held by Land and Property Information. The notice of sale form will be available on the authority's website and through the information brokers.

The electronic notice of sale system will have a variety of benefits for both government and industry. For the authority, there will be savings through the elimination of the need for data entry. This will reduce delays and enable the distribution of information sooner. For the conveyancing industry, the availability of an electronic form will enable industry to integrate the form with existing internal systems. As some information will be prepopulated from information provided by Land and Property Information, there will be improvements in the quality of data provided, reducing the possibility of error. This in turn will reduce the likelihood of errors and delays in registration of the accompanying dealings. The benefits for rating agencies and the Office of State Revenue are obvious. Important ownership information will be provided faster and with a greater degree of accuracy.

Turning to the legislation, section 39 of the Real Property Act currently provides that the Registrar-General may refuse to accept a transfer or other dealing that would change the name of the owner of land unless the dealing is accompanied by a fully completed notice of sale form. The proposed amendment provides that this requirement for dealings, accompanied by a notice of sale form, will be satisfied if, before the dealing is presented for registration, a related notice is lodged electronically. Given the importance of the information contained in the notice of sale and the reliance that will be placed on it by a variety of agencies, a new provision is to be inserted requiring certification of the information in the notice of sale form.

Section 129 of the Real Property Act will be amended to clarify the circumstances in which compensation may be payable from the Torrens Assurance Fund in relation to the information provided in a notice of sale. This move to electronic use of the notice of sale form assists all parties in conveyancing transactions. It is also a small but vital step in the transition to an electronic conveyancing system and demonstrates New South Wales's commitment to the national electronic conveyancing system. These new reforms will continue the Government's commitment to ensuring the integrity and accuracy of land records held by the State, its agencies and authorities. I commend the bill to the House.

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

LIQUOR AMENDMENT (TEMPORARY LICENCE FREEZE) BILL 2009

Agreement in Principle

Debate resumed from 3 September 2009.

Mr GEORGE SOURIS (Upper Hunter) [10.12 a.m.]: It is my pleasure to lead debate on the Liquor Amendment (Temporary Licence Freeze) Bill 2009 on behalf of the Nationals-Liberal Coalition. I state at the outset that the Opposition will not oppose the legislation, but I make the point that this legislation represents government by media release. After an incident at a particular licensed venue, the Premier decided to impose a temporary freeze on the grant of licence applications and extensions. He succumbed to public announcements made by the member for Sydney and Lord Mayor of Sydney. Subsequently the Premier and the Lord Mayor of Sydney convened a summit. A number of stakeholders were invited to participate—principally the Australian Hotels Association, Clubs New South Wales and the Australian Liquor Stores Association. After that, the Government announced that it would prepare the legislation that is before the House.

I take this opportunity to discuss a number of issues and problems associated with the legislation. However, before doing so, I point out that the Government has a very limited view and ability in relation to liquor licensing administration, particularly concerning problems associated with the excessive consumption of alcohol, youth binge drinking, youth behaviour and general misbehaviour in, around and nearby licensed venues. The Government often responds to a particular overnight incident with government by media release. After the Premier has thought up a media statement overnight, it is put into words by a media adviser and is then announced as policy. From that a bind is created, and government departments are left with the job of formulating legislation. This bill is an example of exactly that scenario.

The new Liquor Act came into force on 1 July 2008 and has hardly had time to be effective and fully implemented. The Act conferred additional powers and a range of options upon licence inspectors and agencies,

including the New South Wales Police Force, the Office of Liquor and Gaming, and local government rangers, to deal with venues that needed additional attention or to be brought into line with prevailing community expectations. That was concomitant with closure of the Liquor Administration Board and commencement of the new Casino, Liquor and Gaming Authority. It was another example of the incoherent way that the Government formulates legislation and administers it. A number of applications that had been before the Liquor Administration Board were left unattended. With the closure of the board, those applications have stalled, and the new approval authority has not activated them.

This legislation has been overdue for a year and a half, which is very unfair to applicants whose businesses literally have stalled because of the Government's apparent inability to correct a legislative error, despite indications given to me and a number of stakeholders that there was every intention of doing so. The Government knows the Opposition in principle will support legislation to correct the error; yet this legislation, which deals with governance and administration of the Liquor Act, does not provide resolution, satisfaction or relief for people who, through no fault of their own, have been disadvantaged. The Government just cannot get things right. The Lord Mayor of Sydney championed the new Liquor Act because it provided for the proliferation of small bars in laneways and byways in central Sydney in much the same way as Victorian legislation did for Melbourne. I find it contradictory and inexplicable—perhaps the member for Bligh can clarify this later—

Ms Clover Moore: I will.

Mr GEORGE SOURIS: She does not need to do it by interjection, but I look forward to her clarification. The member for Bligh and the Premier were instrumental in the imposition of a temporary liquor licence freeze that will sweep up a number of prospective small bars. I asked the Government various questions, and I am thankful to the Minister's chief of staff, Mr Steve McMahon, for his assistance and ready ability to find the answers. I asked how many of the existing applications would be caught in the temporary freeze. Of course, no-one will ever know how many may have been lodged during the forthcoming year. Nevertheless, 77 applications were lodged before 25 June for new licences or amendments to licences across the State. I was unable to obtain the exact number, but some would relate to the city of Sydney and some to the specified areas mentioned in the bill.

It may well be that only a small number of applications will be involved in the freeze. As I said, one must start in New South Wales and restrict the scope to the city of Sydney and then to these designated areas. I do not know the figure, but it will obviously be relatively small. Once again, it highlights that this Government makes grand announcements and introduces legislation of this nature as a panacea. In November 2008, before the introduction of this bill, the Government announced that it would declare a list of 48 venues that had recorded the largest number of assault incidents. The Government stated that the list would be amended on a regular basis—it was assumed monthly—as the New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research published new statistics. It was assumed that venues would be removed and added, which has not happened. Twelve months later, the list has not been altered.

Once again, the Government addressed an issue with a press release and the fallout had to be mopped up with legislation. However, that legislation contained flaws. As a result of an emergency situation of its own making, the Government had to introduce legislation that would circumvent a Supreme Court case involving the proprietors of a number of the 48 venues on the list because it looked very seriously as though they were going to win. The Government, in what I regard as a gross act of immorality, introduced legislation that would remove a citizen's right to appeal to a court. Removing that right blurs the principle of the separation of powers and abrogates citizens' longstanding rights and privileges. It is disgraceful that the Government introduced legislation that would remove a citizen's right of appeal to the Supreme Court, but that is a debate for another time. It is further evidence of the incoherent way in which this Government approaches all matters associated with liquor licensing.

That is bad enough, but it was also impossible to operate the list concept effectively. To get itself out of trouble in the court, the Government had to introduce emergency legislation. In doing so, it enshrined the list of 48 venues in the legislation, which implied that to remove or add a venue would require amending legislation. That is yet another error and evidence of the Government's foolish approach to the administration of the Liquor Act. It was announced that the list of 48 venues would be replaced by star ratings. A committee was established and a lot of work was done to try faithfully to implement the Government's desire for a star rating system. Everybody assumed there would be one star, two stars, three stars, four stars and five stars and that five stars

would be the bad end of the scale. A five-star rating would be attached to a licensed venue that experienced the highest number of assault incidents. For some reason, the ratings system was quietly abandoned and we heard no more.

The committee apparently completed its work and made a number of recommendations. However, the Government examined them and saw that the system would be completely unworkable. In fact, it was idiotic. I suggest that people who are intent on misbehaving, consuming alcohol excessively, creating disturbance, being a nuisance and even being violent would enjoy the prospect of having their most prized venue awarded a five-star rating. It would have been a very stupid development in the governance of licensed venues in New South Wales. It was therefore abandoned—thank goodness! How stupid of the Government to imagine for a whole year that it would replace its disastrous list of 48 venues with a star-rating system.

Then we had the summit involving the Lord Mayor of Sydney and the Premier. It was determined that a temporary freeze, which would include the small bars, would be implemented in certain localities. I take this opportunity to declare that I am part owner of a property that is associated with one of those venues. I make that the declaration, but I do not believe that I will either lose or gain anything as a result of the passage of this legislation. I thought about the situation and consulted the Clerk, and I am thankful for his advice. If there had been any conflict of interest I would have asked another colleague on this side of the House to take carriage of the bill. Of course, this legislation will affect thousands of residents and property owners, and I imagine that a number of other members of Parliament either own or lease properties in these precincts and that they will make a similar declaration in the interests of openness and accountability.

It is ironic that only yesterday the Government released new figures from the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research about the 100 most violent licensed venues. It is ironic that this bill is before the House today when only yesterday a new statistical list was announced. By a process of osmosis, it is now clear that the Government intends to consider another classification system for venues. The system will involve rankings. It will not be called a list of 48, and there will not be star ratings. I do not know whether the rankings will be A, B and C, but let us assume that they are A, B and C. No-one yet knows what particular measures will apply to a venues ranked as A, B and C. At least we have the new list, and it is proposed that it will take effect from December this year. Symbolically, the list of 48 will have been in operation for exactly one year. It is expected that the statistical lists will be available three months prior to each half-year rest and venues will have an opportunity to dispute the statistics. I hope that at least two aspects of dispute will be considered: first, size; and, secondly, statistics that pertain to refusal of entry.

It is unfair and inconsistent that the statistics will be applied in the same way to very large venues, such as Penrith Panthers Rugby League Club, and very small suburban hotels. It is unacceptable that a venue with one million patron attendances per annum could be considered equal in any way, and that the statistics will be applied equally to a small venue with much smaller attendances. Under this system, one expects Penrith Panthers to be on the list; it is almost inescapable that it will be on the list. So size is relevant. The agencies charged with the new ranking system should be able to consider the size of the venue, and the management measures put in place by a venue and the way a venue operates should be taken into account to alleviate the impact of the raw statistics.

Secondly, if a venue refuses entry to somebody who appears to be intent on misbehaving or who is already exhibiting significant signs of those intentions and/or affectation by alcohol, and that results in an incident to which the police are called, that registers as an incident in the statistics for that venue, although the venue was obviously doing what was required of it and what is the correct thing. The venue should be credited with refusing entry, rather than be punished by having another statistical incident added to the list. Interestingly, once the list of 48 appeared venues that had gone to the trouble of reporting incidents and ensuring full disclosure and so on were punished by the fact that those incidents created a large statistical figure.

Interestingly, the new Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research statistics show that a large number of venues have dramatically improved their ranking. Venues that were listed at five, six, seven or eight are now listed at 98, 97 or 96, and a number of venues on the list of 48 have disappeared from the new list of 100. That shows that there are a number of flaws. The system is open to abuse. A venue could start creating incidents at a rival venue nearby that would cause that venue to have a higher statistical profile, which results in the imposition of plastic cups, lockouts and closures—all the measures we are fully aware of—to the competitive advantage of the culprit venue causing the problems. It takes only a phone call or a paid messenger to do that. That is a fundamental flaw in the system.

I might be surprised—we will see, of course, as we are about to embark upon this for the first time—to see that there is sufficient flexibility in the statistics to allow for size, for refused entry and even perhaps for some weight to be placed on a pleading that the statistics may have been corrupted. As I said, we will see what measures will apply. As the statistics were announced yesterday and the new system is to be effective from December, we should have a clear understanding of the rankings and what measures will be attached to each ranking. That detail will provide greater certainty. In the past there has been uncertainty about the practice and governance of licensed venues. The Government responded to a media story by bouncing around with measure after measure, and has made a terrible mess of the issue. The problems have continued for a number of years.

I have listed the approaches taken, out of the blue in some cases, only in the past year or so; I have not gone back any further. It is bad enough looking at the measures the Government has fallen for and rushed to implement, even over that short period. I have not mentioned the linking statistics and data; there is a plethora of competing information and statistics. The turf war between the police, the Office of Liquor and Gaming and a couple of agencies, including the statistical bureau, must be seen to be believed. But that is another story for another day. I turn now to the bill, which seeks to amend the Planning Act by providing for a freeze on the granting of development consents by local government during the period of the freeze on licences. I wondered about that provision because the bill implements a 12-month temporary freeze on specific liquor licence amendments and/or new grants.

I would have thought it was sufficient simply to impose a freeze on new licences or variations to licences. I do not understand why an additional provision has been inserted in the legislation to freeze development consents. I have asked the Minister's staff and I have received an answer, which reads okay. However, the bottom line is that applicants in these precincts will be penalised twice: first by the freeze and, secondly, by their inability to prepare to proceed expeditiously once the freeze ends. In other words, why will applicants not be permitted to go through the local government process of a development application and all the other preparations so that they are ready to proceed with their application when the freeze period ends?

Apart from the bureaucratic explanation I have received, I do not understand the effect of the amendment to the Planning Act, which will essentially create a much longer delay. If the development application process can commence only on the day the freeze period ends, that will add to the lengthy period before an application can be made. Effectively, that means that the freeze could be in place for a lot longer than 12 months. Indeed, the freeze could be in place for 1½ years or even longer. I also acknowledge Mr Bruce Bulford, a lawyer in Sydney who is an expert in liquor licensing planning matters. I have had a number of email communications from him and I also have access to the bulletin he publishes. The two issues that he mentioned, which are evident in the legislation and were raised by the very good work of the Legislation Review Committee, are retrospectivity and future regulation. Such regulation, currently unseen, can be described as future unseen regulation. I refer to the report of the bipartisan parliamentary Legislation Review Committee and statements therein about those two issues:

Proposed schedules—

which I will not enunciate—

... extends to an application under this Act for any licence or any other matter referred to in that division that was made on or after 25 June 2009 but not granted or otherwise determined as at the commencement of the amending Act. The Committee will always be concerned with any retrospective effect of legislation, which impacts on personal rights and refers proposed Schedule 1 [3] (Clause 29) to Parliament for its consideration.

I take note of that. The committee's report also says:

The Committee has concerns that the proposed section 411 (7), which impacts on right to appeal to the Land and Environment Court unduly trespasses on personal rights and refers this to Parliament for its consideration.

I take note of that and I ask Parliament to do so also. In relation to regulation, the Legislation Review Committee says:

The Committee is of the view that any amendments varying a freeze precinct could be more appropriately made to the Principal Act by an amending Act rather than through the regulations.

I agree with that. It continues:

Accordingly, the Committee refers to Parliament for its consideration whether proposed section 47J (d) is an inappropriate delegation of legislative power.

I regard these points being made by the Legislation Review Committee as quite important. The committee made this further point:

Section 47A (1) provides that the freeze period ends on 24 June 2010 or such later date as may be prescribed by the regulations before the end of the freeze period. The Committee has concerns that this provision may be considered to be an inappropriate delegation of legislative power.

I completely agree with that as well. It seems extraordinary that we are being asked to pass a bill that has very defined parameters yet will enable the government of the day to double the period of operation by regulation. If it is important that we should legislate now, it is equally important that these two fundamentally unacceptable aspects of the measure be amended by legislation and not by regulation. The Opposition does not oppose the bill but takes it in good faith. The Opposition does so to allow the Government to govern and implement its agenda, even though it is at the whim of a desperate Premier with an apparent propensity to issue press releases in the hope that his Government departments can mop them up and turn them into legislation, and despite a litany of dictatorial approaches to the legislation. It is bad legislation that, quite apart from its unfairness, has two very big, fundamental flaws: retrospectivity and abrogation of legislative authority by regulation.

We are not going to stand in the way of the legislation. We know there is a problem out there. The Government does not think properly about issues or follow through with them, it changes its mind all the time and comes up with a new scheme every few months. The legislation is emblematic of the failings of the Government. The bill has opened a window on the workings of a disastrous government that mucks around with important legislation by breaching principles about retrospectivity and not abrogating legislative authority. The Government bounces from one policy to another, from one day to the next. Who knows, before this new ranking system is implemented, what other new announcements will be made? In six months or 12 months we may well have to deal with legislation based on yet another whimsical pronouncement by the Premier on this difficult, complicated area of the Liquor Act.

Ms MARIE ANDREWS (Gosford) [10.45 a.m.]: I am pleased that the member for Upper Hunter has declared the Opposition will be taking a bipartisan approach to this legislation. After listening to his speech I wondered whether the Coalition opposed it. I support the Liquor Amendment (Temporary Licence Freeze) Bill 2009. The bill is another example of this Government's determination to tackle the growing problem of antisocial behaviour and alcohol-related violence. Last year the Government announced a comprehensive package of initiatives directed at high-risk venues. A cornerstone of the package was a freeze on new 24-hour trading venues. New liquor licences granted since 30 October 2008 must include a requirement for a six-hour closure each day. The Government recognises that the city of Sydney has a high percentage of late-night trading venues concentrated in confined entertainment precincts. The freeze on new liquor licences in these areas is a tailored extension of the statewide freeze on new 24-hour venues to address a local problem.

The Government has driven significant cultural change in licensed venues in New South Wales to reduce alcohol-related violence. Beginning with the special conditions introduced on 1 December last year on the 48 venues with the highest number of assaults during the year ending June 2008, the Government has targeted problems such as assaults, glassing, intoxication and disturbance of nearby areas. These special licence conditions include a 2.00 a.m. to 5.00 a.m. lockout and a requirement to cease serving alcohol 30 minutes prior to closing time. The conditions also impose the following restrictions between midnight and 5.00 a.m. Drinks must not be served in glass or breakable plastic containers; a ban on alcohol "shots"; no drinks may contain more than 50 per cent spirits or liqueur; a ban on ready-to-drink beverages containing more than 5 per cent alcohol by volume; no mixed drinks with more than one nip of spirits or liqueur; a limit of four alcoholic drinks supplied to a person at any one time; 10-minute "time-outs" each hour when either no alcohol is sold, or free water and/or food is provided for patrons and the consumption of water is actively encouraged.

Police and the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing have monitored all the 48 declared premises on at least a weekly basis since 1 December 2008. Thirteen of these premises are located within the City of Sydney local government area—with eight in the proposed freeze precincts. A review of compliance at declared premises showed satisfactory compliance rates and that breaches were limited to individual failures, rather than systemic or endemic issues. In the nine months to 31 August 2009, 68 breaches of the special conditions were identified. These were at 28 venues and involved non-compliance with requirements regarding polycarbonate or unbreakable drinking vessels, 31 breaches; lockouts, 11 breaches; high-alcohol drinks, three breaches; four drinks per sale, seven breaches; 10-minute timeout or alternative, four breaches; service of shots, six breaches; and more than 30 millilitres of spirit, six breaches.

It is fair to say that declared premises have made significant efforts to comply with the special conditions and that this model has had a positive impact on the industry generally. It is noteworthy that

compliance has continued to improve and that 72 per cent of the breaches of the special conditions occurred in the first eight weeks. The Government is continuing to work with affected venues to assist them in complying with these conditions and working through any issues. Building on the approach to the top 48 declared premises, the Premier announced a graduated system of sanctions in July this year, which will see the most violent licensed venues subject to special licence conditions based on the number of assaults on their premises. These conditions are designed to reduce assaults, intoxication and neighbourhood disturbance.

Venues with 19 or more assaults in a year will be subject to similar special conditions currently imposed on 48 of the State's most violent venues. Venues with 12 to 18 assaults a year will be subject to three of these conditions—no glass after midnight, time-outs for 10 minutes each hour after midnight, or free water and/or food for patrons and the active encouragement of water consumption, and stopping alcohol service 30 minutes before closing. Venues with eight to 11 assaults a year will be given help by the New South Wales Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing to strengthen alcohol and security management. All level 1 and level 2 licensed venues will be required to record all assaults that occur during operating hours in a specific register kept on the premises from 1 December 2009. The list of venues subject to special conditions will be revised twice a year on 1 December and 1 June, based on updated assault data provided by the New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research.

Venues added to the list will be subject to the special conditions for a minimum of six months. After that time, the scheme will allow venues with sufficiently reduced incidents of violence to be removed from the list or have the number of special conditions reduced. The names of the declared venues will be published online to allow patrons to make informed choices when deciding where to go out. I understand the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research assault data for the period ending July 2009 suggests the majority of declared premises in the proposed freeze precincts have had a significant reduction in the number of assault incidents recorded against their venues. While the approach to violent venues has proved successful, the Government recognised that a specialised approach was required for particular precincts in the city of Sydney. The precinct approach to these areas will enable a broad approach to addressing alcohol-related violence that not only targets problem venues, but addresses environmental and behavioural impacts. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms CLOVER MOORE (Sydney) [10.52 a.m.]: I welcome and strongly support the Liquor Amendment (Temporary Licence Freeze) Bill 2009, which will introduce a 12-month freeze on liquor licences in Darlinghurst and Bayswater roads, Kings Cross, Oxford Street between Taylor Square and Whitlam Square and associated sections of Flinders, Campbell and Crown streets, and George Street south and associated sections of Liverpool and Goulburn streets. A vibrant night-time economy that adds to the character and liveability of our city is important. Licensed premises are a significant part of the inner-city night-time economy, and are essential to Sydney's status as a global city. Notwithstanding, this legislation is urgently needed because those identified areas in Kings Cross, Oxford Street and George Street south have excessive numbers of licensed premises, leading to disproportionate levels of alcohol-related violence and antisocial behaviour.

Data published in February by the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing [OLGR] in its Social Profile Report for the City of Sydney Local Government Area reveals that there are 1,789 liquor licences within the city. That is 13 per cent of all liquor licences in New South Wales. Relative to population, there are 114 licences per 10,000 people in the area compared with an average of 22 across New South Wales. Liquor licences within the City of Sydney outnumber liquor licences within the whole of New South Wales by a ratio of more than 5:1. Correspondingly, alcohol-related violence and alcohol-related driving offences are much higher within the City of Sydney compared with the whole of New South Wales. OLGR data shows that there is a higher risk of alcohol-related hospitalisations and alcohol-related deaths within the City of Sydney than in the whole of New South Wales.

City of Sydney data shows that alcohol-related crime increases with the supply of alcohol through longer hours of operation, especially 24-hour trading, the size of alcohol outlets, a greater density of outlets, and poorly managed venues. My office regularly receives complaints about the impact of late-night trading in these areas from residents who are living at the highest densities in the State. Residents say that they are fearful of being outside in the street, and cannot sleep because of the continual high level of noise. Inner-city residents in these late trading areas say that their weekends are marred by groups of rowdy patrons who loiter, singing, shouting, arguing and fighting throughout the night. They say that streets like Darlinghurst Road and Oxford Street have turned into one huge and uncontrollable drunken party.

Residents report that streets and doorways are used as toilets and places to vomit, smashed glass and food waste are dumped in the streets, patrons park cars illegally and congregate and drink in and around parked

cars with sound systems blaring, excessively noisy cars cruise repeatedly through residential streets with sound systems and horns blaring, public and private property is repeatedly vandalised, and residents are threatened and intimidated when they ask patrons to move on. The city surveyed Kings Cross and Darlinghurst residents about the impact of late-night licensed premises on residents. While most respondents said they valued the vitality and diversity of their neighbourhoods, and they used late-night premises, approximately 60 per cent believed that Oxford Street and Kings Cross had changed for the worse in recent years, which is why we need this legislation now. Many respondents put this down to the negative impact of increasing numbers of late-night licensed premises.

Managing late-night trading areas has become a challenge for police because of the sheer number of licensed premises in these areas and the sheer number of alcohol-fuelled people on the streets. The number of people visiting these areas on Fridays and Saturdays creates a New Years Eve environment, with large numbers of intoxicated people every weekend. The urgent need for police to respond to violent crime means that resident complaints about malicious damage, noise and antisocial behaviour are usually not addressed. It is not sustainable to allow growth of licensed premises in areas that have reached this level of saturation and cumulative impact. I was pleased that the Premier responded to my question in Parliament about alcohol-related violence by establishing the Sydney Liquor Taskforce, which reports directly to the Premier and to me as Lord Mayor of Sydney. The OLGR director general chairs the task force and the deputy chair is the City of Sydney's chief executive officer. Their first action has been to establish the boundaries of the liquor licence freeze areas.

During the period of the freeze, the task force needs to identify long-term action that will address this saturation and the cumulative impact on these affected areas. It needs to consider: clear and enforced licensing and licensee obligations with restricted trading for demonstrated poor management, improved staff training so that security and bar staff can prevent violence, liquor accord participation, ongoing dialogue with adjacent residents, adequate late-night transport to get patrons who have had a good night home safely and not leave them causing or exposed to violence in the inner city, effective and assertive policing and compliance with joint operations, ongoing cooperation between police, OLGR, and council compliance staff, measures to address the impacts of smoking bans and queuing on footpaths, benchmarks set for noise and amenity standards, better health and education programs on alcohol use and abuse, and planning measures that support the objectives of the City of Sydney's Late Night Trading Premises Development Control Plan to control new licensed venues in high-risk areas through designated "saturation zones."

I continue to be a strong supporter of small bars and a vital live entertainment industry, but not in these designated areas that have such serious alcohol-related problems that I have just described. Small bars in other areas can provide places to listen to live music and provide opportunities for our young creative talent, particularly musos. Small bars are an alternative to large-scale television and poker machine dominated beer barns filled with binge drinkers and they help create a more civilised and diverse drinking culture. Of course, there is very strong community support for them, not only in the City of Sydney but also in metropolitan and regional areas. In order to promote and show our support for small bars, the City of Sydney has been hosting small bar seminars—two have been held and a third is booked out—to provide support, advice and assistance to people who want to open a new small bar in Sydney. We continue to receive inquiries each week.

Ten small bars currently operate in the city and another 18 are at various stages in the development application process. More bars have been approved for the city of Sydney in the first year since the new licensing regime came into force than during the equivalent period in Melbourne, a city now famous for its laneways and small bars. Indeed, the City of Sydney will upgrade laneways in the central business district with alfresco dining, theatrical spaces and stages, new paving and art boxes as part of a six-year program to revitalise our laneways. From October to January the city's By George! art program will transform laneways off George Street with a range of exciting temporary art installations, including an urban bar code, created with white fluorescent tubes, a canopy of birdcages and bird songs, and a temporary forest. Recycling themed laneway art projects will feature in Albion Lane until January.

This legislation is about solutions. The legislation is seeking to address some serious issues, and I welcome the Government's response to those problems and to finding solutions. I listened very carefully to the contribution of the Opposition speaker, the member for Upper Hunter. I kept listening for solutions but I did not hear any. I am sure that many Liberal voters—they might vote Liberal at Federal elections—who live in Potts Point, Kings Cross and areas adjacent to Oxford Street who would like to hear Opposition members supporting solutions. I was surprised to hear criticism of this attempt at providing practical solutions to a serious problem that also address the need for continuing the vital and exciting night-time economy.

The Liquor Amendment (Temporary Licence Freeze) Bill 2009 is important and will contribute to creating a civilised drinking culture. It is about civilised behaviour. I do not believe any member of this House would condone the ugly behaviour that occurs every weekend on Friday and Saturday nights in Kings Cross, Oxford Street and George Street, where young police officers take their lives into their hands. The commander at Surry Hills told me about one young officer whose teeth were bashed out as she went about her normal work on a Friday night in Oxford Street. The behaviour is ugly. I look forward to Opposition members speaking to this bill and offering their solutions to this serious problem.

I believe the bill will help to create a more civilised drinking culture. It will reduce alcohol-related violence, reduce the impact on local amenity and on residents living in the highest densities in Australia, and, importantly, reduce the burden on our healthcare system. Members opposite should spend any Friday or Saturday night at the emergency department of St Vincent's Hospital, where they will see how the doctors and nurses cope with the ugly behaviour that we witness on our streets week in, week out. The bill will give us an opportunity to take stock and develop long-term mechanisms that prevent community harm while also supporting a flourishing entertainment industry.

Mr MIKE BAIRD (Manly) [11.03 a.m.]: I speak on the Liquor Amendment (Temporary Licence Freeze) Bill 2009 because my community of Manly has struggled for many years with alcohol-related violence after midnight. I acknowledge that a late-night economy exists and provides significant jobs. However, the community has reached the point where people's lifestyles are being impacted by these problems. I share with the House the experience of the people of Manly because it is critical that the Government realises that certain regions have particular problems. I argue strongly that it is not good policy to provide opportunities for one region but not offer them to other communities.

I understand that the bill offers other communities the opportunity to participate in the temporary liquor licence freeze. Therefore, today I call on Premier Rees and the Government to extend the provisions in this bill to the Manly community. This morning I attended a committee comprising licensees, police, representatives of the council, community groups, the health professions, and other concerned Manly citizens. They endorsed the view that Manly should be the subject of this legislation. I urge the Government to consider that view, because the community is saying, "Enough is enough". A line must be drawn in the sand. Licences cannot continue to be issued when Manly is struggling with significant alcohol-related assault problems.

Manly is a fantastic place but it can be improved, and this measure is critical in achieving that aim. The object of the bill is to impose restrictions on the granting of liquor licences and licence extensions. This bill restricts that object to the precincts of Kings Cross, Oxford Street and the southern central business district. The bill sets a 12-month liquor licensing freeze as of 25 June 2009. I do not believe any retrospective measure is good, so I argue that the freeze should commence on 1 January 2010 or even 1 December 2009, which coincides with the summer months, when many of these incidents take place. This would mean that the legislation would not impact upon existing development applications and allow people who are considering making proposals to council some time to consider their options. They would be forewarned that the rules are about to change. The bill also provides for a freeze on development application consents, and the same concerns apply. Licensed restaurants, cafes, theatres and special events are not affected and could continue as normal in the Manly area. In his agreement in principle speech the Minister for Gaming and Racing stated:

The freeze on new liquor licences may be extended and applied to other areas should the need arise.

I suggest that the need has arisen and that Manly should always have been considered. The community should have had an opportunity to participate in this debate. The member for Sydney outlined the concerns of her constituents, and Manly residents have similar concerns. The Minister should have included Manly in the extension. Schedule 1 [4] states that the regulations will be able to add or remove a precinct or vary the description of a precinct. I have written to the Premier asking him to consider extending the licensing freeze to Manly. Manly has made progress through the liquor accord and through measures put in place by council, police, licensees and community groups. The Manly Venue Management Plan, which was put in place after months of negotiation and consensus, has made a difference. I shall return to that issue later.

The area has a culture of alcohol-related problems, and recent editions of the *Manly Daily* have carried a number of articles about alcohol-related crime and assaults. Indeed, yesterday it reported that Manly venues feature in the statistics as having the highest number of assaults. As I said, we were starting to see some significant improvements. As part of the Manly Venue Management Plan, Dave Darcy, the police superintendent, was taking a proactive role, a code of conduct was put in place, there was a 2.00 a.m. cessation on the service of alcohol and a 2.30 a.m. closure of venues. However, late last year the Government introduced

new liquor legislation, which the shadow Minister alluded to, that changed the very nature of what was happening in Manly. As a result of that legislation we now have varying closing times and varying conditions, and we want to revert to the measures that made a difference.

When the liquor legislation was introduced in 2008 I expressed my concern that the Manly community had reached a consensus and we were moving forward. Since the introduction of that legislation we have gone backwards. The statistics I will cite today show that the Manly Venue Management Plan was working. From 1 January to 31 October 2008 there were only 79 assaults in Manly whereas in the previous year the figure was 91 for the same period. That represents a 13 per cent reduction. Under the plan that was operating locally in 2007, the Steyne Hotel—which made it into the top 10 of the most violent venues in New South Wales—had 14 assaults during a three-month period that year, but under the venue management plan it had four assaults. We ask for the opportunity to revert to the after-hours venue management plan that was agreed to by the licensees, the council, local police, community groups and me, and which was starting to work. If one of the critical measures is crime statistics, it is clear that the venue management plan was starting to be successful.

I believe the Government's intent in relation to this legislation is right. The Government is trying to clamp down on a problem that the community says it has had enough of. I can understand that. The community has had enough, and my community has reached the point where it wants to see material action. But at the same time we need to be flexible enough to apply local solutions. In that context, we ask that the Manly venue management plan be trialled for 12 months. We ask for the additional requirement that the liquor licence freeze provided for in this legislation be extended to Manly, rather than just apply to the precincts that have been identified.

I believe if we had a temporary freeze on licence extensions, the Manly community would start to have a sense that the Government is listening. I am not the only person putting forward these arguments. This morning I attended the local safety committee meeting and every single representative around the table agreed on this issue. There were many nodding heads and agreement that this is exactly the sort of initiative we want from the Government. We argue that the Government should consider strongly the calls of the Manly community to extend the jurisdiction of this bill to the Manly area. Certainly the legislation should cover a broader area. I think any community that has similar concerns should have the option of asking the Government to extend to its local area the freeze outlined in the bill. I would be surprised if other communities do not do that. From a northern beaches perspective, I know that my colleague the member for Pittwater also has concerns about the legislation, which he will address in his contribution to the debate.

I argue strongly that the legislation should not be retrospective. Indeed, I believe that retrospective legislation is very damaging. The Government needs to forewarn communities, stakeholders and interest groups that the rules are about to change. In that context, I argue that perhaps the legislation should come into effect from 1 December, so that people and businesses that have invested time, effort and money into putting plans together and lodging applications before council are considered and will be aware that from a certain date the rules will change. I think it is fair to say that this legislation will not be a panacea. All of us would love to have a silver bullet to solve this problem once and for all. But there is a lot of goodwill on the part of people who are trying to solve this problem, and we need to support them. Something the Government can do is to provide measures such as this. I endorse the concept of the legislation being trialled for 12 months. Certainly a 12-month trial would give us a sense of whether the legislation is making a difference. The community would then have the option either to reopen debate on the issue or to extend the licence freeze if that is in the interests of all concerned.

I ask the Premier to consider strongly including Manly in the liquor licence freeze. There is no doubt that Manly shares the problems faced by the precincts of Kings Cross, Oxford Street and George Street, in the sense that Manly's after-midnight violence rates are unacceptable. I should acknowledge that just over 12 months ago Manly licensees, the local police and the council got together and put in place a Manly Venue Management Plan that I believe is working and that the statistics suggest is working. As well as extending the bill's provisions to Manly, I call on the Government to consider the Manly community's requests to endorse a venue management plan. That is the consensus position. The key tenets of that plan will enable us to address locally the problems that the Manly community has identified.

This legislation, coupled with the venue management plan, has the potential to strengthen Manly's reputation. From a community point of view I argue strongly that local residents are as one in asking for this problem to be addressed while at the same time delighting in what Manly is. Manly remains one of the most

fantastic communities in the world. We argue that this addition to the legislation would address one of the problems in Manly—which should never take away from Manly being known as one of the best places in the world. We appreciate the Premier's consideration of our request.

Mr MATT BROWN (Kiama) [11.16 a.m.]: The Liquor Amendment (Temporary Licence Freeze) Bill 2009 implements the Government's announcement to freeze the number of liquor licences in three areas of the city of Sydney. The freeze is an important step in addressing alcohol-related violence and antisocial behaviour in these busy late-night entertainment precincts. The Government, in collaboration with the City of Sydney and industry representatives, will oversee this licence freeze through the Sydney Liquor Taskforce. This collaborative approach brings together relevant agencies to address a joint responsibility. Stalling the growth of liquor licences in these precincts will allow the task force to look at other strategies to address the unique problems faced by those precincts in the city of Sydney with a significant number of late-night entertainment venues.

I am advised that the task force is currently focusing on in-venue strategies such as the need to strengthen responsible service of alcohol training to ensure that staff members have the skills to communicate effectively with intoxicated persons and reduce conflict in high-risk venues. The responsible service of alcohol plays an essential role in reducing the risk of alcohol-related violence by ensuring that patrons are not served to the point of intoxication. The responsible service of alcohol is a statewide requirement, but the need for supplementary skill building for staff working in large venues in Sydney city is currently being investigated. Appropriate in-venue leadership is essential for a comprehensive approach to venue safety. Other in-venue strategies include mechanisms to ensure strong management capability within venues. Ensuring that venue security works effectively with management in understanding venue policy and procedures and legal obligations is also important. Venue security plays a crucial role in assessing intoxication and maintaining a safe environment for patrons.

The task force will also look at strategies related to public areas and services in addressing alcohol-related violence in the three freeze precincts. For example, access to late-night transport is important so that patrons can leave the precincts safely. This reduces crowding on the streets, and decreases frustration and the risk of alcohol-related violence. Further work relating to public areas and services includes the use of street cameras and appropriate pedestrian management strategies. A number of these strategies have been implemented in my home town of Kiama. Ensuring that there are enough taxis and that people face the risk of identification for inappropriate behaviour has resulted in a decrease in alcohol-related, poor behaviour in the main street of Kiama, Terralong Street. Individual responsibility is crucial to reducing the risk of alcohol-related violence. The majority of patrons who go to the entertainment precincts of Sydney do so to enjoy the nightlife this fabulous city has to offer. Unfortunately, there are always those who cause trouble to the detriment of the safety of local residents and other patrons. The task force will ensure that patrons are informed of their obligations under the law and the ramifications of non-compliance.

Encouraging people to take responsibility for their behaviour and actions should address some antisocial behaviour. The task force will report to the Premier and lord mayor. The task force will also work with the high-level implementation team established in December last year to oversee statewide strategies to restrict the number of violent venues and to reduce alcohol-related violence. The focus of the task force on narrow freeze precincts will allow a number of innovative strategies to be trialled, which, if successful, could be applied more widely where appropriate. The Liquor Amendment (Temporary Licence Freeze) Bill 2009 puts in place the basis on which the task force can move forward in developing and enhancing strategies to address the problems caused by alcohol-related violence and antisocial behaviour in the city of Sydney. I look forward to a range of effective solutions to secure Sydney's dynamic and exciting nightlife, while ensuring the safety of the community and visitors to this amazing city. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr ROB STOKES (Pittwater) [11.20 a.m.]: I speak to the Liquor Amendment (Temporary Licence Freeze) Bill 2009. I note that the object of the bill is to impose restrictions on the granting of liquor licences and other liquor-related authorisations in relation to certain premises in central Sydney. It will also limit the granting of development consent under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act to those sorts of venues. My point is an obvious one. If the Government is going to introduce a temporary licence freeze then surely it should be consistent. In introducing this bill is the Government arguing that alcohol-related violence is a problem only in the Sydney central business district? Does it believe that alcohol-related injury is a problem only in the Sydney central business district? In the past year or two in Pittwater two young men have died in the immediate vicinity of the Mona Vale central business district, which is consistently a hotspot for crime and alcohol-related

violence in Pittwater. Also in that area is one major hotel that is on the Government's list of hotels most associated with alcohol-related violence. Alcohol-related violence is not only a problem for the Sydney central business district but also a problem for the community of Pittwater.

There is no doubt that there is a demand for small bars in central business district areas throughout New South Wales, and that small bars can offer a great opportunity to change the drinking culture in this State from big beer barns filled with drunks to more elegant places where people can enjoy one or two after-work drinks. The Park Street Social Club in Park Street, Mona Vale, is one of the first of such new bars. I understand that this bar has been a success. There is a real change in culture from bars being a place to get drunk to a place to meet for a pre-dinner drink and a quiet chat. Of course, a proliferation of small bars means that there will be a multitude of places from which alcohol-related violence might erupt, making it much more difficult for police to anticipate where their resources will be required.

There are, however, grave misgivings in the community about the proposed location of small bars in close proximity to quiet residential streets, and I believe many residents' concerns are well founded. Pittwater Council has worked long and hard—at considerable expense and involving extensive community consultation—to develop a policy to address how it should assess applications for small bar licences and related development applications. When the council placed its policy on public exhibition the then general manager, Mark Ferguson, said that the council's draft policy had been developed to ensure that a consistent approach would be taken to any new licence application. At the time he also said:

The draft policy outlines our position on what we believe are simple trading hours, along with appropriate locations for the approval of these new licences...An important part of our policy is to take into account the impact on surrounding neighbours.

Mark continued:

The location of the business will also be taken into consideration. What may be appropriate in a large or small village setting, will not be acceptable in an area which is primarily residential, with neighbours in close proximity.

I commend Lindsay Godfrey and his team at Pittwater Council for developing council policy on liquor licensing and how those applications will be dealt with in a consistent and strategic manner. I am happy to endorse that process. It is helpful to applicants and to the community to understand the view the council will take on the application of these new laws. I also commend the Mayor of Pittwater, David James, who has established a community task force to address the issues of alcohol-related violence in the Mona Vale central business district. The task force is also well supported by the State Transit Authority and Sydney Buses, and I commend Dominic Larosa for his involvement. I thank Viven from Manly Cabs; the Northern Beaches Local Area Command; the licensee of the Mona Vale Hotel, Grant Iverson; Jeremy Drayton from the Inch Café; Michelle Glew-Ross and her sister Brooke Glew from the Park Street Social Club; and the other locals who have a real stake in the future of the Mona Vale central business district.

The Sydney coastal councils have also introduced a policy on how to deal with alcohol-related violence in beachside areas. There has been a considered, strategic, consistent response to these new laws by beachside communities such as Pittwater. We now learn, however, that in an ill-considered, knee-jerk response by the Premier the whole intent and point of the new legislation is to be subverted and undermined to address the failure to manage properly the implementation of the new laws in the city of Sydney by the very Lord Mayor who pushed for the introduction of the small bars in the first place. It is one thing for government to be consistent and appropriate in its response to one community, but these laws should apply to us all. A single community should not be singled out for preferential treatment.

The community I am proud to represent in this place has responded in a mature, measured and strategic way to the challenges posed by the new liquor laws. We do have some issues, but so does the City of Sydney. Why is the city's central business district to receive special treatment? Why is the Government being so inconsistent and timid in its application of its own laws? Liquor, alcohol-related violence, underage drinking, and changing the drinking culture are massive social issues, and perhaps the biggest problems that Pittwater faces. We need consistency, clarity and leadership from the Government on these vital social issues. The social profile reports released recently by the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing indicate that Manly, which is proximate to Pittwater, has almost twice the State average for alcohol-related assaults, and Pittwater is also above the State average.

It is reported also that Manly and Mona Vale hospitals have seen an increase in emergency visits for alcohol-related problems. In 2007 the average number of emergency admissions statewide for alcohol-related

problems was 100. Manly Hospital had 251 and Mona Vale Hospital had 113. The problem on the northern beaches is greater than in other areas of Sydney. The northern beaches, like the city of Sydney, is a hotspot for this problem. Why is the northern beaches not being treated the same as the city of Sydney? The bill singles out one community and deals with it differently. All the speakers to the bill from this side of the House—the member for Manly, me and the member for Cronulla, who will speak next—come from beachside communities. This is a cultural issue in beachside communities that needs to be dealt with. The sort of relief being offered to the City of Sydney is not being offered to other areas of real concern.

The Opposition does not oppose the bill as there are clearly some issues in the central business district that need to be addressed, but it does ask why the central business district is getting preferential treatment. What is it with this Government? Whether it be the CBD Metro or special treatment in relation to liquor licensing, this CBD-centric Government forgets about the impacts of its policies on the rest of us. If a freeze on new licences on the basis of the risks of alcohol-related violence is good enough for the Sydney central business district, why is it not good enough for Pittwater? Why will the Government not offer Pittwater the same benefits? The Government introduced the rules and now it wants to change them. In making those changes it should be consistent and offer some real leadership on this very important social issue.

Mr GEOFF CORRIGAN (Camden) [11.28 a.m.]: I make a brief contribution to the Liquor Amendment (Temporary Licence Freeze) Bill 2009, which I support. This freeze legislation sends another strong signal to industry and the community that the Rees Government is determined to tackle alcohol-related violence and antisocial behaviour. The bill complements action taken by the Government over the past 12 months targeting high-risk licensed premises through licence conditions that promote best-practice management and the responsible service and consumption of alcohol.

The bill also complements the new liquor laws that commenced on 1 July last year. Those new laws include a range of enforcement tools, which allow authorities to target irresponsible licensees and unruly patrons quickly and effectively. For example, drunk patrons who have been ejected but refuse to leave the vicinity of the licensed venue or attempt to re-enter the venue can be issued with \$550 on-the-spot fines. Licensed venues causing problems can have their hours reduced, lockouts can be imposed, and licensees forced to improve security and responsible serving practices. The NSW Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing and the New South Wales Police Force are in regular dialogue to identify licensed venues causing an unacceptable impact on their local community.

These venues are assessed for levels of compliance with the liquor laws. Risks are identified and strategies tailored to strengthen responsible service of alcohol and improve security management. Licensees are asked to adopt these strategies voluntarily. If they refuse, the liquor laws allow the Director General of Communities New South Wales to impose these strategies as conditions on their liquor licence and make them legally binding and enforceable. If there is an immediate threat to public safety, the director general can issue a written direction to a licensee or their staff requiring action to be taken by the venue. The director general or police can also lodge an application with the Casino, Liquor and Gaming Control Authority to shut the venue down for up to 72 hours.

To help licensees manage their venues responsibly, the new laws include provisions for intoxication and liquor promotion guidelines to be developed. These guidelines outline the kinds of activities or promotions that would not be permitted under the new liquor laws, as well as assist licensees to manage consumption of alcohol by their patrons. The guidelines are available to all licensees across New South Wales and are a key measure of best practice to reduce intoxication and ensure responsible promotion of alcohol. Over the past year, the New South Wales Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing has held 40 "RSA on the frontline" workshops—which have been attended by almost 2,000 people working in licensed premises—to further assist industry in serving alcohol responsibly. These workshops have been well attended in the Macarthur region. They provide free, practical training to bar and security staff.

The Government also has increased the number of liquor compliance inspectors to support the broad range of alcohol initiatives introduced since 1 July 2008. During the 2008-09 financial year 25 new inspectors were recruited, bringing the total number of liquor inspectors across the State to 65. These inspectors are working directly with licensed venues that are experiencing high levels of violence to reduce risks and institute better management practices, thereby increasing safety for staff and patrons. For example, since the new liquor laws commenced on 1 July last year over 1,500 site audits of licensed premises have taken place to verify compliance with the liquor laws. A key objective of the new laws is the balanced development of the liquor industry through a flexible and practical regulatory system with less red tape. The licensing system strikes a balance between sensible controls and industry growth.

Applications for high-risk licences must be accompanied by a community impact statement, through which applicants must provide an opportunity for local community stakeholders to have their say about a licensing proposal. This helps applicants and regulators to understand any local concerns, as well as provide support in the community for the proposal. All stakeholders—including residents, police and local councils—are able to make submissions directly to the Casino, Liquor and Gaming Control Authority about any application that is made. Community expectations are a major driver behind the liquor laws, which allow for a variety of hospitality, dining and entertainment choices.

Small business owners have a wider range of opportunities available to them. For instance, restaurants can serve alcohol without a meal if they hold a primary service authorisation. The fee for this authorisation is \$50, compared with many thousands of dollars under the previous liquor laws. During the first year of the new liquor laws 175 primary service authorisations were granted. This measure helps to provide communities in this State with a greater choice of drinking and entertainment venues. I could go on, but I know that Opposition members want to speak to this bill. I fully support the new measures.

Mr MALCOLM KERR (Cronulla) [11.35 a.m.]: I want to speak to the Liquor Amendment (Temporary Licence Freeze) Bill 2009. As the member for Pittwater and the member for Manly stated, beachside suburbs have particular problems in relation to excessive alcohol consumption. I have drawn the attention of the House to the problems on a number of occasions. Both members asked why the measures adopted in this bill are not available in places apart from the Sydney central business district. The member for Sydney spoke about the drinking culture. I have also spoken about that issue in this House and the need to stop binge drinking. Members would be aware of the problems encountered in Cronulla mall. A more civilised drinking culture should be encouraged.

The measures adopted in this bill are unique. The Government has not stated why those measures are not available in other areas of Sydney, such as the Sutherland shire. We must ensure that the antisocial behaviour that occurs with excessive drinking is curbed and eliminated. Some time ago Sutherland Shire Council sought a response from the Government in relation to a strategy it had made on antisocial behaviour and alcohol drinking. I am not aware whether the Government has responded. I am sure the residents of the Sutherland shire would be interested to know what response the Government has given to the paper. They also would be interested to know whether Sutherland Shire Council would be interested in adopting some of the measures that are available in this bill. Currently the Government has made adoption of the measures in the bill geographically impossible for areas such as Pittwater, Manly and Cronulla. The people of the Sutherland shire are entitled to know what action the Government is taking in response to Sutherland Shire Council's paper and whether the council is interested in adopting some of the measures contained in this bill.

Mr KEVIN GREENE (Oatley—Minister for Gaming and Racing, and Minister for Sport and Recreation) [11.37 a.m.], in reply: I thank members for their contributions to this debate. The Liquor Amendment (Temporary Licence Freeze) Bill 2009 is further evidence of the Government's commitment to address alcohol-related crime and antisocial behaviour. The freeze on new liquor licences, as provided for in this bill, is a positive step towards tackling the unique problems faced by busy entertainment precincts in Sydney city. The bill implements the measures in the announcement made by the Government and the City of Sydney in June this year. The bill effectively balances the need for additional measures in areas that have a high risk of alcohol-related violence.

Rather than a blanket approach across the whole local government area and all licence categories, the bill has application to specified geographic areas and licence category types. The bill also ensures that during the freeze period development consent cannot be granted to carry out development on premises situated in the freeze precinct if the developer requires a licence, approval, authorisation or other action that cannot be granted or taken because of the proposed liquor licence freeze. As I said when the bill was introduced, the Government will closely monitor the effects of the freeze on both liquor licences and development applications in the prescribed areas. Should it prove necessary, the Government will implement further restrictions by regulation.

The member for Upper Hunter spoke at length about the special licence conditions that apply to the State's most violent venues and the new arrangements that will apply from 1 December this year. The member for Gosford provided a description of the Government's measures to address violence and irresponsible behaviour at high-risk venues. These measures have been developed following advice from a high-level implementation team, which includes very senior and experienced officers from a number of regulatory agencies. The list of violent premises is based on data from the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research. The

bureau is an independent body, which is highly respected for its research and advice. It is appropriate that the bureau's advice and the outcomes of its research be used to guide government policy and the development of responses to alcohol-related violence.

It is somewhat concerning that the shadow Minister, the member for Upper Hunter, has put out a press release that, unfortunately, was not based on any facts. He seems to have a misunderstanding of the regulations and the legislation brought in in December last year, and that was highlighted in parts of his contribution here today. It is unfortunate that he is not aware of the work that has been undertaken by the Government and how that work is carried out. The confusing press release that he put out to the community yesterday sadly reflects that lack of knowledge. However, we are prepared to provide him with the necessary advice to update his knowledge base, and I am sure my staff will meet with him so that he will not put incorrect information in the public domain in the future.

The member for Upper Hunter also referred to the few outstanding applications that were to be dealt with by the former Liquor Administration Board. Legislation is being prepared to address these applications so that they can proceed, and that legislation will be introduced into this place shortly. The member for Upper Hunter also raised three particular concerns that he had with the specifics of this bill. In relation to retrospectivity, the liquor licence freeze applies to applications that were made on or after the date of the Premier's announcement on 25 June, which have not been granted or determined as at the commencement of the bill. The Government's intentions were clearly made on 25 June. I am advised that no applications for new affected liquor licences for premises in the freeze precincts have been received since 25 June.

In relation to appeals, the bill only stops the clock for relevant development applications so that an applicant cannot appeal to the Land and Environment Court on the basis that the period for determination of the application has expired without a determination being made. In regard to regulations, the bill provides that the areas and end date of the freeze may be extended by regulation. Regulations can be used to extend principles already in legislation. Regulations can also be disallowed by Parliament.

With regard to the concerns raised by the member for Manly, the City of Sydney requires a special focus due to a concentration of entertainment venues and continuing high levels of alcohol-related assault in the area. The Liquor Act contains a range of tools, such as the ability to impose licence conditions to prohibit or restrict activities that could encourage misuse or abuse of liquor, such as binge drinking or excessive consumption. Conditions may also be imposed on liquor licences to reduce trading hours. These tools are being used in other high-risk areas to address alcohol-related problems, and that specifically applies to Manly. The member for Cronulla raised similar issues, and I believe that addresses his concerns.

With regard to the Government's proposal to extend the liquor licence freeze to other areas, at this stage the Government has no plans to extend the liquor licence freeze to other areas. The Government will closely monitor the effects of a liquor licence freeze on the identified freeze precincts. Should the need arise, the liquor licence freeze can be extended to other areas by regulation. I expect that any decision to extend the freeze would be influenced by all the circumstances in the proposed new area, including the levels of alcohol-related violence in the area and the strategies already underway to address these problems.

The Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research data released yesterday shows that the actions taken by the Government in December last year—which were opposed by the Opposition—have been very effective. We indicated in July this year that we would introduce some modifications to that system, again to show our determination to bring about reductions in alcohol-related violence, and we have had a great degree of success so far, as was highlighted by the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research data. We are determined to continue to introduce measures and work with licensed establishments to ensure that alcohol-related violence within the community, which we are all sick and tired of, is curtailed. The Government has clearly shown that determination and we will continue to introduce measures, as we deem appropriate, to address these issues. I commend the bill to the House.

Question—That this bill be now agreed to in principle—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Passing of the Bill

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

RURAL FIRE SERVICE

Mr ANDREW STONER (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [11.45 a.m.]: I move:

That this House calls on the Government to make the commitment that the Rural Fire Service will remain a stand-alone agency, to reflect the voluntary nature of the organisation.

Yesterday during question time we witnessed the Deputy Premier lamenting the impending fire season, and rightly so, given the devastating impacts of the bushfires last summer in Victoria. It appears that we are heading into a prolonged dry and above average temperature period, so it may very well be a very challenging fire season ahead. We know that once again the frontline will be our Rural Fire Service volunteers. That is why I gave notice of this motion yesterday and sought precedence to debate it.

New South Wales is fortunate to have a unique bush fire fighting service comprised of some tens of thousands of volunteers. It is that very voluntary nature that makes it such an effective flat structure, with brigades in virtually every community right around New South Wales ready should disaster strike. Our volunteers in all those Rural Fire Service brigades deserve the strongest support of government. But, sadly, in recent times the Rees Labor Government has done precisely the opposite. Rather than support this unique and vital organisation, we saw an ill-considered super department announcement—that is, the Rural Fire Service is to be rolled into a police-related super department under the control of the police commissioner.

This ill-considered decision and subsequent announcement was made without any consultation with the Rural Fire Service. It was another appallingly bad decision from an inexperienced and incompetent Premier and it caused great consternation in the Rural Fire Service. I know that a number of members in this place have been approached by volunteers from the Rural Fire Service brigades in their electorates very concerned about the ramifications of this decision upon an organisation for which they have spent countless hours of training and, of course, firefighting. There are generations of firefighters in the brigades in my electorate of Oxley, and anything that would jeopardise the unique nature of that organisation is of great concern.

It is no wonder that there was consternation amongst the members of the Rural Fire Service that this decision to roll the Rural Fire Service, along with other agencies, into a mega department under the control of a departmental head would effectively end the independent and voluntary nature of this unique agency. That is why this motion was put forward by The Nationals and Liberals for debate today. This rolling of the Rural Fire Service into a mega department would have already happened if it were not for the member for Blue Mountains, who took a principled stand against the destruction of the agency he once headed. He took a courageous stand. I shall quote some of what he had to say when he swam against the flow of his Government. He said:

If it's not broke don't fix it, and it's not broke.

I agree 100 per cent with the member for Blue Mountains, who has had distinguished service with the Rural Fire Service for many, many years. It should have been the Minister for Emergency Services who swam against the current and made his views known in support of the agency that he is supposed to represent. He could have done so in the Cabinet, but it appears that he did not.

Mr Steve Whan: Do you have a spy in there?

Mr ANDREW STONER: I will not go there. It leaks like a sieve. The Minister for Emergency Services was on ABC radio trying to refute claims that the Rural Fire Service would lose its independence. In fact, he failed to apologise to the thousands of volunteers who were not consulted about the amalgamation. The Minister should have done what the member for Blue Mountains did. The Premier did somewhat of an about-face in response to the member for Blue Mountains. However, he has not given a firm commitment to the service that its unique nature will be preserved or that at some stage it will not be rolled into a departmental restructure. He has merely put the decision on hold, stopping short of committing to preserving the independence of the Rural Fire Service. If Nathan Rees will not do the right thing by the people of this historic and unique organisation, the Coalition will. Indeed, I recently told the Megan Rural Fire Service volunteers at Dorrigo that the Coalition will ensure that the service remains a standalone agency while at the same time optimising collaboration with other emergency services organisations.

What about the Labor Party on this issue? Where does it stand? Where does the Minister for Emergency Services stand? Where do the members representing the electorates of Bathurst, Cessnock, Camden, Kiama, Heathcote, Gosford, Wyong, The Entrance and Maitland stand? Those members represent electorates

that are particularly bushfire prone. In fact, many metropolitan members of the Labor Party are in the same position. These electorates are bushfire prone and they have been very well served by Rural Fire Service brigades for decades. This is the chance for those Labor members to support their Rural Fire Service brigades and to join with the Coalition in ensuring that the service retains its unique, independent and voluntary nature.

Yesterday the Government agreed to give the debate on this motion precedence. It is clear that the Leader of the House and the Premier did not want a vote that might expose their members' lack of support for the Rural Fire Service. I have no doubt that the Government will seek to amend this motion today. In doing so it will be playing cheap politics by sidestepping the real issue and neutering the motion. This motion is crystal clear. It is a real commitment to the men and women who are the front line in our communities when disaster strikes. It is a commitment to keeping the Rural Fire Service and its resources out of a mega bureaucratic structure and to preserving its unique independent and voluntary nature.

To date, New South Wales Labor has not made that commitment. That is why the motion has been moved and must be carried without dissent and without amendment. It is clear; it is black and white. Let us not play politics with this issue. Let us have members on all sides of politics supporting the tens of thousands of men and women in Rural Fire Service brigades in New South Wales. Many of those men and women travelled to Victoria during the awful disaster in February this year. During the forthcoming hot and dry summer we will no doubt see conflagrations—we have already seen them early this spring in various parts of the State. Those men and women deserve the support of this House. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr STEVE WHAN (Monaro—Minister for Emergency Services, and Minister for Small Business) [11.55 a.m.]: I move:

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

- (1) expresses its gratitude and thanks to the 70,000 volunteers of the Rural Fire Service and its support for them in the upcoming fire season;
- (2) recognises the need for Rural Fire Service volunteers to be confident of the independence of the Rural Fire Service and welcomes the Premier's letter of 5 August conveying guarantees satisfying the Rural Fire Service Association;
- (3) congratulates the Government on its support for volunteers through this year's record allocation of \$216 million to the Rural Fire Fighting Fund; and
- (4) reminds the Opposition that there are thousands of Rural Fire Service volunteers who are not necessarily front-line firefighters that ensure the Rural Fire Service is recognised as a world leader in rural fire management and that their recent criticisms of these volunteers who work in communications, catering, aerial support and equipment are not warranted.

I think the House will find the amendment acceptable. I agree with many of the points made by the Leader of The Nationals. It is important that Rural Fire Service volunteers are confident in the independence of the organisation of which they are a part. In his letter dated 5 August, the Premier made the following commitments:

- There have been, and will be, no changes to the legal or financial status of the RFS or to the authority of the Commissioner of the Rural Fire Service. The Service remains a separate legal and financial entity and an independent public sector organisation under the *Public Sector Management Act 2002*.
- There is no change to the current statutory arrangements under the *Rural Fires Act 1997*.
- The Rural Fire Fighting Fund (Fund) will continue to be separately maintained and the resources will continue to be dedicated to the purposes of the *Rural Fires Act 1997*. The NSW Budget Papers are explicit in relation to contributions made by relevant parties to the Fund and I can assure you that there will be no changes to this funding system. Subject to the usual budgetary decision making processes, the current approved levels of expenditure will not be adversely affected.
- The authority of the Commissioner of the Rural Fire Service as the head of the organisation remains unchanged. The Commissioner's line of accountability to the Minister for Emergency Services remains unchanged. This will be reflected in the Commissioner's performance agreement which will continue to be signed by the Minister for Emergency Services. Chief executives will be accountable to the Board, through a performance agreement with the Chair, in relation only to those matters and responsibilities that are within the scope of the Board.
- The Minister for Emergency Services will continue to have responsibility for the current portfolio budget and for bringing forward matters for consideration by the Government. All Ministers in a cluster will be involved in major policy proposals and budget bids. The Minister for Emergency Services will continue to take matters to the Budget Committee where he feels it is required.

The letter contains three more commitments. I will not read them now, but anyone who is interested in reading the letter is free to do so because it is a public document. It was sent to Mr Brian McKinlay of the New South Wales Rural Fire Service Association. That letter confirms the independence of and the Government's commitment to the Rural Fire Service. I had been giving guarantees to the Rural Fire Service Association during the previous weeks, but it was important to produce a letter explicitly expressing those commitments, and that did take some time.

The new departmental structures will impact on the Rural Fire Service only where it can see opportunities to achieve savings through, for example, shared corporate services, and it will be up to the commissioner to determine where he believes that is appropriate. The key commitment that the Rural Fire Service needs from any government or opposition relates to a budget that allows it to do its job and to independently manage its finances. This year the Rural Fire Service budget is a record \$216 million. The proof of this Government's support for the Rural Fire Service is demonstrated by the fact that over the past 14 years its budgets have continued to increase, safety equipment has been continually improved, and tankers and other equipment have been rolled out to ensure that volunteers are safe when they do that vital job of defending our communities.

That is the key commitment that government can make to the volunteers in the Rural Fire Service. This Government has the runs on the board in making that commitment but we do not hear any comment from the Opposition. In contrast, a few months ago the shadow Minister for Small Business phoned a country radio station to criticise the funding arrangement for this State's emergency services of a levy from insurance companies, without offering any alternative. We need to hear from the Leader of The Nationals whether he agrees with his shadow Minister for Small Business that the funding arrangements for the Rural Fire Service, State Emergency Service and the Fire Brigades are not fair and whether he is proposing an alternative. That is a key issue for Rural Fire Service volunteers.

Part of the amendment I have moved is about the volunteers who work in the Rural Fire Service and are not front-line firefighters. Those people do an important job, but one would not know that by listening to the shadow Minister for Emergency Services, also a Nationals member of Parliament, who recently put out several press releases, one in particular criticising the state of readiness of the Rural Fire Service, and suggesting that the 70,000 volunteers are not all front-line firefighters so should not be counted. That was a direct insult. The feedback I have from volunteers is that they felt insulted by the criticism in the shadow Minister's suggestion that people who work in communications, catering, aerial support and equipment are not, and should not be, counted as volunteers in the Rural Fire Service. Of course they should be and it is an absolute insult to them that the shadow Minister made that statement and has still not apologised to those people. That is another challenge for the Opposition. It has an embarrassing shadow Minister who is consistently insulting volunteers and making baseless political comments about the Rural Fire Service, and has openly said to people I have spoken to in the service and in other volunteer services that she is not interested in the facts; she is interested in whether she got a headline. That is not an appropriate approach for a shadow Minister to take to this important group of volunteers.

In his reply today the Leader of The Nationals should distance himself from comments made by his shadow Minister; better still he should stand her down. She is not fit to do the job. She is not willing to understand the real make-up of the Rural Fire Service and she is interested only in political point scoring. The Rural Fire Service should be above politicisation, but today we have seen a motion from the Opposition, which is several months behind because the Premier's letter resolved the issues and, amazingly, up till now there has not been a single media release from the shadow Minister about the independence of the Rural Fire Service. Yet now, some time after the Premier made his commitment, the Leader of The Nationals has moved this motion.

Today I have moved an amendment that brings this motion up to date. It endorses the need for independence of the Rural Fire Service, which the Premier has given commitments to. It does not rule out that we can in some areas like computers, software, financial services software, maybe even legal services, allow it to share services with other agencies. I would be surprised if a Coalition that is constantly berating us about bureaucracy were to rule out something like that in the long term.

Coming into a tough fire season, I appreciate the Leader of The Nationals moving the motion and giving us this opportunity to express our support for the volunteers. It is important to endorse the activities of those volunteers who are not active firefighters but who—like the person I met recently in Griffith who has had 67 years in the Rural Fire Service as a volunteer and was a front-line firefighter for many years—now help with logistics and equipment. If you listen to the shadow Minister you would think that that person should not be counted in the numbers of volunteers for the Rural Fire Service. That comment is offensive to that person.

Today is an opportunity for the House to reinforce for those wonderful, valuable volunteers that their job is just as important as everyone else's and is an integral part of the firefighting efforts for the people of New South Wales. We are coming into a busy fire season. The fire service is well prepared. We have done a record amount of hazard reduction burning in national parks. We have done mechanical and other hazard reduction work around the rest of New South Wales. The Rural Fire Service is well equipped because of record budgets, and that is a result of the great efforts of volunteers and the commitment of this Government. I commend the amendment.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE (Bega) [12.05 p.m.]: I speak in support of the motion by the Leader of The Nationals. In doing so, I will quickly correct the record about what the Minister has just said. The reality is that the shadow Minister has put out in the public domain concerns that we do not have as many volunteers as we need to fight fires around the State. That was her concern. Nobody in the Rural Fire Service is going to be upset about that.

Mr Steve Whan: They are.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: The reason the Minister for Emergency Services has been twisting and turning words is that he is an expert at it. All he is doing is denigrating some of the key issues facing volunteers in the State. To amend a motion so that it completely changes the clear intent of the motion is disingenuous and typical of the member for Monaro. The motion today is about making sure the Rural Fire Service remains a standalone agency. What the Minister has confirmed on the record is that it is not going to be a standalone agency at all. He is talking about shared corporate services with the police and with other emergency service agencies, which is not what we want, it is not what the volunteers want and it is not what the paid professionals within the Rural Fire Service want. The Minister is completely disregarding their concerns, because he has now confirmed on the public record in Parliament that it will not be a standalone agency.

We will not continue to see the important culture and strength that has been built up through the Rural Fire Service over the years maintained because the Government is going to merge it with other emergency services, as confirmed in the Minister's statement in the House five minutes ago when he talked about the sharing of corporate services. That is what the debate is about. The Minister has moved an amendment to the motion amid concerns about information obtained under freedom of information about the active levels of firefighting skill sets within the Rural Fire Service.

The shadow Minister is entitled to address the fact that the Minister for Emergency Services has been running around the community telling everybody there are 70,000 active firefighters in this State when that is simply not the case based on a freedom of information request, which shows the total number of active firefighters is 45,183. There are 76,980 people who have gone through bush fire fighting training. We all recognise—the shadow Minister and all other members of the Liberal-Nationals—the important role that all staff involved with the Rural Fire Service play, be it in catering, be it in planning, be it in firefighting.

Mr Steve Whan: You had better correct your shadow Minister then.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: Let me put on the record what the shadow Minister said in the upper House so it is crystal clear for you. She said:

I do not think there is any argument that the number of volunteers suggested by the Government, through Minister Whan, is the right number over an extended period of time. But I doubt that there are 70,000 active people in the Rural Fire Service currently ...

Can the Minister confirm that number on the record this morning: Can he tell us how many active people there are? He cannot. The Minister plays his spin games, as he has here this morning. He has attempted to amend the motion, which tries to protect the Rural Fire Service by ensuring that it remains a standalone agency. It is very pleasing for the Liberal-Nationals—and I know the Leader of The Nationals will be particularly happy about this—that the Minister has now confirmed there will be a sharing of corporate services between the Rural Fire Service and other emergency services. That is the concern of the Rural Fire Service across the State. I note the member for Blue Mountains is in the Chamber. He will be hearing those concerns around the State better than the Minister will. The Minister is nothing more than a political professional who plays games, spins people's words, but will not get to the crux of the issue.

The Minister has gone around the State trumpeting the figure of 70,000, suggesting that there are 70,000 active firefighters in the State, which is incorrect. That the shadow Minister has pointed out that fact

does not mean she denigrates any volunteer in this State. She merely seeks to ensure that our volunteers have all the necessary support and equipment. That will not happen if the Minister starts mucking around with the culture and expertise, particularly at a corporate level, of the Rural Fire Service. That is what the Minister has confirmed this morning, which is why he has amended the motion.

Mr PHIL KOPERBERG (Blue Mountains—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.10 p.m.]: I speak in support of the amendment, not because I have any difficulty with the substantive motion—and I support my colleague the Minister when he said that the Rural Fire Service, indeed all emergency services, should be above politics and should be treated apolitically—but because we should not miss an opportunity to put on the public record the Parliament's appreciation for what the Rural Fire Service and its sister organisations do for the protection of our communities around the State. Of course, it is not only the volunteers because the Rural Fire Service is made up of in excess of 700 staff personnel, who work long hours during emergencies to ensure that volunteers have the infrastructure and the machinery to do whatever is necessary. They are as committed as the volunteers on the ground.

It is an interesting observation that the majority of salaried staff within the Rural Fire Service found their way to those positions from rank and file volunteer firefighters. That says something about the culture of the organisation. Yes, I did oppose and will continue to oppose any suggestion that might roll the Rural Fire Service into a super department. I recall the last days of the Lewis Government when the State Emergency Service and the Rural Fire Service were amalgamated. Through that process, through that loss of culture the rural firefighting organisation lost about 10,000 members over the space of a couple of years. It was not until the Wran Government came to power that we were able to persuade the then Premier that this situation ought to be reversed. That is why the volunteers, the staff of the Rural Fire Service, members of this House and I are encouraged to hear that the Coalition would not contemplate that, any more than the Government is now contemplating it, as a consequence of the letter of 5 August 2009 from the Premier to Brian McKinlay, President of the New South Wales Rural Fire Service Association, which provides those guarantees.

That having been said, the super department remains in place, but one cannot help but be heartened by the fact that discretion as to what contributions should be made in terms of the super department will be solely that of the commissioners and the board, which is designed to try to identify savings that can be made. The Rural Fire Service is at the forefront of working closely with other organisations to see what savings in corporate services and other areas can be made. There is no objection to that, provided that as a firefighting organisation, as an administrative organisation, as a cultured organisation capable of responding quickly to the needs of communities and volunteer needs, in which it has an unprecedentedly proud record, it is in no way interfered with. The Rural Fire Service, the Minister and I are heartened by the contents of the Premier's letter of 5 August. We would expect that the Government will make no attempt whatsoever, now or in the future, to in any shape or form jeopardise the integrity and the validity of the Rural Fire Service firefighting organisation, its management, culture or anything else.

We need to say as often as we can that the success of the Rural Fire Service is in large part due to the support that it receives from the Government—record funding of \$216 million cannot be denied. It has enabled the Rural Fire Service to go to the very forefront, both nationally and internationally, in the employment of technologies, new firefighting equipment, and exploration of methodologies to better communicate with communities affected by bushfires. The list is endless. A few weeks ago the Leader of The Nationals and I, on behalf of the Minister, Steve Whan, attended several functions in the electorate of Oxley. It is true that the Leader of The Nationals during his address to the Megan brigade pronounced the Coalition's policy on the super department and he was greeted with almost a standing ovation. I am sure it is the Government's intent to ensure that this very important culture, which is the Rural Fire Service, which serves the State like none other ever has or ever will, is preserved in all its integrity. I am buoyed, having administered that organisation for 21 years, by the Minister's assurances, and I am sure that the Rural Fire Service will go from strength to strength.

Mr THOMAS GEORGE (Lismore) [12.15 p.m.]: It gives me great pleasure to recognise the work and contribution to our communities right throughout the State, especially in its role in regional areas, of the Rural Fire Service. The previous speaker, the member for Blue Mountains, who has had almost a lifetime of experience in this area, has commented on the wonderful work that firefighters undertake. However, I was disappointed to hear from the Minister that we are going to have shared corporate services.

Mr Steve Whan: Didn't you listen to what the previous speaker said?

Mr THOMAS GEORGE: Yes, but you are the Minister and I am concerned. The Minister referred to funding and the Rural Fire Service levy on insurance policies. I have expressed concern in the House on a

number of occasions about this issue. I was a past deputy chairman of the Northern Cooperative Meat Company. In one year the fire service levy on its policy went from \$68,000 to \$586,000. In Queensland the limit is \$40,000. If the Government wants to worry about funding, it should fix that problem. Many people in this State do not have any insurance on their properties but when there is a fire on their property they call on the services of the Rural Fire Service. That problem needs to be addressed.

I know that is not within the leave of the motion but the Minister did refer to funding. A representative of the company met the Premier at the time and the person in charge of the Premier's department but they were unable to assist the company. The Minister tried to refute claims on the ABC that the Rural Fire Service would lose its independence but this morning said that corporate services would be shared. That concerns the Opposition. The Leader of The Nationals has moved the motion because in country and regional areas, despite comments about the shadow Minister offending people, not one person from the Rural Fire Service—

Mr Steve Whan: One of your own members went and apologised for her.

Mr THOMAS GEORGE: You have been to Lismore on a fair few occasions because of disasters, but not one person has complained to me about the issue you have presented here this morning. I have heard more concerns about what the Government is doing; none about the shadow Minister. People have written with grave concerns about where the Rural Fire Service is heading. They have expressed uncertainty over the past few months that they may be responsible to the Minister for Police. They are not concerned about what the shadow Minister has said. As the member for Bega rightly pointed out, the shadow Minister's concern was that they keep quoting 76,000 firefighters in this State when only 46,000 firefighters—I think that was the figure mentioned—are at the coalface when there is an outbreak.

The Leader of The Nationals has moved this motion as a matter of priority today and seeks the support of this House. I cannot understand why the Government has sought to amend the motion. The amendment simply says what every member in this House says: that we support rural firefighters. Not one member of this House does not support rural firefighters. And we will continue to support them. The Government's amendment seeks to change the intent of the motion moved by our leader. I certainly will not support the amendment moved by the Government; it simply takes away from the original motion moved by our leader.

Mr PAUL McLEAY (Heathcote) [12.20 p.m.]: I will speak mainly to the Government amendment.

Mr Andrew Constance: Who's the volunteer who complained about Melinda Pavey?

Mr PAUL McLEAY: I will respond to the interjection. The member for Bega speaks about Melinda Pavey. After the Hon. Melinda Pavey denigrated the size of the service, three days later the member for Port Stephens apologised to the members of that brigade. It was the member for Port Stephens who went back to the brigade and apologised. The member for Port Stephens said, "She is wrong; that is not my position." The member for Bega challenged the Minister—about three times—to put on record the 70,000 figure. We have put on record that there are 70,000 volunteers. We have said it time and again. The Premier's letter said it, we have put it in writing, and we have put it on the record. Even now members opposite continue to say by way of interjection that there are not 70,000 active firefighters.

What we say is that the Rural Fire Service is a part of active firefighting, in communications, aerial support and victualling. We think that is just as important a part of the service as are the active firefighters. The fact that the member for Bega continues to attack the service as an element of spin is offensive. He should talk to the secretaries of his brigades, who may or may not be active firefighters. He should talk to the people who prepare the orange juice and sausages when the firefighters get back from fighting fires and tell them that he thinks they do not count, which is what he is doing.

That is not the view of the Rural Fire Service Association. The association had legitimate concerns. It is the association's role as a non-government organisation to question some of the decisions of government, which it did. It did so actively and forcefully. The Government was then able to respond to those concerns. The Minister for Police and the Premier were then able to come back to the association with a package, to which the association said, "On this basis, we intend to communicate to our membership that a compromise position has been agreed to." The association went on to say that whilst its members still prefer no super department, they believe that the current position is workable, that it is an important outcome and that they are very proud of the outcome.

Opposition members firstly question the number of volunteers, which is offensive. Even once that has been clarified, they continue to say that it is not good enough and that the volunteers do not count, which is also offensive. Opposition members also continue to belittle the hard work of the Rural Fire Service Association, and

say that the association has got it wrong as well. Even though the association has won what I believe is a clear and good victory, Opposition members are now saying that that is not good enough for them either. It simply goes to show the Opposition's immaturity and its lack of readiness to govern. That really is what most of the people in the community are concerned about.

In the Heathcote area, we are getting prepared for the current fire season—and it will be very busy and very big. The Sutherland brigades have already conducted two hazard reduction burns in Menai. I am sure Madam Acting-Speaker would know about them. Hazard reduction burns are also planned for Illawong, Loftus and Menai. Menai has been able to have the hazard reduction burns as it has the most properties with a westerly aspect in the shire and the fuel dries out there first. Already this fire season support has been provided for Macquarie, Gosford and Hornsby hazard reduction burns. Woronora station, which is on the Woronora River, is floating and operational. It is a unique situation there: it is a river-based brigade and the fire station floats on piers and the boats simply drive in. The brigade always has a significant static water supply, being the Woronora River, and water is pumped straight from the river.

We have had ongoing liaison and training with the National Parks and Wildlife Service to achieve smooth operational communications, and that will continue and I encourage that. We sent local crews to the Victorian fires in January. This House has heard many stories about the Victorian fire tragedies. We also sent crews to Shoalhaven. Under section 44 we sent five tankers and replaced five tankers with rotating crews during the fires there. We are conducting ongoing community educational programs. Street meetings and an annual open day in Bundeena alone attracted more than 100 people, which is fantastic given that it is such a small town. It shows that people are interested in the programs and want to be part of them. I look forward to Engadine station opening this Saturday, when we will also hand over two tankers to Bundeena and Kurnell stations. This weekend the Sutherland shire will also hold the Rural Fire Service and National Medal Presentation, which will honour over 260 years of combined experience. I also look forward to the large-scale hazard reduction to be conducted at the Cataract scout camp later in September. I support the amendment.

Mr ANDREW STONER (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [12.25 p.m.], in reply: I thank the Minister for Emergency Services, the member for Bega, the member for Blue Mountains, who spoke with a lot of dignity and not a lot of political content, the member for Lismore and the member for Heathcote for their contributions to this debate. The Minister for Emergency Services, as I predicted in my initial contribution, sought to amend the motion. Again as predicted, the amendment that has been moved totally neuters the motion. It effectively deletes the commitment that the members of the Rural Fire Service want from this Government. I will not support the amendment, for a couple of reasons apart from the fact that it completely changes the original motion and sidesteps the issue of commitment.

The second paragraph of the amendment is patronising. The paragraph asks the House to recognise the need for Rural Fire Service volunteers to be confident of the independence of the Rural Fire Service. The Minister is simply telling the volunteers they need to accept the non-commitment that they have had from the Premier. Frankly, that is insulting to the volunteers; it is patronising. Paragraph 4 of the amendment makes reference to the fact that recent criticisms of volunteers who work in communications, catering, aerial support and equipment is not warranted. That is simply wrong. I quote from a letter from the shadow Minister for Emergency Services to the Rural Fire Service Association, in which she says:

There are a number of wonderful volunteers in support roles such as the catering brigades. However, I don't think they make up the difference in the advertised volunteers compared to the actual number of active volunteers. I am forwarding the RFSA a copy of the document.

I will come back to that issue, because the Minister, predictably, sought to politicise the whole motion and cloud the issues. The question is: Will the Government roll the Rural Fire Service into a super department, yes or no? That question has not been answered. The Minister referred to commitment in relation to the budget and authority of the Rural Fire Service commissioner, but his comments are mealy mouthed. They do not demonstrate the commitment that is sought by the Rural Fire Service, the volunteers of which do not want to be under the control of the police commissioner or any paid bureaucrat other than the Rural Fire Service commissioner.

The Minister got political. He clouded the issue, he attacked the shadow Minister for Small Business, who criticised the method of Rural Fire Service funding and not the quantum of it. The shadow Minister for Small Business criticised the fact that the Government is increasing the cost of insurance in New South Wales and driving down insurance take-up. The political attack continued on the shadow Minister for Emergency Services, who, through a freedom of information request, found that the Government's figure of 70,000 that it had been bandying around—leading the public to believe there is an active volunteer contingent of that

number—is simply wrong. The shadow Minister for Emergency Services never insulted any volunteers; she insulted the Government for fudging the figures. There are about 35,000 trained, active Rural Fire Service Brigade members.

The shadow Minister makes the point that even when you count the number of other volunteers in these support roles, it still does not add up to 70,000. That is no insult whatsoever to the volunteers. The Minister attacked the shadow Minister for not issuing a single media release about the structure of the Rural Fire Service. Actions speak louder than words. As soon as Parliament resumed, precedence for the motion was sought in order to obtain the commitment that the Rural Fire Service wants. The Minister clarified in his contribution that he fully intends the assets and resources of the Rural Fire Service to be shared with other agencies. The intent is clear, and that is essentially a loss of independence by that agency. When it comes to corporate services one can conclude only that job cuts are on the way. That is why the Minister has sidestepped completely the original motion and moved an amendment.

Mr Steve Whan: Point of order: The member is misleading the House about comments I have made. There are already shared corporate services from the Rural Fire Service.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarrity): Order! There is no point of order. The Leader of The Nationals has the call.

Mr ANDREW STONER: That is why the Minister has introduced an amendment to neuter the motion and to avoid a commitment to maintain the Rural Fire Service as a standalone agency.

Question—That the amendment be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 48

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|-------------|--------------|-----------------|
| Mr Amery | Ms Gadiel | 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 Burney | Ms Keneally | Mr Stewart |
| Ms Burton | Mr Khoshaba | Ms Tebbutt |
| Mr Campbell | Mr Koperberg | Mr Terenzini |
| Mr Collier | Mr Lalich | Mr Tripodi |
| Mr Coombs | Mr Lynch | Mr West |
| Mr Corrigan | Mr McBride | Mr Whan |
| Mr Costa | Dr McDonald | |
| Mr Daley | Ms McKay | |
| Ms D'Amore | Mr McLeay | <i>Tellers,</i> |
| Ms Firth | Ms McMahan | Mr Ashton |
| Mr Furolo | Ms Megarrity | Mr Martin |

Noes, 38

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|----------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Mr Aplin | Mr Hazzard | Mr Roberts |
| Mr Baird | Ms Hodgkinson | Mrs Skinner |
| Mr Baumann | Mrs Hopwood | Mr Smith |
| Ms Berejiklian | Mr Humphries | Mr Souris |
| Mr Besseling | 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 J. D. Williams |
| Mrs Fardell | Mr Page | Mr R. C. Williams |
| Mr Fraser | Mr Piper | <i>Tellers,</i> |
| Ms Goward | Mr Provest | Mr George |
| Mrs Hancock | Mr Richardson | Mr Maguire |

Pair

Mr Gibson

Mr Piccoli

Question resolved in the affirmative.**Amendment agreed to.****Motion as amended agreed to.****PARLIAMENTARY REMUNERATION AMENDMENT (SALARY PACKAGING) BILL 2009****Message received from the Legislative Council returning the bill without amendment.****MYALL RIVER SYSTEM****Business called on, and postponed on motion by Mr Craig Baumann.****HELICOPTER RESCUE AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES****Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER** (North Shore—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [12.40 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that on 23 September 1973 Ian Badham ran the first training day for Australia's first civil helicopter rescue service;
- (2) notes the 35th anniversary of helicopter emergency medical services and search and rescue in New South Wales;
- (3) commends the 35 years of hard work and the dedication of Ian Badham in building up NRMA CareFlight; and
- (4) condemns the Government's decision to kill off the community sponsored world class services offered by Careflight in favour of foreign, for profit operator CHC.

I gave notice of this motion on 23 September 2008, 35 years after the first training day for Australia's first civil helicopter rescue service on 23 September 1973. That is noted in the first part of the motion. The motion also notes the thirty-fifth anniversary of helicopter emergency medical services and search and rescue services in New South Wales and commends the 35 years of hard work and dedication of Ian Badham in building up NRMA CareFlight. This motion should receive the support of all members of the House. Most members would be well aware of the fantastic work that CareFlight has done over many years. Sadly, a couple of years ago CareFlight lost its government contract to a Canadian for-profit organisation. Since then, we have heard many reports of problems in relation to that service. CareFlight remains in existence today, but not through any support from this Government. In fact, it receives no funding from the Government.

Mr Paul McLeay: CareFlight? I think it gets financial support.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: CareFlight is not funded by the State Government. It is funded by the insurance industry to undertake a head injury retrieval trial. Government members are trying to suggest that CareFlight is funded by the State Government. CareFlight receives no State government funding. It receives a direct grant from an insurance company because of the valuable service CareFlight provides taking trauma doctors to people with head injury sustained in road and other accidents. One of the most well-known cases is that of young Sophie Delezio. When she was involved in the second accident, CareFlight doctors flew to the scene to treat and stabilise her, and they were credited with saving her life. A former health Minister, Dr Andrew Refshauge, is the current chairman of CareFlight. Government members may have seen the error of their ways and realised the axing of CareFlight was a very poor decision.

That first training session 35 years ago was held to prepare rescue experts and paramedics for Australia's first civil rescue helicopter service. In 1973 dedicated professionals started what would become one of the premier medical helicopter rescue services in the world. A 36-member team formally launched the Wales Bank Sydney Surf Life Saving Association Rescue Helicopter Service on the October long weekend in 1973. The same core group of professionals went on to form what is now known as the NRMA CareFlight rescue

helicopter service. If it were not for the hard work of people like Ian Badham and others, many people would not have received the vital care they needed in order to save their lives. Literally thousands of people owe their lives to the dedicated professionals who founded these rescue helicopter services.

It is a tribute to their pioneering spirit that helicopter rescue services that began 35 years ago on 23 September 1973 continue to save lives across New South Wales today, particularly through the Head Injury Retrieval Program. However, the State Labor Government dispensed with the community rescue helicopters when it appointed a profit-driven foreign company in December 2006. Since then the foreign operator, CHC, has proven to be hugely expensive—compared with the CareFlight service, which was largely a community and corporate sponsorship funded service—and plagued with problems, in particular, the aircraft itself. The Government was short sighted in signing off on helicopters that did not have proper air conditioning.

Last summer we heard stories of desperate attempts by the CHC service to cool its helicopters because medical staff were unable to provide treatment in the confines of the craft due to the extreme temperatures. Some helicopters were grounded because doctors were sick and vomiting and unable to treat very ill patients. There were stories of emergency landings and other problems. It was a sad day when the fantastic NRMA CareFlight service was dispensed with as a community rescue service, and the surf life saving helicopter service, which provided a fantastic service over many years and still performs sea rescues.

This thirty-fifth anniversary is a reminder that the State Government has abandoned these hardworking professionals. Over the years I have met many of the people who operated CareFlight: doctors, nurses, paramedics, pilots, and Ian Badham, the founder of the service. I am sure that Government members have met them as well. They are an amazing group of professionals who are on call night and day. I have seen films of some of the incredible vertical retrievals they have performed on winches in difficult circumstances, such as in the Blue Mountains. If the people they rescued had had to wait for land retrieval, their outcome would not have been as positive. The CareFlight helicopter service doctors also work in trauma teams in our emergency departments. They are highly skilled doctors who give up their time freely because they know the importance of the CareFlight work.

This service has developed a reputation worldwide. Overseas it is held up as a model of how to run a medical retrieval service. It is not merely an ambulance transport service; it takes doctors and paramedics to the scene of injuries. Returning to the Head Injury Retrieval Program, I do not think the final results have been published but I understand that the early findings are incredibly promising. Taking skilled trauma surgeons and specialists to patients has saved many lives and lessened the impact of terrible injuries. The prognosis for the victims is so much better because they are stabilised where they sustained the injury before they are transported to hospital for further treatment.

It is a fantastic service and I am sure that everybody in this Chamber will join me willingly in supporting the motion and congratulating the people who had the foresight to found this service all those years ago—particularly Ian Badham, who is such a champion of the service and who has stayed involved with it for all that time. I do not know how many members are on the service's email list for press releases and information, but CareFlight would undertake a dozen retrievals a week, with very happy outcomes for the majority of patients. Many of the patients are young people with very serious injuries, and I know that many of their families have rallied in support of CareFlight. Many others in the community also continue to support the service even though it no longer has the full support of the Government.

Ms LYLEA McMAHON (Shellharbour—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.50 p.m.]: I move:

That the motion be amended by leaving out paragraph (4).

The New South Wales Government recognises the important contribution made by NRMA CareFlight. Former helicopter operators such as NRMA CareFlight, along with others over the years, have made a valuable contribution to the emergency medical services helicopters as they progressed from the initial volunteer services to subsidised charitable organisations. In May 2007, following a public tender, the Ambulance Service of New South Wales upgraded its emergency medical services helicopters for the greater Sydney area. The decision to award the contract to CHC was not a criticism of NRMA CareFlight or of the lifesaver service but rather the result of an expert assessment of the best option for delivering and operating the upgraded helicopter service in the coming years. CHC was able to bring alternative aircraft on line to maintain service—a capacity that was not available to the ambulance service before the commencement of this contract.

Since the implementation of the new contract, the ambulance service has negotiated a commercial contract with CareFlight to continue to supply some of the medical staff for the air ambulance helicopter

service. The ambulance service now has five larger and more capable emergency medical helicopters operating from bases in Wollongong, Orange and Sydney, under a strict commercial contract. The new dedicated back-up aircraft are due to come on line in early 2010, providing even greater service continuity.

Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [12.52 p.m.]: I well and truly support the motion moved by the member for North Shore. It is almost one year since she gave notice of her intention to move the motion, which proves again that this House does not run as efficiently as it should. We should have debated this matter a long time ago. I condemn the Government not only for killing off the community-sponsored world-class services but also for moving an amendment to delete part of the motion moved by the member for North Shore. The CareFlight service is fantastic. I congratulate CareFlight on its many years of valuable service to the community, saving lives just about every day.

A number of years ago, Riley, a young student of Asquith Public School, and his mother were involved in a terrible road accident in a rural area outside Sydney. Riley lay on the roadside, critically injured. He sustained multiple fractures, particularly in his neck area, and was in a very poor condition. His were definitely life-threatening injuries. This boy was retrieved by CareFlight, and owes his life to the service. CareFlight's management of the situation contributed significantly to the fact that today that little boy is now a young man attending Ku-ring-gai Creative Arts High School. I give CareFlight the absolutely highest commendation for its work. Its operators are highly trained and have excellent skills. They have made, and still make, a wonderful contribution in dealing with accidents and the many other incidents that they are called to attend.

I will relate a little of the history of CareFlight. Twenty-three years ago a group of doctors had a shared vision to create a better medical retrieval service in New South Wales. They believed that very sick patients who needed to be moved between hospitals and severely injured patients who needed to be treated at the accident scene should be attended by critical care specialists who could perform physician-only procedures. From that vision CareFlight was born. My electorate comprises a large area of national park and a number of famous walks, including the Great North Walk. CareFlight has assisted in the retrieval of people who sustained injuries along those walks. The service has also helped a number of people who sustained injuries while participating in the Duke of Edinburgh Scheme, as well as a number of older people who sustained injuries while walking in the national park. CareFlight retrieved those people and contributed to their recovery.

The head injury retrieval team visited my electorate and opened its helicopter for inspection. The staff gave interviews and handed out information to the general public. It was a wonderful display of the skills of the CareFlight staff that we have almost come to take for granted. The head injury retrieval trial is a major clinical trial that aims to demonstrate that the delivery of trauma physician management to accident scenes could improve outcomes for head injury patients. NRMA CareFlight conducted the trial in partnership with the NRMA and the Ambulance Service of New South Wales. The trial involved sending a specialist doctor and paramedic directly to sites where people had sustained a severe head injury. Sydney has twice the rate of severe disability in head injury survivors than cities such as London, Basel and Maribor in Slovenia. Unlike Sydney, those cities have a system that involves a physician accessing a head-injured patient within 15 minutes of injury. As the member for North Shore mentioned, we have not seen the final results of the trial but the preliminary findings are very promising. The trial—I have met the doctors and I know this for a fact—revealed the excellent skills that the highly trained personnel use at accident scenes.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS (Hawkesbury) [12.57 p.m.]: It is an absolute privilege to speak in support of the CareFlight helicopter service, which has been around since 1973. If it had not been for the work of people such as Ian Badham and others, many more lives most certainly would have been lost in the years since then. The service has become an absolute icon in this country, and has saved the lives of many, many thousands of people across the land. It is a tribute to the pioneering spirit that the helicopter rescue service, which began 35 years ago, continues to save lives across New South Wales today—especially, as the previous speaker said, through the Head Injury Retrieval Program. The program is operated by CareFlight, which—it is worth pointing out—receives non-government funding. It was a great pleasure to be able to visit the site at Westmead recently with the shadow Minister for Health Jillian Skinner, the member for Lane Cove, the then shadow Minister for Emergency Services, and the member for Baulkham Hills. We had a wonderful tour of the facilities. Of course, the supply of night vision goggles was raised.

CareFlight has played a major role in the evolution of critical care transport in Australia, having been a leader in research and development of both systems and equipment employed in retrieval medicine. Out of this

research has emerged NRMA CareFlight's head injury retrieval trial. Members have mentioned the major clinical trial undertaken to evaluate the impact of advanced pre-hospital medical interventions in the treatment of severe head injury. CareFlight was incorporated in May 1986 and in July that year its first patients were flown from Lithgow to Sydney following an horrific car crash. In December 1987 a fisherman was rescued after falling down a cliff at Bluefish Point, Manly, at night. That was 22 years ago, but CareFlight was already demonstrating its expertise at rescuing injured people in the dark.

In January 1990 CareFlight implemented a medical registrar training scheme after becoming the first Australasian non-hospital organisation to be granted accreditation for specialist training in critical care. In February that year, the then New South Wales Minister for Health, Peter Collins, opened the Westmead operations base that I recently visited. In July 1991 CareFlight retrieved its 2,000th patient, and in March 1992 Chief Pilot John Hoad received the HAI Bravery Award for a rescue operation carried out at Bungonia Gorge at night. That was many years before the introduction of night goggles.

In August 1996 a 13-year-old girl was rescued from the flooded Nepean River—just next door to my electorate—seconds before she was swept over a weir. The NRMA CareFlight crew involved in that rescue were later recognised for their bravery with a number of prestigious international awards—and quite rightly so. In December of that same year CareFlight rescued seven sailors from the stricken yacht *Business Post Naiad* during wild storms in the Sydney Hobart Yacht Race. The crew involved later received the Prince Phillip Award and wide-ranging recognition for its rescue efforts. The list goes on. In January 2003 New South Wales CareFlight medical teams attended the Waterfall train crash, in which seven people were killed. They were involved in triaging, treating and transporting injured people to hospital. This is an incredible history of success. ChildFlight was the inspiration and vision of Councillor and Mayor of Hawkesbury, Bart Bassett, who is a very experienced helicopter pilot. In September 2005 NRMA CareFlight retrieved its 14,000th patient. The list goes on, and the achievements are many and varied. The success of NRMA CareFlight can never be underestimated and I am very proud to be able to speak about it in this House.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER (North Shore—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [1.02 p.m.], in reply: It disappoints me that the Government has tried to pretend that all is well with the CHC Helicopter Corporation service. Clearly it is not. Evidence exists that the tender process was not fair and that the reasons the Government said it awarded the contract to CHC have not been vindicated. The service is more expensive and less efficient, and it is not providing the service it was contracted to provide. I do not see how the Government can claim on any grounds that it was a good decision. It stands condemned and the Opposition will definitely vote against the amendment.

It is amazing that members have not read and heard the great stories about what is happening with CareFlight beyond the Government's rejection of it as the preferred provider of the main service. Members on this side of the House appreciate the wonderful work of these amazing doctors, paramedics and aircrew on behalf of the people of the State—long may they continue to provide that service. Should any member of this House of any political persuasion need the help and support of CareFlight I sincerely hope they remember what they said today about the fairness of the tender process. It was not fair and the selection process was flawed. The Government should stand condemned for trying to justify its decision when the evidence clearly proves that it was wrong.

The motion congratulates Ian Badham and his associates who, 35 years ago last year, set up the first rescue helicopter service in New South Wales. They went on to develop what has become the model of medical retrieval services around the world. As the member for Hawkesbury said, I recently visited the CareFlight base at Westmead together with him, local Mayor Bart Bassett and others. We met some of the overseas operators working there, who confirmed that the service is held up as a model for the rest of the world. In fact, CareFlight is still very much involved in international retrievals. The staff tell incredible stories, which could easily be used as the basis for a television program. I am sure that some enterprising producer will see that potential. Iconic organisations such as the Royal Flying Doctor Service, CareFlight and the Westpac Life Saver Rescue Helicopter should have the support of all members. They should be restored as the principal retrieval services for the benefit of people across this State.

Question—That the amendment be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 50

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

Noes, 37

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

Pair

Mr Gibson

Mr Hartcher

Question resolved in the affirmative.**Amendment agreed to.****Motion as amended agreed to.****KINGS HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENTS**

Mr STEVE WHAN (Monaro—Minister for Emergency Services, and Minister for Small Business)
[1.17 p.m.]: I move:

That this House welcomes improvements to the Kings Highway being undertaken as a result of a joint commitment by the New South Wales, Federal and Australian Capital Territory Labor Governments.

I gave notice of this motion a year ago, 23 September 2008, but unusually it is just as relevant today as it was then. Work is continuing on the Kings Highway. It has been positive work and will be positive work for the whole region over a considerable time. For members who do not know it, the Kings Highway runs from Queanbeyan to Batemans Bay, where it meets up with the Princes Highway on the South Coast. It is an important highway for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is a major commuter link for people in the Monaro electorate who live in Braidwood and Bungendore as well as for people on the South Coast who commute to Canberra to access a large range of services. Canberra Hospital, as we have discussed on many occasions, is the

tertiary hospital for our region and the Kings Highway is one of the major links to it. The Kings Highway is a commuter link for many of my constituents who work in Canberra and Queanbeyan and who commute from outer areas, whether rural and residential areas along the highway or in the towns of Bungendore and Braidwood.

The Kings Highway is also the major tourist route for people travelling from Canberra to the South Coast to go to the beach. As a result it can have quite high peak loads, but overall it has reasonable loads. The NRMA has done a number of studies on the Kings Highway over the years. The most recent one I have read highlighted a number of issues. The study found that the Kings Highway is not at capacity and that it will be some years before it reaches capacity, but that it needs additional overtaking opportunities. The study also found that it needs additional run-off areas on the side of the road—that is, widening the road to give drivers somewhere to go when trying to avoid colliding with someone travelling in the opposite direction on the wrong side of the road—and improvement to some curves in the road.

In the six and a bit years that I have been a member of this House I have focused on those areas. A number of areas on the Kings Highway have had improvements to curves and bridges widened to make the curves near them safer. A huge amount of the road has been resealed. The Kings Highway between Queanbeyan and Braidwood particularly has had significant improvements to the surface. It is a much better quality road than it was six years ago when I was elected as the local member.

As part of that work additional overtaking lanes have been constructed, including an additional overtaking lane towards the top of Clyde Mountain, a challenging area. It is very difficult to construct a road going down a mountain—obviously, it cannot be a straight four-lane road. An area at the top of the mountain near the Monga National Park needs improvement and is a high priority. The Government has constructed one overtaking lane, which was an important achievement. Improvements were made to bridgework in between that part of the Kings Highway at the top of the Clyde Mountain and Braidwood.

Recently an overtaking lane was opened 15 kilometres east of Bungendore, an area in which overtaking lanes are important. People travelling west from the coast to Canberra use the overtaking lane. It is an important achievement, which will help reduce driver frustration and enable them to overtake slower vehicles. I hope that the new overtaking lane will reduce attempts by drivers to overtake in unsafe conditions. The bulk of the work being done on the highway is the result of a \$36 million dollar project funded jointly by the Commonwealth, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory governments. The New South Wales Government has allocated \$10 million while the Commonwealth Government is providing the balance, with the Australian Capital Territory making a contribution to that part which is in its Territory.

That project came out of the decision by the Commonwealth to build defence headquarters along the Kings Highway. Studies showed significant additional traffic was expected to result from the building of the defence headquarters. Even though the former Federal Government made the decision to build the defence headquarters, it did not allocate sufficient money to improve the roads. I am grateful to Mike Kelly for the work he has done since he was elected to find the \$23.3 million to undertake the work. The section of road between Queanbeyan and the new defence headquarters will be upgraded, with the Rudd Government allocating \$23.3 million, the New South Wales Government allocating \$10 million and the Australian Capital Territory providing the balance.

The alignment of the road out of Queanbeyan as it goes up a steep hill and around a corner will be improved. Currently environmental studies are being undertaken and I acknowledge that some nearby residents are opposed to the project. This is a sensible alignment for the betterment and safety of people in the region. Substantial improvement has been undertaken to provide a roundabout on Captains Flat Road and to widen the road between that area and the New South Wales-Australian Capital Territory border. The project will provide an additional overtaking opportunity for motorists travelling towards Queanbeyan. As the NRMA reported, this is for safety and run-off areas.

The Australian Capital Territory section of the road, which up until now has been the worst part of the Kings Highway—the NRMA assessment showed this as well—will have a completely new alignment. This will include additional overtaking lanes for cars travelling east to the defence headquarters. I have to admit to some frustration about the length of time that the Australian Capital Territory's planning process has taken. Originally there was an excellent alignment for the road. However, as is often the case in the Australian Capital Territory, the project involved a threatened species area and we had to go back to the drawing board. A design company has now been allocated the contract design for that portion of the highway. I hope that progress will be made

soon on a new alignment, which I anticipate being to the east of the current alignment, that is, closer to the New South Wales border. It will involve the addition of overtaking lanes, and wider and smoother alignments on that section of the road.

This project is the biggest single investment in the Kings Highway in the past 20 years. It is a great credit to the way that Labor governments are working together in partnership to achieve it. Mike Kelly, the Federal member, broke the deadlock when he was elected. New South Wales added \$10 million to assist and the Australian Capital Territory also came to the party. Without exception that is the first time we have seen that level of cooperation on this road, for which all three governments are responsible. Talking with people in the Monaro electorate and consultation with State planning in Cooma recently provided feedback that people are pleased to see such a level of cooperation between Federal and State members, rather than having a go at each other in the media. These projects are the result of this relationship.

At times the people of Bungendore have been cynical about what I have promised and whether it will eventuate. The new road will be a magnificent improvement for commuters from Bungendore. I am sure they are pleased that a lot of it is now under way. This project is the single biggest improvement on the Kings Highway. If the member for Bega has any time to speak I am sure he will highlight the lower part of the Kings Highway towards the coast. I have met with the Eurobodalla Shire Council, which has highlighted sections of the road that need improvement, and I will draw that to the attention of the Roads and Traffic Authority. I agree that not all work on the Kings Highway is finished; more work is needed. However, in the area that I represent significant progress has been made and that is something positive for the residents of the region.

Over time we will continue to improve other areas, particularly alignments and safety opportunities on the road. Those measures will reduce the road toll on that road and reduce the risks for people who travel on it. In the past people in the Australian Capital Territory have suggested that we should build a four-lane dual carriageway all the way to the coast. We must all accept that the level of traffic would not justify such a road. No government would allocate billions of dollars to such a project in the next 15 or 20 years at least. We must keep improving the current road and upgrading its alignments. We are seeing good results in that regard.

The Kings Highway upgrade builds on the work done on roads such as the Monaro Highway, where two additional overtaking lanes were built between Queanbeyan and Cooma—I am working towards additional lanes—and a new bridge was built over Native Dog Creek. Incidentally, when Labor came to government it was a dirt road to the Victorian border and a truck could not travel the length of it. It is now a B-double suitable route all the way as a result of the Labor Government's investment in roads in the region. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE (Bega) [1.27 p.m.]: It is important to acknowledge the need for more work to be done on the Kings Highway. The Minister for Emergency Services has had a very busy morning: he has been debating motions all morning. His approach in the last debate was somewhat interesting. It has resulted in a press release from the Rural Fire Service Association, which said the original motion of the New South Wales National Party Leader, Andrew Stoner—

Mr Steve Whan: Point of order: The member for Bega knows that he is out of order in raising a motion that has already been debated in this place. He should return to the leave of the motion about the Kings Highway.

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

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: I was transgressing by stating what the Rural Fire Service Association had to say and helping the Minister by informing him of what was being said after the last debate. In 2006 the NRMA issued a statement which indicated that accidents on the Kings Highway cost about \$40,000 every day. This highway is incredibly unforgiving and dangerous in a number of areas. Although the Minister has cited some of those areas, it is important to acknowledge that we have not seen the same degree of emphasis by the Roads and Traffic Authority on the Kings Highway as on other highways and, as a result, terrible accidents have occurred. It is horrific for communities on the far South Coast to endure the loss of members of their communities because of fatal accidents on the highway. The Minister referred to sections of the highway between Braidwood and the Clyde, and sections around Bungendore. Horrendous accidents involving families have occurred on those sections of the highway, and those events can affect lives forever.

I believe there is a real need for a five-year plan to be developed to improve sections along the Kings Highway. The Minister spoke about overtaking lanes. The need for an overtaking lane heading towards Canberra from Batemans Bay, between the top of the Clyde and Braidwood, must be addressed. The road there has no shoulder whatsoever, it is built to 1940s standard, and yet we continue to have statements from the Government that the highway is not at capacity. I would argue otherwise. The highway, given its current state of repair, is well and truly beyond capacity. For the Minister to say that the highway is not at capacity is misleading the House and the community, and is justification for the Roads and Traffic Authority not doing the necessary work.

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

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

PRIME TELEVISION PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU CLOSURE

Ministerial Statement

Mr NATHAN REES (Toongabbie—Premier, and Minister for the Arts) [2.15 p.m.]: I advise the House of sad news for the Parliament, for the media, and for the people of country New South Wales with Prime television's closure of its Parliament House bureau. Not only does this mean the loss of a vital media outlet; it means the departure of one of the most respected and admired figures in the State's media sector, George Wood, and his friend and colleague, cameraman Sam Catford. George is one of the absolute gentlemen of the media. He is all class—professional, credible, and trustworthy. George is always objective, but never at the cost of being warm and approachable. He is never prey to gamesmanship or cynicism, and he is never glib about politics and its importance in the life of our community.

Like Brian Henderson and Laurie Oakes, George Wood is one of those reassuring figures who convey not only authority but decency and integrity as well. Those qualities will be missed on thousands of television screens, as will Sam's steady hand and clear eye that put George's stories to air every night with such clarity and style. George is old school in the best sense of the term—a newshound who would travel anywhere for a good story. All of us in government over the past decade will miss the sight of George and Sam at the bottom of Governor Macquarie Tower hovering patiently for a good yarn. And there is a patch of grass in the level 9 garden here at Parliament House that will finally get a chance to grow back!

Above all else, George loved and loves regional New South Wales. His commitment was solely and squarely to the millions of people who live outside Sydney—millions of people who do not necessarily care what goes in Leichhardt or Lindfield but who feel deeply that they want to be included and informed in the issues and decisions that shape their future. Drought, locust plagues, floods, water supplies—these are issues that make an occasional colour story in the metropolitan media but which are the lifeblood of country communities, something George understood passionately.

Back in July, for example, fire ripped through the main street of Gilgandra. It got hardly a blip in the Sydney media, but it was a life-changing event for this town. George was on to the Minister for Regional Development straightaway, asking, "What are you going to do about it?" And within a day George was able to convey the good news to the Gilgandra community of a New South Wales Government rescue package to help them rebuild. That is the sort of insight and reassurance that George Wood delivered to country families in his nightly bulletin—a service, regrettably, that will be no more.

George Wood is an unforgettable figure in this era of parliamentary politics in New South Wales. All who worked with George will remember him with affection and respect. Few of us in this House, if any, will survey George's career feeling that he ever once betrayed a confidence, welched on a deal or twisted a story unfairly. He is a true gentleman of the press gallery. Assets to this Parliament, and invaluable to rural families, George and Sam will be much missed. We bid them a fond and thankful farewell.

Mr ANDREW STONER (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [2.20 p.m.]: I join the Premier in acknowledging the gentlemen of the gallery, George Wood and Sam Catford. Indeed, they have for a long time been friends of all the non-metropolitan members of the Parliament, making sure that the Macquarie Street media got beyond the Sydney Basin. Certainly their presence on the nightly news bulletins across country and coastal New South Wales will be sorely missed. George is unique in press conferences. I recall that at the time

the Australian Rugby Union announced that Australia would host the 2003 World Cup George bowled up, in front of the international media, with the question, "Will Cootamundra be allocated a World Cup fixture?" When told no, he asked, "Why not!" And rightly so, George!

I recall when Morris Iemma gave his first press conference as Premier. A question was being put to the new Premier about infighting within the Labor Party—things do not change too much—and George got in with the first question about a doctor's dispute in Albury. That is the way it ought to be, George: regional New South Wales first and foremost. George has a distinguished background in the media. He has been a working journalist for more than 25 years, with experience in print, radio and television. He fittingly completed his journalism degree at the Charles Sturt University at Bathurst. He got his start at the *Illawarra Mercury* in Wollongong.

Mr David Campbell: A great newspaper.

Mr ANDREW STONER: A very good newspaper. Working at the *Illawarra Mercury* provided George with a solid grounding in all forms of reporting, from rounds to sport and a stint with a specialist investigative team. He worked in radio with the ABC in Wollongong and Cairns. He has been a senior reporter on WIN Television and, more recently, with Prime. Sam, as the Premier said, has a steady hand and good eye and, of course, was the custodian of fluffy. He did an excellent job of looking after fluffy the microphone. As the Leader of the Opposition commented to me, Sam usually asked the best questions. George and Sam, we will sorely miss you. We cannot understand why Prime has made this decision. We want you back!

The SPEAKER: The House joins me in thanking George and Sam for their significant contributions, particularly to the electorates outside the Sydney central business district. They have had an enormous influence in getting the information out of this place and into our regional communities. To George and Sam, we extend our congratulations and thanks for your contributions. This has been a short-sighted decision by the Prime executives.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of Motions

Government Business Notices of Motions (for Bills) given.

QUESTION TIME

[*Question time commenced at 2.27 p.m.*]

HOSPITALS PERFORMANCE

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: I direct my question to the Premier. The most recent official State figures reveal hospitals such as Nepean, Blue Mountains, Wyong and Gosford are failing to meet Government emergency performance benchmarks, yet the Premier told Parliament yesterday that our hospital performance was "the best in Australia". Is the Premier delusional, deceptive or dopey?

Mr NATHAN REES: Assessments of the New South Wales hospital system by the Commonwealth Government and the Australian Medical Association—historically no friend of Australian Labor Governments—have said that New South Wales has the best performing hospitals in Australia.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: Tell that to the people in the Nepean, Blue Mountains, Wyong and Gosford.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition has asked his question and he will allow the Premier to respond.

Mr NATHAN REES: New South Wales has a record health budget in excess of \$15 billion, there is more hospital construction in New South Wales than in any other State in Australia, every day hundreds of procedures are performed without incident, every day hundreds of babies are born without incident and every day thousands of people are presenting to our emergency departments in what is the best hospital system in the world. In the face of demand for a health system that grows in the order of 8 per cent each year, yes, the system does have its challenges. Faced with an 8 per cent growth in demand plus a pandemic of swine flu, yes, it will have challenges.

The Commonwealth Government has kicked off a review process for the delivery of health services across Australia. In due course New South Wales will make a submission to that review process. First, it will identify the top 10 cost drivers and demand drivers for the health system in Australia, not just now but into the future. The submission will also take into account the ageing of the population and recognise that diabetes, cardiovascular disease, obesity and renal failure are some of the biggest causes of increase for demand not just now but into the future. We then need to work out the models of care. We will then need to work out who will run each piece of the system. We will then need to have a discussion about how much we will fund it. We will contribute to the Commonwealth reform agenda.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Mr NATHAN REES: In the face of that the Opposition has come up with a plan to re-establish health boards. That is all.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members on both sides of the House will come to order.

Mr NATHAN REES: I reiterate: The New South Wales health system is one of the very best in the world. People come to New South Wales to access health treatment from the 100,000 men and women—doctors, nurses, allied health workers and administrators—who work day in, day out to deliver the best health care anywhere in the world. Everywhere I go in New South Wales people have good stories to tell me about the health system. It is a Labor Government that put cardiac services in south-western Sydney. It is a Labor Government that has committed record funding for health services in New South Wales. It is a Labor Government that has rebuilt or refurbished nearly every hospital—more than 200—across New South Wales. I will not run through yet again the Opposition's record of shame.

Mr Paul McLeay: Go for it! We want to hear it!

Mr NATHAN REES: I will do the downgrades first: Bellingen, downgraded; Parramatta, downgraded; Wallsend, downgraded; Yoeval, downgraded; Bombala, downgraded; St Josephs, downgraded; Binnaway, downgraded; Carcoar, downgraded—I could go on.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Mr NATHAN REES: Universal health care is an article of faith for Labor governments around Australia.

Mr Brad Hazzard: Point of order: As can be seen from the clock, the Premier has talked for nearly five minutes and has not answered the question. Perhaps he has to a degree because he has proved that he is delusional. Not only has he proved he is delusional; he has prove he is dopey.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Wakehurst will resume his seat. The Premier has the call.

Mr NATHAN REES: I have just had thrust in my hand a testimonial from Mrs Audrey Anderson, who wanted the member for East Hills and me to know that she had had a fall and was taken to Bankstown hospital. She said, "Staff and treatment were Excellent." Quality universal health care is an article of faith for Labor Governments in Australia. It is a tenet that the Opposition would walk away from in a heartbeat. If it were politically doable, it would walk away from it in a heartbeat. Last week I got to the Ds, from memory. I will start at in the middle this week.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: For the benefit of those in the public gallery, I have in my hand one volume of testimonials—good news—about our health system.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: Lithgow Hospital—

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

Mr NATHAN REES: It states, "We have all heard horror stories about the lack of patient care in our hospitals—

Mrs Jillian Skinner: Point of order: I refer to Standing Order 129, relevance. Lithgow Hospital was not mentioned in the question. It is not even included in the Government's—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for North Shore will resume her seat. That is not a point of order. The Premier has the call.

Mr NATHAN REES: I have concluded my answer.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for North Shore to order. She will cease interjecting.

EPPING TO CHATSWOOD RAIL LINE INVESTMENT

Ms CHERIE BURTON: My question without notice is addressed to the Premier. How is the Government facilitating investment around the \$2.3 billion Epping to Chatswood rail line?

Mr NATHAN REES: The Government is providing a rail system that Sydney desperately needs and that will service the people of western Sydney, and ultimately north-western Sydney, by initially building the spine of the CBD Metro and ultimately, as part of stage two, taking it out to Westmead. This system will fundamentally enhance the public transport system of Sydney, help get cars off the road and contribute to increases in public transport patronage. It comes on top of the opening of the Epping to Chatswood rail link, an outstanding piece of infrastructure with more than 10,000 people a day using the service at no cost for the first three months.

The public transport system in New South Wales is good. There has been an increase in patronage of 5 per cent for the rail system and 3 per cent for our bus services. Over the past two years there have been 385 new bus services and on-time running and reliability is at 95.4 per cent. A blueprint is underway for the construction of 626 new carriages and more than 300 buses. This substantial contribution to transport infrastructure in New South Wales is in stark contrast to the so-called policy of the Opposition—not a single new bus or rail carriage and no funding mechanism for anything it offers the people of New South Wales.

MINISTRY

Mr ANDREW STONER: My question is directed to the Premier. Given that despite a long list of ministerial failings—including excessive expenditure on lunches, dinner and furniture—Ian Macdonald is confidently telling everyone that he is safe in a reshuffle the Premier is yet to announce, will the Premier now tell the people of New South Wales who really appoints his ministry: him or Labor Party factional heavyweights?

Mr NATHAN REES: Unequivocally me.

LAND REZONING AND JOBS CREATION

Ms TANYA GADIEL: My question is addressed to the Minister for Planning. How is the Government using the planning system to rezone land for job-creating projects?

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: This morning I was at Macquarie University to announce the approval of a \$1.7 billion concept plan and rezoning for the Macquarie University campus. This plan will see the growth and development potential of this key site on the Epping to Chatswood rail line realised over the next 20 to 25 years. What the Government has approved at Macquarie University is a plan that will deliver a huge boost in employment and investment to Sydney's inner north. It will provide some 4,000 construction jobs and potentially 10,000 ongoing jobs over the life of the plan, all next to Macquarie University's new railway station. The jobs created by this concept plan represent a significant move towards the Metropolitan Strategy jobs target of 23,000 new jobs for the Macquarie Park precinct.

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

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: The Government is getting on with the job of creating jobs for New South Wales families, attracting investment to our great State to help fend off the effects of the global financial

crisis. Last month we announced the western Sydney employment area, a rezoning at the intersection of the M4 and the M7, which will support approximately 16,500 jobs. However, one thing we are not doing is rezoning land at the former CSIRO site in western Sydney. We are not rezoning land that has significant infrastructure requirements. As the Government gets on with the job of rezoning job-creating land in the right location, the Opposition gets on with the job of spreading misinformation and wasting taxpayers' time and money.

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

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: Yesterday the Leader of the Opposition, speaking about the upper House inquiry, said on 2BL radio:

What we're singling out is a public concern about issues revolving around a parcel of land. The upper House inquiry is into the planning system around that.

If that is so, it will be the shortest parliamentary inquiry in history. This land has had the same zoning for a number of years. Today the Government approved a concept plan and rezoning of Macquarie University that will create thousands of jobs. Today the Leader of the Opposition has had his W26 moment.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting. I call the member for Epping to order.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: Who can forget when Barry O'Farrell's predecessor, Peter Debnam, made hasty and false claims of corrupt behaviour against a former Attorney General, the Hon. Bob Debus, relying solely on the word of a convicted criminal, a prisoner known as W26? Who can forget what that did to the credibility of the former Leader of the Opposition? It is time to deal with the facts. The facts is—the facts are—I apologise for my grammar; I did not have the opportunity to go to Marist Brothers, Ryde, as my husband did. I welcome students from that school here in the Chamber. It is time to deal with the facts.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting. The Minister does not need the assistance of Opposition members.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: It is time to deal with facts. We have a global financial crisis and a path out of it, which we will lead by rezoning, such as the one we announced today at Macquarie University and the one we announced for the western Sydney employment area. The Government is dealing with the facts in this situation; the Opposition is dealing in lies. Just like the former Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the Opposition has made false claims in public. In this case he has claimed that land has been rezoned when it has not. The Leader of the Opposition relied on the word of a man who is less than credible.

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

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: I remind the House of what the Leader of the Opposition said on 7 September on 2BL radio:

And you know, at the height of these allegations appears to be a claim that land in western Sydney was rezoned, resulting in a massive multi-million dollar windfall for one of the developers involved.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: Just like the former Leader of the Opposition, the current Leader of the Opposition will see his own credibility in tatters because of his own rush to judgement, his own sloppiness, his own willingness to park his integrity at the door. Whose word did the Leader of the Opposition rely on when he said that land had been rezoned? Whose word did the Leader of the Opposition trust when he claimed the developer had made a multi-million-dollar profit? Did he check with the Department of Planning? Did he call the local council? Did he ask the landowner? No. The man he relied on was Jim Byrnes.

Mr Alan Ashton: Tell us about him.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: I will tell you about him. This is what Kate McClymont wrote about Mr Byrnes in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 25 September 2006:

Mr Byrnes has had endless run-ins with the authorities. He has been jailed for the deemed supply of heroin, convicted for assaulting a bikie, banned by the Australian Securities and Investments Commission, and labelled a habitual offender by the Roads and Traffic Authority.

That is the man the Leader of the Opposition relied upon. That is the man the Leader of the Opposition trusted when making a claim that this land had been rezoned.

Mr Brad Hazzard: Point of order: The question is clearly not being addressed.

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

Mr Brad Hazzard: Give us some actual facts.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Wakehurst to order for the third time. That the member for Wakehurst is acting as shadow Leader of the House today does not give him the right to abuse the procedures of the House. The Minister has the call.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: So this is Jim Byrnes—discredited, banned by the Australian Securities and Investments Commission and convicted for the deemed supply of heroin. The Leader of the Opposition relied upon that man when claiming that land had been rezoned, and that millions had been made and an inquiry was needed. The Government is not shying away from rezoning land to create jobs closer to home and public transport. The \$2.3 billion Epping to Chatswood rail line, together with the \$1.7 billion Macquarie University concept plan and rezoning, will create a lasting legacy for the people of Sydney. The \$80 million Erskine Park link road and the rezoning of land at the western Sydney employment area will create thousands of jobs close to home for the people of western Sydney.

The actions of the Leader of the Opposition will leave a far shorter legacy, which voters will remember all the way to 2011. The Leader of the Opposition forgot to bring his focus, his integrity and his sound judgement to work the day he decided to stake his reputation on the claims of Mr Jim Byrnes. However, today the Leader of the Opposition can do what Peter Debnam, the former Leader of the Opposition, never did. He can apologise. The Leader of the Opposition, Barry O'Farrell, can apologise to the people of New South Wales. Today he can show that he still has integrity and that he can still exercise sound judgement. Today he can say, "I am big enough and I am humble enough to admit I got it wrong", or he can commit himself to coming before the upper House inquiry and explaining why he made a false claim that land had been rezoned. He can commit himself to that course of action or he can look to the backbench at the former Leader of the Opposition, who is both discredited and irrelevant, and see the future of Opposition leaders who rely on the word of people like Jim Byrnes and W26.

NEPEAN HOSPITAL

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: My question is directed to the Premier. Given doctors have revealed that Sydney West Area Health Service is millions of dollars in the red, nurses are being sacked and operating theatres are unavailable to surgeons, is it any wonder that Nepean Hospital has more patients stuck in emergency than any other hospital and has the third longest waiting list in the State?

[Interruption]

Mr NATHAN REES: A "health board" is not going to fix any of that. The advice to me is that, contrary to reports in some media outlets this morning, the over-the-benchmark of 45 days owing to creditors is not \$60 million; it is less than a quarter of that.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: I am further advised that the area health service is owed more than it owes. There is clearly a cash flow issue there. The chief executive officer is working on that. As we have said before in this place, creditors should be paid on time. The first creditors off the rank are our staff. No staff go unpaid because of lack of funds, including visiting medical officers, as has been asserted previously. At the end of the financial year the area health service had overrun its budget by \$14 million, and by the end of August creditor accounts over 45 days were at \$17.3 million. The chief executive officer says that they are owed more than they owe, so he will fix that. All up that is around 1 per cent of the total budget for the area health service—one of the biggest in Australia. I stand by the performance—

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Mr NATHAN REES: I stand by the performance of the New South Wales health system—one of the very best in the world.

Mrs Jillian Skinner: Point of order: The question was specifically about nurse sackings and cuts to operating theatre times. It is a betrayal of the people of western Sydney.

The SPEAKER: Order! That is not a point of order. The Premier has concluded his answer.

ELECTRICITY INDUSTRY REFORM

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I direct my question to the Premier. Will the Premier update the House on the Government's plans for electricity reform?

Mr NATHAN REES: I thank the member for his question and interest in this most important matter. Two and a half years into the term of this Parliament and the Opposition does not have anything resembling an energy plan—

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

Mr NATHAN REES: —that most essential of services: a network of electricity supply for the people of New South Wales to enable their lights to go on, to enable their houses to be heated, to enable our hospitals to work, to enable our children to be educated and to enable our trains to run.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: Two and a half years into this term of Parliament and the Opposition has no plan to provide energy to the people of New South Wales—not a hint. It is all part of the Opposition's shameless plan to try to win government by doing absolutely nothing. In contrast, on this side of the House we are encouraging investment, we are looking after families and we are assuring the State's future energy supplies. In short, we have a plan—a comprehensive plan—to redesign the electricity market. Our plan rests on two foundations: keeping vital assets in public hands and, at the same time, attracting new entrants who will bring additional resources and competition to the energy sector. Today the Government is proud to release the final strategy paper on the energy reform transactions. It is a comprehensive blueprint resulting from extensive market testing, vigorous policy analysis and development, and expert advice—concepts entirely foreign to the Opposition.

One policy platform is the delivery of at least one new entrant into the national electricity market. We will have a new generation trading company to bring the benefits of competition to New South Wales consumers and New South Wales businesses. We will do this through a dual track process involving a trade sale, which will commence with expressions of interest later this month, and a potential share market float of selected assets. Preparations for an initial public offering—a float—will commence immediately. However, a decision on a float will be made only after the initial trade sale offers have been assessed against our competition and valuation objectives. In other words, the Government will not rush in on any offer that is put on the table; it will push for the best outcome for the people of New South Wales. Our retail businesses, development sites and generation trading rights are sizeable and attractive assets. They are assets that the people of New South Wales rightly expect will be traded prudently and carefully.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: That is why over the past few months the Government has undertaken detailed discussions with key groups, including integrated utility companies, private equity houses and many others. All of their feedback has been strong and encouraging. The Government and its financial advisers are therefore confident of a successful process and one that maximises the outcome for the people of New South Wales. I contrast that with the Coalition's bungled sale of the State Bank, which netted the New South Wales taxpayers next to nothing.

Ms Gladys Berejiklian: That is rubbish!

Mr NATHAN REES: No, it is not; it is a fact. If the member does not like that example, I remind her of Port Macquarie hospital, which was paid for twice by the taxpayers of New South Wales. It was handed to the private operator and bought back by the Government for \$80 million. That money could have built a new hospital somewhere else in regional New South Wales. Unlike the Opposition, the Government will get this right and the benefits will flow to the taxpayers of New South Wales because the value we unlock will be reinvested in vital public infrastructure.

It is also important to stress that we have undertaken detailed discussions with staff, consumer groups and unions. They can be assured that the Government's fundamental protections will remain in place: public ownership of the poles, wires and generators; protection of employee entitlements; consumer safeguards, including regulation by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal until 2013; and a \$272 million package to assist those less well-off to manage their electricity bills.

These reforms are probably the largest energy transactions occurring anywhere in the world. This is bold microeconomic reform in true Labor tradition: getting the big settings right, but never forgetting our obligation to serve the common good. Today New South Wales stands ready to embark on one of the biggest energy reforms implemented in 25 years. These reforms are as significant in their own way as Neville Wran's massive expansion of the sector in the early 1980s and McKell's electrification of rural New South Wales in the 1940s. This is reform with equity and it is good public policy. It is another contrast with the performance of members opposite. They are utterly without a plan or a clue. I commend these reforms to the House.

PLANNING TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: My question is directed to the Minister for Planning. Given Graham Richardson's public admission that he speaks to the Minister's political mentor—Joe Tripodi—about planning issues, will she advise the House what arrangements she has that allow Joe Tripodi to discuss her portfolio issues with lobbyists such as Graham Richardson?

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: I thought the question of the member for Pittwater yesterday was pretty lame, but this takes the cake. Given the performance of the member for Pittwater, I did not think he had a chance of being elevated to the front bench. However, after that question, bring him down! He could not do any worse than the member for Wakehurst. For the second day in a row, the answer is none.

LITERACY AND NUMERACY

Ms NOREEN HAY: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Education and Training. Can the Minister update the House on further measures the Government is implementing to improve literacy and numeracy in our schools?

Ms VERITY FIRTH: We all know how important strong literacy and numeracy skills are for students. They are essential for success at school, in everyday life and as a foundation for other learning and work opportunities. Last year's first ever National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy tests, known as NAPLAN, provided school performance data with a level of detail never before available. I am pleased to say that New South Wales had the lowest proportion of students not reaching the minimum standard in all categories for literacy and numeracy, and we expect similar results this year. However, we can always do more.

We know that some students need extra help and that is why the Federal and New South Wales governments are working together to support schools serving low socioeconomic status communities to help improve teacher quality and, of course, literacy and numeracy under the new \$891-million National Partnerships Program. It is with great pleasure that I announce a new \$41 million literacy and numeracy national partnership targeting New South Wales schools that most need our help. Over the first two years of the program 114 New South Wales schools will each be allocated between \$183,000 and \$241,000. They will be able to choose from a menu of eight intervention programs the program that best suits their school's needs. Principals and teachers will be able to provide additional support to students experiencing difficulty in reading or numeracy through tailored intervention strategies.

One program—Quicksmart—is a numeracy strategy for years 5, 6 and 7 involving pairs of students participating in 30-minute lessons three times a week. An eight-year assessment of the program in other States has shown fantastic results, with students achieving three years' worth of literacy improvement over the 30-week program. That is magnificent. Another option that schools can choose is the Making Up Lost Time in Literacy

Program, known as MULTILIT, which is based on research done at Macquarie University into how students learn to read. This remedial program is designed as an intervention for students who have fallen behind their peers. Its foundation is the traditional phonics approach of sounding out new words supported by reading with a teacher one-on-one. That approach has been shown to be particularly effective in teaching Aboriginal students to read. In a trial in Cape York children using MULTILIT showed average gains of two years' worth of reading improvement, again in just two terms.

This is a great program because principals will have the flexibility to select an intervention program based on their school's NAPLAN results. To help them to choose the right program the New South Wales Government will also provide training to teachers to help them to analyse and interpret NAPLAN data. Schools involved will also receive funding to release their best teachers in literacy and numeracy from the classroom so that they can share their expertise and ideas with other teachers.

Mr Peter Draper: Point of order: I am finding it very difficult to hear the Minister.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is too much audible conversation in the Chamber. I uphold the point of order. The House will come to order.

Ms VERITY FIRTH: I thank the member for Tamworth. I know he is very interested in this because it is exciting. The schools involved will also receive funding to release their best literacy and numeracy teachers to act as mentors in the classroom. We know that mentoring of other teachers, including new teachers, supports one of the key aims of the National Partnerships Program—that is, to improve teacher quality. The Rudd Government's Smarter Schools National Partnerships is investing about \$716 million in new funding in New South Wales classrooms over the next five years. As I said, the focus will be on schools serving disadvantaged communities. The New South Wales Government is also contributing a further \$175 million in new funding to the National Partnerships Program.

It is interesting that the Opposition had to be called to account on this issue. I remind the House that the NAPLAN data that we are using to help channel \$41 million for literacy and numeracy programs into the schools that need our help is precisely the information that the Opposition voted last night not to allow newspapers—and newspapers alone—to publish. In a policy initiative, which I think was probably last talked about in the bread lines of Moscow, Comrade O'Farrell—

Mr Barry O'Farrell: You would know.

Ms VERITY FIRTH: It is not me.

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

Ms VERITY FIRTH: It was last seen in the bread lines of Moscow, superbly resurrected here by Comrade O'Farrell from the People's Republic of Ku-ring-gai to get rid of that pesky little thing we call freedom of the press. It was about making sure that all government information can be controlled, that no-one need ever see it and we do not have to guide any of our policy interventions by using that information—we would not want that, would we? It is great to see that the dear leader opposite has achieved what we thought was possible only in the Soviet Union circa 1938.

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

Ms VERITY FIRTH: As I said all along throughout this debate, the power of data, the power of transparency, is all about how governments react to it.

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

Ms VERITY FIRTH: It is all about the extra resources governments are prepared to give to support schools that need our help. It is all about shining the light on schools that need our help and providing them with that help. That is what this \$819 million worth of new funding is all about, funding that was never provided by the Liberals in Federal government and will never be provided by the Coalition in State government. We are about to announce an expanded list of schools that will be able to take advantage of all the great initiatives under the national partnerships, initiatives such as centres for excellence, which will see 50 schools across New South Wales become hubs where our next-generation teachers and existing teachers can observe high-quality teaching first hand.

It is a similar concept to a teaching hospital and each centre for excellence will be linked to a university, which will be able to send its teaching students to the school at any stage of their course, not just for the traditional internship. We have connected classroom technology, which will be extending this benefit to a further 200 schools, including those in remote areas. We will also be identifying some of our best performing teachers and offering them increased pay to teach in schools in the State's most disadvantaged communities. We will be offering them \$98,000 a year to take their teaching excellence, their teaching expertise, to the kids who need it, to the kids we owe.

Under national partnerships all States and Territories are offering a range of intervention strategies to their schools and each will be rigorously evaluated over two years. The evaluation will become the basis for a national database of the best and most effective literacy and numeracy teaching strategies that all schools will have access to. The data will be used so that all schools can achieve best practice. This is groundbreaking national research, which will have long-term lasting benefits. To watch the Opposition stand in its way is truly embarrassing. While New South Wales is achieving great results in literacy and numeracy, we want to keep working hard to deliver good results.

Today's announcement complements a range of learning programs already available to New South Wales public schools as part of our record \$14.7 billion education and training budget. When this year's national assessment program literacy and numeracy results are released tomorrow we again expect New South Wales students to have performed strongly. It is a credit to our teachers and principals, and school communities supporting the students. The data will be a valuable tool that will allow us to continue to refine our strategies, target new resources to the schools that need them most and promote excellence in our schools for the kids who need our help.

PEEL VALLEY WATER SHARING PLAN

Mr PETER DRAPER: I direct my question to the Minister for Water. Following last week's release of tenders for a \$128.4 million safety upgrade of Keepit and Split Rock dams, and with Chaffey Dam's safety upgrade funding already secured, will the Minister update the House on progress of the Peel Valley Water Sharing Plan?

The SPEAKER: Order! Before the Minister commences his answer, I ask members of the Opposition, particularly the member for Murray-Darling, to come to order.

Mr PHILLIP COSTA: I thank the member for Tamworth for his deep interest in initiatives in his electorate. The member has a strong interest in all matters across his electorate, particularly in water. I thank him personally for the work he has been doing with the community group we formed. Dam safety is an issue the Government has taken seriously. We are investing hundreds of millions of dollars across the State to ensure our dams will withstand the most extreme weather events and meet the high safety standards set by the New South Wales Dams Safety Committee. Last week the Government announced tenders for the \$128.4 million upgrade of the Keepit and Split Rock dams. The upgrade will improve the ability of Keepit Dam to withstand the probable maximum flood, protecting over 10,000 downstream residents and valuable agricultural land. Keepit Dam's environmental credentials will also be improved by the upgrade. A new variable level off-take tower will prevent cold water pollution, improving river health and aquatic biodiversity. The project also includes \$18 million for fish way upgrades that will increase the survival and reproduction rates of native fish species.

As is the case with major pieces of infrastructure, the Tamworth electorate will experience an economic windfall as a direct result of this project. The \$128 million investment will create 30 full-time jobs over the three-year construction timeframe; it will generate up to \$115 million in gross regional product and \$54 million in household income—a great boost for regional New South Wales. State Water will be sourcing manpower and materials locally where possible, which is more great news for the Tamworth electorate. I note the member's reference to the Peel Valley Water Sharing Plan, which has been making very good progress. The Government is committed to completing the Peel Valley Water Sharing Plan by the end of this year, which the member will be pleased to know. The plan is aimed at striking a balance between all users—urban, irrigation and the environment. I thank the local member and the team that has been working with him on this project. It is making good progress.

As part of the process I established an advisory group of local stakeholders, chaired by the member for Tamworth, to provide direct advice on the many complex issues associated with developing this plan. I thank the members, including representatives of Cockburn Valley water users, the Namoi catchment management

authority, Namoi Water, Tamworth Regional Council, local indigenous people, environmental groups, local residents and the Tamworth Chamber of Commerce. The members of my team have worked very cooperatively together and I thank them for their valuable contributions.

Finalisation of the water-sharing plan for the Peel Valley is a condition of the Commonwealth's funding commitment towards the Chaffey Dam augmentation. I reiterate: the Office of Water is working hard to complete this plan by the end of the year to secure the funding. Further, I am pleased to inform the House that State Water is proceeding with stage one of the upgrade works. The contracts for detailed design and review of environmental factors have been let, with works underway. The Government is committed to funding 100 per cent of the stage one safety works, with construction due to start in April 2010. Progressing with stage one works does not threaten the augmentation plans.

New South Wales will continue to progress the water-sharing plan in order to secure Commonwealth funding for the augmentation works. I am sure the member and the local community will be pleased to hear that. I look forward to continuing to work with the local member, the Tamworth community and my group to ensure that we deliver the essential services to the community of the Tamworth region and we are looking forward to a positive outcome from all sides.

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

JUVENILE JUSTICE CENTRE SAFETY

Mr MATTHEW MORRIS: My question is addressed to the Minister for Juvenile Justice. Can the Minister outline works carried out at juvenile justice centres across New South Wales to improve safety?

Mr GRAHAM WEST: The New South Wales Government has committed \$20 million in the past 12 months to upgrading juvenile justice centres across the State. These upgrades not only improve safety and security at juvenile justice centres, they also enable better delivery of rehabilitation programs and provide much-needed jobs in New South Wales communities. The Government has just announced that a Kempsey-based company, Lahey Constructions, has been awarded the \$5.6 million tender for the upgrades to the Acmena Juvenile Justice Centre in Grafton.

The building project will see 10 local subcontracting companies engaged by Lahey Constructions, around 200 direct or indirect jobs generated and approximately 15 apprentices employed. Upon completion of the project around 25 permanent jobs will be created, adding to the almost 350 people already employed through Juvenile Justice in the region. The works undertaken by these North Coast community members include the construction of a new unit, which includes two new classrooms and space for teaching staff. Once complete, these high-standard facilities will enable the Government to provide better opportunities for young offenders to reform their behaviour. We all know that the more young offenders we are able to rehabilitate, the more money we have to spend across New South Wales.

The SPEAKER: Order! If the member for Clarence wants to conduct a meeting, he will do so outside the Chamber.

Mr GRAHAM WEST: But Lahey Constructions is not the only business to have been awarded a contract for the works at this centre; O'Donnell and Hanlon, a local family-owned business, was awarded the \$500,000 contract for the earlier works. These works included the building of a secure fence to separate the centre's custodial area from the construction zone and building a service road to provide all-weather access to the site. While some of these works may seem minor, they prove the Government's commitment to safety and security at juvenile justice centres.

Last month I was at Dubbo with the local member, Dawn Fardell, to open the \$7.4 million upgrade of the centre there. That included a 15-bed unit, an open communal and recreation space for detainees, and a safe working space for staff. I had the chance to talk to many local contractors, who were pleased to see a local firm once again getting the job, which had 520 people directly or indirectly involved in the construction. Further to this, approximately 20 new jobs have been created at the centre, adding to the more than 100 people already employed by Juvenile Justice in the region. Now that the works are complete, the New South Wales Government will be able to better deliver rehabilitation to young offenders in the Dubbo area. This is on top of \$750,000 in Wagga Wagga, which saw 120 people directly or indirectly involved throughout construction;

further upgrades at Broken Hill, which actually saw it convert to a full-time centre, with 1½ coordinators and 10½ casual youth officers; and the upgrade of Emu Plains for \$4.35 million, with 180 people employed through the construction and 56½ jobs at the centre.

These are just a few of the major works undertaken by the New South Wales Government to improve safety in juvenile justice centres. The New South Wales Government is committed to the delivery of education and individually targeted rehabilitation programs, both of which address the underlying causes of offending behaviour in young people. It is through the rehabilitation of these young people that we will be able to reduce the rates of reoffending among young people, reduced crime rates and save money for New South Wales taxpayers.

Question time concluded at 3.13 p.m.

PETITIONS

The Clerk announced that the following petitions signed by fewer than 500 persons were lodged for presentation:

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 Tourism Developments

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

Wagga Wagga Base Hospital

Petition requesting funding for and the commencement of construction of a new Wagga Wagga Base Hospital in this parliamentary term, received from **Mr Daryl Maguire**.

Tumut Renal Dialysis Service

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

Tumut Hospital and Batlow Multiple Purpose Service

Petition asking that vital equipment be provided immediately to both Tumut Hospital and Batlow Multiple Purpose Service, received from **Mr Daryl Maguire**.

Tumut Hospital Anaesthetic Services

Petition asking that anaesthetic services at Tumut Hospital be made available immediately, received from **Mr Daryl Maguire**.

South Coast Rail Line Facilities

Petition requesting that train carriages be fitted with toilet and luggage facilities on the South Coast rail line, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

South Coast Rail Line Staffing

Petition opposing the relocation of and reduction in staff on the South Coast Illawarra rail line, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

South Coast Rail Services

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

Bus Service 311

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

Pymont Metro Station

Petition opposing the Metro proposal for a Pymont station at Union Square and requesting community consultation for a suitable site, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Darlinghurst Planning

Petition requesting that the 2006 master plan for the Garvan St Vincent's research precinct be adhered to and that the plan incorporate the heritage classified terrace, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Pet Shops

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

Shoalhaven Police Station

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

Shoalhaven Local Area Command

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

Princes Highway Rest Areas

Petition requesting adequate toilet facilities on the corner of the Princes Highway and Sussex Road, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

The Clerk announced that the following petition signed by more than 500 persons was lodged for presentation:

Blue Mountains District Anzac Memorial Hospital

Petition asking that services at the Blue Mountains District Anzac Memorial Hospital be re-instated and the future of maternity and paediatric services be assured, received from **Mrs Jillian Skinner**.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**Suspension of Standing Orders: Order of Business**

Mr JOHN AQUILINA (Riverstone—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.14 p.m.]: I move:

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

The suspension is required because the House does not have any private members' bills for consideration this afternoon and the standing orders do not allow us to automatically deal with Government business. Therefore, we need the approval of the House to do so.

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

Motion agreed to.

CONSIDERATION OF MOTIONS TO BE ACCORDED PRIORITY

Rural and Regional Jobs

Mr FRANK TERENCEZINI (Maitland) [3.15 p.m.]: This motion should have priority. It is of great interest to the people of New South Wales what the Government is doing to create rural and regional jobs. In particular, I highlight the fantastic \$85 million Building the Country package to help rural communities obtain vital infrastructure. This matter is a priority because what is more important than regional jobs? The people of New South Wales do not want to listen to a debate on members scoring political points or being negative. This motion is about positive news for the community. This motion seeks to get away from the Opposition's negativity.

This motion seeks to give the Opposition an opportunity to speak about something that is positive. It is an opportunity for the Opposition to make a contribution to rural and regional jobs, not to demonstrate its usual negativism and political opportunism. When was the last time the Opposition moved a motion on a positive subject? This motion will give them an opportunity to make such a contribution.

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

Mr FRANK TERENCEZINI: They have certainly not done so since I had become a member of Parliament. They are always negative. Do members of the Opposition value jobs in regional New South Wales?

Mr Barry O'Farrell: Your job?

Mr FRANK TERENCEZINI: You are not going to get it, Barry, I can tell you that. You will have to do better than what you have now. I have seen the candidates. You will have to do better than that.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Coffs Harbour will contain himself.

Mr FRANK TERENCEZINI: When was the last time that the Opposition moved a motion not making political capital out of something? The people of New South Wales do not want that. They want good, positive news. That is why this House should debate my motion and why it should receive priority.

Government Performance

Mr ANDREW STONER (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [3.18 p.m.]: Regional jobs are extremely important but a \$50 million-odd package will not do much. A much more significant impact on regional jobs would be a competent government in New South Wales that is not distracted with internal scandals. My motion deserves priority today because the long-suffering people of New South Wales want a government that is not preoccupied with scandals and internal machinations, a government that is up to the challenge of fixing the issues that are holding New South Wales back from its rightful place as the premier State.

In the last two weeks there have been two major scandals involving Labor members of Parliament. First, there was the fall from grace of the would-be Premier, John Della Bosca. Some say it was no coincidence that on the day of the first caucus meeting after the winter recess the man who was doing the numbers was ruthlessly removed as a contender, but with scandal, after weeks of instability and speculation about the leadership. On the same day, we had a newspaper headline about a court decision that referred to the former planning Minister, Frank Sartor, and so-called land bribes—another scandal. Then, of course, we had the McGurk affair. McGurk was a shady character in the midst of a network of shady characters, including New South Wales Labor powerbroker Graham Richardson. McGurk was murdered in a professional hit after it was revealed he was in possession of a tape that implicated a number of Labor members of Parliament in a corruption and bribery scandal.

I could go back over the last 12 months, but there is enough just in the last two weeks. The people of New South Wales are desperate for a government that is capable of fixing the State's problems. They are desperate for an end to the tawdry soap opera that passes for a government in this State. The people of New South Wales want real reform. They want improvements to public transport, roads, hospitals, law and order, and the New South Wales economy. It is no wonder the producers of *Underbelly III* want to film in the New South Wales Parliament. But they do not need a script; they already have one. They do not need actors; there is already a cast: Eddie "The Fixer" Obeid, Joey "The Puppeteer" Tripodi, Nathan "Freckles" Rees, Kristina "The Blonde American", Matty "Pants Down" Brown, Noreen "The Table of Knowledge"—

Mr Alan Ashton: Point of order: I think the Leader of The Nationals knows, as we all know, that if he is going to make such attacks on members of the Cabinet he needs to make them by way of a substantive motion rather than by way of innuendo and affectation.

The SPEAKER: Order! As the Leader of The Nationals is aware, I extend a degree of latitude during these debates. However, I will not extend that degree of latitude.

Mr ANDREW STONER: It is just a bit of humour, Mr Speaker. What a cast! I could go on. There are many other figures in the cast of *Underbelly III*—a tale of five factions. What a cast! What a saga! It is a tale of treachery, lust for power, and bad behaviour. But the people of New South Wales do not want a non-fiction *Underbelly III* about the New South Wales Government. They want a government of integrity and competence. That is why this motion deserves priority today. The people of New South Wales want one week to go by in New South Wales politics without another scandal or distraction involving the New South Wales Labor Party.

It is an embarrassment to every citizen in this State that, day in and day out, when they pick up the newspapers they read about another scandal, another distraction, or internal machinations, rather than about focus. The other States around this nation are laughing at what is happening in New South Wales. It is time we got on with the job of fixing this State. Every citizen in New South Wales desperately desires a government that is ready to make our great State No. 1 in the nation again. Only the Liberals and Nationals have the focus, the determination, and the positive, practical plans to turn this State around.

Mr Gerard Martin: Is that all?

Mr ANDREW STONER: More characters: Johnny "The Iguana"— [*Time expired.*]

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

The House divided.

Ayes, 49

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

Noes, 39

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

Pair

Mr Gibson

Mr Piccoli

Question resolved in the affirmative.**RURAL AND REGIONAL JOBS****Motion Accorded Priority****Mr FRANK TERENCEZINI** (Maitland) [3.30 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) congratulates the Government for continuing to support jobs in rural and regional New South Wales;
- (2) notes that the Government's \$52 million Local Infrastructure Support Fund is helping unlock growth and create new jobs across rural New South Wales; and
- (3) condemns the Opposition for putting these jobs at risk by continuing to talk down the New South Wales economy.

It is time for the Opposition to stop talking down New South Wales. It is time to highlight the good things that are happening in this State to the people of New South Wales. Building the Country Package is an \$85 million investment in rural New South Wales and across seven funds it aims to ensure growth continues in country towns and gives people a sense of worth in their communities. The \$52 million Local Infrastructure Support Fund, which is included in the package, is designed to do just that. The fund provides a catalyst for common business infrastructure, which will unlock private investment and ensure that impediments are removed when private business wants to invest in their local economy. I welcomed the announcement of two important pieces of infrastructure in the Upper Hunter by the Premier last week. The first of those was at Scone: funding of \$600,000 for the Upper Hunter Shire Council to build critical infrastructure for a new industrial State on the New England Highway at Scone. [*Quorum called for.*]

[*The bells having been rung and a quorum having formed, business resumed.*]

The new project will enable 90 new businesses in the Scone area. It is a \$1.46 million project, which will make a significant contribution to growing Scone's business community and the future of Scone. It includes a project to lay the foundations for a veterinary practice, which will create 36 jobs over the next four years. Further to that, we are investing more than \$122,500 to establish a new medical centre in the Gloucester area. This will include the upgrade of roads and the relocation of sewer and stormwater services. Psychological, respiratory and pathology services will be offered at that centre. Those local health services are vital in attracting new business investment to the area.

The Government is investing in projects such as these across the State. We are funding \$735,000 to Blayney Shire Council, towards the construction of a new road and power infrastructure for the Blayney SeaLink site. Members opposite might not know what the Blayney SeaLink site is. That site will become a future commercial investment hub in the Blayney area, housing an expanding logistics and warehousing facility, and freeing up trade in the region. The New South Wales Government investment will go to the construction of a high-voltage power line to the site and the replacement of a wooden bridge on Newbridge Road, Blayney. The project will also see a \$3.89 million private investment. Importantly, more than \$130 million will be invested over the next five years into the local economy. The significant upgrade of road, power and rail infrastructure will secure new business to Blayney. We are talking about 205 direct jobs and a further 228 indirect jobs across the area. Mr George Tanos, the managing director of the Blayney Group, said this about the project:

This infrastructure is critical in terms of developing the SeaLink site...Upgrading the road, power and rail infrastructure will help us to take forward our expansion plans.

The Mayor of Blayney Shire Council said this about the project:

This assistance will provide an enormous stimulus for future investment in our rural community...The opportunity for employment growth and increased attraction of the Shire to future business investment and development is a tremendous boost.

This is on top of a \$1.72 million investment to Albury City Council for a project to build critical infrastructure for the Ettamogah Intermodal Rail Hub. That project is being undertaken in partnership with the council and the

Colin Rees Group. Patricia Gould, the Albury city mayor, praised the funding and said it would ensure the construction of a high-quality access road suitable for B-double trucks from the Olympic Way directly into the intermodal hub.

This is all about ensuring that those areas in New South Wales that have the potential for growth are assisted in every way possible to provide local infrastructure and to provide seed funding to ensure that private investment is unlocked. This is all about upgrading roads, sewers and drains to ensure we have the vital pieces of infrastructure so that businesses with money will want to invest and businesses will want to invest in those areas because the Government is supporting projects. We are blessed with an entrepreneurial private investment in the Maitland area, and because the Government is keeping infrastructure in line with the growth in Maitland we continue to get private investment and creation of jobs.

The \$85 million package is a fantastic initiative across New South Wales and I want the Opposition to support it. I want to hear constructive comments coming from the Opposition during this debate, not just the tired old political comments, not point scoring or the negative comments that we always hear from the Opposition. This matter should be debated properly. Jobs are being created in Coffs Harbour and in the Tweed. I am sure we will get 100 per cent support from the member for Tweed for this important project. The member for Coffs Harbour is looking at me very seriously. I am sure he is thinking about the great contribution he is about to make. The Government does not want negativity from the Opposition. The Government wants to ensure it is doing the best it can for the people of New South Wales. I very much look forward to the contributions of those on the other side.

Mr ANDREW FRASER (Coffs Harbour) [3.37 p.m.]: One must forgive the member for Maitland because this is his first term in this place. He has now come up with a motion that has been given to him to try and talk up what the Government is doing in regional New South Wales. First I move an amendment to the motion as follows:

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

this House condemns the New South Wales Government for continuing to fail regional New South Wales.

The member for Maitland spoke about negativity in his speech. The reality of the argument is that prior to the member coming into this place, the New South Wales Government under a Coalition, and purportedly under Labor when it first came in, said it would fund 50 per cent of country town water and sewerage supply schemes. When looking at the qualifications and the eligibility of the Local Infrastructure Fund, what does it say? It says that projects that can be funded will be country town water and sewerage schemes. What happened in Coffs Harbour was that the then Minister for the Environment, Pam Allan, and the then Minister for Public Works and Services, Michael Knight, visited us and said, "We are going to ask you to put in a new sewerage scheme, one of the highest treatment sewage plants in Australia, and"—these were the words of Michael Knight—"it will not cost the constituents in Coffs Harbour local government area one cent extra."

However, \$200 million later we are still waiting for the contribution from the New South Wales Government. The Coffs Harbour local government area has one of the greatest schemes in probably one of the wettest areas, so reuse is a very limited option. But it also has a \$200 million bill, thanks to the Government. The Government, under Treasurer Eric Roozendaal, will provide councils with interest-free loans for schemes. The Government used to pay for 50 per cent of those schemes. That is hypocrisy at its worst. This week I received a call from Minister Macdonald's office asking me to meet with Nick Roberts, Director General of NSW Forests, and two of the Minister's staffers. They told me that 8 of the 14 employees of the New South Wales Transplantation Improvement Unit would be cut. The majority of those employees come from the Coffs Harbour electorate. Successive Labor governments have locked up State forests that were productive for that many years it is not funny.

Mr Thomas George: Closed down offices.

Mr ANDREW FRASER: As the member for Lismore says, the Government has closed offices. In Albury, Lismore, Coffs Harbour and other forest towns the Government has locked up forests that had been operating successfully for more than 120 years and sacked staff. Last year's budget figures show the Department of Primary Industry shedding 200 jobs from regional New South Wales. Regional centres, such as Orange, Coffs Harbour, Lismore and the Tweed, are losing jobs and money. The member for Maitland, who has been a member of this House for only five minutes, told us about 90 new businesses. If the member read *Hansard* he

would see that the Premier and other members have changed their language. They used to say that the Government was creating new jobs. They now say that the Government is supporting jobs in regional and other areas. We are losing government staff across regional New South Wales.

The Government is conducting an assessment of red gum forests in the Riverina. As a result of a green outcome, 600 jobs will be shed from that area. Yanco station, which had been run as a viable agricultural industry harvesting timber, grazing cattle and growing crops, is being turned into a national park. If it is good enough for it to be turned into a national park, it is good enough for it to stay as an operating farm. The Government will close the forests in the Riverina, as it did the cypress forests in the Brigalow and the forests on the North Coast, putting hundreds of people out of jobs. The North Coast Area Health Service will cut 400 health service jobs—40 from the electorate of the member for Murray-Darling. At Coffs Harbour Hospital the equivalent of 6.94 full-time cleaning staff have been cut. As a result, the hospital has had another outbreak of vancomycin resistant enterococci [VRE]. This outbreak was hidden from the media until I reported it yesterday. As a result of cutting these cleaning jobs, 14 patients have been confirmed with VRE, 30 elective surgeries have been cancelled and operating theatres have been closed.

Mr Thomas George: A new hospital.

Mr ANDREW FRASER: As the member for Lismore says, in this new regional hospital the cardiac unit and operating theatres are out of action because of an outbreak of VRE. It is proposed that more than 400 jobs will be cut from the North Coast Area Health Service. Seven cleaning jobs have already been cut at Coffs Harbour Hospital. Chris Crawford, on behalf of the Government, told the ABC this morning that the high-priority areas of the hospital will be cleaned and extra staff will be hired to perform this work. Why did they sack the seven staff in the first place? What is a high-priority area in a hospital? Every part of a hospital is a high-priority area. Hospital patients and visitors should not have to be concerned about contracting a dangerous virus that could kill them. I ask the Government and its part-time health Minister to support regional New South Wales. We do not want the nonsense that we heard from the member for Maitland. Let us have true support for regional New South Wales.

Mr KERRY HICKEY (Cessnock) [3.44 p.m.]: Opposition members will try to say that New South Wales has little to be proud of. I say that is a lie. We live in the best State in Australia. Regional New South Wales is home to the most beautiful tourist attractions and we have the best cities in which to live and work. Government members understand that because we deal in the facts. I want to share some more facts with the House. The Australian Bureau of Statistics labour force surveys show a steady increase in the number of people working in regional New South Wales over the past five years. Between 2004 and 2008 more than 108,000 extra people were working in regional New South Wales. There have been increases every year for the past five years, with 10 per cent more jobs in rural and regional New South Wales than there were five years ago. This must be very informative for Opposition members, who constantly claim that families are fleeing rural New South Wales.

Mr Thomas George: Point of order: The member for Cessnock is reading his speech, not referring to copious notes.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! The member for Cessnock is referring to copious notes.

Mr KERRY HICKEY: I want to emphasise these vital facts: From September 2008 to July 2009 the New South Wales Government has directly assisted more than 250 investment projects in regional New South Wales, securing capital investment of more than \$970 million and creating and retaining more than 3,700 jobs. In his speeches to the House, the member for Coffs Harbour always talks about sewerage. I am greatly concerned about that, as is every other Government member. I want to talk about facts. The creation of 3,700 jobs and an investment of \$970 million will go a long way to addressing many of the issues in regional New South Wales.

On Friday last week the Premier announced a \$2.5 million investment for the Newcastle Port Corporation to make Newcastle harbour a home base for cruise ships. That is a major benefit to the people in my community. The first place that tourists visit in the Hunter is the vineyards to sample the wines and dine at the restaurants. Members who represent Hunter electorates are well aware of that, unlike the members for Coffs Harbour, Tweed and Lismore, who are more concerned about putting out misinformation about our great State and our great regional areas. They are negative. They carp and moan and groan about how bad things are. In fact, the Government is doing a marvellous job.

Mr Thomas George: Point of order: I ask that the member for Cessnock be drawn back to the speech that he was reading in the first place.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! That is not a point of order.

Mr KERRY HICKEY: This project potentially will create 96 direct jobs. It will provide facilities to attract international day visits and navy ships, bringing an entirely new market to the Hunter. Carnival Australia, the operator of P&O Cruises, announced in March 2009 its intention to home base the *Pacific Sun* in Newcastle for the 2010 season. This will involve six cruises where passengers embark and disembark in Newcastle. The *Pacific Sun* is the biggest ocean liner based in Australia, carrying a maximum of 1,900 passengers. I will explain how this will provide a significant boost to Newcastle. Passengers are expected to spend around \$393 each day in port. It is estimated that the ship's crew will also spend around \$180 per day in the port. The Hunter—home to beautiful beaches and wine and gourmet food industries—is particularly well placed to capitalise on this tourist growth. My Hunter Labor colleagues know this because we are constantly spruiking the strength of the region and its tourism industry, and the beauty of its natural attractions—unlike those opposite who do nothing but talk our State down. Opposition members are always moaning and groaning. [*Time expired.*]

Mr GEOFF PROVEST (Tweed) [3.49 p.m.]: It must be Groundhog Day because this motion is pretty much identical to the tripe the Government came up with yesterday. We already knew that Labor had denial problems; now it seems to have dementia problems as well. The Government wants us to congratulate it for supporting jobs in regional New South Wales. What jobs? Unemployment has increased by 4 per cent on the North Coast, particularly in the electorate of Tweed, where it is about 3 per cent higher than the State's average and about 5 per cent higher—

Mr Kerry Hickey: Point of order: Madam Deputy-Speaker, it is clear that the member for Tweed is reading his speech. I ask you to direct him not to read his speech.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! I am sure the member for Tweed is referring to copious notes.

Mr GEOFF PROVEST: The Federal Government's stimulus measures will inevitably support some jobs, although generations of taxpayers will foot the bill. But the State Labour Government is not creating net jobs in regional New South Wales. In fact, it is just the opposite. The Rees Labor Government is axing jobs left and right. Four hundred front-line jobs are being axed from North Coast hospitals. Over the past two months 42 businesses have shut in the Tweed, putting 200 people out of work. One reason is that payroll tax is lower across the border. It is sucking us dry like a husk of wheat. Labor has even axed two child psychologist positions in the electorate of my friend the member for Clarence. Why is the Government taking it out on the children of New South Wales? How much lower can the Government go? It was no surprise to see media reports today confirming that hospitals across the State are in deep crisis.

Mr Kerry Hickey: Point of order: The motion is about regional jobs; it is not about hospitals.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! The member for Coffs Harbour moved an amendment to the motion. The member for Tweed is referring to the amendment.

Mr GEOFF PROVEST: My local hospital in Tweed is running at 107 per cent capacity, but Labor is axing 30 jobs there too. Last year the then Minister for Health—we have had a couple come and go since then—officially opened 30 new beds at the Tweed Hospital. The problem is that most of those beds remain empty. Why? It is because the State Labor Government will not employ the nurses needed to support them. Government members should not come into the Chamber slapping themselves on the back over supporting jobs in regional New South Wales. As I said yesterday, this pathetic Government has been spinning announcements for so long it has started to believe its own porkies. No-one gives any credence to this pap. This is yet another complete waste of time from the most complacent mob of lazy fat cats ever to hold power in this once proud State.

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

Mr GEOFF PROVEST: Like yesterday, today's motion condemns this side of the House for allegedly putting jobs at risk. We are not the ones sacking front-line public servants—including from the medical profession—left, right and centre. We are not the ones trying to cut the pay of our hardworking police. We are not the ones turning New South Wales into a joke with nearly daily sex and corruption scandals. We are not the

ones playing merry-go-round with our leaders in the hope that one of them might stop voters laughing. I listened to Ray Hadley interview the member for Rockdale the other day. Frank certainly did not complain about being addressed as "Premier Sartor"!

The current Premier is big on reminding us of his humble beginnings as a garbo. Maybe it is time he dealt with some of the garbage his caucus comes up with in this place. It is a fact that the Tweed, and particularly the North Coast and regional New South Wales, are losing jobs hand over fist. In the area of health, the North Coast gets short-changed by about \$50 million a year—and it is really starting to show. As the member for Coffs Harbour indicated clearly, there are significant health problems at the hospital at Coffs Harbour—not through the fault of the hardworking staff of doctors and nurses, whom I stand 100 per cent behind, but because of the cost-cutting bean counters. People in Sydney need to go out into the regional areas to see the effect of the Government's ill-conceived, ill-designed and poorly implemented plans on our great State.

I believe New South Wales is a great State and it will be again come 2011, because we need positive policies, not just spin, re-announcements, re-hashing and the daily scandals that come out of this place. I know the people on the street on the North Coast. They are sick and tired of it. I know people who have voted Labor all their life and they shake their heads in disgust at what the mob opposite is doing. Once again, I am 100 per cent for the Tweed and for New South Wales.

Mr FRANK TERENCEZINI (Maitland) [3.54 p.m.], in reply: This debate has provided yet more examples of the great negativity of those opposite. The member for Coffs Harbour talked about the amount of time I have been in Parliament. I may not have been in Parliament long, but one thing is for sure: the member for Coffs Harbour has been in Parliament way too long. I have been in Parliament for only 2½ years but it is about time the member for Coffs Harbour left and did something else. I suggest that he and the other Opposition members who have been in this place too long get back on the bus and start touring regional New South Wales again. Except this time instead of arguing about which DVD they are going to watch, they should get out of the bus and talk to some people in country New South Wales. If they talked to the people they would not make contributions of the sort we heard from the member for Coffs Harbour.

Mr Andrew Fraser: What is your preselection about, Frank?

Mr FRANK TERENCEZINI: The member for Coffs Harbour always changes the subject. Opposition members do not want to hear that we are spending \$85 million creating jobs.

Mr Andrew Fraser: I think you are a nice bloke. You should retain your preselection. I like you.

Mr FRANK TERENCEZINI: Look at the member for Coffs Harbour, talking over me. Those are the tactics of a drowning man. He does not want to listen to my speech. I suggest that Coalition members have a good, long, hard look at themselves after 14½ years in Opposition and come up with some credible ideas. They should not keep changing the subject and talking about something else. The money—\$85 million—is being invested, jobs are being created and, although the Opposition really hates to hear it, investment opportunities are being created in rural and regional New South Wales.

Mr Andrew Fraser: Point of order: The member for Maitland is now talking about \$85 million. His motion states a figure of \$52 million.

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

Mr Andrew Fraser: It is about relevance. The member for Maitland should direct his remarks to the motion, which gives the figure of \$52 million. I do not know where he got the \$85 million figure.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! That is not a point of order.

Mr FRANK TERENCEZINI: Again, the member for Coffs Harbour is not listening. He is not listening to the debate in this House. He does not remember the rule that you never listen to anything when you are doing the talking. He also does not remember the old saying: A closed mouth gathers no feet. The member for Coffs Harbour should remember that. The \$85 million is being invested and jobs are being created, and all that Opposition members can do is change the subject. It is about time those opposite came up with some credible policies. We want to hear them. We want to hear how they will create jobs in regional New South Wales.

[*Interruption*]

Mr Greg Smith: Double jeopardy.

Mr FRANK TERENZINI: The member for Epping changes the subject again. He does not want to talk about jobs in regional New South Wales. He thinks he is still a lawyer; he thinks he is still a Deputy Director of Public Prosecutions talking about legal principles. I remind the member for Epping that we are talking about regional jobs and about a very good initiative from this side of the House that is creating the environment for investment in regional New South Wales.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! Members on both sides of the House will come to order. I am sure that Hansard is having difficulty hearing the member for Maitland.

Mr FRANK TERENZINI: Yes, of course they are; they are trying to hear the good news from this side of the House. There are good initiatives out there. Money is being spent in regional New South Wales to create jobs. And what do those opposite do? They whinge and they change the subject and talk about something else. They do not want to hear about it. I suggest that members opposite organise another bus trip. The member for Epping might want to go along this time—he might even learn something. However, this time they should get out of the bus and talk to people. If they did, I have no doubt that on their return debate in this House would be richer and fuller because members opposite would be better informed about what is happening in regional New South Wales. The member for Epping should get out of his electorate and go bush to find out what it is really like in the country. This time members opposite should not simply fight over which DVDs to watch. I am sure that if the member for Coffs Harbour went on the bus trip he would be much better informed. I am sure it would be a very fruitful exercise.

Question—That the words stand—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 47

| | | |
|-------------|--------------|-----------------|
| Mr Amery | Ms Gadiel | 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 Burney | Ms Judge | Mr Stewart |
| Ms Burton | Ms Keneally | Mr Terenzini |
| Mr Campbell | Mr Khoshaba | Mr Tripodi |
| Mr Collier | Mr Koperberg | Mr West |
| Mr Coombs | Mr Lalich | Mr Whan |
| Mr Corrigan | Mr McBride | |
| Mr Costa | Dr McDonald | |
| Mr Daley | Ms McKay | |
| Ms D'Amore | Mr McLeay | <i>Tellers,</i> |
| Ms Firth | Ms McMahan | Mr Ashton |
| Mr Furolo | Ms Megarrity | Mr Martin |

Noes, 36

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

Pair

Mr Gibson

Mr Piccoli

Question resolved in the affirmative.**Amendment negatived.****Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.****The House divided.****Ayes, 47**

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

Noes, 38

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

Pair

Mr Gibson

Mr Piccoli

Question resolved in the affirmative.**Motion agreed to.**

The SPEAKER: Order! Debate on the motion accorded priority having concluded, the House will now proceed to Government business.

MAJOR EVENTS BILL 2009

Bill introduced on motion by Ms Jodi McKay, on behalf of Ms Kristina Keneally.

Agreement in Principle

Ms JODI McKAY (Newcastle—Minister for Tourism, Minister for the Hunter, Minister for Science and Medical Research, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Cancer)) [4.18 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

Major events bring significant economic and community benefits to New South Wales and this Government has worked hard to ensure that New South Wales continues to be a leading global events destination. In recent years New South Wales has demonstrated its ability to successfully host enormous sporting and cultural events, including the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games and the 2003 Rugby World Cup. Most recently, Sydney hosted World Youth Day in July 2008, which brought more than 200,000 people to the mass celebrated by the Pope at Randwick Racecourse. Major events increase tourism, create jobs and can contribute millions of dollars to the New South Wales economy. New South Wales dominates tourism in Australia, receiving over 50 per cent of all international tourists to Australia and over 30 per cent of domestic visitors. Tourism is enormously important to the New South Wales economy and injects around \$24 billion into the State economy every year.

The New South Wales tourism industry directly generates approximately 156,000 jobs, which is about 5 per cent of the New South Wales workforce. An example of the benefits that major events can bring to New South Wales is the Australian round of the World Rally Championship, which was held in the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales earlier this month. Events New South Wales has estimated that the rally will generate more than \$100 million in direct economic benefits for New South Wales over the life of the 10-year agreement covering the event. It is boosting tourism and creating jobs in regional New South Wales. In October Sydney will host the Sydney 2009 World Masters Games, which will bring over 30,000 people from more than 90 countries to compete at more than 70 venues throughout Sydney. This event will bring both economic benefits to New South Wales, with an estimated \$48 million boost to the economy, and social benefits, by promoting friendships between people from all over the world and participation in sport by people of all ages.

These types of events involve enormous amounts of planning, coordination and logistical support from government agencies, including transport and traffic management, health, police and emergency services, crowd management and use of venues. The events, in turn, bring increased international and domestic tourism to New South Wales, economic benefits, jobs and an enhanced international profile. Special legislation has often been enacted to facilitate the conduct of particular major events in New South Wales. Most recently this occurred in relation to the World Rally Championship. Special legislation was also enacted to facilitate the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, World Youth Day 2008, V8 Supercars motor racing at Homebush and the Sydney 2009 World Masters Games.

Over time, a standard set of provisions has been developed for major events legislation. Although the types of events have varied widely, many of the legislative provisions necessary to support the events have been essentially the same. To increase certainty for event organisers and to further encourage the economic investment produced by the staging of events in New South Wales, the Government is introducing the Major Events Bill 2009. The bill collects together the provisions that have been regularly used in such special legislation and allows specified provisions to be applied to an event that is declared in regulations to be a major event for the purposes of the legislation.

An event can be declared to be a major event only after consideration of the nature of the event, the number of people expected to attend or participate in the event and whether it is in the public interest for the event to be declared a major event. Generally, only events that are anticipated to be of a large scale with a large number of participants or spectators would be declared as major events. The regulation that declares an event to be a major event will also declare which components of the bill will apply to the event, and specify the period of time that those provisions apply. Not all components of the bill will be relevant to every major event. Sometimes the scale of the event will mean that it will be necessary to set up a special government agency to coordinate government support for the event, as was done for World Youth Day 2008 and the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games.

On other occasions it will not be necessary and existing arrangements will be sufficient. For these events, the Department of Premier and Cabinet's Community Engagement and Events Division will generally

continue to be responsible for the central coordination of operational planning and logistical support by government agencies for special and major events. The bill contains a number of components that can be activated by regulation for a declared major event. A specially constituted agency may be established or an existing government agency or official may be designated as the responsible authority for the event. The responsible authority may co-ordinate the delivery of government services and government agencies may be required to cooperate with the responsible authority to support the event.

The responsible authority may coordinate special transport services and will be able to plan and coordinate integrated road and transport services in consultation with the Roads and Traffic Authority. General traffic management powers may be applied to a declared major event, including powers to allow for the closure of roads, the designation of special lanes and clearways for the event and the removal of vehicles from those areas, and offences for illegal car parks. Advertising and marketing controls may be applied to a declared major event, including restrictions on the use of airspace, aerial advertising and advertising on buildings and structures in and around specified major event venues and facilities, and protection of special event titles and insignia.

Safety and crowd management provisions may be applied to a declared major event, including offences relating to dangerous, offensive or nuisance conduct and provisions for the appointment of authorised officers with powers relating to the issuing of penalty notices, directions to leave venues and the authority to request a search of articles or electronic search of persons as a condition of entry to venues. The liability of the Government and others may be limited, including the civil liability of agencies and staff when exercising their functions in good faith in relation to the event, and the protection of persons from liability in nuisance in relation to the staging of an event. The Government can still, however, be liable in relation to acts or omissions that cause personal injury to a person or the death of a person.

The bill allows for the modification of the application of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979, Local Government Act 1993 and the noise provisions of the Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997 to a major event. The bill does not, however, modify the application of the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974. The bill also contains provisions that apply generally to a declared major event, including provisions allowing court proceedings to be brought for an offence against a provision of the Act or regulations and the issuing of identification cards to authorised officers. Many of the provisions in the bill are similar to the provisions that applied during the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games and World Youth Day 2008.

For example, the restrictions on advertising in the bill applied during both of those events. Restrictions on advertising may be necessary for a major event in order to prevent ambush marketing and to provide clean venues, free of advertising, to event organisers. Ambush marketing cashes in on media attention relating to the event, where the advertiser has not contributed to or sponsored the event. The provisions, if applied to a particular major event, will also protect the official titles and symbols associated with the major event. This will prevent persons from making false claims that their products or services are associated with the event. The restrictions on advertising ensure that event organisers can protect important commercial relationships with their business partners and event sponsors.

Not all of the components of the bill will be relevant to every declared major event, but the use of uniform provisions will increase transparency, certainty and consistency in relation to the way in which major events are regulated. The bill will also remove the need to enact special legislation for some major events altogether, and will reduce the need to enact special legislation for other major events. Other jurisdictions—including Victoria, Queensland and New Zealand—use generic major events legislation. This bill will ensure that New South Wales maintains a competitive advantage in attracting and staging major national and international events. The bill demonstrates the Government's continued commitment to attracting major events to New South Wales and to providing coordinated government support to those events. I commend the bill to the House.

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

**CRIMES (FORENSIC PROCEDURES) AMENDMENT (UNTESTED REGISTRABLE PERSONS)
BILL 2009**

Agreement in Principle

Mr BARRY COLLIER (Miranda—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.28 p.m.], on behalf of Mr David Campbell: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

The Crimes (Forensic Procedures) Amendment (Untested Registrable Persons) Bill 2009 was introduced in the other place on 2 September 2009. The second reading speech appears at pages 4 and 5 of the *Hansard* galley for that day. The bill is in the same form as introduced in the other place. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr GREG SMITH (Epping) [4.29 p.m.]: I lead for the Liberals-Nationals in regard to this bill, which we do not oppose. The Crimes (Forensic Procedures) Amendment (Untested Registrable Persons) Bill 2009 amends the Crimes (Forensic Procedures) Act 2000. Part 7B of the Crimes (Forensic Procedures) Act 2000 authorises the conduct of certain forensic procedures on persons who have been found guilty of sexual and other serious offences against children and who are required to be registered, and who are subject to certain reporting obligations under the Child Protection (Offenders Registration) Act 2000. The stated object of the bill is to amend part 7B of the Forensic Procedures Act:

- (a) to enable a police officer to detain an untested registrable person when the person attends a police station or other place in person to make a report in accordance with the person's reporting obligations under the Child Protection Act at a police station or other place:
 - (i) for the purpose of determining whether the person consents to the carrying out of a forensic procedure in accordance with the Forensic Procedures Act, and
 - (ii) if the person consents, for the purpose of carrying out the forensic procedure, and
 - (iii) if the person does not consent, for the purpose of obtaining a senior police officer's order to carry out the forensic procedure and carrying it out, and
- (b) to enable the police officer to use reasonable force to ensure the detained person remains at the police station or other place, and
- (c) to make it clear that an application may be made to a court for an order for the carrying out of a forensic procedure on an untested registrable person whether or not the untested registrable person has been requested to consent to the carrying out of the forensic procedure or been ordered to undergo the forensic procedure by a senior police officer, and
- (d) to make it clear that a court may order the carrying out of a forensic procedure on an untested registrable person whether or not the person is present, and
- (e) to enable a police officer to arrest an untested registrable person who fails to comply with a court order for the carrying out of a forensic procedure for the purpose of carrying out the procedure in accordance with the order, and
- (f) to make other minor and consequential amendments.

Part 7B of the Forensic Procedures Act was amended in June 2009 by the Crimes (Forensic Procedures) Amendment Bill 2009 in relation to the carrying out of forensic procedures on a child who is under the age of 10 years. The changes in the current bill, some four months later, relate to untested registrable persons. "Untested registrable person" is defined in section 75P as follows:

- (1) Intimate forensic procedures to which this Part applies. This Part applies to the carrying out of an other-administered buccal swab.

I presume that refers to a police officer carrying out a buccal swab by putting the swab inside a person's mouth and scraping the gum to get a DNA sample. The definition continues:

- (2) Non-intimate forensic procedures to which this Part applies This Part applies to the following non-intimate forensic procedures:
 - (a) the carrying out of a self-administered buccal swab,
 - (b) the taking of a sample of hair other than pubic hair.
- (3) This Part applies to any person:
 - (a) who is a registrable person under the Child Protection (Offenders Registration) Act 2000, and
 - (b) who is required to comply with the reporting obligations under that Act, if it appears that the person's DNA profile is not contained in the offender's index of the DNA database system (an "untested registrable person").

The Minister for Police, Mr Tony Kelly, admitted in his second reading speech of 3 September that this amendment is based on advice from the Crown Solicitor that there was ambiguity in part 7B of the Crimes (Forensic Procedures) Act 2000. The Minister's second reading speech did not explain that clearly, as it was very brief. However, I am indebted to Ms Sylvia Hale, who, in her contribution to the second reading debate in the upper House said that she asked the office of the Attorney General to explain why the legislation was

necessary given that registrable persons are already required to provide a DNA sample. Ms Sylvia Hale said the answer she was given was that some released persons who have been living in the community for a time were not caught by the new DNA sample requirements so they have not been tested. The member was further advised that a small number of these people have sought to evade giving a sample by leaving a police station when asked to provide a sample. As they are technically not under arrest, they are therefore free to leave. When no court order is in place, this allows them to avoid providing a sample.

Section 75W of the Crimes (Forensic Procedures) Act authorises a police officer to request an untested registrable person, other than a child or incapable person, to consent to a forensic procedure to which the part applies being carried out on the person. Subsection (2) is added, and authorises a police officer to detain an untested registrable person at a police station or other place for so long as is reasonably necessary to determine whether the untested registrable person consents to the forensic procedure and to the carrying out of same, or, if they do not consent, then to order the carrying out of a non-intimate forensic procedure. Subsection (3) sets out the information a police officer must provide to an untested registrable person on detention, such as why they are being detained and what authority the officer has for detention. Reasonable force may be used for such detention and a court order can be sought where an untested registrable person does not consent to the forensic procedure being carried out. Further, a court may order the carrying out of a forensic procedure whether or not the person is present in the court. An untested registrable person who fails to comply with a court order may be arrested.

There are some arguments in favour of the bill. Clarification of these police powers will assist officers in the performance of their duties, particularly in relation to suspected paedophiles. Further clarification of this ambiguity will deter wasted time and resources in regard to legal challenges to part 7B powers. There are no significant arguments against the introduction of the bill. As I said, the Opposition does not oppose the bill. The legislation should have been amended in the past to cover these people, but we do not take that point. It is extremely important that young and vulnerable people who are preyed on by paedophiles be protected by the law as much as possible. For those reasons we do not oppose the legislation.

Mr BARRY COLLIER (Miranda—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.37 p.m.], in reply: I thank the member for Epping for his contribution to the debate. The Crimes (Forensic Procedures) Amendment (Untested Registrable Persons) Bill 2009 amends part 7B of the Crimes (Forensic Procedures) Act 2000 with respect to the power of police to conduct a forensic procedure on a person who is registered on the Child Protection Offenders Register—that is, an untested registrable person. The bill amends the Crimes (Forensic Procedures) Act 2000 to enable a police officer to detain an untested registrable person when he or she attends a police station or other place in person to make a report in accordance with the person's reporting obligations under the Child Protection (Offenders Registration) Act 2000 if the person tries to leave during the consent process, during the time taken for an officer to consider making an order, or during the time the order is being carried out. The bill further amends that Act to make it clear that an application to the Local Court for a procedure can be made at any time.

It also amends the Act to make it clear that the court can make an order that a procedure be conducted without the registrable person being present at court. The bill further amends that Act to provide that a police officer can arrest a person who fails to comply with a Local Court order, for the purpose of carrying out the order. The bill makes other minor and consequential amendments to the Act. The member for Epping referred to an ambiguity in the bill. The need for clarification was based on advice that police were unsure of their power to physically take DNA from a person reporting to a police station pursuant to the requirements of the Child Protection (Offenders Registration) Act where that person did not consent to the DNA being taken and an "officer order" had to be made.

The bill amends part 7B of the principal Act to allow police the power to detain such a person when he or she is reporting. It also clarifies police powers concerning court-made forensic procedure orders against registrable persons ensuring that an order can be made in the absence of the registrable person and making it abundantly clear that a person who breaches such an order can be arrested and have his or her DNA taken forcibly if required. The bill clarifies the powers of police to take DNA samples from untested registrable offenders. The government is committed to ensuring that police do have appropriate powers and to maintaining appropriate safeguards on the appropriation use of DNA information. The bill strikes an appropriate balance and I commend it to the House.

Question—That this bill be now agreed to in principle—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Passing of the Bill

Bill declared passed and returned to the Legislative Council without amendment.

BUDGET ESTIMATES AND RELATED PAPERS

Financial Year 2009-2010

Debate resumed from 3 September 2009.

Mr ALAN ASHTON (East Hills) [4.40 p.m.]: I conclude my budget speech by referring to a couple of final matters. First is the tremendously innovative and important Community Building Partnership program that was introduced by the Government this year. This program will not only benefit the constituents of my electorate but it will also benefit the other 92 electorates in the New South Wales lower House; it will benefit everybody in New South Wales. The \$300,000 that has been set aside for each electorate is the equivalent of about six years worth of funding under the Capital Assistance Grants that are usually supervised by the Minister for Gaming and Racing, and Minister for Sport and Recreation. The two most important aspects of the Community Building Partnership are the creation of jobs, which is what all economies are about—especially in difficult economic times, although Australia and New South Wales are progressing well—and the provision of benefits to local sporting, social and cultural organisations in New South Wales.

I sent out letters to dozens of different sporting, social and cultural organisations I have come to know in my electorate. The Bankstown City Council also provided lists, together with the information provided by the State Government. Over time local members become well known to their local sporting clubs, rotary organisations and Lions clubs. I note the member for Lismore, Thomas George, is present in the Chamber. I take this opportunity to recognise the great work he did today in holding the rooftop barbecue to support the Lions NSW Eye Bank—

Mr Thomas George: The club did it.

Mr ALAN ASHTON: The club did it but you deserve credit, along with Karen Paluzzano and Shelley Hancock for their work at the barbecue.

Mr Thomas George: They were the ones.

Mr ALAN ASHTON: The barbecue was great. One may well ask what that has to do with the budget. It demonstrates the goodwill of members of Parliament who do not often receive the recognition they should. Importantly, those organisations are eligible to apply for a share of this \$300,000. Many applications have gone in from my electorate, although I am not aware of all of them. Some sought advice from me and others submitted their applications straight to the relevant authority. The groups that applied will know the results in a couple of weeks. The sums will then be done. They will be supervised and checked by the Department of Premier and Cabinet to ensure the probity of the organisations and that they are what they say they are, and then jobs will begin and the money will be spent. Hopefully this will not be a one-off and something like this will be able to be done again. In a sense, this is part of the Government's own stimulus package. For example, one of the football clubs in my electorate needs concrete to make some steps, others have asked for shade shelters, a tennis club has asked for—

Mr Thomas George: We are talking about the last budget, not the next one.

Mr ALAN ASHTON: No. A lot of them have asked for fencing and the like, or for the upgrade of netball courts, and many other worthwhile purposes. The Government also has a \$62.9 billion infrastructure spend over the next few years, on critical work. In every area there is record expenditure, despite the difficult economic times. I congratulate the Government on this year's budget.

Mr THOMAS GEORGE (Lismore) [4.45 p.m.]: In making my contribution to the budget debate I would like to refer to the media release, "2009 Budget is one big déjà vu: A budget of re-announcements", that I issued straight after the budget. In that release I said I was disappointed that there had been no funding allocated to the stage three redevelopment of the Lismore Base Hospital, that there was no opportunity for the

Murwillumbah hospital to maintain and improve services, that 24-hour policing at Murwillumbah was not recognised, that Woodenbong to Legume Road was overlooked, and that the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme funding was not brought up to date.

Those of us from the northern rivers, and especially in the seat of Lismore, felt bypassed. A few announcements were made but they were already projects that were underway in the area. I would, however, like to congratulate the community on its great win with the Lismore Hospital Integrated Cancer Centre, which was announced in 2004 and is finally underway. That development will also include the completion of the cardiac catheterisation unit at Lismore Base Hospital. I will return to the health needs of the Lismore electorate shortly.

The Minister for Police and the Minister for Roads recently visited us at Lismore to discuss the New South Wales State Plan. Approximately 80 people were in attendance at that community meeting. Clearly, if the Government had been listening it would have known everything that came out of that discussion was what I have been saying in this Chamber for some time. The Government does not listen to what local members say about their communities. In the Government summary of the outcome of the community meeting, under the heading "What works well in your community?" the responses were:

1. A strong sense of community—North Coast communities work well together.

That is nothing new to this place. The next response was:

2. Life style and environment—productive, fertile, natural environment, positive environment for families".

Any member from the North Coast could have told the Government that. The next response was:

3. The education system—primary, secondary, TAFE and university."

That has been recognised by me a number of times in this House. The next response was:

4. Creativity and capacity for innovation and entrepreneurship—creative industries and small businesses."

If the Government had listened it would have known that is representative of our community. Under the heading "What are the priorities for action in your community?" the responses were:

1. Improve transport infrastructure and public transport services across the region.

That has certainly brought to the attention of the Government on a number of occasions.

2. Land use planning—balancing development and natural resources.

Again the planning issue has been registered in this House on a number of occasions.

3. Improve access to modern technology....
4. Improve community infrastructure particularly in smaller regional communities.

But what does the Government do? It keeps taking things away from these smaller communities. In the health system, for example, services are being taken from smaller hospitals and given to Lismore where the required infrastructure is not in place. There is no regional transport to get people there and that is creating problems. The next issues were:

5. Housing affordability—the region needs more social housing opportunities for the aged and disadvantaged.
6. State Plan needs to include a stronger regional focus and regional delivery framework

The State Plan refers to transport in Sydney. It does not say anything about transport in regional New South Wales. Government members run around New South Wales talking about the State Plan, yet the Government's own document refers to transport in Sydney and nowhere else. That is typical of the State Plan: Newcastle—Sydney—Wollongong. In relation to education, I forwarded to the Minister for Education and Training a letter I received from Karen Slater, President of the Parents and Citizens Association, Kyogle Public School. Ms Slater states that the school's new hall, which is being constructed under the Building the Education

Revolution program, is grossly inadequate to meet the school community's needs. The new hall will house only two-thirds of the students. What will happen to the other one-third? I am awaiting the Minister's response, although she may have responded directly to the association.

The Government often refers to the school computer laptop program. Only one-third of the laptops have been delivered and only one-third of teachers have received them. As a result of this program, schools have incurred greater costs. At one school the power bill has increased by \$40,000 a year. But schools have not had an increase in their budgets. As a result of the swine flu, schools have been required to improve hygiene by installing soap dispensers in toilet blocks. But they have not been reimbursed for these costs. They have not received extra funding for changes in class sizes. There have been many examples of some schools receiving money, but other schools with priority needs missing out. I always enjoy visiting the TAFE facilities at Lismore and Murwillumbah. I recently supported TAFE teachers who held a rally in front of Parliament House. TAFE teachers should not have to give up conditions in order to receive a wage increase.

On the issue of bullying, I am one of the few members of Parliament to have issued a brochure on this matter. I ask every member of the House to participate in debate on this issue. A member who said that there was no bullying at any school, private or public, in their electorate would be telling a lie. Bullying is a major problem. Concerns have been raised with me about bullying issues at a major interchange in Lismore. It is probably the largest interchange in regional New South Wales, being used by about 2,600 to 2,800 students. There was the recent tragedy in Mullimbimby in the electorate of the member for Ballina. I have brought to the attention of the House a situation at Kadina High School and an incident at Lismore Public School where a young boy with special needs ended up in hospital. We as a community must come to grips with this issue. When I, and I am sure other members, attended school bullying occurred. Bullying is not new. But today there are so many ways to bully that we must be more proactive. The Department of Education and Training has informed me that it has policies in place. However, we must ensure that those policies are administered consistently at every school.

As the member for Clarence has often told the House, there will be 400 jobs lost from the North Coast Area Health Service. The North Coast Area Health Service is underfunded, according to the Government's own formula, by approximately \$62 million a year. Although it has been underfunded, Chris Crawford has to try to balance the budget by cutting about 400 jobs. When the cuts were announced in the mini-budget last year, the Premier told the House that no front-line services would be lost. That statement has turned out to be totally incorrect. The Premier has misled the House. There are many indications of front-line services being lost. Some of the issues that have been brought to my attention include the non-replacement of staff on sick leave, long service leave and recreational leave, which places greater pressure on staff.

Further issues I have raised in the House include hospital staff being sent a threatening email prior to a rally held on 5 August; a nurse manager being forced to perform clinical duties with no management hours allowed; all management jobs being temporary contracts, causing nil job security, deterring staff from applying and impacting on leadership, mentoring and patient care and safety; and plans to replace registered nurses with enrolled nurses and assistants in nursing in critical and acute care settings. The list goes on. The fact is that the North Coast Area Health Service is losing 400 positions. The cuts are interfering with front-line services and the non-replacement of positions is placing greater pressure on staff. The only person who would be thrilled to have the same bed occupancy as the Lismore emergency unit would be the local motel owner. These issues must be addressed urgently, otherwise a major disaster will occur and someone will suffer at the hands of the system.

A mental health unit and child and adolescent beds have been opened in Lismore and an integrated cancer unit, stage 2 of the hospital development, is being built. However, stage 3 of the hospital development has dropped off the Government's plans. It does not seem to be in anyone's plans at the moment. That causes concerns not only for the Lismore community but for the whole Northern Rivers area. Patients from Kyogle, Bonalbo, Urbenville, Nimbin, Casino, Ballina and surrounding areas are sent to Lismore. The outlying hospitals are doing their best but when patients are transferred to Lismore we just do not have the infrastructure in place to be able to handle it. Until such time as we get that infrastructure in place the health system in Lismore will remain under stress. These people are working under extreme conditions and it will have ramifications somewhere in the system.

Another problem concerns the Department of Primary Industries. The livestock health and pest authorities have been revamped recently. That has had a major effect along the coast, with an increase in rates in that area. A number of landholders have contacted me and I have passed on their concerns to the Minister. That issue needs to be looked at. I must register concern also about the native vegetation laws in this State and what

they mean for farming. For example, we have the Department of Climate Change telling dairy farmers in my area that they have to upgrade their systems to become more water efficient. One of the youngest dairy farmers in my electorate is doing a fantastic job; he milks about 250 cows. He decided to do what the Department of Climate Change said and upgrade his water system. But to be able to put this new and very efficient water system in he has to take about 25 trees off his property. But the native vegetation department says he cannot take those trees out. The only way he can get around this is to buy the property next door for \$800,000 and plant every acre of that property down with trees so he can take the 25 trees out. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

That is a problem that needs to be looked at. We have people with what should be productive farmland but it is not productive because they cannot clear it because of our native vegetation laws. Many farms are not producing as well as they should be because they cannot get a water licence. We are telling farmers they have productive land but they cannot improve their land because they cannot get a water licence. A farmer might have water on the property or going past it but that farmer cannot get a water licence because there have been embargoes back to the member for Mount Druitt's day. People have productive land but they cannot do anything with it. We are contradicting everything we tell the farmers and that is why they are up in arms. There has to be a valley-by-valley approach. When he was shadow Minister for Water the member for Ballina certainly went down that path.

I could speak about many other issues, and I know the member for Mount Druitt loves me talking about cattle ticks. I will not address that issue today, although it is still of concern. There are many issues I would like to talk about but time does not allow me. I have talked about industries but I want to talk about roads now. The road system is not fair to people in New South Wales. As most people know, I was Deputy Chairman of the Northern Co-operative Meat Company, which is owned by cattle producers. It has a pig processing plant at Booyong and a cattle processing plant at Casino and a lot of the livestock comes from Queensland. Road weight limits are a problem.

A truck can travel from Toowoomba in the north, where a lot of pigs come from, down to Booyong. They load the truck with, say, 300 pigs, they come down to the Queensland border and they have about 70 kilometres to come into New South Wales, but they cannot. Because of the difference in weight limits between the States, they would have to unload 60 pigs. The roads are the same—it is the same Pacific Highway they are travelling on down the coast—but the weight limits are different in New South Wales. It places northern New South Wales businesses in an unfair position compared with their counterparts, and we have brought this problem to the attention of the Minister for Roads.

Equally, when you load a container in New South Wales you have to load it at a third less because of the weight limit. But once it gets 80 kilometres up the road you can put the third back in it to travel the Queensland roads. The containers coming out of the Northern Co-operative Meat Company—whether meat, macadamia nuts or whatever—are being loaded lighter in northern New South Wales just to travel the 50, 60 or 70 kilometres to Queensland. Once they are in Queensland they can be topped up. But economics do not allow the producers to do that. I was very pleased to see a road summit held recently in Ballina organised by the Federal member. All the mayors and everyone else were invited but the local members were not.

However, the summit came up with a great system for heavy transport on the Pacific Highway: trucks should go from Grafton across to Casino, east of Mount Lindsay into Beaudesert and into Brisbane, which is a direct route; put a second bridge across at Grafton—and I am sure the member for Clarence could remind everyone of all the times that was promised by Bob Carr two elections back—take the road over to Casino, then on to Kyogle, east of Mount Lindsay into Beaudesert, where south-east Queensland has really opened up now, and you have a direct route for the trucks to go instead of going up the Pacific Highway. That is a great idea. But it is the same idea that The Nationals put up prior to the last election, which was booed by the Minister for Roads at that time, who said that it would not work. He did a back-of-the-envelope costing of it and said it would not work. The Federal member and all the mayors now think it is a great idea, but they did not realise that it was the same plan that we submitted prior to the last election.

The east-west connections to the Northern Rivers are a disgrace. Warwick across to Lismore, Kyogle, Casino and into the Northern Rivers is the worst road in Australia between Woodenbong and Legume—they are not my words but the words of people who have travelled that road and have provided that description of the road on the Internet. We have been working very hard for years now to try to have this road recognised. It is the only road out of Brisbane that is flood-free and can get people down the New England Highway whenever there is a flood.

Mr Phillip Costa: Isn't that a Queensland road?

Mr THOMAS GEORGE: No. Woodenbong to Legume is just in the northern part of New South Wales. It is a vital link to south-east Queensland in terms of not only tourism and industry but also safety. At the moment trucks coming from Warwick down into the Northern Rivers have to travel to Tenterfield. B-doubles cannot travel the road. B-doubles that want to travel from Warwick, where Big W has a distribution centre, have to travel from Warwick down to Glen Innes, down to Grafton, down to Woodburn and then back up into Lismore that way. We talk about problems with climate change but the extra miles that trucks are forced to travel do not help. Again, the Northern Rivers are being penalised because we are so far from Sydney no-one knows we have these problems up there.

When Ministers come to the area they do not go into the top part of the State. But this is one road that has received the support of all the councils—not only Tenterfield shire but also Kyogle shire. Richmond Valley Council, Lismore City Council and Beaudesert shire have all supported this road because it is so important, not only to the people of Lismore, Casino and Kyogle but to the people in south-east Queensland and northern New South Wales. I do not know what I have to do to convince the Government. I will talk to Minister Daley to see whether I can bring a deputation to speak to him about this issue. This is one road in New South Wales that definitely needs to be fixed because it is a vital link between south-east Queensland and the North Coast of New South Wales.

Payroll tax is just one issue on a list of 70 or 80 cross-border issues that must also be addressed. The Northern Co-operative Meat Company at Casino employs 1,000 people. If it were to move 80 kilometres away into Queensland, it would save more than \$3 million annually in payroll tax and workers compensation premiums. That figure is five years old, and I do not know what it would be today. I mentioned the fire service levy in a debate earlier today. The company's fire service levy increased from \$68,000 to \$586,000 in one year. Queensland caps its levy at \$40,000. The company's Queensland competitors take that cost advantage to the world market. Every New South Wales business faces that problem when it competes with its Queensland counterparts.

I remember telling the House about a plasterer in Lismore who showed me figures that he obtained from a competitor in Queensland. He tendered for five government contracts, including Lismore police station, the Ballina hospital and the mental health unit, but he lost out to a Queensland company. I am talking about New South Wales Government contracts. The difference in the tender price was the higher payroll tax and workers compensation premiums charged in New South Wales. This Government must realise that that is happening every day, not only in the meat industry but also in the building industry and every other industry. If the member for Tweed were here he could give further examples.

People from Queensland cross the border to work in New South Wales, but we do not have reciprocal arrangements with regard to licences. People who complete a responsible service of alcohol course in New South Wales cannot use it to obtain work in Queensland. That causes pressure in every cross-border area, but the Government does not seem to accept that there is a problem. The Government must understand that to make this State more competitive and efficient we must address these cross-border issues. If we do not, we will have a continual flow of businesses not only to Queensland but also to the Australian Capital Territory, Victoria and South Australia.

I could say much more, but one of the most urgent issues in Lismore is providing for our homeless people. All members face this problem in their electorates. We have a soup kitchen in Lismore that is enthusiastically supported by volunteers. Ridley and Mieke Bell have been great benefactors and they recently put their hands in their pockets to buy a Lismore hotel to provide accommodation for homeless people. I compliment them on their efforts and note that they are looking for support. I have spoken on their behalf to the New South Wales Minister for Housing, and the Federal Government has offered help. The council is also supporting the project. This is a dream come true for the Bell family and for the entire community. I look forward to making representations to the Minister for Housing on their behalf to find a resolution to this problem in Lismore.

Mr RICHARD AMERY (Mount Druitt) [5.15 p.m.]: I will make some brief comments—they will be much briefer now that the member for Lismore has spoken for such a long time. He raised some budget-related issues and many others concerning northern New South Wales. Members should concentrate on the 2009-10 budget in their contributions to this debate. I acknowledge that the budget was handed down a few months ago and that as a result it has lost some of its currency for debating purposes. However, the passage of time gives us an opportunity to reflect on the budget's impact and its effect on New South Wales' credit rating.

Budget debates have focused traditionally on the detail of the Government's financial program and comparisons with what the Opposition has to offer. In other words, we discuss the Opposition's alternative budget, which is presented by the Leader of the Opposition a few days after the State budget is handed down. That is what happens in the Federal Parliament—I am sure members recall the debate that took place not only in the Parliament but also in the press regarding what Malcolm Turnbull had to say about the national budget. I understand that other State Parliaments follow the same format. However, that did not happen in New South Wales.

No-one expects the Opposition to produce colourful documents like those produced by the Government when presenting and promoting the budget. Nor does anyone expect the Opposition to reveal its every policy this far out from the next State election—and no-one is suggesting that it should. However, it is not unreasonable for the community to expect a substantial statement from the Opposition setting out what it supports and does not support in the budget. It is a \$40 billion or \$50 billion budget and members opposite probably support most of the measures in it. However, of course they do not say that. The Opposition is expected to provide at the very least a broad direction statement on a number of general issues.

One such issue is privatisation. The Opposition has presented two or three different privatisation policies in recent months. Members opposite might also tell us what they intend to do about the size of the public service. During the last State election campaign the then Leader of the Opposition offered a couple of different versions of the number of public servants that a Coalition government would sack. The Leader of the Opposition could also have given us an idea about the Coalition's policy on private involvement in public transport, decentralisation and so on. Unfortunately, the Leader of the Opposition did not provide any general direction in his speech in reply to the budget.

The debate on the budget is a good opportunity to test the community's reaction to any major public works projects the Coalition has been considering. For example, members opposite often say that we need new dams. This debate is a good opportunity to tell the House where they should be constructed and their potential benefits, not to mention the cost of those projects. In the past members opposite have floated the motorway through the Blue Mountains policy. Does that policy still stand? How much would it cost and what does the community think about it? I recall that it was first mentioned at a National Party conference in the 1990s. Has the Coalition dropped that policy altogether? We do not know.

I sat through the Leader of the Opposition's reply to the Budget Speech in June. If members were to test me on the dot points in that speech I would recall some comments about payroll tax—it seems to be the only thing members opposite talk about—something called a "State stimulus package" and boards for every hospital. They are the three dot points about Opposition policy that I remember writing down in my very small pocket notebook. Recently I listened again to the Leader of the Opposition when he moved a motion of no confidence in the Government. This was followed by the speech of the Leader of The Nationals. In both speeches the budget and the mini-budget of late last year were mentioned.

Again, I paid them the courtesy of sitting in Parliament and listening to their contributions. Again, I listened to the alternatives put forward by the Opposition. Again, I recall mention of boards for hospital districts—not boards for individual hospitals this time but boards for hospital districts. I ask the question—rhetorically I suppose—is there a change in that policy? The Opposition should spell out its policy more clearly. In his reply to the budget the Leader of the Opposition said there would be board for every hospital and now he says it is a board for every hospital district. It is a grey area, and I would like more information.

Again, I heard the story about payroll tax, and the State stimulus package also got another run. What did we get then? There was a cobbling together of news headlines of the past year. The Leader of The Nationals very much amused me: he had his newspaper clippings laminated. That was his prop, and it was virtually the basis of his speech. The point is that my dot points on those speeches are as follows: no new policies and no new budget alternatives—absolutely nothing. So we are left to talk about one side of the argument—unlike in Canberra where we have public and parliamentary debates on the budget. Unlike those of nearly all the other States, the New South Wales budget debate is about what the Government is doing. There are no alternatives and no comparisons for the community. Basically, the Opposition has let this budget go unchallenged.

The member for Lismore, one of our most respected members, spoke about a few items that are needed for the North Coast. He talked about cross-border issues—and I do not claim that all those items have to be funded—but they were not key points in the budget. We should not leave the points he made go unchallenged. Over 14 years this Government has been working through ministerial council meetings, through the Council of

Australian Governments arrangements and through mutual recognition legislation to make sure that wherever possible guidelines, laws, regulations, pricing and so on are uniform between the States. There will always be examples such as those referred to by the member for Lismore, but I hardly think it is a major point to bring to the House and raise in the context of a debate about what is good or bad in the budget.

I believe the State Government should be congratulated—some would expect a Government member to say that—on the standard of this budget. It was well presented. The Treasurer's speech made mention of the fact that no-one—certainly no government—is immune from the effects of the global recession. Malcolm Turnbull in Canberra and the Leader of the Opposition in this place seem to suggest that we are somehow quarantined from the global recession. It is not just talk; the Treasurer's speech referred to revenues that have been written down by something like \$10 billion over the next four years or so. The Opposition got some one-liners in the press about a \$1.3 billion deficit, but this deficit is minor when we compare the debt to asset value of this State, which is the most valuable entity in the country.

So while the Opposition talks down the State for its very small debt, it is pleasing to see that the ratings agencies have reaffirmed our triple-A credit rating—I think twice—since the State budget was brought down. In debates about budgets oppositions will say they are bad and governments will say they are good. But the good thing about ratings agencies is that they are non-biased and non-political. They have assessed the State's finances. They have assessed its debt, its capital commitments and its revenue potential and they have given us—to use the Premier's words of the other day—a big tick. In other words, they have given us a triple-A rating, and that should not be scoffed at.

The Opposition would be the first to attack the Government for being economically irresponsible if what happened in Queensland happened in New South Wales. Queensland is well run and mineral rich but of course it has been affected by the global financial situation. So the State got a double-A credit rating—no doubt in recognition of some issues that may be peculiar to Queensland. However, Labor was re-elected in Queensland while it had a double-A credit rating. New South Wales—which, according to the Opposition, supposedly has an incompetent Government—was assessed independently by Standard and Poor's, which is a non-biased, non-political organisation, and got a triple-A rating that was confirmed at least twice.

I come back to the early criticism of the Government by Opposition members who seized upon the Rudd Government's stimulus package when it was announced last year. You could hear the team in Mr O'Farrell's office saying, "Stimulus package, that sounds good; that is our position. We will call on the State Government to introduce one." That seemed to be a major component of Opposition members' comments after the State budget was brought down. The major component of the Federal scheme is infrastructure spending. Although it has not used the Federal Government's description, that is exactly what the State Government is doing. The budget papers talk of a \$62.9 billion infrastructure package over the next four years. This funding will be shared by every electorate. The package is certainly at work in my electorate of Mount Druitt, and has been for a number of years now.

What I like about the budget papers and about the Premier's comments is the way in which projects are valued in terms of job opportunities. For example, the budget speech refers to projects supporting 160,000 jobs per year. It lists projects that will provide 300 jobs for the Orange Hospital and 1,250 jobs on the Pacific Highway. The Port Botany expansion will deliver 2,000 jobs, and so on. Of course, this is what the stimulus package is all about at the Federal level, and it is what the infrastructure program is about at the State level. So in answer to the Opposition's call for the State to introduce a stimulus package, the response is clear: We have already done it. It is called the State infrastructure program. If members look at the program they will see that it is a stimulus package. Some 80 per cent of the Federal stimulus package is capital expenditure around the country. As members are starting to highlight, this money is being spent in all our electorates—including that of the member for Lismore, who spoke for half an hour this afternoon. That is more big expenditure in New South Wales, including, I am pleased to say, in the electorate of Mount Druitt.

In past years I have reported that my electorate has been somewhat of a building site, with projects such as the Mount Druitt courthouse, the rail bus interchange at Mount Druitt railway station, upgrades at the Mount Druitt TAFE and a library at Rooty Hill High School, to name just a few. It gave me plenty to talk about in the press and during budget debates and it revealed the activities that flowed from the Labor Government's commitment to improve services in electorates such as mine. Now those projects are out of the way, some would say that I should not expect too many more as other electorates are competing for taxpayers' dollars. But thanks to the Rudd Government's stimulus package and the State Government's infrastructure program much more is being done, and it is being done in my electorate.

This fact has been highlighted in many press releases issued from my electorate office. For example, on 10 June 2009 I announced the calling of tenders for a food technology facility for Plumpton High School. On the same day, my press release highlighted the \$22.5 million upgrade to Mount Druitt schools throughout the electorate. This work has been highlighted many times by others in the electorate. Plumpton High School will also receive a library upgrade, at a cost of \$3 million. Blakett Public School will get a new hall and covered outdoor learning area as well as a library upgrade, at a cost of \$2.5 million. Dawson Public School—one of the older primary schools in the area—will receive a new hall and covered outdoor learning area, also at a cost of \$2.5 million. Hebersham Public School, a fantastic school that is getting great results academically, is to receive a new hall, covered outdoor learning areas and a canteen, at a cost of another \$3 million. Noumea Public School is to receive \$2.5 million and Hassall Grove Public School will also receive funding.

Mr Thomas George: Is that in the budget?

Mr RICHARD AMERY: I am sorry to confuse the member for Lismore—whose 30-minute speech contained about five minutes on the State budget—but I am mentioning some items that are in the budget papers. I hope this is helpful to him. Another important part of the budget is housing. The Mount Druitt area has one of the largest housing estates in the State. It has one of the older housing estates that dates back to the 1960s. With those few comments, I conclude my contribution.

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

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ABBOTSFORD ROAD MAINTENANCE

Ms ANGELA D'AMORE (Drummoyne—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.30 p.m.]: This evening I bring to the attention of the House concerns from residents living on Wymston Parade, Abbotsford. As the local member of Parliament, on Saturday 29 August 2009 I convened a meeting of residents on Wymston Parade to discuss concerns relating to their road following a number of representations to my office. Wymston Parade is a council road that has been in disrepair for some time. Whilst the council has made some attempts to address repairs on the road with the assistance of State Government grants, no comprehensive works have been undertaken to address the overall state of the parade. Residents believe the current road is in urgent need of upgrading to address a number of concerns.

For several years residents have raised with council significant concerns about Wymston Parade. Wymston Parade experiences significant flooding associated with drainage problems and the slope of side streets. Sections of the seawall have been damaged over the years and are in urgent need of repair. There is clear visual evidence to indicate that the Wymston Parade seawall is deteriorating fast. The pressure behind the wall is significant, especially during periods of heavy rainfall, as occurred in May and June this year. Residents feel that the council can no longer ignore the deterioration of the seawall and that it needs to act and use sound engineering practices to repair the damage that is being caused by surface and underground water. During strong rainfall, the roadway experiences significant flooding—and residents have photographic evidence to prove it.

Wymston Parade has a beautiful walkway that is in need of a lighting upgrade. Many locals regularly make good use of the foreshore walkway. However, the walkway would be utilised more, particularly in the late afternoons and early evenings, if lighting were provided. Residents would feel safer using the walkway. They are also concerned about the possible collapse of a section of the parade roadway due to large underground voids. The parade currently has no kerb and guttering. The lack of kerb and guttering on the waterfront of Wymston Parade and the incorrect siting of the kerb and guttering above the sewer main north of Bickleigh Street are causing major problems. The road pavement has been raised to compensate for the lack of kerb and guttering, which is supposed to direct water to the eastern side of Wymston Parade. This has been ineffective and water now pools on both sides of the road during periods of heavy rain.

Some roadwork has been undertaken in the past with the assistance of State Government funding, but residents believe the current road is in urgent need of upgrading in order to address the above concerns. I note that in 1999 the State Government contributed \$80,000 for some upgrades to the road. Significant funding will need to be allocated to fix Wymston Parade. I ask the City of Canada Bay council and the Roads and Traffic Authority to provide options for measures to fix the road, and to provide an estimation of how much it will cost

and in what time frame the upgrade can be achieved. Residents are well aware that it may take two to five years to achieve a total upgrade because it must be done in stages to avoid disrupting the entire street. It is imperative that council and the State Government work together to reach agreement on an appropriate time frame and the necessary funding.

As I have stated, Canada Bay council has responsibility for upgrades to Wymston Parade. Notwithstanding this, I have written to the General Manager of the City of Canada Bay requesting that the council and the Roads and Traffic Authority work together, find solutions and repair the road. As a representative on the council's traffic committee, I have also forwarded this as an agenda item for actioning at the September meeting. At the meeting of residents it was resolved that, as the local member of Parliament, I seek the following: coordinate on-site inspection between residents, council officers and the Roads and Traffic Authority to inspect scope of work and outline options to remedy road problems; support the council to seek joint funding with the Roads and Traffic Authority to fix Wymston Parade; and continue meetings with Wymston Parade residents to ensure that consultation and commitments are progressed.

I have made representations to the Minister for Roads on this matter and we are in the process of confirming an on-site inspection with the Roads and Traffic Authority and council. I thank, in particular, two residents of Wymston Parade who have been active in pursuing these issues—namely, Vic Grant and Franca Rodilosso—for their efforts and commitment in liaising with my electorate officers to ensure the meetings were undertaken. The local road can be fixed through a number of funding sources. The State Government has allocated \$2 million to Canada Bay council for local roadworks in the 2009-2010 State Budget and under the New South Wales Local Government Grants Commission.

The State Government has made available up to \$200 million in interest-free loans to our local councils. Under this initiative councils can apply for loans to provide funding for upgrades to local roads, footpaths, seawalls, water, sewerage and other essential infrastructure. Land values in the Canada Bay council area have increased by an average of 5 per cent. This means that the council will be receiving additional income from rates based on 3.5 per cent of land value. This will provide Canada Bay council with windfall revenue this year.

THE SPIT CORRIDOR

Mr MIKE BAIRD (Manly) [5.35 p.m.]: Today I share with the House and the Minister for Transport a public transport option that deserves consideration as a measure to ease congestion along The Spit corridor. This roadway is so congested that the average speed a car travels is only 26 kilometres per hour. A person wearing running shoes can often travel faster—let alone any other form of transport. A bus rapid transit [BRT] system on the northern beaches has the potential to address this crippling problem for peninsula commuters, and I urge the Minister for Transport to seek expressions of interest as a priority.

Well-publicised reports have shown that traffic congestion damages the environment, harms people's health and wellbeing, and reduces the productivity of a city. Sydney's car addiction is so significant that, according to a study by the University of Sydney, if traffic continues to grow at the same rate as it has in the past couple of years, the number of car trips in the morning peak will climb 83,000, to 250,000 by 2013. That trend must be reversed. Car trips have continued to climb because the New South Wales Government has failed to provide public transport that is reliable, frequent, accessible and affordable. The Spit-Military Road corridor is the second-slowest road in Sydney yet the Government's plans for it have been sadly lacking. One could only describe it as tinkering around the edges. At the moment the solutions being offered will take five years to implement, and even then will achieve only a five-minute reduction in travel time, at best. That simply will not do. Public transport is the core of The Spit solution, and it is time the matter was addressed.

Last year I asked an international public transport expert to assess the viability of a bus rapid transit system for the northern beaches. These systems operate across the world in cities such as Istanbul, York in the United Kingdom, Brazil and, closer to home, on the successful busways in Brisbane. A BRT system incorporates exclusive bus lanes that traditionally run down the centre of the road. Because buses run frequently, there is no timetable and commuters can ride, walk or catch feeder buses to join the BRT network. The placement of the BRT system in the centre of the roadway removes any kerbside conflicts. The BRT system offers a number of advantages. It is affordable as it utilises existing infrastructure, with development costs assessed at being less than 5 per cent of those of rail. It is efficient, with one bus carrying five to 20 times as many people per hour as a car. It improves traffic flows as all existing buses are removed from mixed traffic and replaced with one bus lane in each direction. It reduces air pollution through car emissions, with one bus said to equal the emissions produced by 60 cars.

I wrote to the Minister for Transport because I understand that he is putting together a transport plan for Sydney. In this context, I asked him to call for expressions of interest and formal engagement to determine the feasibility, timing and density implications of a BRT system on the northern beaches. According to the transport expert assessment, a BRT system on the northern beaches would result in 9,000 fewer cars every morning on The Spit and a 45-minute bus journey to the city from Newport, halving the current travel time. In the letter I made it clear to the Minister for Transport that a dedicated bus lane through the Mosman community would not be tolerated so other routes or configurations would have to be considered to make that a possibility.

It is expected that a BRT system on the northern beaches could convert 15 per cent to 20 per cent of car users to public transport. Certainly the system could work in conjunction with a short tunnel, but it is necessary for the experts to look at the proposition, determine the feasibility of the routes, the configuration and how it would work within the existing density of that corridor. The Government has a proposal before it and the people on the northern beaches believe a BRT system should be incorporated. We have asked the Minister for Roads to respond to the community with a sensible proposal incorporating a BRT system. If he does so, the people of the northern beaches may have a long-term solution that not only makes sense but also puts public transport at the core, which is what has been missing from the debate. The Government should not be tinkering around the edge and looking solely at road solutions. Public transport is the core of the solution.

We know that 80 per cent of people who work in the northern beaches area use their cars, rather than public transport, to get to work—in the case of many, because they have no choice. The time they are forced to sit in their cars in traffic gridlock day in and day out would be better spent in achieving productivity, from a commercial perspective, or with their families, from a community perspective. I believe that a bus rapid transport system on the northern beaches is an affordable way for the Government to get people out of their cars; it is a measure the Government should seriously consider. Such a system would reduce congestion, improve the wellbeing of commuters, and boost the productivity of the State. I urge the Minister for Transport to formally seek expressions of interest to see whether a bus rapid transport system on the northern beaches could work, and then to consult the community on the issue.

KAREELA SHOPPING CENTRE DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

Mr BARRY COLLIER (Miranda—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.40 p.m.]: Plans for a massive expansion of Kareela neighbourhood shopping centre can best be described in two words: developer greed. An outfit called DBL Property has lodged a development application with Sutherland Shire Council for a huge increase in the size of the present village-style neighbourhood shopping centre in Freya Street without any increase in the site area whatsoever. The \$14.6 million proposal includes an expansion of Coles and Liquorland, with new loading bays for the largest delivery trucks, 18 extra shops, a two-storey gym and medical centre, an enclosed shopping mall, and a four-storey, eight-level car park adjacent to Siandra Drive. This means an expansion in the size of all existing shops and an increase in the total floor space from 3,980 square metres to 6,814 square metres. For existing small shopkeepers this means an increase in their rents whether they like it or not. Given that the owners of the centre are, I understand, already earning a respectable 8 per cent on their existing investment, the proposal smacks of sheer greed.

In anyone's language, this proposal is a massive overdevelopment of the site. As a Kareela resident, I can vouch for the fact that our local shopkeepers have served the people of our suburb very well for many years. But these greedy developers want to turn our vibrant, convenient neighbourhood shopping centre into a mini-Southgate, duplicating shops and services that are either in Kareela already or are already in other larger centres nearby, such as Jannali, Gymea and Miranda. If approved, the proposed development will alter the amenity and character of the suburb, and it will impact adversely on Kareela residents, their families and their lifestyles. The cost of the development to the Kareela community and its existing shopkeepers clearly outweighs any benefits to our community.

Not surprisingly, Kareela residents are strongly opposed to this development, with the loss of Kareela's village atmosphere that is so important to us. Recently I joined Kareela local Mrs Jill Maddox in presenting a petition to the shire mayor, Councillor Lorraine Kelly. The petition expresses the residents' strong opposition to the development, with the 2,490 signatories regarding "the proposal contained in D/A 09/0600 as a gross overdevelopment of the site, adversely affecting our community". Council has received more than 320 submissions from residents—including me—outlining their objections to the proposal on a wide range of fronts, including traffic congestion, pedestrian safety, disabled access, noise, pollution, security concerns, the potential for antisocial behaviour, loss of amenity and environmental impacts. I have received copies of many of

these submissions and, suffice to say, they are excellent. The submissions are thoughtful, logical and well balanced. They express well-founded concerns and suggestions by people who have lived in Kareela, brought up their families there, and used the shopping centre there for many years.

An excellent report, prepared by Council's Bruce Powe and tabled at last week's Sutherland shire consultative traffic forum, revealed that a total of 462 objections had been raised on significant traffic issues alone. These included traffic volumes, traffic congestion, pedestrian safety, impact on bus stops, disabled parking, increased heavy vehicle movements, and so on. It is little wonder that residents have focused on these issues, given that the developer predicts a whopping 56 per cent increase in traffic during peak periods. But surprise, surprise! The developer has submitted its own report suggesting that an increase in traffic from 462 vehicles per hour to 725 vehicles per hour in a suburb with only one access road in and out is not "substantial" and that the centre will operate "satisfactorily". The developer's traffic report contains more spin than a Shane Warne leg-break. The report states:

The traffic generation arising from the development can be accommodated with no external road improvements necessary and levels of service at intersections in the locality will remain unchanged following the completion of the development.

That statement is simply an insult to the residents' intelligence! Mr Bruce Powe's report identified nine significant adverse traffic issues that need to be addressed, as well as nine problems associated with the proposed multi-deck car park. The consultative traffic forum—comprising Councillor McCallum, police, the Roads and Traffic Authority, Veolia buses, ageing and disability council officers, my committee representative, Mr Jim Foy, and me—was unanimous in its decision to recommend that Sutherland Shire Council not support the development application, based on traffic and parking considerations. Other issues raised by the residents include the fact that the area is already congested, as anyone who tries to get out of the suburb on weekday afternoons after school hours would know. I fully support the decision of the consultative traffic forum—as I fully support the residents in strongly opposing the development. I encourage the consent authority, Sutherland Shire Council, to totally reject this development proposal.

VEHICLE SUSPENSION REGULATIONS

Mr ANDREW STONER (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [5.44 p.m.]: I have been contacted by a number of four-wheel drive owners in my electorate of Oxley, and indeed other parts of the State. Four-wheel driving is one of Australia's favourite pastimes. It is all about getting off the beaten track and seeing all the secrets this great country holds. Four-wheel driving is also about sustaining local tourism by attracting visitors to our diverse natural surroundings. Indeed, thousands of people across New South Wales participate in four-wheel driving every year, and the great majority of them are responsible drivers who enjoy exploring our beautiful country with their families and friends. So the question that must be asked is: Why did the Minister for Roads this year target four-wheel drive owners when he announced his new so-called anti-hoon regulations? The new regulations, which prevent car owners from raising or lowering their suspension, were supposedly designed to stop hoons from lowering their cars. However, the regulations apply to all kinds of motorists, not just hoons.

The approach taken by the Rees Labor Government is like using a sledgehammer to crack a walnut. While there are a small proportion of hoons who do lower their car's suspension to look cool, in reality most motorists who change their vehicle's suspension are responsible drivers, not hoons. Many four-wheel drivers and off-roaders raise or lower their vehicle's suspension in order to improve its handling and braking, making it safer and certainly not more dangerous. The new regulations mean that four-wheel drive owners will have to get their vehicles approved by Roads and Traffic Authority engineers, at a cost of around \$1,000, or risk having the cars labelled as not being roadworthy. If the drivers continue to drive their modified four-wheel drive vehicles, they face fines of up to \$7,700. A memorandum of understanding signed on 23 January 2007 by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the then Department of Environment and Conservation, and the peak body Four Wheel Drive NSW & ACT states:

4WD NSW promotes responsible 4WD family touring, environmental awareness, driver education and skills development.

The 4WD New South Wales follows closely the activities of public land management authorities and prepares submissions to Government, NPWS, the Department of Land and Water Conservation and other organisations to help ensure that the natural asset that 4WD NSW members enjoy (the bush) is properly managed.

Do the organisation Four Wheel Drive NSW & ACT, the 80 affiliated clubs in New South Wales, and the numerous families and four-wheel drive enthusiasts involved in these activities sound like hoons? If not, why was Four Wheel Drive NSW left in the dark about the proposed changes until after they were announced? But it

is not just four-wheel drive owners who are affected; the regulations can apply also to caravans, rural motorists and even wheelchair taxis. It shows just how out of touch the Rees Labor Government has become. Hoons and four-wheel drivers are completely disparate groups; only a fool would group them together.

The worrying thing is that these rules were introduced without any proper consultation with the community or industry. If the Minister had taken the time to talk to four-wheel drive owners, he would have realised that most of them raise their vehicle's suspension for safety reasons, not to make them look cool. This is just another example of the out-of-touch Rees Government making up policy on the run, which sadly would end up costing and inconveniencing thousands of responsible motorists. However, following pressure from the media, the automotive industry and members of the community, the Minister for Roads recently backflipped and announced that the harsh new regulations will be placed "on hold" to allow time for consultation.

Mr Robert Coombs: What's wrong with that?

Mr ANDREW STONER: It should have happened in the first place. It is shameful that a government can put as little thought into announcing new rules in order to catch the whole industry unawares. If, as it seems in this instance, this is the case, the question needs to be asked: Who does the Government consult with prior to announcing new regulations and legislation? The answer in this case is that no-one was properly consulted before these regulations were put in place. The Minister's approach and his mismanagement of his department in this whole affair has been extraordinary. Four Wheel Drive NSW & ACT correctly observed that the Minister for Roads, Michael Daley, ignored the current national code of practice for the modification of light vehicles, which has been produced with Roads and Traffic Authority participation.

The authority is a member of the working party that is currently updating that national code of practice. This is not good enough. We want to see the Rees Labor Government's attack on four-wheel drivers not put on hold but called off altogether. That is why I call on the Rees Labor Government to rule out these changes, full stop. I have begun an online petition at www.nothoons.com.au so that members of the public may register their opposition to the Rees Government's out-of-touch new rules. The petition has already logged some 3,000 signatures in just the past few weeks. This is a significant issue. It is an issue that needs to be addressed. The Government should rule out these changes.

GOVERNMENT ASSET SALES AND PRIVATISATION

Mr PETER DRAPER (Tamworth) [5.49 p.m.]: When people were asked whether the Premier should sell NSW Lotteries, four out of four respondents to yesterday's On The Street poll in the *Daily Telegraph* said "No!" I do not for one minute suggest that 100 per cent of constituents in the electorate of Tamworth oppose the sale, but a large majority do—as do a large majority of people across the State. Similarly, they oppose the sale of electricity assets and other proposals to sell off the family farm. It is time that both the Government and the Opposition in New South Wales listened more closely to what the people have to say. Economic rationalism usually fails to deliver any of the much-promised extra competition, or lead to better and cheaper services. Fingers have been burnt far too many times: families and people on fixed low incomes never see the benefits that allegedly would flow from previous privatisations and rationalisations. For many people, sell-offs and economic rationalism equate to the continuing devaluation of our once famous ethic of giving people a fair go.

Recently I attended a rally in Dubbo to help to defend another icon that is under threat—the Royal Flying Doctor Service. People from right across the State attended the rally, which was part of an ongoing campaign to demand that the Government keep the New South Wales air ambulance contract in the safe hands of the Royal Flying Doctor Service. If the Flying Doctor loses this contract it will be not only a financial loss for this vital institution but a blow to its other services. A former Australian Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies, once said that the Royal Flying Doctor Service represented "the greatest single contribution to the effective settlement of the far distant back country that we have witnessed in our time ...". It still fulfils its vital role of providing a mantle of safety to so many people in rural and remote Australia. I congratulate the member for Dubbo on allowing so many concerned citizens to have their say. Dubbo councillor Lyn Griffiths attended the rally as a concerned citizen and acted as master of ceremonies. During the proceedings she read messages of support for the Royal Flying Doctor Service from people throughout New South Wales.

Peter Dooley drove from Sydney to attend the rally. He told how his Outback Trek team had raised more than \$600,000 for the Flying Doctor. I doubt that such generous public support would continue to flow should Flying Doctor services be compromised. Royal Flying Doctor Service board member Judy Jakins admitted that its finances will be more difficult to balance if the air ambulance contract is lost, and that

fundraising will become even more important. Local government also added its voice, calling for reason on the issue, while other speakers included the Country Women's Association's Macquarie group representative, Helen Tink, who said, "Leave the RFDS alone—its ours—don't touch it!" Two hundred people from Lightning Ridge sent a petition backing the Royal Flying Doctor Service. The mayor of Cobar, Lilliane Brady, added, "We have to stand together and tackle the Government head on. Put your pen to paper, lets stand up, lets be counted." Baradine resident Bob Johns summed it up for many by saying:

... the continuity of the RFDS in its service provision should be enough for the organisation to retain the NSW air ambulance service, and the loss of this contract could mean the loss of an RFDS base and jobs.

The real question is: Are elected representatives listening closely enough to the people and respecting majority views? Sadly, the answer is no. The wishes expressed by people who are against the sale of NSW Lotteries are also falling on the deaf ears of both the Government and the Opposition. The member for Barwon stated on local radio yesterday that the Opposition had won a major concession for newsagents and would now support the sale—wrong. If the sale goes ahead newsagents have merely gained a temporary stay of execution. The amendments are basically illusory and their future position will be white-anted and undermined as soon as the sale goes ahead. Profit for a few will become the driving factor. I do not want death by a thousand cuts to be the fate of country newsagencies.

The debate on the NSW Lotteries (Authorised Transaction) Bill 2009 was very interesting to watch. It gave a true picture of what is going wrong in the State. Although the Opposition supports the sale of NSW Lotteries—after all, it is Coalition policy—originally it voted against the bill. A number of Government members made vigorous speeches in this House condemning the sale of NSW Lotteries, yet they voted in favour of the sale. A few weeks later the Opposition changed its mind, and now the sale will proceed. Both the Government and Opposition ended up looking ridiculous in the eyes of voters because of their conduct in debate on the sale of electricity assets. A Premier fell, the Government fell into disarray, and the Opposition has shown that it really does not know what its stands for. Despite the loud public cry of "No!" on the issue, the assets are still being sold through backdoor methods. Why do I continue to oppose the sale of lotteries and electricity assets as well as current threats to the Royal Flying Doctor Service? I do so because the vast majority of local constituents, plus people right across New South Wales, also oppose the sales and sellouts. It appears to me that many members of Parliament need to listen to the voice of the community and its message: enough is enough.

WARATAH PARK

Mr ROB STOKES (Pittwater) [5.54 p.m.]: I wish to highlight to the House the plight of Waratah Park—a magnificent 12-hectare sanctuary adjoining the spectacular Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park, which recently achieved national heritage listing for its outstanding biodiversity values. Waratah Park is best known as the home of *Skippy the Bush Kangaroo*, the iconic 1960s Australian television series that became part of television history. Waratah Park won international recognition as the quintessential Australian wildlife setting and played a crucial role as an ambassador for Australia's biodiversity and extraordinary natural environment. Coincidentally, at the same time as I am speaking in the House tonight, the cast and crew of the *Skippy* series are just down Macquarie Street at Dendy Circular Quay for the Premier of *Skippy—Australia's First Superstar*, which is directed by Stephen Oliver of Electric Pictures. It will be screened on the ABC next Thursday evening. I encourage members to watch it to gain some appreciation of just how iconic Waratah Park is, and how important it is as a site of Australia's cultural heritage.

However, following the filming of *Skippy*, the once superbly maintained park slowly began to deteriorate, becoming a faint facsimile of its glorious past. The Government ignored calls for State heritage listing by my friend and former member for Pittwater John Brogden. By 2003 the Australian Government's Department of Agriculture animal welfare unit intervened amid concerns for the welfare of the animals on site. A rescue of Waratah Park was attempted by Earth Sanctuaries Limited and was led by John Walmsley, who embarked on visionary project to restore the park by eradicating feral animals, restoring and replanting native vegetation and reintroducing native wildlife for which the area was once home, including bettongs, bandicoots and potoroos.

So successful was this undertaking that the park was referred to as the "1788 sanctuary" due to its effectiveness in showcasing the flora and fauna that existed in the area prior to European settlement. Its future was bright as the first native earth sanctuary in Sydney that focused on the promotion and protection of Australian native flora and fauna and presented an invaluable opportunity for tourists, school groups and university field students to witness firsthand the splendour of the Australian environment. Sadly the parent company of Waratah Park failed, pulling the rug from under Waratah Park before it could begin to succeed commercially.

Subsequently the Government consented to a transfer of the lease for Waratah Park to Melbourne-based property development group Prudential Investments. Since then, the park again has been closed. The gates were locked and once again the park was allowed to deteriorate. Ultimately the RSPCA ordered the removal of all surviving animals. International tourists are still driving out to the home of *Skippy*, only to be turned away. It is terribly sad, and a terrible indictment on this Government's environmental credentials, that what was once an internationally regarded sanctuary for native animals on Crown land is now deemed too dangerous for native animals to remain there.

I acknowledge the incredible efforts of Penny Edmonds and many others who are determined to ensure that the site not only remains in public ownership when the current lease expires but is restored so that the native animals can return to this spectacular bushland sanctuary. I note the ongoing efforts of the Duffys Forest Residents Association that is led by motivated, articulate and passionate environmentalists, such as Mary Newlinds, David Harris, Tony Carr and Richard Smallwood, whose presence I acknowledge in the gallery tonight. I also acknowledge the efforts made by many others who have fought to preserve the magical environment that still characterises this special rural community that is surrounded by national park, yet is so close to Sydney. These residents are determined to ensure any suggestion of inappropriate development of the site is refused. When the spectre of redevelopment appeared in 2002 the then planning Minister, Andrew Refshauge, said:

Waratah Park is an icon for thousands of people ... any application to rezone and develop this site would be rejected by the government.

He also stated that if an application for a heritage order were to be lodged for the site it would be looked at favourably. If the Government is so committed to the icon that is Waratah Park, why did it authorise the transfer of a lease for a wildlife sanctuary to a property development company? Why has it failed to take any action to include Waratah Park on the State's Heritage Register? It is time for the Government to show some leadership by outlining a clear plan for Crown landholdings in Duffys Forest, including Waratah Park. The public has a right to know the Government's intentions for the future of public land and we need a clear plan for a sustainable future for Waratah Park.

I call on the Government to acknowledge the dire state of affairs that currently confront Waratah Park. The Government must acknowledge the historical significance of the site and the recognition it commands throughout Australia and world wide. I also call on the Government to direct the Heritage Council to consider the inclusion of Waratah Park, particularly the iconic ranger cottage, on the State's Heritage Register. We must ensure that the site is preserved under public ownership and remains open for the enjoyment and benefit of the people of New South Wales. This is a real challenge for the current Government, and I urge it to meet that challenge.

BELMONT DEMENTIA DAY CARE CENTRE

Mr ROBERT COOMBS (Swansea) [5.59 p.m.]: It gives me great pleasure to inform the House of the funding for the construction of a new dementia day care centre worth more than \$1.5 million at Belmont, in the electorate of Swansea. The State and Federal governments are jointly funding the new centre. Under the Home and Community Care [HACC] program the New South Wales Government will contribute \$600,000 and the Federal Government \$900,000. HACC delivers affordable and accessible care to help meet the individual needs of older people, younger people with a disability and their carers, which helps them remain independent and in their own homes.

Since about 1988 the East Lake Macquarie Dementia Centre has recognised this. It was the first dementia centre to operate in the Hunter region and now deals specifically with patients from the East Lake Macquarie area. This great organisation has worked tirelessly with government authorities and relevant Ministers to secure the funding. It is a magnificent group, which provides an important health service in our area. The Minister for Ageing, Justine Elliot, was unable to attend to commemorate the announcement but she released a press release, in which she said:

We are constantly reminded that as people age they want to remain independent and in their own homes and communities, without Home and Community Care services, many people would have to move prematurely into residential care. The building of this dementia day care centre shows the Australian and New South Wales government is working together and preparing for the future. This facility is the 14th of 16 purpose-designed dementia-specific day care centres to be built across New South Wales in response to the increasing incidence of dementia.

The Minister for Ageing, Minister for Disability Services, and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Paul Lynch, said on the day:

In 2006 there were more than 73,000 people in New South Wales living with dementia and by 2050 this number will increase to an estimated 227,000. Dementia day care centres are one way we are responding to the challenges of an ageing population. These centres can provide outings, day trips, support, nursing and Allied health services to people with dementia and their carers.

The Federal member for Shortland, who was representing Minister Elliot, said:

The centre will provide a much-needed boost to dementia services in the Lake Macquarie area.

It goes without saying that the construction of the new facility is expected to generate up to eight full-time jobs in the construction and manufacturing areas, as well as jobs for architects, surveyors and project managers. It will also provide permanent employment for those people currently working at the dementia centre. The new centre will provide services to in excess of 60 clients from East Lake Macquarie alone. The new building will have adequate space for the provision of respite services. It will have two large activity areas, the larger of which can be divided into two smaller activity areas; a fully equipped kitchen; five toilets, all with disability access, and a fully equipped bathroom; three multipurpose rooms that may be utilised as consulting rooms; quiet rooms that may be utilised as bedrooms as and when required; a committee training room that will be equipped with up-to-date training equipment; a staff room; a laundry; and large, secure garden space.

My contribution today would not be complete without recognising some very important people who have worked to deliver this magnificent initiative. Board members Dick Delbridge and Josephine King and chairwoman Jenny Webb have worked tirelessly, and one cannot go past the magnificent efforts of current manager Glennis Butler. They are all very much looking forward to moving into the new premises, which are expected to be built alongside the Belmont hospital by December next year.

COFFS HARBOUR HOSPITAL PATIENT TRANSFERS

Mr ANDREW FRASER (Coffs Harbour) [6.04 p.m.]: Tonight I speak on behalf of one of my constituents, Fiona Erquiaga. On 16 July 2009, Fiona, a young businesswoman from Coffs Harbour, had an unfortunate experience when she was admitted to the Coffs Harbour Health Campus suffering severe respiratory distress. Fiona was placed immediately in the intensive care unit, where she stayed for two days. But at 10.00 p.m. on the second day she was airlifted from Coffs Harbour to Tweed Heads hospital. I have no problem with the fact that at times intensive care unit beds have to be cleared to accommodate emergency road accident victims, but a helicopter was flown from Wollongong at 10.00 p.m. to undertake the transfer. Mr Acting-Speaker, as a past board member of the Westpac Rescue Helicopter Service in Lismore—which serves our area so well—you would understand the extreme cost involved in flying a helicopter from Wollongong to Coffs Harbour and then on to Tweed Heads. Fiona was very ill when she was taken to Tweed Heads and she remained in the intensive care unit at that hospital from 18 to 23 July.

On 23 July, Fiona and her mother—who had come from Yamba to look after her as Fiona's husband was working in North Queensland and could not be with her—were told that Fiona would be transferred back to Coffs Harbour by ambulance on 24 July. Her mother was happy with that. She told her that she would visit Fiona at the Coffs Harbour Health Campus but stop off at Yamba on the way. She then left. Two hours later the doctors told Fiona that she was to be discharged. Where was the ambulance? There was no ambulance—find your own way back to Coffs Harbour! Fiona then had to ring her mother, who travelled from Yamba back to Tweed Heads—Coffs Harbour is about 3½ hours drive from Tweed Heads and about 2½ hours from Yamba—to collect her. Together they drove to Coffs Harbour, where Fiona was readmitted to the Coffs Harbour Health Campus for a further two days.

This matter is relevant because I have raised the issue of vancomycin resistant enterococci [VRE] at the Coffs Harbour hospital in both the media and Parliament today. Resources and jobs are lacking on the North Coast because of budgetary reasons. We have been told that we will lose 420 jobs. The cost of flying a helicopter from Wollongong to Coffs Harbour to Tweed Heads and back comes out of the budget of the North Coast Area Health Service. Fiona asked me to raise this matter in Parliament. She is happy to talk to anyone—the Minister, the media or whoever—to ensure that this sort of thing does not happen to other people. Fiona's mother received \$156 from the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme, which is fairly paltry compensation for such a long drive. What will this transfer cost the North Coast Area Health Service?

The system is not being managed properly. I believe the Government is responsible for ensuring that the management of the North Coast Area Health Service is efficient and proficient so that people such as Fiona

do not have to be transferred by air ambulance from Coffs Harbour to Tweed Heads. If there had been more respiratory equipment at the Coffs Harbour Health Campus—I have raised that issue in the Chamber before—I am sure that Fiona could have been cared for there. I am also sure it would have been cheaper for the North Coast Area Health Service to transfer Fiona to Baringa Private Hospital and pay the private hospital fee, rather than flying her to Tweed Heads. The management system needs to be looked at. More money is needed to put more nurses, doctors, front-line staff and cleaners into the health campus, which is a regional facility. We need to give people such as Fiona Erquiaga confidence in our health system.

DAVID NEWHAM

Ms SONIA HORNERY (Wallsend—Parliamentary Secretary) [6.08 p.m.]: Members will be anxious to hear about a very special person from the Wallsend electorate who has not only beaten the odds but made a conscious decision to give back to our community the benefits of his people's wisdom, knowledge and skills. I speak about a young man who is a descendant of the Wiradjuri and Ngemba peoples of central and north-western New South Wales. He is not a man who seeks publicity. On the contrary, he lives by "Indyamarra mumbar gari nurra nurra-bul"—or "Respect, humility and trust always", to quote the language of his ancestors.

His name is David Newham and he has lived in the Wallsend area all his life. He attended Wallsend High School and is an active member of the local Aboriginal community. David struggled with literacy issues in primary school, but fear of being a dunce drove him to try very hard, and by year 10 that persistence found him in the top classes. A huge turning point in his development came about at the year 11 Careers Day when he visited Aboriginal staff and students at the Aboriginal Studies School, Wollotuka, which is now the Institute of Aboriginal Studies on the University of Newcastle Campus. Meeting other Kooris on campus helped David to realise that university was a real option. From these humble beginnings, who would have thought that this young Koori boy would one day win the prestigious University of Newcastle Leadership Award?

The award aims to recognise and encourage emerging leaders in the Hunter and Central Coast regions and to provide the winner with additional training and support to help them address the challenges facing our society. Applying for this award proved to be a cultural challenge for David. As I said earlier, one of the major tenets of David's ancestral beliefs is humility. The application resonated with the panel and David later learned that the panel believed that humility was a major factor lacking in many leaders. Winning this award was yet another life-changing experience in David's journey. A \$10,000 Leadership Development Scholarship was part of the prize, which David used to attend a five-day senior leadership program in Melbourne, where he rubbed shoulders with multimillionaire executives and industry leaders from around the country and the world. David said:

It was truly life changing because it made me drill most deeply into who and what I am and what makes me tick. It challenged my concept of leadership and I examined the differences between leadership and management, workplace culture, adaptive change and being mindful. We had to face up to some really hard questions about what we subscribe to and who we are trying to be.

David is clearly grounded in his culture, which he describes as his backbone. We appreciate that he regularly visits our local schools, helping to raise the self-esteem of Aboriginal youth by promoting cultural harmony and identity. David said:

Working with the next wave of young people is exciting and is a huge responsibility. We take them out bush and teach culture, dance, to be proud and why it is important to have a solid education. By reconnecting them to their culture hopefully they will become engaged, empowered, strong and healthy community members.

David is a wonderful example of the success that can be achieved with the support of family, education and community.

NOWRA TAFE

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK (South Coast) [6.12 p.m.]: Last week TAFE teachers rallied outside Parliament House in response to the Rees Government's attack on the working conditions of TAFE teachers in New South Wales and as a result of the continual downgrading of TAFE in New South Wales by the State Labor Government. I attended the rally in support of TAFE teachers in my electorate and in support for their campaign to achieve salary justice and appropriate recognition for the crucial role they play in communities across New South Wales. Today, however, I raise an issue that is also of great concern to teachers at the Nowra

TAFE campus. In particular, the issue relates to the proposals by the Rees Government to completely downgrade the arts and media department at the campus, contrary to former promises that such facilities would be enhanced and upgraded following new building works to be undertaken.

I have been contacted by many, many teachers and students regarding proposals to downgrade arts facilities at the TAFE since the planning has occurred without any consultation whatsoever with students or teachers. These concerns were expressed passionately at another protest rally outside the campus at Bomaderry last month. In effect, what is proposed is the closure of a large proportion of the TAFE's visual arts and ceramics courses, Aboriginal arts course and arts facility. I am informed that in 2006 visual arts, fine arts and ceramic teachers at Nowra TAFE were advised that the arts and media department would receive an upgrade that would include a superior facility incorporating studio spaces for print making, drawing, sculpture and painting. The ceramics facility was to remain.

My statement today relies on information supplied to me by a number of teachers and students who have visited me. In particular, I note the representations made to me by Mr Alan Baptist, a former arts manager for the city of Shoalhaven and a passionate and highly respected advocate for the arts in our community. Mr Baptist and others have informed me that the new upgrades envisaged for the Nowra TAFE will effectively result in the following: first, the discontinuation of all ceramics courses from December 2009; secondly, no studio spaces available to allow the teaching electives for visual arts/fine arts or Aboriginal arts; thirdly, no higher-level courses requiring the completion of practical electives will be run; fourthly, Aboriginal students will be denied the opportunity to advance into higher-level mainstream arts and media courses; and, fifthly, no room for future expansion or return to previous levels of service.

I have also met with teachers who prefer not to be named as they genuinely fear for their future employment prospects—if they have any at this stage. They have shown me plans for another facility in Goulburn that was apparently promised to them and the current plans for arts facilities that provide a small space entitled "Wet Area" for all the arts, visual arts and ceramics courses to be run. So there is obviously no intention to enhance arts and media at the TAFE but, rather, to drastically downgrade all the facilities. Obviously, that would result in job losses. However, there are potential solutions to the issues I have raised today, if the Minister wants to listen and pursue them. One potential solution involves not demolishing J Block from which arts courses are currently run. This proposition has been put to the Government, which has responded in a misleading way by suggesting that the building is infested with white ants and should be demolished. I believe, and the teachers and students believe, that that is not the case and that J Block could be retained and the current arts courses maintained and enhanced. I should add that the arts courses are very popular.

I have made representations to the Minister for Education and Training, who has in her reply not responded to the concerns of teachers and students at all. She states in her reply to me that the spaces in the new facility will provide access to training in the arts industry and replace outdated facilities. That is not the case. Today I call on the Minister to review the proposals for the upgrading of facilities at Nowra TAFE campus, which will clearly downgrade a number of highly successful and popular courses. Shoalhaven city has matured over the past decade as a community that passionately supports the arts. The council has established the Shoalhaven Regional Arts Centre and constructed a beautiful new entertainment and function centre. It is imperative that we continue to support the arts in the Shoalhaven. I call on the Minister for Education and Training to review the proposals envisaged for Nowra TAFE, with a view to reversing its decision to massively downgrade the arts and media courses at the Nowra campus.

I also call on the member for Kiama, many of whose constituents attend the Nowra campus—which is, after all, in Bomaderry in his electorate—to, just once, support the teachers and students in his electorate. I am disappointed that many of those students and teachers have made representations to the member for Kiama, who is their local member, and that he has not responded appropriately. Finally, I call on the Minister for Education and Training to turn her attention to the Education portfolio. I know she has some issues in her electorate of Balmain, with the Greens chasing her down, and the chances of her retaining her seat are slim. But Education is an important portfolio and she needs to return to it seriously—and very soon.

BANKSTOWN RELAY FOR LIFE

Mr ALAN ASHTON (East Hills) [6.17 p.m.]: Tonight I acknowledge the great work done by the people in the Bankstown community for Relay for Life fundraising events over some years. Relay for Life is run in association with the New South Wales Cancer Council. The 2009 Bankstown city Relay for Life committee

will be launching the 2009 Relay for Life at an event to be held at 6.30 p.m. on Wednesday 16 September at the famous Handle Bar Tavern, at the Dunc Gray Velodrome. The velodrome, which was in my electorate before the electoral redistribution, is where the Olympic cycling events were held. The Bankstown Relay for Life is a 24-hour relay for the Cancer Council. Sponsored teams will walk around the Crest athletic track at Bass Hill for 24 hours, on Saturday 7 November and Sunday 8 November.

Relay for Life has been held for several years now. Unfortunately, the first attempt last year was rained out, but it was held in November. During the event hundreds of people camp all night in tents, under the floodlights, and sing songs and play music while people walk continuously around the track. All funds raised go to the ongoing research to find a cure for cancer. At the Bankstown Relay for Life cancer survivors walk the first lap and then there is a lap for carers of people with cancer. There are local school dance groups, singers, a fireworks display and the Hope Ceremony, when we remember those who have lost their fight against cancer. The Bankstown Relay for Life started in 2002 with John Murray from Bankstown Sports Club as chairman, together with his directors. The relay was next held in 2006 with Wayne Trotman as chairman for 2006-07. Trent Engisch of the Torch Publishing family company took over the helm as chairman in 2008, with my colleague Tony Stewart as patron. At the end of 2008, with the event having been run only four times, they had raised just short of \$300,000.

In 2008 the Torch Kids Day Out, another fundraising venture for cancer research, commenced. I attended that event last year. This event is a family-based fun day where families in the community get involved and have fun at the same time. The inaugural Torch Kids Day Out in 2008 raised in excess of \$14,000. The two phantom race nights that are held throughout the year raise between \$6,000 and \$8,500. This year Bankstown Relay for Life intends to add to the fundraising amount, hopefully topping \$430,000. They are on the way. About two weeks ago I, together with other parliamentary colleagues, attended a Bankstown mayoral dinner, which was held in Bankstown Sports Club's new grand ballroom. This is now a charity function rather than a debutante ball. Many people from the Bankstown community, members of Parliament, business people and organisations attended the function in support of Relay for Life and cancer research, raising over \$52,000. The generous donations of two of the major sponsors, Bankstown Sports Club and Canterbury Leagues Club, greatly assisted these fundraising events.

The patron for 2009 is Jason Clare, Federal member for Blaxland and Parliamentary Secretary for Employment. Without even starting the relay, Bankstown Relay for Life is proud to announce that it has raised over \$74,000. That is a tremendous achievement. I acknowledge the special groups that form teams for the 24-hour walk. As I said, they camp out overnight so that they continue to walk as long as they can. I acknowledge also Mark Newey, a legendary auctioneer in the Bankstown area, whose outstanding skills assist in raising money at many local functions. He and his wife, Sabrina, are tremendous assets at many functions. With goodwill, they are able to drag out of people three or four times the amount of money than an auction item is worth.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Most auctioneers do.

Mr ALAN ASHTON: They do, as Acting-Speaker Thomas George would know. I congratulate John Engisch, Trent Engisch and the wider Torch Publishing family on the role they have played in making this charity a great success and for raising money for sufferers of cancer.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields—Parliamentary Secretary) [6.22 p.m.]: I thank the member for East Hills for his speech on Bankstown Relay for Life. I commend all Relay for Life organisations, who do magnificent work in our communities. For example, a hub was provided at Casula. I am the patron of Liverpool Relay for Life, which started last year. It will go on to greater achievements over the next few years. I commend Mr and Mrs Wayne Trotman for their tireless work for Relay for Life following the tragic and premature death of their much-loved son Patrick. They have done wonderful things for their local community and have contributed an enormous amount to Relay for Life and the New South Wales Cancer Council. I commend them and Relay for Life to the House.

LAKE MACQUARIE ELECTORATE RAIL SERVICES

Mr GREG PIPER (Lake Macquarie) [6.23 p.m.]: The Lake Macquarie electorate has significant unmet transport needs, and improved access to rail transport is high on the list. The Cardiff and Glendale area equals Newcastle central business district [CBD] as one of the Hunter's largest employment zones, with some 16,000 employees working in light manufacturing, retail, warehousing and freight logistics. The zone falls

within the Lake Macquarie and Wallsend electorates and adjoins Charlestown. I acknowledge the members for Wallsend and Charlestown for their recent constructive comments in this place about needed improvements to rail infrastructure. I particularly acknowledge the member for Wallsend, who told the House on 3 September 2009 that the Glendale road-rail interchange is the key transport issue in the Hunter.

Glendale is at the geographic and demographic centre of the lower Hunter and under State policy will accommodate 8,000 new jobs and 5,000 new dwellings by 2031. It has the advantage of access to the F3, the New England Highway and the Pacific Highway. The main northern rail line separates Glendale and Cardiff. But extending Pennant Street in the Cardiff Industrial Estate to Main Road, Cardiff, via a new bridge and interchange could directly link these suburbs. This would provide direct rail and road access to an existing major retail centre, a regional athletics facility and a major employment zone. This connection will immediately improve access for commuters. An estimated 1,500 people per day drive, walk or cycle to the railway station to catch trains. This is expected to increase to 6,000 people per day by 2031.

The new road would greatly improve heavy vehicle access from the Cardiff industrial area to the F3 and the port of Newcastle. This is not the only significant transport issue in the lower Hunter, but it has the greatest potential to provide economic, environmental and social benefits. The Newcastle rail line also deserves a solution that actually improves public transport rather than diminishes it. Debate has focused largely on the decline of Hunter Street in contrast to the burgeoning Honeysuckle precinct. Put in context, though, the disparity between the old and the new is as a result of the New South Wales Government assuming control of Honeysuckle. Whilst many regard the result as progressive, it has drawn much life from the old city and has fostered the illusion that the rail corridor is the chief cause of the decline.

I do not hold the heavy rail to Newcastle as sacrosanct, but I know that it meets the needs of many Lake Macquarie residents. I cannot support removing the current rail line without a definite plan for providing alternatives, connecting more areas and serving more people. This is where the recent suggestion of a tram-train deserves consideration. Only through a shared vision and a commitment to improved service will the commuting public ever regard plans to cut the heavy rail with anything other than suspicion. Constructing the Lake Macquarie transport interchange and improving services to inner Newcastle are not mutually exclusive. They serve interlocking needs and they each deserve appropriate consideration and resources. Debate on the future of the Wickham to Newcastle line would be better informed if there were also plans to improve public transport and maximise its use.

The Lower Hunter Regional Strategy identifies Glendale as an emerging major regional centre and describes its role as a high-order employment zone and a focal point for subregional road and transport networks. The strategy also predicts the largest jobs growth of any of the major regional centres. Constructing the interchange is estimated to create 549 direct jobs and 1,260 indirect jobs and to inject more than \$300 million into the Hunter's economy. Stockland has advised Lake Macquarie City Council that the interchange would allow it to further develop its Glendale site, creating more than 2,780 jobs and doubling retail floor space. The Lake Macquarie transport interchange will deliver direct jobs growth and an economic benefit, which clearly makes it at least as important to the region as cutting the heavy rail at Wickham.

A study done for lower Hunter councils shows little or no saving in terminating trains at Wickham and an estimated \$2 million annual cost for additional bus services. The study points to many benefits that could result from a tram-train network using existing heavy rail lines and extended to reach new areas. On 4 September 2009 the Premier announced a further study on the Newcastle option. It is also timely and arguably a priority to press on with delivering regional benefits by investing in the Lake Macquarie transport interchange at Glendale. The projected job creation and benefits of long-term infrastructure make the Premier's recent announcement on job creation in the Hunter look decidedly weak by comparison. I call on the Government to support this important investment in the Lower Hunter.

Private members' statements concluded.

**The House adjourned, pursuant to standing and sessional orders, at 6.28 p.m. until
Friday 11 September 2009 at 10.00 a.m.**

