

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Thursday 1 April 2004

Mr Speaker (The Hon. John Joseph Aquilina) took the chair at 10.00 a.m.

Mr Speaker offered the Prayer.

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTORATES AND ELECTIONS AMENDMENT (PROHIBITION ON VOTING BY CRIMINALS) BILL

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 18 March.

Mr ANDREW HUMPHERSON (Davidson) [10.00 a.m.]: I have concluded my contribution.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Neville Newell.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Postponement of Business

General Business Notices of Motions (for Bills) No. 3 called on, and postponed by Mr Andrew Humpherson.

LIQUOR AMENDMENT (PARLIAMENT HOUSE) BILL

Bill introduced and read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [10.03 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Before speaking to the bill, on behalf of the Liberal Party, but in particular on behalf of the former member for Albury, Ian Glachan, and his wife, Helen, I welcome the Showgirls and Rural Achievers, who are in the public gallery, to the Parliament. Ian and Helen passed a message to me yesterday to ensure that I dropped in to the morning tea with the Showgirl and Rural Achievers at 10.30 today, in particular to say hello to Miss Albury, Angela Steinke, who is competing in the Royal Agricultural Show Showgirl contest. I wish her well on behalf of not just the Liberals and The Nationals in this place but also Ian and Helen Glachan and the Albury community.

The legislation before the House is important. I do not intend, unless provoked, to review the circumstances which led to the suggestion of the need for this legislation, other than to say that, following a notorious incident a fortnight ago, the Leader of the Opposition made two calls. The first call was that we ought end the exemption of Parliament House from the application of the Liquor Act. The second call was that the Greens motion dealing with members of Parliament who may or may not be in the Chamber in an inebriated state be sent to the Parliamentary Ethics Advisor to provide the House with practical advice. The second issue is important because, as all honourable members are aware, the Greens sought to play politics with a motion. That motion sought to play on a perception that after dinner members of Parliament are frequently inebriated, but at no stage did it contain any mechanism to determine how the suggested change to the standing order would work.

The Government and the Opposition, following the calls of the Leader of the Opposition, referred the Greens motion to the Parliamentary Ethics Advisor. This took the matter out of the hands of partisan members of the other House and sought from the Parliamentary Ethics Advisor practical advice on how to apply the suggested tests. The fatal flaw in the Greens proposal is that where a government has, say, a one-seat majority in a Chamber like this, unless there is an impartial, appropriate and practical means of determining who was or was

not inebriated, partisan members could use their numbers to have non-government members removed from the Chamber, increasing the majority of the partisan members and ensuring that what might have been a difficult vote for them was an easier vote for them. That is the Realpolitik, the practical implication, the reason we need serious advice from the Parliamentary Ethics Advisor on how such a motion could be applied.

As I said shortly after the events of a couple weeks ago, I have had two occasions in nine years to stand at this lectern and complain about members who I believed were behaving inappropriately in this Chamber, who were certainly acting contrary to standing orders, and who, if their colleagues had been better looking after them, would have been ushered from the Chamber. Two occasions in nine years does not lend weight to the Greens attempts to portray this Parliament as a place in which after dinner many members in both Chambers are inebriated. As someone who was ejected from this Chamber for what he did a couple of weeks ago, I am happy to make it clear—as I did in all the interviews I did after that event—that I do not believe that alcohol is any worse a problem in this place than it is in the wider community.

I say again, as I said in those repeated interviews: I think the incidence of alcohol use and abuse in Parliament House has significantly reduced in recent decades, as indeed it has in the wider community. It is anomalous that in this Parliament's 147-year history the Liquor Act has never had application over the operation of this parliamentary precinct. Why is that anomalous? In the first instance, I have always believed that politicians should be prepared to do what they say other people should do. Not to do that is to open us to a charge of hypocrisy, and it is an easy charge to make about politicians.

[Interruption]

I am happy to respond if the honourable member for Kiama wishes to continue his interjection. However, he should be forewarned, because I know the records. A charge of hypocrisy is an easy charge for others to make about members of Parliament. It is important that, as we go about our roles, we do not set ourselves up for that appellation to be made against us. In applying this legislation to Parliament House there is a motivation to remove from ourselves the charge of hypocrisy because we are requiring others to do something that we will not do ourselves.

This important legislation is necessary also because Parliament House is a public building. But it is more than a public building; it is a building that is used regularly by many groups in our community. In the time that I have been either working here or a member, the dining facilities are occupied significantly more than they were 10 or 15 years ago. On an annual basis, I host lunches for the opera society and the opera foundation, and many functions involving the scout movement and other charitable organisations are held in the dining facilities. The continued use of those facilities by outside groups is a good use of Parliament House and a continuing attempt to ensure that this Parliament of all parliaments, the oldest Parliament in Australia, is as much a part of the public as possible.

Alcohol is largely served at those functions, although I am sure that it is not served at all functions. Alcohol is often served as a precursor to pre-dinner drinks. Certainly, at most of the functions I attend, it is served as an accompaniment to the meal; indeed, at times alcohol has helped one to get through the speeches. Not only do members of Parliament and their staff, and departmental advisers have access to the bars and dining facilities in Parliament House, but also members of the public have access to those facilities in which alcohol is served.

I make the point that the Liquor Act applies to all bar, restaurant and catering facilities in this city and State that are available to the public, which is why this legislation should also apply to Parliament House. Another reason is that currently under the leadership, care and management of the catering manager at Parliament House, David Draper, we seek to practise the Government's policy of the responsible service of alcohol, which was introduced by the former Minister for Gaming and Racing in 1997. At present the policy is practised in Parliament House as a voluntary code, although it is practised in all other licensed premises across the State as a mandatory code that is statutorily laid down by the Liquor Act 1982.

The Liquor Act sets out the penalties if the code is breached. I am satisfied that David Draper and his staff endeavour to abide by the responsible service of alcohol provisions, particularly in relation to functions held in Parliament House involving members of the public. However, I am concerned that, because the code is voluntary and not mandatory, and because effectively there is no back-up to it, the nature of this place can thwart the intent of the responsible service of alcohol. The responsible service of alcohol code is intended to

ensure that inebriated people no longer have access to alcohol. That is set out in section 125C of the Liquor Act 1982, which describes "responsible service" thus:

- (1) The regulations may make provision for or with respect to requiring or encouraging the adoption of responsible practices in the sale, supply, service and promotion of liquor.
- (2) In particular, the regulations may make provision for or with respect to the following:
 - (a) restricting or prohibiting the conduct of promotions or other activities (including discounting or supply of liquor free of charge) that could result in misuse or abuse of liquor, such as binge drinking or excessive consumption,
 - (b) the standards to be observed on licensed premises in the sale and service of liquor, for the purpose of preventing misuse or abuse of liquor,
 - (c) requiring licensees, managers and other persons engaged in the sale, supply, service and promotion of liquor and other activities on the licensed premises to undergo courses of training that will promote responsible practices in those activities.

The penalties set out in clause 4, which applies under the Liquor Act, applies to all other licensed premises in the State that serve alcohol but are not mandatory in Parliament House. David Draper seeks to abide by the code in a voluntary manner but there is no backup for him or his staff. The reality became clear to the Leader of the Opposition and myself after the events of a fortnight or so ago. To be blunt, the Parliament is set up to support the activities of members of Parliament. Staff are employed to assist and support members of Parliament within this precinct, and I believe there is an unequal relationship. Frankly, it is reflected in the way most staff address members. I can tell people until I am blue in the face to call me by my first name, but they still call me Mr O'Farrell. That is the approach they are expected to take, and that is the attitude that exists in this place. My concern is that if I am sitting at a table in the dining room, and I am inebriated or on the way to being inebriated, and I ask for another bottle of chardonnay, because that is my wine of choice, a staff member may decide—

Mr Tony McGrane: Blackie.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: The honourable member for Dubbo has exposed the member to whom I am referring.

Mr Gerard Martin: No, he has not. You are talking about yourself.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: No, the honourable member for Dubbo said "Blackie". If the frequent flying member for Bathurst would like to sit tight, I will take him on a trip in a minute. My concern is that if I am close to or over the edge in relation to my level of inebriation the staff in any other licensed premise in the State would refuse to serve me, and if I insisted I might be asked to leave the premises. However, because of the unequal relationship between members of Parliament and the staff, no matter how well intentioned those staff are, if I as a member of Parliament were to press the envelope, I suspect that I would get the additional bottle of chardonnay.

The major importance of the legislation is that it will provide staff with the protection to say "no" to me and any other member in this place, and to know that when they say "no" to me they have the full backing of the law and the full support of the courts in the administration of law in this State. By no means is this an attack upon those who work in this place: it is designed to support them and give their application of the responsible service of alcohol code the backing of the law that is enjoyed by those who operate in pubs, clubs, restaurants and bars across the State. It might be a novel concept 148 years in the making. When one considers the early history of the colony of New South Wales and that we sit, at least in part, in a building that was constructed through the proceeds of the import of rum into the colony of New South Wales one could argue that what goes around has finally come around. It is pioneering legislation.

One of the more interesting things I did a few weeks ago was to go back through the Liquor Act to discover that over the past 148 years the Liquor Act in all its guises has never applied to this Parliament House. Less than 10 years ago there was no responsible service of alcohol code in the policies of the State Government of New South Wales. But time has moved on and it is time for us to address this issue. I know those who are in the hospitality industry, restaurant and catering, pubs and clubs and those who represent the Australian Hotels Association would be supportive of politicians applying to themselves the same rules that we seek to apply to others. During last year's Alcohol Summit a number of representatives of the hotel industry tried to describe to the summit the difficulties with which the policies in the legislation were being ascribed.

A publican from the northern beaches took me aside, to point out in particular that although staff may have stopped serving a drunk or someone who they thought was drunk, if that person was sitting quietly in a corner with his mates who were still sober when police visited that hotel and the person who had been stopped responsibly from buying further alcohol was assessed by police as being drunk then that publican was liable to be issued with a major fine. I thought the results of the Alcohol Summit were largely creditable, but at no stage during any of the consideration, recommendations or extra requirements, for instance, on the hotel industry did any Minister attempt to try to explain to the hotel industry, the patrons and, more importantly, the staff who at the end of the day have to administer the responsible service of alcohol guidelines, how their lives would be made easier when publicans who practise the responsible service of alcohol can be penalised for doing the right thing.

Perhaps one of the unintended consequences of applying the Liquor Act to New South Wales Parliament House is that parliamentarians, those who make the laws and advisers who visit this place, will gain a better understanding of the impacts of the laws and in future draft them in ways that seek to meet the same admirable goals that we all want but in a far more practical way—not just for pubs, clubs, restaurants, bars and the like but for activities involving alcohol within this Parliament House. For the benefit of the honourable member for Bathurst, who I said I would take on a trip, I was in Melbourne last week with two of his colleagues.

Mr Gerard Martin: And you were also in Taiwan, in San Francisco—

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

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: Keep going. I have his, too. Last Friday when I opened the *Herald Sun* in Melbourne I was greeted by the headline "Spring St sly grog corked". For the first time in 147 years the first liquor licence was issued for the Victorian Parliament, an initiative taken by the Speaker of the Victorian Parliament, Judy Maddigan, who said that the Government had always been strict on the rest of the community when it came to liquor laws, and it was now Parliament's turn. That is the first argument I made. Ms Maddigan said:

We are cleaning up our act and making sure we are legal—it's just taken us 147 years to do it.

She went on to say that regulations controlling the supply of liquor at Parliament under the Liquor Control Reform Act were currently vague. Although she did not believe that Parliament had been supplying alcohol illegally, she wanted to ensure that Parliament House did the right thing. We now have a precedent for the legislation, which removes any argument that it is inappropriate to apply the liquor laws to this Parliament House. Two weeks ago the Leader of the Opposition announced that we would introduce the legislation. That week I sought to give notice of motion to introduce this very simple bill, which removes from the Act section 6 (1) (a), which states:

(1) Nothing in this Act applies to or in respect of the sale of:

(a) liquor in Parliament House under the control of the proper authority

First, the bill seeks to remove section 6 (1) (a) of the Liquor Act. Second, it seeks to provide this place with a governor's licence. In that regard some residual amendments are made to the Liquor Act. The governor's licence exists at a number of other facilities and premises around the State. For instance, it applies to the Trust Box at the Sydney Cricket Ground and the Sydney Football Stadium. More importantly, it ensures that my principal objective is met, which is that the responsible service of alcohol provisions are applied mandatorily in this Parliament House with the same penalties, provisions and sanctions as are applied to any other purveyor of liquor across the State.

After I gave notice of motion of the legislation the Minister for Gaming and Racing had a number of conversations with me, which culminated on Tuesday in having discussions with him and his adviser, John Whelan. It is fair to say that at that stage the department was proposing that we seek to achieve all of this through a memorandum of understanding. However, I was concerned that a memorandum of understanding between you, Mr Speaker, and the Commissioner of Police was no more than the voluntary code that David Draper currently seeks to effect responsibly within this Parliament House.

I pointed out, because I do not think the department had pointed out to the Minister, what had occurred last week in Victoria. When that was pointed out the Minister quickly agreed that the way to resolve this issue was to apply the provisions of the Liquor Act to New South Wales Parliament House. I welcome the Minister's

announcement yesterday that that is precisely what will be done. I am grateful that Parliamentary Counsel was able to so quickly put together this relatively simple legislation, which seeks, through schedule 1 item [1] to remove section 6 (1) (a) of the 1982 Act to exempt Parliament House and through schedule 1 item [2] insert proposed section 19 (1) (a1) to ensure that the system of governor's licences applies in premises known as Parliament House New South Wales.

Irrespective of the events of two weeks ago, this legislation is long overdue. The legislation can only improve the operation of this place for all those who work in it, those who visit it and those who seek to use its licensed facilities in support of their organisations, big and small, across the State. It should not have taken the events of two weeks ago to do so, but if this is the outcome, even the events of two weeks ago will have had a silver lining.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Alan Ashton.

Pursuant to sessional orders business interrupted.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

Mr SPEAKER: I welcome to the public gallery a large delegation from the China Overseas Friendship Association under the leadership of Ms Yang Xiao Juan and representing 17 different provinces of the People's Republic of China.

GOVERNMENT SCHOOL ASSETS REGISTER BILL

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 11 March.

Mr BRYCE GAUDRY (Newcastle—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.31 a.m.]: As I said before I was interrupted, since coming to office this State Government has more than doubled funding for school maintenance—from \$85 million in the last year of the Coalition Government to a record \$186 million. Just recently the Minister for Education and Training announced a further \$15.6 million to improve more than 600 schools across the State. This will mean a total of 822 improvement projects for 611 primary, secondary and central schools. As I said, the new work at schools includes replacing roofs and guttering, internal and external painting, upgrading and repairing outdoor areas, replacing floor coverings, fixing paving, concrete and brickwork, stormwater and sewerage upgrades and perimeter fencing replacement. There is no doubt that those works, and in particular the perimeter fencing, have greatly improved school safety and in many cases have given a sense of pride to both students and staff within the schools. They know they can maintain high standards of work when the school improvement programs are undertaken.

This package means a total of \$78.9 million has been allocated to improving and enhancing schools through the school works and replacement works program. In the 2003-04 program 2,706 improvement projects will be completed across New South Wales. We have also totally overhauled the school maintenance system in schools. We have introduced condition-based maintenance to determine the program of work that needs to be undertaken to ensure schools meet agreed building standards. We want to make sure our school maintenance system continues to meet the needs of schools. That is why the Minister for Education and Training appointed an assets maintenance task force. He accepted all 36 recommendations, which will further improve the system so that schools will continue to receive a high level of service. An asset management directorate will co-ordinate and monitor maintenance work across the State's 2,200 government schools.

Further changes include new standards and benchmarks for maintenance and building design; giving principals more day-to-day control over the maintenance and up-keep of their schools; a new maintenance helpdesk giving all schools advice and support; new teams of regional asset managers to monitor the quality of maintenance; long-term maintenance plans to be developed for each school with the local school community; new school maintenance contracts that demand higher standards and greater accountability; new key performance indicators and agreements between schools and contractors to ensure contractors are accountable for their work; and new asset management teams in each region to better support schools. These changes will result in clear guidelines and standards for contractors, for schools and for the department. It will mean the best possible outcomes are achieved when it comes to school maintenance. New maintenance contracts will go to tender shortly and commence from July 2004.

The \$186 million spent on maintenance is just one component of the Government's plans to enhance our schools. The Government's spending on education and training now stands at a record \$8.7 billion—a 50 per cent increase on what was spent when we came to government in 1995. We will be spending more than \$1.2 billion on capital works over our third term of government. We have committed \$341 million for the class size reduction program, including \$107 million to build and install additional classrooms. By 2007, this will reduce class sizes to an average of 20 in kindergarten; an average of 22 in year 1, and an average of 24 in year 2, meaning that we can give our youngest students the best possible start. We are spending \$368 million on school major and minor capital works in 2003-04.

We have a world-class education system in New South Wales, and it is time the Opposition recognised this instead of knocking our schools. Last year, our years 7 and 8 high school students recorded the best ever literacy results in the annual English language and literacy assessment. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] reported in 2002 that the literacy levels of New South Wales high school students are among the best in the world.

Mrs Jillian Skinner: Point of order: While the Coalition agrees that the results of the literacy tests are wonderful, this bill is about capital works. The honourable member is straying far from the leave of the bill.

Mr BRYCE GAUDRY: To the point of order: This is a passing reference and a demonstration of the excellent work being carried out in our schools by teachers, and the impact of improved maintenance on schools in New South Wales.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I am satisfied that the honourable member for Newcastle is making only a passing reference to literacy tests.

Mr BRYCE GAUDRY: This international study—the OECD report in 2002—showed that the New South Wales results were on par with first-placegetters Finland, Canada and New Zealand. In 2003, year 3 students matched the previous year's basic skills test results, which equalled the highest score since testing started in 1990, and literacy results for year 5 were consistent with those of previous years. The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning from Wales visited New South Wales a few months ago and admired the high standard of education of New South Wales, particularly in the area of information technology. Our higher school certificate is envied in the United States of America and European countries. As I said, these are passing references to some of the highlights of education in New South Wales. I am sure the Opposition would agree with these statements.

We have a world-class education system, and people are coming here to learn from us. We will continue to support our world-class system with first-class facilities. Our capital works and asset management program will continue to deliver practical improvements to our schools so that students have a love of learning and enjoy their school days. If the Opposition were serious about improving our already world-class system, it would join with us in calling on the Howard Government to reverse the extraordinarily generous level of funding to elite private schools at the expense of the public system. I challenge the Opposition to take a bipartisan approach and work with us to achieve a fair level of Federal funding for our public schools.

I reiterate that the Government has an asset management register and publishes it on a yearly basis, and every year the Government lists its major capital works programs in the budget. The Opposition only has to go to Budget Paper No. 4 to see the capital works projects that are listed for future years. The Government opposes the bill, which is impractical, spends valuable resources on collecting unnecessary data, and could result in a lot of information being collected that will only gather dust on bookshelves.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE (Bega) [10.39 a.m.]: I support the Government School Assets Register Bill, which was introduced by the shadow Minister for Education and Training in New South Wales, Jillian Skinner. The shadow Minister visited the far South Coast last Monday and inspected six schools. I know that the shadow Minister has visited six schools over the past 12 months and it has to be said that that is six schools more than the previous three Labor Ministers. From all accounts, it is also six schools more than the current Minister for Education and Training has visited in his own electorate. It is horrific to hear Labor Party members refer in this place to the wonderful facilities and capital works programs and maintenance programs that the Government is providing to schools. If they had bothered to visit some schools, talk to parents, teachers and school principals, they would realise that a significant problem exists in this State. The commonsense approach that is outlined in the bill is designed to alleviate many of those problems. I will quote a report in my local newspaper, the *Merimbula News Weekly*, of 31 March.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Bega purports to present facts to the Chamber. What verification does he have for those facts?

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: The article goes directly to the heart of the bill.

Mr SPEAKER: But what is the source?

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: The *Merimbula News Weekly*.

Mr SPEAKER: Can the honourable member verify that what is printed in the newspaper is correct?

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: I can hold it up to show you.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The rulings of former Speakers apply to quoting from newspaper articles when the member cannot verify the accuracy of what is printed in the article.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: I can. If you listen to what I am about to say, you will hear that I can verify that.

Mr SPEAKER: I will listen further.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: The *Merimbula News Weekly* reported on a public meeting that I organised last Monday evening with the shadow Minister for Education and Training to discuss many of the problems that are facing the Merimbula Public School. The article states very clearly:

The school grounds are a dustbowl when it doesn't rain and a mud heap when it does.

The toilets are so dark and dingy some students refuse to use them.

Teachers and students sweat in demountable classrooms on hot days and freeze on cold days because there is no air conditioning.

There is little shade in the playground and open-air drains overflow.

I hope that that meets with your approval.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Bega has quoted from a newspaper article. There is no way of verifying whether the article is accurate. That brings me to the practice of the House in relation to quoting from the media. Unless members can verify the accuracy of what is printed in a media article, they should not use the article as their source.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: Mr Speaker, you will be pleased to know that a number of resolutions were passed unanimously by teachers and the school principal at that meeting, with personnel of the Department of Education and Training present. I will place the resolutions on the record because they also go to the heart of the matters sought to be addressed by the bill. The first resolution resolved that the Minister for Education and Training nominate the start date and completion date for construction of the school works to be undertaken at the Merimbula Public School. The second resolution nominated that the Department of Education and Training provide the parents and citizens association and the school council with regular correspondence so that parents can be informed about the timetable for construction at the school. The third resolution sought a guarantee from the department that all funds were available for construction of the school without a break. The fourth resolution urged the department to fast-track the development to compensate for lost time due to delays, given that the project was to be completed this year, according to the budget papers.

The fifth resolution called on the department to explore all avenues and work with the parents and citizens association and the school council to alleviate the dust, shading, toilet and occupational health and safety issues facing the school during the construction period. The sixth resolution stated that the department and the Bega Valley Shire Council should begin investigations into a greenfield site for a second school at Tura Beach. Those resolutions were passed unanimously and it is important to note that members of the school council, the school's parents and citizens association, members of the broader community as well as members of teaching staff, administrative staff, the school principal and personnel from the Department of Education and Training were present. If the provisions of the bill before the House were implemented, such public meetings would not be necessary because the school's parents and citizens association would have been able to go to the department's web site and see in black and white the maintenance and construction work that will be undertaken at the school.

The object of the bill is simply to establish a requirement for the Director-General of the Department of Education and Training in New South Wales to keep a register of school assets comprising reports on the status of capital assets within Government schools and three-yearly plans on building and maintenance work for those schools. One of the most frustrating matters for parents in New South Wales is that they have no idea of maintenance expenditure that will be applied to their local school. The Merimbula Public School is a good example of that. The kids are refusing to use the toilets simply because the State Government has not provided the necessary funding for maintenance to ensure that that basic facility is available.

I also add my opinion that the Merimbula Public School is a dust bowl. It is disgraceful that members speaking on behalf of the State Government have stated in this place that everything is rosy in public education in this State. I stood in the grounds of the school with the shadow Minister for Education and Training last Monday and can verify that we stood in a dust bowl. The dust was horrendous and kids with respiratory problems, especially asthma, were affected adversely by it. Teachers are angry and upset at the current conditions. It is simply not good enough that no dust mediation work has been undertaken by the State Government such as the laying of woodchips, tan bark or anything else that will lay the dust. It is important to note to that a lot of the information gathering that the bill provides for has already been collated by each of the schools. The suggestion that the bill will unnecessarily result in the collection of unused information is untrue because the information already exists.

The proof of what I am saying is to be found in the annual reports that are prepared by each school. The Merimbula Public School's annual report 2002 states in section one—the school and its major achievements—that the school provides a caring, friendly environment in which students experience a variety of activities that are designed to cater for different learning styles of the students. The school's staff is dedicated to providing students with individual attention and special programs addressing academic, social and emotional needs in a caring and safe educational setting. The interesting part of that report is that it states that the most important event in the school's history was the announcement of funding for a new school. Beginning in 2003, the new buildings will include a large school hall, a library, 12 new classrooms and a new administration area, and that work is anticipated to commence in January 2003 and to be completed late in 2004. It is now April 2004 and only as recently as this week the Government issued a press statement confirming that work will commence next term on the construction of the new school.

The State budget papers state that work on the new school was supposed to start in 2001, but that has not occurred. The State budget papers also state that the work would be completed in 2004, but the work has not even started. The objects of the bill constitute an attempt to iron out these types of problems. There has to be greater accountability by this Government to ensure that parents and educators are able to understand what is likely to occur in their local school environment in relation to local maintenance programs and school building programs. That understanding goes to the crux of the issues addressed by the bill.

Parents are frustrated because they do not have any idea of the Government's intentions about their local schools. Why is the Government shy of accountability when everyone agrees that education is the silver bullet, the best way to provide opportunities for young people? Yet 56,000 schoolchildren in this State are being taught in run-down demountables. We want to ensure accountability from the top about the capital works that will take place in these schools over a three-year period. I commend the bill to the House. It is a great shame that Government members will not in a bipartisan way endorse this bill and its intent. It is simply a commonsense initiative from the New South Wales Opposition.

Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [10.50 a.m.]: I support wholeheartedly the Government School Assets Register Bill. I congratulate the shadow Minister for Education and Training on her foresight and recognition of the lack of accountability for assets and capital works in schools. I urge the Government members to support the bill, which provides a sensible solution to the dilemmas faced by schools on a day-to-day basis. The object of the bill is to establish a requirement for the Director-General of the Department of Education and Training to keep a register of government school assets. The register is to comprise reports on the status of the capital assets of government schools, called school status reports, and three-yearly plans on building and maintenance work in those schools, called school building plans. School status reports and school building plans are to be prepared by the director-general and included in each of the department's annual reports. This is the missing piece of equipment that schools require to identify their needs and it will bring out in the public eye school needs for capital works.

I also commend the shadow Minister for Education and Training for visiting schools on a regular basis throughout the State. She recently visited my electorate and spoke with parents from the local school

community. The parents found it to be a great advantage to talk to her about issues associated with their individual schools. That begs the question: Where is the Minister for Education and Training? In the two years since I have been elected I have not laid eyes on the Minister in the electorate of Hornsby except once just before the State election when he attended a Cabinet meeting hosted by the local council. As to the school status report the bill provides:

- (1) The Director-General is to prepare and submit to the Minister a report on the status of government school assets ... within the period of 4 months after the end of each financial year.
- (2) The report is to contain the following matters:
 - (a) particulars of the capital assets of each government school and of the state of repair of those assets at the end of the financial year to which the report relates, together with a statement identifying how the existing state of repair of those capital assets was assessed,
 - (b) an assessment of works of a capital nature that have been identified by government schools or by the Department or any other public authority, during the financial year to which the report relates, as works that need to be carried out in government schools,
 - (c) an assessment of the progress that has been made in carrying out those works of a capital nature that are identified in the relevant school building plan as capital works to be carried out during the financial year to which the report relates, together with the amount expended in carrying out each of those works during that financial year,
 - (d) particulars of the amount expended on maintenance work for each government school during the financial year to which the report relates,
 - (e) particulars of the amount of any additional funding requested by a government school for urgent maintenance during the financial year to which the report relates and the amount of any additional funding granted for that purpose, together with a statement of reasons for any refusal to grant any such funding.

As to the school building plan, the bill provides:

- (1) The Director-General is to prepare and submit to the Minister a plan ... within the period of 4 months after the end of each financial year, with respect to building and maintenance work in government schools for the next 3 financial years (inclusive of the financial year in which it is submitted).
- (2) The school building plan is to contain the following matters:
 - (a) particulars of works of a capital nature that are to be carried out in government schools during the period to which the plan relates, the estimated time frame for completing the works and the estimated cost (at current values) of carrying out the works,
 - (b) particulars of the money to be allocated, out of the money appropriated by Parliament, to carrying out works of a capital nature in government schools, together with the criteria by which decisions are made about the allocation of that money and how those criteria are applied,
 - (c) particulars of the money to be allocated, out of the money appropriated by Parliament, to carrying out maintenance work for each government school, together with the criteria by which decisions are made about the allocation of that money and how those criteria are applied.

I will now speak about issues in my electorate. On a number of occasions I have raised issues that relate to Berowra Public School. I again raise the issue of the master plan that the school principal and school community desperately seek. The Government told the school that it could formulate a master plan, and that it would make a decision on the master plan and submit it to council for development application approval pending funding. Unfortunately, after the State election last year, all of those well-laid plans came to a grinding halt. To this day, more than one year later, the school still does not have a master plan, let alone a development application for the work to be approved pending funding. The school desperately needs a new hall. The hall that students, staff and parents use is falling down and needs to be demolished. It is an uncomfortable building and inappropriate to hold events that are generally presented in school halls. As I said, the school is in desperate need. I call on the Government to ensure that the school in the very near future is provided with a master plan from the Department of Education and Training and that the plan progresses, as the Government said it would before the State election.

The bill provides for the collecting of information on assets, which is very valuable information. As to the security of assets, I put on the record that Brooklyn Public School in the past couple of weeks has been the subject of three break-ins. Its assets—such as computers and computer hardware—have been taken. Some of the items were donations to the school and now they are gone. We need an assets register, but we also need the

ability to look after the assets. Berowra Public School also has had three break-ins with the loss of computers. Cowan Public School had two break-ins last year. I draw the attention of the Minister to the fact that we value our school assets and we want to set up school status reports about those assets, but we also need to keep those assets safe. Obviously they are not safe at present. I call on the Minister to urgently consider installing a security system in at-risk schools, which, I am led to believe, is his policy. Brooklyn Public School should be one of the first schools on the list.

Waitara Public School will be a victim school as a result of unreasonable and outrageous developments that have been inflicted upon Waitara. I understand that the Department of Education and Training no longer employs a demographer to investigate the impact on schools of developments in local areas. Waitara Public School is now in the process of setting up demountables on the last piece of green in its grounds to cope with 550 students. I am very worried about that situation, considering the developments in Waitara are not complete and the population will continue to grow. Further, I draw the Minister's attention to the need for airconditioners in schools. In my area students in classrooms, particularly demountable classrooms, suffered greatly and had much trouble concentrating during the very hot days last summer. I call for a hastening of the installation of airconditioners into school classrooms.

Mt Kuring-gai Public School is a fantastic little school, but it needs assistance to improve its grounds and its buildings. It has demountable classrooms, some of which are run down and need attention. A school status report would focus on the items in that school that need assistance. Mount Colah Public School is undergoing redevelopment, and I congratulate former Minister Chadwick, who, all those years ago, included that redevelopment in the budget papers. I condemn the Labor Government for taking it out of the budget papers in 1995, but I congratulate Stephen O'Doherty on reinstating it in the budget papers after a vigorous fight. The grounds of that school will now be improved. The report by Professor Tony Vinson stated:

The ways in which buildings impact upon human life range from the purely functional to the aesthetic. These qualities are as important, if not more so, to a satisfying and productive life within schools as they are in other institutions.

That says a lot about the needs for school status reports and asset registers. The Vinson report suggests that "maintenance and refurbishment of the education estate has been neglected and fitfully managed". Schools in my electorate certainly reflect that statement. The report referred to "substandard conditions in which teaching and learning are being attempted". I would like to assist teachers and students in my area to have the best environment in which to conduct classes, but that desire is impeded by some of the conditions. The Vinson report further stated:

Essentially what would be involved would be the aggregation of information about individual projects that have been found to have a degree of merit short of gaining the priority needed to access available funds. The use of such information for budgetary planning purposes would enhance the rational consideration of the portfolio's claims for asset acquisition and improvement funds at both the State and national levels.

In his report Vinson is stating the essence of the bill: that it is essential that we have school status reports and building plans, and that schools know exactly where they stand. It is obvious what we all want for our schools: we want the best for our students. The missing link is the school assets register and status reports. I again urge the Minister and members opposite to support the provisions of the Government School Assets Register Bill. I support the bill in the strongest terms.

Mr STEVEN PRINGLE (Hawkesbury) [11.05 a.m.]: This is such a straightforward bill that I would have thought that members opposite would have been totally and utterly in support of it. What companies, what other organisations, do not have something similar to what we are proposing in this bill? This is not a difficult bill; it is extremely straightforward. It advocates a basic management tool that one would expect would be in existence already, so one would expect the Department of Education and Training and the Minister to be totally and utterly in favour of it. Our local parents and citizens groups expect such a bill to exist, as do our school councils. Indeed those groups have a very strong right to know about the assets and plans of their schools. Schools in my electorate, and I am sure most of those in other electorates, have active fundraising programs, but they have to know what they are fundraising for. They need to know the actual state of their school, including shade structures in the playground that offer sun protection, wet weather facilities, and what new facilities are proposed. They need to know the state of the existing facilities.

Councils do an audit on playgrounds; surely the same thing could be done by the Department of Education and Training. What are the hazards in schools? What disabled facilities are available or proposed? Is there enough seating, how old is it, and what condition is it in? In the classrooms, how much furniture is available and what condition is it in? Is there enough furniture? I am sure all of us would have heard of schools

that have to borrow equipment from another classroom, because they have no other choice. What blinds are provided in the classrooms? When the teachers use overhead projectors can the rooms be blacked out? What is the department's policy on replacing backboards with modern whiteboards? What office space is available for teachers, and what is the condition of the offices? Is ergonomic furniture available or proposed? The list goes on and on.

Safety, especially electrical issues, is a major concern in my electorate. Many schools want to put in airconditioning and parents are prepared to pay for it, but they do not know the condition of the electricity supply to the school. Parents ask for that information and are fobbed off by departmental officers. Parents want to know the condition of the flooring in the school buildings, and what slip hazards have been identified? What heating is available, and what is proposed? My electorate has 53 schools—it is one of the great education electorates in New South Wales—and I will not list all of them and all their major issues. This valuable planning tool, a register of school assets, would be appropriate at Annangrove Public School, which has kept its demountable classroom as school numbers fluctuate slightly from one year to another. The school wants to know when it will get proper facilities for the students.

For years and years the Galston Public School has demanded a master plan. That item has been put on the notice paper and the department replies that it has no idea when it will be provided, because there is no long-term planning, no three-year program. That school does not know where it is on the list or when its requests will be responded to. The parents at Gross Vale Public School have raised funds for airconditioning that school but, unfortunately, the airconditioning causes many power failures. Often on a Saturday the principal has to go to the school to reset the fuses that have blown. Luckily a local parent can cobble together the electricity so that the school is usable on the next school day.

Wilberforce Public School requested security fencing—a pretty basic ask at about \$20,000—but it was not provided. And what happened? There was an arson attack on the school, its hall was burnt down, and the department faced a \$1 million bill to replace it. That would not have happened if there had been a proper assets register and the school had security fencing. At Windsor South Public School the children do not use the toilets; they have to hang on all day because the department has refused to upgrade the toilet facilities. Also, there are no seats on the toilets. It took a visit to Wisemans Ferry Public School by the shadow Minister, and I thank her for visiting, to get its toilets repaired; they had been inoperable for some nine months. That school is in an area about which the Government professes to be environmentally conscious—those toilets could have caused pollution to the Hawkesbury River—but the department took no action, yet again.

This is a straightforward bill that advocates a valuable planning tool that is similar to that used by companies and local councils. The bill is about accountability and openness and about the Government being out of touch with the requirements of local communities. Parents and citizens associations demand that this bill be implemented, because they want to be able to get on the Internet and find out where their school is on the list for a new hall or airconditioning. When the department is questioned about airconditioning upgrades it responds by saying, "You are not on the hot spot program, therefore we have no idea when you will get airconditioning." These schools are in one of the hottest parts of Sydney, so there is no reason why the Government should not support this bill. It should receive bipartisan and universal support so that our children are given a decent education and so that parents know what projects will require their fundraising efforts. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN (Willoughby) [11.10 a.m.] I am pleased to support the Government School Assets Register Bill, which was introduced by the shadow Minister for Education and Training, the honourable member for North Shore. The object of the bill, which is quite basic, is to ensure that the Director-General of the Department of Education and Training keeps a register of government school assets. As was mentioned by other honourable members who participated in the debate, it is disappointing that the Government will not support what, in essence, is a logical and much-required piece of legislation that will not be overtly costly but will give parents, students, and school communities immense confidence.

Their school assets and capital works will be listed on a register and they will be able to monitor their future maintenance. This bill is necessary for a number of reasons. Other honourable members made reference to the report that was released by Professor Vinson, which refers to the correlation between sufficient capital works provision and the impact that will have on student learning. I will not refer to those parts of Professor Vinson's report that have already been quoted, but I will mention one aspect that has not. He states:

... the observation that teaching and learning can be enhanced or retarded by the presence or absence of appropriate physical conditions; the school community's spirits can be uplifted or depressed by the presence or absence of well-designed and well-

maintained buildings; good building quality and maintenance are associated with improved academic results; the quality of physical space affects self-esteem, peer and student-teacher interactions, parental involvement, discipline, attention, motivation and interpersonal relations; and the quality of school buildings and their surrounds can also be a potent symbol of the regard, or otherwise, in which public education is believed to be held by governments and the community.

Professor Vinson notes in his report the significance and importance of appropriate buildings and surrounds for students and teachers in public education, and I would like to highlight some interesting aspects in the Willoughby electorate. I am privileged to represent an electorate that, according to the electorate profiles released by the Parliamentary Library, has the third highest standard of education. In most other social demographics the Willoughby electorate is ranked as being in the top five in relation to demographics and income. However, it is ranked eleventh in relation to the number of parents who choose to send their children to private schools.

That confirms an important criteria that I have encountered since I became the member for Willoughby—that is, that people in the Willoughby community, notwithstanding their ability to afford private school education, want to choose whether to send their children to public schools. Only this week a constituent visited my office and discussed with me the fact that he and his wife can afford to send their child to a private school but chose to send their child to a public school. A year later they are disappointed about their decision. They came to see me to seek advice as to what they should do. They made an ideological decision to send their child to a public school but because of insufficient capital works in that school—classrooms were cramped because there were insufficient demountables—they are now reconsidering their decision.

That is consistent with recent Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] results which show that enrolments at non-government schools are up. In February this year the shadow Minister for Education and Training issued a press release that contained statistics from the ABS report. The report showed that enrolments at non-government schools were up by 6,375 in the past year and that enrolments at government schools were down by 3,820. While the Coalition supports the rights of parents to choose the school they think is most appropriate for their children, it is the responsibility of the Government to ensure that government schools provide an excellent option for parents. Regrettably, that is not the case. Parents like those in the Willoughby electorate who make the conscious decision to have their children educated in the public system should not regret making that decision and they should not, therefore, be forced to send their children to private schools.

I will refer now to specific provisions in the bill and highlight some capital works issues in the Willoughby electorate and, most notably, at Chatswood primary school. That school is an extraordinary and outstanding primary school with an excellent principal and teachers and a vibrant school community. Students flourish in every area of activity. However, regrettably, currently there are insufficient classrooms to house all the children. The library, the school hall and the toilet facilities are inadequate in size and quality to cater for the number of students who are enrolled.

With recent increased medium-density development in Chatswood, the population of Chatswood primary school is increasing. Notwithstanding the old classrooms and the insufficient facilities, the number of demountables is also impacting on playground space, and inadequate accommodation means that many classes are large. That school is just one example of a school with an outstanding academic output and an outstanding school community in music, culture and sports. I do not want to see the great qualities of that school diminished because it has insufficient classrooms to house its students. Unfortunately, it has insufficient facilities to ensure that the quality of education that students receive is commensurate with the values that parents place in sending their kids to that school.

The school has applied for a number of capital works upgrades. I am pleased and proud to represent the parents and the school community in their request for additional capital works upgrades. If the Government changes its mind, comes to its senses, and supports this legislation, I hope the parents of Chatswood primary school will be able to have the assets of the school registered on the Internet. They would then be able to establish what progress is being made at the school, and they would not need to consider sending their children elsewhere. Castle Cove Public School is a fantastic school. The parents there—one of whom is a former Minister of the Australian Labor Party Government—have raised literally hundreds of thousands of dollars for a new school library.

They applied to the Government over a period of two or three consecutive years to receive dollar-for-dollar funding for the library but on each occasion they have been denied it. I have visited the school and seen the library on a number of occasions. It is a great school. When parents are deciding whether to send their child to a private or public school, and they have adequate income to make a choice, Castle Cove Public School

should be able to compete. A state-of-the-art library would be a key factor in any determination. If this bill receives royal assent it will assist parents at Castle Cove Public School and parents at surrounding schools to make that important choice. Chatswood High School is another case in point. I was educated in a public co-educational or comprehensive high school.

Mr Bryce Gaudry: A good example of public education.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: I thank the honourable member for Newcastle. If he says so, I am a good example of public education. Schools such as Chatswood High School are few and far between. Chatswood High School is extremely important as it is the only comprehensive co-educational public high school in my electorate. I am extremely disappointed that the Government is dragging its feet in that regard. If the Government believes in public school education and wants to support comprehensive high schools, Chatswood High School is one place where it can articulate its overused rhetoric.

As I said, the population of Chatswood High School is increasing. There is a lot of competition among public, private, and selective high schools in the Willoughby electorate, and therefore it is important that Chatswood High School be given resources to upgrade and build much-needed additional classrooms. I include in that the Chatswood Intensive English Centre. Chatswood High School currently houses on its grounds one of the few intensive English centres in New South Wales. Students come from as far as the Central Coast and the North Coast to Chatswood, if they are new to Australia, and over three or four months they learn to speak English before they are sent to mainstream high schools.

I have visited the Chatswood Intensive English Centre on several occasions, and the buildings that house the students are deplorable. The centre produces positive results for students only because the teachers greatly value what they are doing. I have mentioned just some schools in need in the Willoughby electorate. If we multiply that number by 93 I am sure there would be thousands of similar examples throughout New South Wales. We need a school assets register to illustrate the deficiency of current capital assets. We are led to believe, by the Government's rhetoric, that it is spending a great deal of money on schools. I do not know where that money is going, because we continue to hear stories of desperate need from schools around the State. We must have a school assets register that reveals the current status of capital works projects and capital works deficiencies. Parents, students and teachers need a reference point and a central register to identify capital works progress.

I fail to understand why the Government will not support this bill. It is most disappointing. It is also extremely disappointing that no Labor members except the honourable member for Newcastle intend to speak to the bill. They must surely have schools in their electorates with capital works deficiencies which are in need of repair. Yet Labor members remain silent. They are letting down their constituents, their schools, and the public education system. I am sick and tired of hearing the Government's rhetoric about public education because, when it comes to the crunch, that rhetoric is not matched by action. If it were, the Government would support this extremely well-targeted bill.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD (Wakehurst) [11.22 a.m.]: It is a great pleasure for me to support the shadow Minister for Education and Training, the honourable member for North Shore, who is trying to focus on an issue that has frustrated many people for many years and reached a ridiculous stage under the Carr Government. The Government spouts the rhetoric of support for public education but more often than not does not have a handle on the issues. Without reflecting specifically on the current Minister for Education and Training, the conga line of preceding education Ministers was absolutely incompetent at driving public education for the people of New South Wales. In the past few years I have watched students and parents become more and more frustrated with government schools. They are voting with their feet and literally walking away from the public school system. That is very sad. I am a product of public education, as are many members on both sides of this Chamber. We value public education. However, for some reason the conga line of education Ministers under the Carr Government has failed miserably to nurture and encourage public education in New South Wales.

The problem extends across a range of issues. However, the Government School Assets Register Bill specifically addresses the physical environment of government schools. It has been, and continues to be, a constant source of frustration for teachers, students, and parents that many government school maintenance and capital programs are a complete mess. Schools on the northern beaches have not seen much money for some years, particularly under the Carr Government. Many parents are trying to bring necessary focus into their children's education and into improving the physical structures in those schools through a variety of means. Some parents have raised money for new capital facilities but have so far received no response from the Carr Government. I hope the current Minister might make a bit more effort in that regard.

Some schools in my area have been applying for funding to build school halls for longer than I have been in Parliament. Enrolments in some primary schools in my area have increased dramatically in the past few years. It is an interesting scenario. Primary schools have been doing very well but secondary schools have not—in fact, Beacon Hill High School in my local area was forced to close. Yet primary schools continue to grow. In fact, some primary schools are bursting at the seams but cannot get the capital infrastructure they need. When I start receiving letters from six-year-olds asking me, as the local member of Parliament, to get this Government to acknowledge that there is an urgent need for new school structures, I know that public education in New South Wales is pretty sick. Last year I received a series of wonderful letters from children at Wheeler Heights Public School. Six-year-old Sarah Beavan wrote:

Dear Mr Hazzard,

My name is Sarah Beavan and I am 6 years old. I am in year 1 at Wheeler Heights Public School. We need a hall because the school is getting bigger. I do Stage Arts Drama. If the school keeps getting bigger we won't have anywhere to do it. Last year we had to have our Easter hat parade in the library because it rained. If we had a hall we would have enough room for special things like that.

I hope you can help our school with this.

Thank you,
Sarah Beavan

I also received a letter from Jessica Duncan, who attends the same school. She wrote:

I am writing this letter to say that my school desperately needs a hall. These are some of the reasons why: When we have assembly every week it is really squashy. We need room to practise dance group. Our double room doesn't even fit half our school in it. Now that we have 500 students in our school—

Jessica wrote this letter on 6 March last year—

we need somewhere we can sit and our parents. Now that we have more students we don't have any spare classrooms if our school grows any more.

I would appreciate you assisting us with a new school hall.

Sammi VanderSaag wrote:

Dear Sir,

I am a Wheeler Heights student and I am in desperate need of a school hall. Firstly our school is getting bigger by the minute and maybe even we might have to split the double room in half and make it two more classrooms.

Also it would be much more fun to practise dance, band and choir in a hall. Lastly our school almost has 500 students and is the only school of our size without a hall.

So please keep my reason in your head.

That should send a message to the Carr Government and to the Premier. I have visited Wheeler Heights Public School many times over the years. It has a double classroom that it uses as a school meeting area—it could not be called a school hall. Special celebrations such as that held on Australia Day must be held twice. Half the school population listens to guests from the community who are invited to talk to students about the value of Australia Day and the significance of our heritage, and then the whole event is repeated. The children and parents feel frustrated that they cannot come together as a school community to celebrate one of the most significant events in the year. As for school plays, Easter parades, and Book Week events, unless it is a fine day they are in deep trouble. That school now has 521 students—I checked the figure this morning with the parents and citizens association. That is only one of the schools in my electorate with a problem. I have written to the current Minister about this issue, just as I have written to previous Ministers. Unfortunately, this Minister has the same word processor as his predecessors because the same paragraph appears in every response from education Ministers.

Mrs Jillian Skinner: It's a macro.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Yes, it is a macro in the software. The letters always state:

In relation to the provision of a hall at—

and the name of the school is inserted—

I am advised that all funds have been allocated for—

and the year in question is inserted. In the example I have before me the financial year was 2002-03. The letter continues:

You may be assured your support of this proposal is recognised and this matter will be considered along with other priorities across the State when finalising the 2003/04 Capital Works Program.

In the case of Wheeler Heights Public School it was the 2003-04 budget. For some time I have been receiving similar letters from other Ministers. I wrote to the current Minister for Police when he was Minister for Education and Training about Narraweena Public School, one of the best public schools in the State. Its principal, Patricia Petterson, is an amazing, energetic, wonderful human being who almost dances across the playground with enthusiasm for her students. The parents and citizens association of that school received a similar response when it sought a school hall. The school, which is in a low socioeconomic area, has expanded incredibly in the past few years and has been on the priority funded program for disadvantaged schools for some years. The parents and the school community have worked hard to try to get a school hall but they received the same form letter from Minister Watkins, who stated:

In relation to the communal hall at Narraweena Public School, I am advised that all funds have been allocated for the 2002/03 financial year. The issue you have raised will be considered along with other priorities across the State when finalising the next year's Capital Works Program.

The problem is that there is no transparency in the system. The shadow Minister, the honourable member for North Shore, has brought to the attention of the House in a significant and important way the need for transparency in the services provided to our schools and the capital works program in the education system. Parents and school communities are entitled to transparency about the criteria for allocation of funds.

Pursuant to sessional orders business interrupted.

ROYAL COMMISSION INTO HEALTH COMPLAINTS

Mr JOHN BROGDEN (Pittwater—Leader of the Opposition) [11.30 a.m.]: I move:

That this House calls on the Government to establish a royal commission into health complaints in New South Wales.

The pathetic response of the Carr Government, particularly the Premier and former Minister for Health, Craig Knowles, to the revelations yesterday in the interim report of Bret Walker, SC, has only deepened the Opposition's commitment to establish a royal commission into the health complaints system. Mr Walker's report destroys the credibility of the Health Care Complaints Commission, whose operations for 3½ years under the former commissioner do not have a shred of credibility. The Opposition sheets home the blame, by association, to the Government for its failure to do anything about genuine and ongoing concerns about the performance of the Health Care Complaints Commission. Indeed, it simply does not wash that Craig Knowles, the former Minister for Health, kept sending case after case down to the Health Care Complaints Commission expecting a proper inquiry but got nothing back and sat at his desk thinking there was nothing wrong. It is not believable.

Members of the Opposition, individuals representing their communities, will attest that on numerous occasions they sent genuine complaints from members of their local communities to the Health Care Complaints Commission. In all honesty and having the best interests of their constituents and their families in mind they said, "I will send this matter to the Health Care Complaints Commission. It is an independent body and it will properly investigate this matter for you." We now know that was never the case in the 3½ years under the former commissioner.

The most damning indictment of the Health Care Complaints Commission is that in not one of 70 cases reviewed by Mr Walker that had been allegedly investigated by the commission did the commission comply fully with its statutory duties. In short, the watchdog became a lapdog and the Government sat by and let it happen. The Government selected Amanda Adrian because it wanted a quiet life. It knew that the previous commissioner, Merrilyn Walton, was a watchdog and was happy to use the powers of the Health Care Complaints Commission to bring the Government to heel in relation to health care in New South Wales. The Government did not like that. The tactics of intimidation, threats, bullying and harassment by Craig Knowles would not work on somebody like Merrilyn Walton.

When the opportunity presented itself the Government looked for a quiet option. It looked for someone who was known to have views that opposed the name-and-blame culture, as she referred to it, of a watchdog and who decided to take a more educative role. The commission took a systemic approach of not blaming individual doctors or health practitioners for their failings but of trying to solve those problems by fixing the system. There is not a woman in New South Wales who did not reel with horror with the revelation that a Macarthur Health Service operation resulted in a woman having the wrong breast removed because of cancer. It is self-evident that every woman in New South Wales would reel in horror to learn that that could and did happen in a New South Wales hospital and that the Health Care Complaints Commission, the State's premier watchdog, did nothing to pursue the bureaucracy or the health professionals involved in a such a shocking, appalling and heart-wrenching disaster.

The Government happily presided over that because, as we know from its actions, it did not want to be embarrassed by the Health Care Complaints Commission. As the honourable member for North Shore, the former shadow Minister for Health, and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, the present shadow Minister for Health, and members of the Opposition know, the Government had to be dragged kicking and screaming into re-referring these allegations to the Health Care Complaints Commission and then to establishing an independent inquiry.

If Bret Walker, SC, found that 70 out of the 70 cases he reviewed were not properly investigated, it is clear that the more than 8,000 complaints and the more than 1,000 investigations finalised by the Health Care Complaints Commission during the previous 3½ year tenure of the former commissioner could also have been poorly investigated. It is not a leap of faith: it is a simple line of logic to argue that if 70 out of 70 were wrong at Camden and Campbelltown, then undoubtedly 1,000 out of 1,000 investigated across the State were wrong, because the whole culture of the organisation was to not properly investigate matters. That is why there must be a royal commission into health complaints in New South Wales.

The House will recall that almost exactly 10 years ago this State was under enormous pressure to create a royal commission into the police service. If the Police Force was corrupt in 1994, the health system is corrupt today. And it is corrupt right through the bureaucracy up to the top, to the former Minister for Health, and to the Premier, who both happily sat by and saw a corrupt complaint system stay in place because it provided them with a political advantage. On 11 May 1994, almost 10 years ago, the then Leader of the Opposition, now the Premier, Bob Carr, said:

... a royal commission has that additional focus. If there were any reservations about the stand the Opposition would take, the Premier's trepidation ... his defensiveness when faced with the prospect of a royal commission, would, I am afraid, tip the balance. Let ... whistleblowers come forward with the full range of protection being offered by a royal commission.

Isn't that fascinating? This is the Government one of whose Ministers harassed, intimidated and bullied whistleblowers when they came forward. Those whistleblowers lost their jobs for telling the truth. And thank God they told the truth, and thank God they stood their ground, because otherwise those problems would never have been exposed. I quote again the Premier:

Do not let it be on our consciences that we walked out of this Parliament tonight not having provided for the fullest investigation of the matters that have been placed before this Parliament. A royal commission provides a focus—some guarantee to the community that these matters will be exhaustively explored. I believe the case is overwhelming. I believe the balance of probabilities pushes towards the inevitability of this full, comprehensive and powerful public inquiry into the matters before the House today.

Despite those words, the Premier would tell us that the matter is now closed and we need to move forward. On Sydney radio this morning the Minister for Health indicated he has concerns about the appropriateness of the previous 8,000 cases but said we have got to move forward. Tell that to the people whose parents died, whose loved ones died, or who themselves received unacceptable treatment under the health system and were not given justice by the Health Care Complaints Commission. If the Premier ignores this Parliament, ignores calls for a royal commission and refuses to appoint a royal commission, this issue will dog him to his last day as Premier. He cannot avoid his responsibility to do his job.

Though the Premier will not answer questions in this Chamber, he cannot avoid the fact that as Bret Walker has discovered that 100 per cent of cases he reviewed from two hospitals alone were not properly investigated by the Health Care Complaints Commission, there is a question mark over the 8,000 complaints investigated by the commission in the same period of time. Those could be complaints about any part of the health system in this State, be it Tweed Heads, the South Coast, across suburban Sydney—anywhere! The Premier cannot wash his hands and walk away from this issue. He must grant the people of New South Wales a royal commission into health complaints in this State.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA (Lakemba—Minister for Health) [11.40 a.m.]: I will start by dealing with the 8,000 complaints that the Leader of the Opposition paraded before the House to justify his call for yet another royal commission.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Paul Lynch): Order! Opposition members will come to order.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: Interestingly, the motion called for a royal commission. In the Chamber yesterday when I heard the words "royal commission" I waited for the addition of the words "into the health system", because that was the cry of a couple of months ago. But the call yesterday was for a royal commission into the health care complaints system. The Opposition, because it and the crossbenchers have the numbers in the Legislative Council, has been parading so-called health care complaints before the Legislative Council committee that should be inquiring into the health care complaints system. That inquiry provides a perfect opportunity for any staff member, any bureaucrat or any member of the public concerned about a matter that they have raised in the past, or would like to raise now, to bring the matter before the upper House inquiry. Yesterday's call by the Opposition was not for a royal commission into the whole of the health system. That is because when the Opposition first raised the cry of "royal commission into the health system" and started to parade and exploit individuals—

Mr John Brogden: Point of order: You did not mind exploiting that woman and her baby when you dragged them in from the North Shore.

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

[Interruption]

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Paul Lynch): Order! The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: That outburst by the Leader of the Opposition was for the benefit of the gallery, because he has an audience. The health care professionals who work in our health care system have been telling the Leader of the Opposition why morale in the system has taken such a nosedive, that morale is being eaten away because of the constant undermining of the people who work in the health care system. That is why yesterday the Leader of the Opposition did not call for a royal commission into the health care system but a royal commission into the complaints handling system. Bret Walker's interim report, delivered yesterday, was a confirmation of the action that the Government took some months ago to change the leadership, management and structure of the current complaints handling system—a system that the report delivered yesterday confirmed was badly in need of reform. That is why the Government has reformed it.

A special commission of inquiry has been investigating complaints handling matters related to the Macarthur Area Health Service, and that has shown that the complaints handling system was in need of reform. The Opposition wants a royal commission that will tell us what a special commission of inquiry has already told us: there is a need for reform of the complaints handling system. The Government has set about reforming that body. The Opposition would spend another \$100 million to tell us what Bret Walker has already told us: that body is in need of reform. The Government is interested in reform, and has already commenced that reform. The stock standard response of the Opposition to any issue to do with health care is to call for a royal commission. That is, it calls for a continuation of the status quo for two or three years and the spending of an additional \$100 million, not on our hospitals but on a freeze of the current system. It wants not reform but a freeze on the current complaints handling system for two or three years—and then have another inquiry, on top of all the inquiries that we already have.

At present we have a special commission of inquiry, with the powers of a royal commission. People who come forward and participate in that special commission of inquiry have protection and privilege. That is inquiry number one. The terms of reference of the upper House inquiry relate to complaints handling, but a reading of the transcripts makes it clear that not a lot of the evidence taken has been about complaints handling. It has been a trawling expedition. Nevertheless, it is an upper House inquiry into complaints handling. That is inquiry number two. Another inquiry is investigating other allegations made about Macarthur, relating to documents and other matters relating to staff. That is inquiry number three. I understand matters are also with the police. That is inquiry number four. So we have the Independent Commission Against Corruption inquiries, the Bret Walker special commission of inquiry, an upper House inquiry, three standing committee inquiries, with the terms of reference of the upper House inquiry specifically relating to complaints handling.

Yesterday the Opposition was saying there was now a need for a royal commission into the complaints handling system. It got nowhere with its call for a royal commission into the whole of the health system because the health care professionals gave the Opposition the answer on that one; that is why the Opposition has backed away from that call. Let us have a look at the supposedly 8,000 matters that are all now thrown into doubt. The fact is that only 9 per cent are referred for investigation because most of them are dealt with by way of conciliation.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Paul Lynch): Order! Opposition members will come to order.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: Forty per cent of cases were referred to the relevant assessment and investigative bodies, such as the Medical Board and the Nurses Registration Board.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Paul Lynch): Order! I call the honourable member for Bega to order.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: Thirty per cent went to conciliation, or were resolved by some other means. That is the advice I have. But the Leader of the Opposition would bring into question all 8,000 cases. It is not as though this has not been in the public domain or the subject of strong public debate ever since criticisms were made of the Health Care Complaints Commission investigation into Macarthur and the delivery of the report in December. It is not as if there has been a secret about the HCCC report delivered in December or a lack of media or public focus, or media, public or political debate. People who are concerned about previous matters have had ample opportunity to come forward.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Paul Lynch): Order! The Leader of the Opposition will come to order.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: Right now there is an upper House inquiry into the very matter the Opposition is bringing forward calling for a—

Mr John Brogden: Pretty pathetic, Morris.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: What?

Mr John Brogden: It's pretty pathetic, your performance.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Paul Lynch): Order! The Leader of the Opposition will come to order.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: If the Leader of the Opposition wants to call the upper House inquiry pathetic, that is good. His colleagues are participating in that inquiry. The Leader of the Opposition is only interested in looking back. He will never talk about a health reform agenda. He is always freewheeling when it comes to spending money on royal commissions of inquiry. But we never hear anything from him when it comes to a health reform agenda that involves expenditure of dollars on front-line health services in our hospitals to support our nurses and doctors. We only ever hear from him when he is looking backwards; he never has any plans to go forward or for reform.

Yesterday the sentence in the motion was adjusted. The reference to the whole system was removed and "into the complaints handling system of New South Wales Health through the HCCC" was inserted. The report of the Walker inquiry confirms the actions of the Government in reforming the HCCC, in restoring public confidence in the HCCC and in establishing a body that not only the public but the staff that work in the system can have confidence in when they have concerns about health care. The Government is determined to implement all of the recommendations of Mr Walker, whether they relate to complaints handling or any other matter.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [11.50 a.m.]: The Minister for Health has demonstrated that not only is he the portfolio successor to former Minister for Health, Craig Knowles, but he is as politically bankrupt as Craig Knowles. He gets up in this place and smiles after we revealed yesterday the bankruptcy of the Health Care Complaints Commission investigation into complaints from the public about the State's hospital system. His defence is, "It is not 8,000 complaints, it is 4,000." I remind the House that Bret Walker investigated 70 complaints, and for that the Government was happy to establish a special commission of inquiry after media and Opposition pressure.

If 70 complaints can lead to a special commission of inquiry, why, on the Minister's argument, can 4,000 complaints not lead to a royal commission? Why do we want a royal commission into health complaints

in New South Wales? We want a royal commission because there are no health successes. Despite the Minister's protestations to Alan Jones and others—"I'm sorry, Alan. I understand there are problems. I'm trying my best"—he has revealed himself to be cut from the same cloth as Craig Knowles—a cloth woven by the Premier, Bob Carr; a cloth woven with lies and a lack of care for the public. The golden thread that goes through that cloth is, "How the hell do we stay in office? How the hell do we continue to enjoy the benefits of office?"

Ms Peta Seaton: Whatever it takes.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: It is, as the honourable member for Southern Highlands says, a whatever-it-takes approach. Why would that not be the case when one considers that the Minister worked for Graham Richardson, a former Federal Minister, the man who brought that phrase into the Australian lexicon? For all those who held out hope that Morris Iemma would bring a fresh approach, he has shattered their hope and that illusion today. Unlike other Ministers who have taken over other portfolios, we have seen that he is incapable of saying that the former Minister got it wrong, the former Minister was happy to have a dysfunctional Health Care Complaints Commission, the former Minister was happy to have a health care complaints body to which he could throw complaints from time to time as they arose in the media because he knew he would never get back reports. As the Leader of the Opposition said previously, the former Minister was happy not to have a health care watchdog but a health care lapdog.

Every time there was a media problem—whether it related to switchboards at Concord Hospital, deaths or problems with the Ambulance Service—the former Minister would refer it to the Health Care Complaints Commission. He did that knowing full well that he would never receive a report, that accountability would never be brought to bear, that there may well be cover-ups and that the Health Care Complaints Commission at the time would not expose the fundamental corruption of the Department of Health. To his credit a former Federal and State public servant, John Menadue, was happy to do it. He claimed that no-one was managing the State's hospital systems because in the New South Wales Department of Health under Craig Knowles the management worked upwards to protect the Minister from political fall-out. It did not work downwards to provide the quality health care to patients that they deserve.

Morris Iemma stands condemned because of his approach today: a smirking contribution that, even on his figures, concedes that 4,000 health care complaints are unlikely to have been properly investigated. He then seeks to say that we do not need to address that. The Government continues to raise costs, an issue that I know the Premier, Bob Carr, never dealt with during the debate on the proposed police royal commission because of the importance of public safety to the operation of this State. The reality is that there could be no more important State service than health. By saying no to a royal commission, that it is moving prospectively, that it has reformed the health care complaints body, the Government is saying that the system will pick up prospectively the duds and the problems in the system.

In other words, the new health care complaints body will not pick anyone up because it is not going back to look at the 4,000 or 8,000 complaints until a doctor, nurse, system or public servant has caused more deaths, more injuries and more adverse outcomes for the families of those in the State's hospital system. It is like having a new building regime but allowing shonky builders to remain licensed: the only time they will be disciplined is when they next come before the tribunal. That is the approach the Government is endorsing. It is an approach that says to some families across this State, "Expect people to die, expect there to be no accountability until those systems, doctors and nurses who may be at fault come before the new body." Morris Iemma stands here with a smirk on his face and says that 4,000 complaints do not need investigating. His attitude is the reason they need investigating. He is a complete and utter hypocrite; he is a logical successor to Craig Knowles. [*Time expired.*]

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Paul Lynch): Order! I call the honourable member for Drummoyne.

[*Interruption*]

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Paul Lynch): Order! Members of the Opposition will come to order.

Ms ANGELA D'AMORE (Drummoyne) [11.55 a.m.]: I am at a loss today—

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Paul Lynch): Order! I call the honourable member for Bega to order for the second time.

Ms ANGELA D'AMORE: —to understand why the Opposition is calling for a royal commission into the health care complaints system that would cost \$100 million over two years, rather than looking at what we need to fix in the system. Let us look at what \$100 million would provide in the public health system. I note that of all the people in this Chamber I am the one who has had some experience with negotiating terms and conditions for nurses throughout New South Wales. Let us look at the recruitment and retention of our nurses. The sum of \$100 million would go a long way towards increasing wages for our nurses. I know that we have the best-paid nurses in Australia, but they deserve more. The sum of \$100 million would go a long way towards increasing on-call allowances, shift allowances and overtime.

Mr John Brogden: Are you going to advocate on behalf of nurses, are you?

Ms ANGELA D'AMORE: Yes. All public sector nurses come under the Public Hospital Nurses State Award, which will be up for negotiation in the next two to three years and we want to make sure that money is being spent in our budget rather than chasing our health professionals and trying to reduce their morale. Anyone who has ever seen nurses and doctors working in our hospitals would understand the immense pressure they are under. A royal commission would demoralise them. Those opposite want to pick on every single public hospital in New South Wales and demoralise our staff. That is wrong! The Labor Government will stand up for its health professionals. We will be there, by their side, listening to their concerns and working with the community to ensure that money is put into the health care system when matters need to be rectified. This Government is not about targeting our health professionals. There are adequate disciplinary procedures in the awards and there is the Nurses Registration Board as well as the Impaired Nurses Panel, so the structures exist.

Let me examine professional development, which is one of the most important issues for nurses in New South Wales. Honourable members know how far \$100 million would go toward providing every conceivable avenue of training that is needed for our nurses. The development of medical technology is increasing at a rapid pace. We need to ensure that doctors and nurses have access to professional development and that they are given adequate support which will enable them to attend professional development courses. Let me tell members of the Opposition what we are up against now. There is a nursing shortage because the Federal Government will not provide funding for university places. When nurses have to take sick leave, annual leave and long service leave, there is no-one to replace them. They are forced to work double shifts because there are not enough nurses in the system.

Notwithstanding that, members of the Opposition do criticise our nurses and call for a royal commission. The \$100 million that it would cost for a royal commission will go a long way toward assisting and supporting our doctors and nurses. Workplace child care is also an important issue for doctors and nurses. Do members of the Opposition know how far \$100 million would go in enabling our health professionals to balance their family responsibilities with work responsibilities? That money would go a long way toward assisting our health professionals, but the members of the Opposition do not want to deal with that because they are not interested in supporting our nurses and doctors. Members of the Opposition are interested only in tearing apart the system.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! There is too much noise from the Opposition.

Ms ANGELA D'AMORE: The wonderful Concord hospital is situated in my electorate of Drummoyne. Fortunately, as a result of the State Government and its commitment to the residents of New South Wales, a magnetic resonance imaging [MRI] machine will be delivered some time in August.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! The Leader of the Opposition will remain silent.

Ms ANGELA D'AMORE: The Labor Government allocated \$3 million to purchase that machine, but the Federal Government has denied the Medicare licence that will enable people to use their Medicare card when they are treated by that machine. If the Federal Government has not granted that licence by August, I will be telling my residents that they will have to pay \$500 for a scan. I will not tolerate that on behalf of the pensioners in my community. Why should we not have a royal commission? The fact is that the Opposition is trying to throw the entire health system into disrepute.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! The Leader of the Opposition will remain silent

Ms ANGELA D'AMORE: The interim report of the Walker special commission of inquiry has fulfilled its terms of reference and will deal with improvements to the Health Care Complaints Commission. The Government should be given the chance to examine the reforms recommended by the Health Care Complaints Commission as well as the reports from other inquiries, and should implement those recommendations. This attempt by the Opposition to launch a royal commission is no better than an attempt to spend \$100 million to pursue personal tragedy for the Opposition's own political gain. I note that the Leader of the Opposition has just had a son, which is why it is more disgraceful. There is no focus on improvement.

Mr John Brogden: Point of order: I invite the honourable member for Drummoyne to withdraw that personal comment.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! The Leader of the Opposition has taken a point of order. The honourable member for Drummoyne merely stated that the Leader of the Opposition had just had a son.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: To the point of order—

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! I ask the Deputy Leader of the Opposition to resume his seat.

Ms ANGELA D'AMORE: If the Leader of the Opposition is offended by the joyous event of his son being born—

Mr Barry O'Farrell: To the point of order: The honourable member for Drummoyne is not entitled to withdraw in a qualified sense. She either withdraws or she does not, and I would be happy for her not to do so because I would like to debate this matter. The honourable member for Drummoyne clearly sought to tie the birth of the child of the Leader of the Opposition with the tragedies that have occurred in the Government's hospitals.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat.

Ms ANGELA D'AMORE: I withdraw the comment.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! The comment has been withdrawn.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER (North Shore) [12.00 p.m.]: What this really comes down to is: What price a life? What price many lives? The Government is into its cover-up again. We have seen not only the smirking response by the Minister for Health, which was breathtaking, but also the charade performed by the honourable member for Drummoyne. It is absolutely shocking that both members of this House spoke the way they did, and that their colleagues sat in silence, indicating that they support their Minister and the honourable member for Drummoyne, who preceded me in this debate.

Mr Bryce Gaudry: Point of order: The honourable member for North Shore is imputing motives to Government members who are sitting in the Chamber. She is referring to their views but they have not expressed their views on this matter. I ask her to confine herself to the debate rather than impute motives to members on this side of the House.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! I uphold the point of order.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: I will merely say that I believe the performance of Government members who have spoken in this debate—I note that a number of them have been sitting silently—has indicated their discomfit at the revelation of the cover-up by this Government and the lengths to which it will go to keep quiet the events that are occurring in our public health system.

Mr Bryce Gaudry: Point of order: The honourable member for North Shore is misleading the House. As the Minister for Health pointed out, a special commission of inquiry was established. There is no way at all that the matter is being covered up. The matter is the subject of a protocol of investigations by Mr Walker, SC, and yesterday the Minister for Health made it clear that when the full reports are presented to him, he will make an absolute determination on them.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! There is no point of order.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: This motion calls for a royal commission into the complaints processes applied to health matters. I assure the House that as a former shadow Minister for Health I referred many matters in good faith to the Health Care Complaints Commission whenever people raised their concerns with me about treatment they had received in hospitals. In good faith I referred those matters to the Health Care Complaints Commission, and I am absolutely disgusted to now find that those matters were merely swept under the carpet. The findings brought down in the interim report, which was released yesterday, show that 100 per cent of 70 matters investigated were improperly dealt with. As the Leader of the Coalition has pointed out, 8,000 matters were dealt with by the Health Care Complaints Commission, yet there is no guarantee that any of them have been dealt with appropriately. That is why an investment in a royal commission is not only desirable but is obligatory to restore the public's confidence in the system. It is about complaints being dealt with appropriately and reforms being implemented to ensure that adverse occurrences do not recur.

The Government's cover-up continues. It began when the whistleblower nurses came forward with information about what was happening at the Camden and Campbelltown hospitals. I had a meeting with those nurses immediately after they had met with the former Minister for Health. The nurses told me that they had been told by the Health Care Complaints Commission that it was a body that could not examine their concerns. The former Minister referred those matters to the Health Care Complaints Commission. Does he now believe that the Health Care Complaints Commission was the right place to which those matters should be referred? Surely he cannot believe that, because the inquiry established by the Minister's successor has shown that the process was flawed. The former Minister, in compliance with the Commissioner of the Health Care Complaints Commission—a lap-dog who had no intention of coming forward with anything that would be politically damaging to this Government—engaged in a cover-up for reasons of political expediency. Again I ask: What cost a life? People who were in the care of our health systems and died would be alive today if matters had been dealt with properly. [*Time expired.*]

Mr GERARD MARTIN (Bathurst) [12.05 p.m.]: I support the Minister for Health in opposing the call by the Opposition for a royal commission. Speakers who have preceded me in this debate have already pointed out the cost of more than \$100 million for a royal commission.

Mrs Jillian Skinner: How do you know it is \$100 million?

Mr GERARD MARTIN: I know from the lessons of history and the estimate that it will take about 10 years to complete it. I would have thought that members opposite would be well versed in the magnitude of lawyers' fees, which is the major cost component in the cost of a royal commission. The Minister stated and put his case very well. This morning the Committee on the Health Care Complaints Commission was sitting in Parliament House and, interestingly, not one member of the Liberal Party turned up at the meeting. Yesterday the Liberal Party was calling for the chairman of that committee to resign and was accusing the previous Minister of appointing—

Mr Barry O'Farrell: Point of order: I do not raise the same point of order raised by the honourable member for Newcastle. The honourable member for Bathurst has been a member of this House long enough to know that on sitting days, particularly on Thursdays when we have private members' business, the House takes precedence over the sitting of any committee. My second issue is, why sit on the committee of the—

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! That is not a point of order. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat.

[*Interruption*]

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat.

Mr GERARD MARTIN: Earlier in the day the Deputy Leader of the Opposition called across the Chamber and said, "The next speaker won't get two seconds. We are just going to take point of order after point of order." That is his tactic, and we know about it.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: Point of order: I am incensed now. I point out that the honourable member for Bathurst had spoken for two minutes before I raised a point of order—and that is hardly second by second.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! There is no point of order.

Mr GERARD MARTIN: Yesterday in this House the Opposition called for the resignation of the chairman of the parliamentary committee and also claimed that the previous Minister appointed the chairman who had been sacked.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! There is far too much noise in the Chamber.

Ms Peta Seaton: Point of order: The substance of this motion is about a royal commission. We have heard from the honourable member for Bathurst all sorts of discussions about committees—

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! What is your point of order?

Ms Peta Seaton: We have heard all sorts of discussions about points of order and about what happened yesterday. We are not hearing from the honourable member for Bathurst about the substance of this motion, which is to do with whether there should be a royal commission.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! There is no point of order.

Mr GERARD MARTIN: On the point about a royal commission, the Government is opposing the Opposition's motion for a royal commission because, quite frankly, we do not think it is necessary. Processes are in place to reform the HCCC, and the Minister explained that chapter and verse. What the Minister said was quite right; let us get on with this. The Government is about reform and about managing change and improvement. And that is what is happening, and has already been demonstrated. This morning the word "hypocrisy" was heard in the Chamber. When the Liberals were in government in 1994 it desperately opposed a royal commission into police. Suddenly things have changed down the track. There was a lot more evidence then and evidence is available now for a royal commission. The Liberal party, when in Opposition, was able to bring the royal commission about because it had real, meaningful evidence to give.

Mrs Jillian Skinner: Don't you care?

Mr GERARD MARTIN: Of course we care. That is why changes are being raised, and that is why the Leader of the Opposition is being exposed for his cheap gutter politics. Two Opposition members are expert on that point. Two members of his party are trolling around the place saying how disgusted they are about his gutter tactics.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: Point of order: I understand that the honourable member for Bathurst is disappointed that he is not going to Japan, but that has nothing to do with this debate.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition well knows that that is not a point of order.

[Time expired.]

Mr JOHN BROGDEN (Pittwater—Leader of the Opposition) [12.10 p.m.], in reply: There could be no better evidence for this Government to put in place a royal commission than the damning evidence uncovered by Bret Walker in the commission of inquiry into only two hospitals. In those two hospitals alone, of the myriad of public health facilities in New South Wales, he reviewed 70 cases and found that the Health Care Complaints Commission [HCCC] had failed to properly investigate all 70 cases. If the system is rotten in two hospitals, it is rotten across the State. There can be absolutely no doubt that, of the other 200 or more hospitals in New South Wales, if 1 per cent gets wrong the handling procedures under the HCCC that is likely to be replicated in some form across the State. Indeed the entire argument of the Government from this pathetic Minister for Health down is: Let's draw a line and move on, we have fixed it for the future—and that is yet to be fully determined. We are dealing with the past in relation to two hospitals, but the other 200 will be ignored.

That is not good enough. Let it be on the conscience of each and every member of the Labor Party in this Chamber when they go home to their electorates and face their communities that they failed them on the

very simple point of actually seeking to unearth a potential outrageous situation across a number of hospitals in their local communities. The sadness in today's debate is not that some members spoke, but that other members failed to speak. The honourable member for Camden and the honourable member for Campbelltown did not front in the Chamber or speak in the Chamber, and that is appalling. The former Minister for Health, who continues to avoid questions on this matter, was not here to defend his administration of the health system or his relationship with the HCCC under the former commissioner, and that is equally appalling.

Today the Government has an opportunity to come clean, to say that the Health Care Complaints Commission did not get it wrong only in Camden and Campbelltown, but there is every chance it got it wrong in the other 200 hospitals and the nearly 8,000 cases it investigated and the other complaints it received. It is not plausible for the Government to argue that this disaster happened in only one discrete area of the State. Today the Government has been found wanting. When questioned in the House yesterday, the former Minister for Health, Craig Knowles, refused to answer whether he was happy with the performance of Amanda Adrian, or whether he had concerns. The Premier gave no commentary. After nine years in government, the Labor Party thinks that people have short attention spans and do not have memories. The Government thinks that people will pick up today's paper and confidently trust the Government to move forward and fix the problem.

The people of New South Wales have no faith in Premier Carr and Minister Iemma's handling of the health system in New South Wales. Their patience has run thin. The Government has had nine years to get it right, to provide quality health care in New South Wales, and to ensure that the watchdog body had real teeth and pursued real problems in the health system. But it failed dismally. The Government failed dismally again today. It keeps going back to the old chestnut of how much it will cost. That is seeking to put a dollar sign above the head of someone who was treated inappropriately in a hospital or who died unnecessarily in a hospital. I tell every member of the Labor Party in this Chamber that if that happened in their electorate, and the Health Care Complaints Commission failed one of the constituents, they will never be forgiven.

Mr Paul Crittenden: Point of order: The Leader of the Opposition should tell us where and how many hip replacements should be cut to fund the royal commission. He is not doing that in this debate. He should tell the people of my electorate how many hip replacements will not occur—but he is not doing that, he is simply playing politics.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Marie Andrews): Order! I uphold the point of order.

Mr JOHN BROGDEN: I am sure that the people of New South Wales would be willing to sacrifice from the health system what it would cost to effect the personality replacement that is needed by the honourable member. There is an enormous amount of duplication in the health system. This Government has failed the New South Wales community. [*Time expired.*]

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 29

Mr Aplin	Mrs Hopwood	Ms Seaton
Mr Armstrong	Mr Humpherson	Mrs Skinner
Ms Berejiklian	Mr Kerr	Mr Slack-Smith
Mr Brogden	Mr Merton	Mr Souris
Mr Constance	Mr O'Farrell	Mr Stoner
Mr Debnam	Mr Page	Mr J. H. Turner
Mr Fraser	Mr Piccoli	Mr R.W. Turner
Mrs Hancock	Mr Pringle	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Hazzard	Mr Richardson	Mr George
Ms Hodgkinson	Mr Roberts	Mr Maguire

Noes, 53

Ms Allan	Mr Greene	Ms Nori
Mr Amery	Ms Hay	Mr Orkopoulos
Ms Andrews	Mr Hickey	Mrs Paluzzano
Mr Barr	Mr Hunter	Mr Pearce
Mr Bartlett	Mr Iemma	Dr Refshauge
Mr Black	Ms Judge	Mr Sartor
Mr Brown	Ms Keneally	Mr Scully
Ms Burney	Mr Knowles	Mr Shearan
Mr Campbell	Mr Lynch	Mr Stewart
Mr Collier	Mr McBride	Mr Torbay
Mr Corrigan	Mr McGrane	Mr Tripodi
Mr Crittenden	Mr McLeay	Mr Watkins
Ms D'Amore	Ms Meagher	Mr West
Mr Debus	Ms Megarrity	Mr Whan
Mr Draper	Mr Mills	Mr Yeadon
Ms Gadiel	Ms Moore	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Gaudry	Mr Morris	Mr Ashton
Mr Gibson	Mr Newell	Mr Martin

Pair

Mr Hartcher

Ms Saliba

Question resolved in the negative.**Motion negatived.****DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING HOT SPOTS POLICY****Debate resumed from 18 March.****Mr BRYCE GAUDRY** (Newcastle—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.29 p.m.]: I move:

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

"this House:

- (1) commends the Government for spending over \$61 million on airconditioning schools since coming to office, and
- (2) notes that comprehensive measures have been taken to aircondition Parkes High School, as well as funding other improvements to the school."

I thank the honourable member for Dubbo for raising this matter of Department of Education and Training hot spots policy and I acknowledge the strong interest he takes in public education and the schools in his electorate. Since coming to office in 1995 the Government has acted to make the school environment comfortable for students in the hottest parts of the State. Indeed, it was a visit to Parkes High School by a former Minister for Education and Training that led to a change in the air-cooling policy, which meant that schools in the 30 degrees to 33 degrees isotherm range of the State became eligible for air-cooling.

Since 1995 more than \$61 million has been allocated to air-cooling our schools, and the Government has given a commitment to aircondition all remaining demountable classrooms by 2005. Our record spending on air-cooling is in stark contrast to the record of the Greiner and Fahey governments—and I note that former Premier Fahey is visiting Parliament today. The Coalition showed no interest in air-cooling schools east of the 33 degrees isotherm and spent nothing on demountables in Western Sydney. Since 1995, hot spot classrooms in more than 790 schools have been air-cooled as part of the Government's Air Cooling Program.

Parkes High School has a current enrolment of more than 800 students, and the Government has taken comprehensive measures to ensure a better learning environment at the school. I advise that as part of the 1997-98 Air Cooling Program \$116,228 was spent at Parkes High School on airconditioning five permanent hot spot rooms, which were nominated by the school. Additionally, the school hall at Parkes High School was air-cooled as part of the 1999-2000 Joint Funding Program, under which the school received a joint funding grant from the

department of \$29,126 to undertake the work. A further \$30,597 was spent on airconditioning demountables at the school as part of the 1998-99 and 1999-2000 Air Cooling Programs. The two remaining demountables at Parkes High School—a science facility and an arts facility—are airconditioned. As part of the 2003-04 Air Cooling Program another six permanent hot spots at the school have been air-cooled at an estimated total cost of \$90,000.

I am pleased to inform honourable members that work on this project has been completed and the air-cooling units became operational on Friday 20 February 2004. This means that since 1997 the Government has spent nearly \$266,000 on providing airconditioning to Parkes High School. In addition, nearly \$2 million of capital works funding has been allocated to the school. This includes the provision of a new building for special education facilities that was air-cooled as part of that capital works project. Other minor capital works included the installation of security screens, rails, ramps and lift access.

We will continue to make sure that our rural students enjoy the same opportunities as their metropolitan counterparts. Our \$1.2 billion in capital works funding this term will continue to deliver practical improvements to our schools so that students have a love of learning and enjoy their school days. We are doing all of this in spite of the Howard Government's failure to provide fair Federal funding to our public schools. It is instead directing record levels of funding to elite private schools. I note that my good colleague the honourable member for Upper Hunter is in the Chamber. I recently enjoyed in his company an event to celebrate the upgrade and expansion of the Muswellbrook South Public School. The pathetic four-year funding offer from the Federal Minister for Education, Science and Training, Brendan Nelson, fails to deliver one extra dollar from the Commonwealth for our public schools, but it will deliver large increases for non-government schools. It is clear that Labor governments are the champions of public education in this country.

I also inform honourable members that the Government is ahead of schedule in its \$24 million election commitment to air-cool New South Wales public schools. The Government promised to aircondition all demountable classrooms by 2005 and has already completed 88 per cent of those classrooms. More than 800 demountable buildings have been airconditioned since June last year. Another 650 demountable classrooms will be airconditioned by the end of 2005. All demountable classrooms in New South Wales will then be airconditioned.

We have had a very hot summer so it is appropriate to refer to the new guidelines that have been developed for government school students in extreme hot weather. Principals have a range of options to assist staff and support students in extreme weather. They include the variation of normal teaching programs and the use of shady and cool outdoor facilities; rotating class use of airconditioned facilities; the avoidance of rigorous physical activity, including postponing outdoor sport and physical education that might put students under undue stress; the use of fans; the strong enforcement of "no hat, no play" policies in the playground or other outdoor settings; providing water bottles or similar facilities in the classroom or playground; and in extreme circumstances a principal can contact the regional director if he or she believes it is necessary. I thank the honourable member for Dubbo for bringing this matter to the attention of the House and I am sure that he welcomes the more than \$2,200,000 allocated to Parkes High School since 1995. I commend the Government's amendment to the House.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER (North Shore) [12.36 p.m.]: I support the original motion of the honourable member for Dubbo, which highlights one of the major flaws in the Government's delivery of public education in this State. The Government is very good at rhetoric but very poor at providing the facilities in which students and teachers must learn and teach. I remind the House that in 2001 the Minister for Education and Training told Parliament that it was Government policy to aircondition permanent buildings in schools in those parts of the State above the 30 degrees isotherm and demountable classrooms above the 27.5 degrees isotherm. The Government has clearly failed to deliver on that promise. During the recent spate of hot weather many students and teachers were very distressed. The Minister responded by telling students to sit outside under trees, for example. What a pathetic response from the person responsible for providing the facilities and the environment in which the students of New South Wales learn.

The Vinson report identified the run-down physical state of public schools in this State. The report also commented that, by not providing proper facilities at those schools, the Government was sending the message to students, teachers, and the community that it does not value public education. If the Government had kept its promise to aircondition schools such as Parkes High School the Department of Education and Training would not have had to suggest that schools rotate the use of airconditioned classrooms. The use of airconditioners causes blackouts in many schools with old electrical wiring. The use of heaters in winter will cause similar

problems. Computer use regularly causes blackouts in old school buildings that have not been rewired to accommodate the additional load that modern equipment places on electrical circuits. Students were given water bottles and told to run under sprinklers and sit under trees, and teachers were so desperate that they brought fans from home to school. They are the types of stop-gap measures forced on schools because the Government provides empty promises to upgrade buildings and equipment while school infrastructure crumbles.

Parkes High School is a perfect example and is specifically mentioned in this motion. Ironically, in May 1995 the honourable member for Lachlan, a member of The Nationals, referred to the need for airconditioning in Parkes High School in a letter to the Government. If ever there was an indication of the Government's lack of response, that is it. The matter was ignored and it is now raised by the honourable member for Dubbo. The member said that Parkes High School has 800 students. The Parliamentary Secretary referred to airconditioning that has been provided to the school, but he failed to say that only one-quarter of the school is airconditioned.

The Government keeps saying that it is fast-tracking, and is ahead of schedule with, the airconditioning of demountables. It will be interesting to see how fast it proceeds in the next six months to ensure that all demountables are airconditioned by next summer. I guarantee that when the weather heats up again next summer, teachers and students will be told to sit outside under a tree, because this Government has swept the problem under the carpet, like it does with so many things.

Mr STEVE WHAN (Monaro) [12.41 p.m.]: I support the Government's amendment and acknowledge the efforts of the honourable member for Dubbo in representing his constituents, which he does far more effectively than a member of The Nationals, but not as effectively as a member of Country Labor. Between 1995 and June 2003 this Government spent more than \$61 million on airconditioning our schools and through that program it is targeting the hottest parts of the State first, which, of course, is commonsense. The Government has committed more than \$24 million to aircondition all demountable classrooms by June 2005, which includes Bungendore Public School in the Monaro electorate, about which a number of people have contacted me this summer and last summer.

That money is also for electrical upgrades to run the airconditioning system, as referred to by the honourable member for North Shore. The Government has already airconditioned 88 per cent of demountable classrooms, and has 650 left to meet the total target by June 2005. It is worth noting that since 1995 almost \$600,000 has been spent on air-cooling classrooms in the electorate of Monaro, on top of \$25 million spent on capital works. I listened to a number of speakers who referred to backlogs in maintenance and airconditioning. When this Government came to office it had to maintain and upgrade many schools in Monaro, which is an indication of how little the previous Coalition Government did in any area of education.

Bungendore, Cooma North, Jindabyne and Wyndham schools almost needed complete rebuilding when this Government came to office because of the neglect of previous governments. That so much work is now taking place in our schools around the State is a mark of what needed to be done. It is logical to start airconditioning schools in the hottest areas, which is something I have trouble explaining to some of the schools in the southern parts of my electorate. Schools nominate their six hottest rooms to get airconditioned first when they exceed the set isotherm mark. If it had been left to the Coalition, and the lack of progress before this Government came to office, schools such as Parkes High School would never have received any airconditioning. The Carr Government extended the areas in which schools were eligible for airconditioning, and thanks to this Government an extra 780 schools have received airconditioning.

When I was in year 11 at school in the Australian Capital Territory I went on strike for airconditioning in my school, so I know how important it is to take action to call for airconditioning, particularly in buildings that are not designed with good cooling features. Many of our new schools are designed to be energy efficient to ensure we do not need as much energy for airconditioning. The airconditioning program is only part of what the Government is doing to provide more comfortable classrooms. We are committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and minimising waste and consumption of energy. Our new schools have integral design principles—including passive ventilation, the orientation of buildings, appropriate construction materials, sun control, ventilation and natural lighting—to save taxpayers' money and to provide a more pleasant learning and teaching environment.

Jerrabomberra Public School, which was opened yesterday, is a classic example of good building design. It has high ceilings, good ventilation, and a shaded sunny side to make sure it does not require too much energy. It also has noise insulation because of the incidence of aircraft overhead. These are important design

principles to ensure that buildings are environmentally friendly energy users. The Government is delivering on its promise to improve classroom comfort in the hot summer months and it is on track to meet its commitment on things such as demountable classrooms by June 2005. It is important to note that before the Carr Government was elected in 1995, only 167 schools had been airconditioned. Since then, an extra 790 schools and classrooms have been airconditioned. That has been achieved while the Federal Government has been cutting our education funding. [*Time expired.*]

Mr RICHARD TORBAY (Northern Tablelands) [12.46 p.m.]: I congratulate the honourable member for Dubbo on moving this motion. He has been a long-term contributor and strong advocate for his community, both in his former life as a mayor and now as the State member of Parliament, as evidenced by this motion that he gave notice of a considerable time ago. Like most issues, there has been a lot of toing-and-froing and political sparring, but the fundamental objective of the honourable member for Dubbo, and I am sure all members, is to try to provide appropriate accommodation for our schools and therefore a more comfortable learning environment.

Public schools are in the spotlight, particularly since the scandalous comments of the Prime Minister, who attempted to devalue public education. I acknowledge that the Government has increased funding in certain areas and, because it is important, I also acknowledge that maintenance funding in my electorate has increased in the past four years by \$3 million. However, the amendment is not appropriate, because it avoids the question posed by the honourable member for Dubbo. I am happy to acknowledge that the Government has provided additional expenditure in many areas, but the honourable member for Dubbo does not know when the balance of the airconditioning program will be completed. It should be set out in a program of works so he can see where particular schools fall into the scheme of things. The amendment does not deal with the substantive issue raised in the motion moved by the honourable member for Dubbo.

Education issues will not go away. There will always be a strong demand for not only capital expenditure but also action to address all issues regarding public education. Public education is very important, as every member of Parliament would, I hope, acknowledge. It has been disappointing that some debates have sought to pit one side of education against the other, private versus public, rather than recognise the very important role of education generally, but particularly public education. The purpose of public education is to help educate all children, regardless of their financial background. Let us not move away from that. Let us debate education and make sure that everyone recognises the socially disadvantaged and other important issues. The recently published report "Community adversity and resilience" by Tony Vinson referred to the fact that the solution to so many of our problems is better access to education.

I commend the honourable member for Dubbo for moving this motion, but there is a whole new world of opportunity for investment in every level of public education. That investment is not being made. Governments have made incremental improvements, but much more needs to be done, particularly in public education. I want to acknowledge the recent requests for a review of the school staffing formula for rural and remote schools. The formula needs review, and the Government agreed to undertake that review pursuant to a resolution of this House. The Minister for Education and Training at the time said that the review would take place. The then shadow Minister acknowledged that the review should take place. I moved that motion, but I am yet to hear anything about what has happened in that regard. Many schools in my electorate have raised the issue of the school staffing formula, which makes it very difficult for schools to plan.

Black Mountains Public School recently wrote to me about the retention of a second teacher and about a demountable classroom that is currently used as the school's library. As the shadow Minister has said on a number of occasions, when the school student number is one or two under the magic cut-off point, the school can lose perhaps a third or one half of its teaching staff. We must have a better formula than that. I am hopeful that a resolution of this House will enable us to work constructively to bring about improvements in capital expenditure, or a continuation of improvements that have occurred, to meet the very important needs of public education.

Mr GERARD MARTIN (Bathurst) [12.51 p.m.]: I commend the honourable member for Dubbo for moving this motion. Interestingly, the honourable member for North Shore referred to a letter written by the honourable member for Lachlan in 1995 to the new Minister for Education and Training seeking the installation of airconditioning at Parkes High School. One can only wonder what the honourable member for Lachlan was doing in 1994 and all the years before that when he was a member of the Coalition Cabinet. Apparently it was not important to spend money installing airconditioning at that school when the Coalition was in government, but it suddenly became very important when they went into opposition.

This Government is serious about targeting classrooms of greatest need first. It is putting its money where its mouth is and spending more than \$10.5 million this financial year alone to aircondition 800 demountable classrooms, specialist learning spaces and libraries. We are working smarter to ensure that the hottest classrooms in the State get relief sooner. This program is being rolled out on a priority basis, determined by climatic data from the Bureau of Meteorology and estimates for every school location throughout New South Wales.

I am pleased to inform honourable members that nearly \$543,000 has been spent on air cooling in the electorate of Bathurst. I am pleased also to say that more than \$26 million in total has been spent on capital works in my electorate since 1995. That is a pretty fair effort. It is with modesty that I take some credit for that, but I thank successive Ministers for Education and Training. In fact, the Carr Government's spending on education and training now stands at a record \$8.7 billion, a 50 per cent increase on what had been spent when Labor came to office in 1995. Remember, this Government had to employ another 2,500 teachers sacked by the Coalition Government.

This Government is spending more than \$1.2 billion on capital works this term. The Government has committed \$341 million for the class size reduction program, including \$107 million to build and install additional classrooms. This will reduce class sizes to an average of 20 in kindergarten, an average of 22 in year 1, and an average of 24 in year 2. So, by 2007 we will be able to give young students the best possible start. I can inform honourable members that this significant reform has been universally welcomed by the education community in my electorate.

Without doubt, New South Wales has a world-class education system. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development reported in 2002 that the literacy levels of New South Wales high school students are among the best in the world. This international study showed that New South Wales results were on par with those for first-place getters Finland, Canada and New Zealand. According to the Productivity Commission, New South Wales spends more per head on primary school students than do all other States in Australia. We all know how important the early years of education are. New South Wales also spends more than any other State except Western Australia on high school students.

This year's Productivity Commission report shows that in 2001-02 we spent \$7,857 on each primary school student, well above the Australian State average of just over \$7,500; \$10,199 on each high school student, compared with an Australian average of \$9,856; and \$9,157 per student across all State schools, compared with the Australian average of \$8,937. By any benchmark, New South Wales is doing well. The honourable member for Northern Tablelands said we can always do more, and we certainly can. It is a matter of money and determining priorities. But we certainly should not be, nor are we, resting on our laurels.

This investment is clearly showing great results. The Carr Government is delivering huge improvements in public education in my electorate and throughout New South Wales, in spite of, and not because of, the Howard Government. Since the Howard Government was elected, it has directed vastly increased funding to elite private schools. The Kings School at Parramatta is getting an extra \$3 million a year to provide things like a private rifle range for its students—a very important educational facility! While I commend the honourable member for Dubbo for bringing this matter on for debate, I regard the amendment as sensible, and I ask honourable members to support it.

Mr TONY McGRANE (Dubbo) [12.56 p.m.], in reply: I thank the honourable member for Newcastle, the honourable member for Monaro, the honourable member for Bathurst, the honourable member for North Shore and the honourable member for Northern Tablelands for participating in this debate. While I appreciate the thrust of the amendment, it seems to be quite out of order as it does not deal with the subject of the motion, which is the airconditioning of Parkes High School. As I said in moving the motion, for the past 10 years—indeed, since it was built in the 1960s—Parkes High School has suffered from the lack of airconditioning of its classrooms. Though I appreciate that the hotspot program is working in the sense that the school has been allocated \$265,000 to aircondition six classrooms this year, I remind the House that that is only a quarter of the classrooms at Parkes High School.

As has been said, other money has been spent on the high school, and I and others in Parkes appreciate that. However, when the school was built in the 1960s it only had fans, not airconditioning. That was because it was on the wrong side of the Newell Highway. Departmental regulations at that time provided that any schools west of the Newell Highway would be airconditioned. If the school had been one kilometre further west, it

would have been airconditioned from the day it was built. Therefore the hotspot program is not particularly relevant to Parkes High School, because it should have been airconditioned in the 1960s.

Another problem with Parkes High School is that it is made of brick, and at times of high summer temperatures the bricks retain the heat and make the classrooms unbearably hot. As the shadow Minister for Education and Training said, this matter was raised in the House some nine years ago by the then member for Dubbo. That followed representations that the parents and citizens association made to the then member requesting that something be done. For the past nine years, therefore, we have been waiting for something to be done.

Action has been on the cards for the past nine years, and for the past nine years the students of Parkes High School have sweltered in untenable non-airconditioned classrooms. This year only six classrooms have been airconditioned. That means that three-quarters of the classrooms remain without airconditioning. When will the rot stop? The people of Parkes are a tolerable lot and they have done a number of things for their school. Promise after promise has been made, but none of them has come to fruition. When the Minister for Education and Training was in my electorate last week—I appreciate his visit—he said that all classrooms in the hottest parts of the State would be airconditioned. If the high school had been placed on the other side of the Newell Highway when it was built in the 1960s it would have been airconditioned. I cannot understand why, if a school is on one side of the line, it is eligible for airconditioning but if it is on the other side of the line, it is not.

The problem for Parkes High School is that, according to regulations, it was built on the wrong side of the highway. But the regulations have changed and the Newell Highway is no longer the line in the sand. At the time the line should have gone around Parkes, and all schools in Parkes should have been in the western area. This year classrooms in Parkes High School experienced temperatures of more than 40 degrees on 14 days. We cannot expect students to study or teachers to teach in such deplorable conditions. The headmaster at Parkes High School, his staff, the students and the parents and citizens association have done an excellent job trying to cope with the problem. But the people of Parkes have had a gutful of all governments and the lack of airconditioning in their school. They have been tolerant and they have waited. Every year they are promised that something will be done, and every year a little bit is done, but three-quarters of the school remains without airconditioning. That is not good enough. I commend the motion to the House.

Question—That the amendment be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 46

Ms Allan
Mr Amery
Ms Andrews
Mr Bartlett
Mr Black
Mr Brown
Ms Burney
Mr Campbell
Mr Collier
Mr Corrigan
Mr Crittenden
Ms D'Amore
Mr Debus
Ms Gadiel
Mr Gaudry
Mr Gibson

Mr Greene
Ms Hay
Mr Hickey
Mr Hunter
Mr Iemma
Ms Judge
Ms Keneally
Mr Lynch
Mr McBride
Mr McLeay
Ms Meagher
Ms Megarrity
Mr Mills
Mr Morris
Mr Newell
Ms Nori

Mr Orkopoulos
Mrs Paluzzano
Mr Pearce
Dr Refshauge
Mr Scully
Mr Shearan
Mr Stewart
Mr Tripodi
Mr Watkins
Mr West
Mr Whan
Mr Yeadon

Tellers,
Mr Ashton
Mr Martin

Noes, 35

Mr Aplin
Mr Armstrong
Mr Barr
Ms Berejiklian
Mr Constance
Mr Debnam
Mr Draper
Mr Fraser
Mrs Hancock
Mr Hartcher
Mr Hazzard
Ms Hodgkinson

Mrs Hopwood
Mr Humpherson
Mr Kerr
Mr McGrane
Mr Merton
Ms Moore
Mr O'Farrell
Mr Page
Mr Piccoli
Mr Pringle
Mr Richardson
Mr Roberts

Ms Seaton
Mrs Skinner
Mr Slack-Smith
Mr Souris
Mr Stoner
Mr Tink
Mr Torbay
Mr J. H. Turner
Mr R. W. Turner
Tellers,
Mr George
Mr Maguire

Pair

Ms Saliba

Mr Cansdell

Question resolved in the affirmative.**Amendment agreed to.****Motion as amended agreed to.***[Mr Deputy-Speaker left the chair at 1.10 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]***PETITIONS****Autism Spectrum Disorder**

Petition requesting additional support for children affected by Autism Spectrum Disorder in all educational settings in New South Wales government schools, received from **Mr Daryl Maguire**.

Stamp Duty Reduction Legislation

Petitions supporting the Duties Amendment (Stamp Duty Reduction) Bill 2003, received from **Mr Greg Aplin, Mrs Judy Hopwood, Mr Barry O'Farrell, Mr Steven Pringle and Mrs Jillian Skinner**.

Gaming Machine Tax

Petitions opposing the decision to increase poker machine tax, received from **Mr Andrew Fraser, Mr Chris Hartcher, Mr Malcolm Kerr, Mr Daryl Maguire, Mr Steven Pringle and Mr John Turner**.

White City Site Rezoning Proposal

Petition praying that any rezoning of the White City site be opposed, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Water Police Pymont Site

Petition opposing development of the current Water Police Pymont site, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Luna Park Development Application

Petition opposing the latest development application for Luna Park, received from **Mrs Jillian Skinner**.

Kosciuszko National Park Management Plan

Petition opposing the formulation of the Kosciuszko National Park Management Plan without community consultation, received from **Mr Adrian Piccoli**.

Coffs Harbour Pacific Highway Bypass

Petition requesting the construction of a Pacific Highway bypass for the coastal plain of Coffs Harbour, received from **Mr Andrew Fraser**.

Windsor Road Traffic Arrangements

Petitions requesting a right-turn bay on Windsor Road at Acres Road, received from **Mr Wayne Merton and Mr Michael Richardson**.

Windsor Traffic Conditions

Petition requesting funding for construction of a bridge across the Hawkesbury River, from Wilberforce Road and Freemans Reach Road, connecting to the bridge into Windsor, and the rescheduling of the current roadworks program, received from **Mr Steven Pringle**.

The Spit Bridge Traffic Arrangements

Petition opposing the proposal to add a two-lane drawbridge next to The Spit Bridge, and calling for a responsible and holistic solution to the transport, traffic, and freight needs of the area, received from **Mrs Jillian Skinner**.

Acquired Brain Injury Patients

Petition requesting facilities for acquired brain injury patients, received from **Mr Greg Aplin**.

Coffs Harbour Aeromedical Rescue Helicopter Service

Petitions requesting that plans for the placement of an aeromedical rescue helicopter service based in Coffs Harbour be fast-tracked, received from **Mr Steve Cansdell**, **Mr Andrew Fraser** and **Mr Thomas George**.

CountryLink Rail Services

Petitions opposing the abolition of CountryLink rail services and their replacement with buses in rural and regional New South Wales, received from **Mr Andrew Fraser**, **Ms Katrina Hodgkinson**, **Mr Daryl Maguire** and **Mr John Turner**.

State Forests

Petition opposing any proposal to sell State Forests, received from **Ms Katrina Hodgkinson**.

Hoxton Park Road, Cartwright, Bus Stop

Petition requesting the installation of a bus stop at the intersection of Cartwright Avenue and Hoxton Park Road, Cartwright, received from **Mr Paul Lynch**.

Public Transport

Petition requesting the development of a transport blueprint for public transport as an alternative to private vehicle use, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Bus Service 311

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

Goulburn Rail Services

Petition opposing any reduction or removal of rail services between Goulburn and Central, received from **Ms Peta Seaton**.

Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme

Petitions objecting to the criteria for country cancer patients to qualify for the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme, received from **Mr Thomas George**.

Horticultural Industry Water Restrictions Assistance

Petition requesting assistance for the horticultural industry to cope with water restrictions, received from **Mr Chris Hartcher** and **Mr Steven Pringle**.

Local Government Amendment Bill 2003

Petition opposing the Local Government Amendment Bill 2003, received from **Mr Andrew Fraser**.

Local Government Amalgamation

Petition opposing any forced amalgamation of or boundary changes to Merriwa Shire, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Companion Animals Legislation

Petition requesting amendments to the Companion Animals Act 1998, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Wagga Wagga Electorate Fruit Fly Control

Petition requesting funding for fruit fly control/eradication in Wagga Wagga, Lockhart, Holbrook and Tumbarumba, received from **Mr Daryl Maguire**.

Circus Animals

Petition praying that the House end the unnecessary suffering of wild animals and their use in circuses, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Sow Stall Ban

Petition requesting the total ban of sow stalls, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Cat and Dog Meat

Petition requesting legislation banning the sale of cat and dog meat for human or animal consumption, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Australian Capital Territory Prison Proposal

Petition opposing the construction of a prison at Hume, in the Australian Capital Territory, received from **Mr Steve Whan**.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC PROSECUTIONS AND MR DAMIAN McEACHERN

Mr JOHN BROGDEN: My question without notice is directed to the Attorney General. Given that the Director of Public Prosecutions advised the Attorney General on 10 November 2003 that he could not appeal the case of Bandido biker Damian McEachern because his office lost the paperwork in the mail, why did he tell the House on 4 December 2003 that Mr Cowdrey had "one of the most rigorous and respected prosecutorial processes in the common law world"?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Minister will be heard in silence.

Mr BOB DEBUS: As the Opposition is probably aware, on 4 December last I said that the Director of Public Prosecutions [DPP] processed around 18,000 matters a year and that when the DPP considered that there were valid grounds to lodge an appeal, that was done. The DPP has advised again today that in this case there were no valid grounds for lodging an appeal.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Minister will be heard in silence.

Mr BOB DEBUS: That is so, regardless of any question of a time limit. It is possibly appropriate at the present time that I indicate some other circumstances surrounding this matter. The House will recall the facts of the case. In December 2000 Damian McEachern was sentenced for armed robbery to a term of imprisonment of three years and a non-parole period of nine months. In January 2003, while he was on appeal, he was arrested by police. A number of prohibited firearms were seized. Following a number of delays in presentation of the brief

to the court, and concerns raised by the DPP regarding critical evidence, a plea deal was accepted by the police and the DPP.

The magistrate noted that McEachern was on parole and that a decision on revocation would be made by the Parole Board. The public was justifiably concerned by this pattern of events—a concern that I shared, as did the Premier. For that reason the Premier and I agreed that there should be a review of the whole matter by the Director-General of the Attorney General's Department. The review was to be broad based and include the operational aspects of policing, right through to the handling of parole issues by the Department of Corrective Services and the Parole Board. Now that the report has been presented to the Government, a copy has been forwarded to the appropriate Ministers, namely, me, the Minister for Police and the Minister for Justice. That report contains a series of recommendations right across the criminal justice system. This is a circumstance that is likely to be forgotten, especially by the honourable member for Epping, who has what one can only describe as an unhealthy personal obsession with the DPP. The honourable member acts as if nobody else exists in the justice system.

Mr Andrew Tink: Point of order: When the DPP loses a letter from the Attorney General on an appeal—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Epping has not heard correctly. There is no point of order. The honourable member for Epping will resume his seat.

[Interruption.]

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Epping has deliberately flouted the standing orders. I place him on three calls to order.

[Interruption.]

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

Mr BOB DEBUS: Over the coming months the Government will consult widely with relevant agencies about the implementation of the recommendations of this report. I am able to report to the House that a Government response is being formulated by me, in consultation with the Minister for Police and the Minister for Justice. In the meantime, substantial progress has already been made. I have been informed by the DPP that he is implementing all recommendations of the report that relate to his office. NSW Police reports that it is now examining the recommendations relating to police practices in this and other cases to address the concerns raised. I understand that the Police Ministry is in the process of seeking further advice on ways to improve practices involving the DPP and police handling of prosecutions in circumstances such as these.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Vacluse to order.

Mr BOB DEBUS: The Minister for Justice has also advised me that many of the recommendations relating to the Probation and Parole Service have also been critically analysed and steps have been taken to implement recommendations in the report. In other words, we are seeing good government at work. The Government will continue to review cases from time to time when flaws are brought to its attention and will take appropriate action. I seek leave to table the report of the Attorney General's Department entitled "Damien McEachern, Review of the Operations of the Justice System", dated 19 February 2004.

Leave granted.

Report tabled.

NSW POLICE GANG ACTIVITIES INVESTIGATION

Mr TONY STEWART: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Police. What is the Government's response to community concerns about internal police complaints in south-western Sydney?

Mr JOHN WATKINS: At the time of the Legislative Council's Cabramatta policing inquiry a youth codenamed "James" made a number of allegations concerning drug and gang-related activity in Cabramatta. These allegations received wide publicity. An internal police investigation into the James allegations was then

commissioned by the Greater Hume Region Command. In May 2002 NSW Police received a complaint in relation to the so-called James investigation. That was one of a number of complaints and other matters arising from the Cabramatta inquiry. The matter was referred to Commissioner Moroney, who in turn referred the matter to Special Crime and Internal Affairs. On 20 February 2003, following advice from Ian Temby, QC, the commissioner directed that there should be a full independent review of the James investigation. NSW Police Legal Services engaged Mr Peter Bodor, QC, to conduct that investigation. I advise the House that Mr Bodor has completed his inquiries and he makes no recommendation for police internal disciplinary action or criminal charges against any individual.

I have received a recommendation from the commissioner to table the report. In the interests of full public disclosure and to give the House the full story, I seek leave to table the report by Peter Bodor, QC, entitled "Memorandum of Advice: James Investigation and James Report", dated 20 February 2004, together with eight volumes of documents from the Crown Solicitor's Office in relation to the review of the NSW Police "James" investigation. On the advice of the Crown Solicitor, some names, addresses and other non-substantive details have been blacked out of the report. That has been done where there are ongoing operational concerns, or the safety of "James", police or other witnesses could be compromised. I note also the finding of Peter Bodor, QC, which states:

I accept James was at all times doing his honest best with police and his attempts to assist must be respected and commended with the sincerest gratitude. His courage in coming forward is very impressive.

Leave granted.

Documents tabled.

HEALTH CARE COMPLAINTS COMMISSION RURAL COMPLAINTS INVESTIGATION

Mr ANDREW STONER: My question without notice is addressed to the Minister for Health. Given the Walker inquiry's findings in regard to the improper handling of Health Care Complaints Commission [HCCC] investigations involving Camden and Campbelltown hospitals, how can the estimated 1,400 country people who made complaints to the HCCC over the past three years have any confidence in the handling of the complaints?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: At the outset I should say that for a few weeks the Government has been reporting to the House on some of the claims made by the Leader of The Nationals and on how wrong they have been.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of The Nationals will come to order and listen to the reply in silence.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: In one celebrated interview on radio, Steve Price called him ignorant and an idiot. Today I report another celebrated interview on radio between the Leader of The Nationals and Graham Robinson. What he said in relation to changes to the Health Care Complaints Commission endorsed what the Government has done. I welcome the support and endorsement of the Leader of The Nationals for what the Government has done in relation to the Health Care Complaints Commission. This morning Graham Robinson posed a question to the Leader of The Nationals. He asked:

The new body that's been announced to investigate these complaints, do you think that will now suffice?

The Leader of The Nationals responded:

The Opposition, including the Nationals of course—

and he had to throw that in to remind us that his party is a member of the Coalition—

are supporting legislation currently before the Parliament which will require more thorough investigations, will require the HCCC to actually refer matters involving health care practitioners, ah, for ah, to professional boards, perhaps for deregistration, ah, and it will certainly give a lot more teeth to the HCCC. So we are supporting that ...

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Minister will be heard in silence. I call the honourable member for North Shore to order.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: That was a good endorsement from the Leader of The Nationals of the reforms that the Government has made to restore public confidence in the HCCC and to ensure a permanent watchdog body—

Mr John Brogden: Point of order: The Leader of The Nationals specifically asked the Minister about cases investigated by Amanda Adrian in the past for country citizens in New South Wales. He should answer that question.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. I call the honourable member for North Shore to order to the second time.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: Mr Robinson also asked:

Do we need an independent or separate commission for regional areas? Is it too large to have just one commission ...

In response the Leader of The Nationals said:

I think as long as a commission is properly resourced, as long as its properly managed, as long as you have a commissioner who is not simply going to whitewash complaints ... then I think a commission can cover both ...

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Ballina to order.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: The Leader of The Nationals has answered his own question. There is no need for the people to be concerned, because we have a new commission that is refocused and reformed, and is headed by a judge. There has been a clean-out of senior management and the commission is refocused on its statutory obligation. It has an additional \$5.7 million in resources, 15 additional investigators and a strategy to handle the backlog. We have a reformed and refocused complaints commission to which the public can take their complaints.

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

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: Just as importantly, the professionals who work in that system can take their concerns to that commission. It is part of a determined effort on the part of the Government to rebuild confidence in the complaints commission so that the public—

[Interruption]

The Leader of The Nationals answered that question this morning on radio; he gave the answer.

BIOTECHNOLOGY INDUSTRY

Ms LINDA BURNEY: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Science and Medical Research. What is the latest information on attracting international researchers to New South Wales to generate jobs and investment here?

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

Mr FRANK SARTOR: As I indicated to the House yesterday, science and medical research in New South Wales is an important priority for the Government, and that is reflected in our support for our world-class researchers. Biotechnology is one of the key research fields of the future. Australia's biotechnology sector is now the sixth largest in the world with almost 400 individual companies. Last June New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland signed an historic agreement to jointly promote Australia's \$12 billion biotechnology and pharmaceutical industries. Health care, agricultural products and environmental remediation are all areas in which biotechnology can bring substantial benefits. It will be a driving force in economic development over the next decade. Biotechnology research has already delivered our State significant benefits, and I cite the cochlear implants project, the diagnostic test for ovine Johne's disease, DNA matching in criminal investigations, the ResMed sleep apnoea device and the ultrasound cardio output monitor. That is why the New South Wales Government is working hard to attract biotechnology researchers to New South Wales.

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

Mr FRANK SARTOR: Much is said about Australia's ability to retain its best and brightest; many lament the brain drain. In New South Wales we are reversing that process: we have the brain gain. Through the New South Wales Government's BioFirst awards we have already brought five researchers of international stature back to New South Wales. Honourable members will be interested to hear that this year the New South Wales Government will support five more international researchers. This is a huge win for New South Wales, as these world-class researchers and their teams will bring new skills, techniques and research capabilities to New South Wales. They will create new collaborations and cross-fertilisation of ideas, they will create new employment, training and educational opportunities for researchers in New South Wales, they will strengthen New South Wales research and industry links overseas, and they will bring additional research funding to this State.

In this round we brought Professor William Price home from Tokyo Metropolitan University to work at the University of Western Sydney. Professor Price is researching nanotechnology—the science of machines and devices whose dimensions are measured in molecules. Professor Price is based at the University of Western Sydney, where he is researching how these tiny devices are constructed. Ultimately, this knowledge may lead to the development of new biomaterials that could be used to produce skin and other transplantable materials or therapies and treatments for diseases such as Alzheimer's disease and Parkinson's disease. Professor Price's work not only brings that nanotechnology research to the western Sydney, it plays another vital role. Professor Price's decision to locate to the University of Western Sydney means that, for the first time, the university has been able to offer an undergraduate course in nanotechnology, creating an opportunity for young Australians to become skilled in the technologies of the future. Professor Price's vision is to establish the University of Western Sydney as an internationally recognised centre of excellence in nanobiotechnology. We wish him well.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the Minister for Gaming and Racing to order. I call the honourable member for Coffs Harbour to order for the third time.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: We brought in another researcher. Professor John Dalton from Ireland has used his BioFirst award to take up a position with the Institute of Biotechnology of Infectious Disease at the University of Technology, Sydney.

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

Mr FRANK SARTOR: Professor Dalton has come to Sydney to find a vaccine for the deadly liver fluke parasite, a major cause of livestock death in Australia and Europe. Liver flukes are killers and, as traditional methods of treating flukes are becoming less effective, the need for a vaccine is becoming necessary. Liver flukes are currently responsible for production losses worth many millions of dollars to the Australian livestock industry.

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

Mr FRANK SARTOR: A breakthrough could have significant economic benefits for Australian agriculture and industry. Professor Dalton brings with him two senior research scientists and a post-graduate student and he is expecting another colleague to join him shortly, bringing additional research dollars and know-how to New South Wales. Professor Dalton and his team are already working at the University of Technology, Sydney. A third top researcher, Dr Naomi Rogers, will return to Australia from the United States of America to work with the Woolcock Institute of Medical Research in the growing field of sleep research.

Dr Rogers will attempt to understand the role of circadian and homeostatic systems in both the healthy and patient population, an important area of research. That research will concentrate on a number of key areas: treatment of nocturnal asthma on sleep quality, differentiating circadian and sleep-induced effects on the respiratory function, something that I know Opposition members are keen to hear about, assessing the effects of chronic sleep loss on insulin sensitivity and cardiovascular measurements, and changes in reproductive hormones associated with shift work.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Southern Highlands to order. There is too much audible conversation in the Chamber.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: Dr Rogers will bring an additional \$150,000 in research funding with her to her new post. She will take up the position in May this year. Another researcher is Professor Mats Olsson from the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. He has taken up a position with the University of Wollongong.

[*Interruption*]

If Opposition members are patient I will tell them all about it. Professor Olsson will establish an innovative research program to examine molecular immunology. His research is in the evolutionary biology of fertility and reproduction. It will further develop an area of fundamental science in which Australia has a strong international reputation.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is far too much audible conversation on both the Government and Opposition benches. Question time will be conducted in accordance with the standing orders. The Minister will be heard in silence.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: This research program has the potential application of assisting reproduction in humans. Professor Olsson has begun his appointment with the University of Wollongong. Another researcher, Dr Andrew Mitchell, will move from the University of Natal in South Africa to take up a permanent research position with NSW Agriculture's Orange Agricultural Institute. Dr Mitchell will research the DNA-based identification system for insect pests and pathogenic plant bacteria. Put simply, that is a DNA bar code for insects and other pests that will enhance the management of our resources and ecosystems. Dr Mitchell will arrive in Australia next week to begin the groundwork for his move to New South Wales. I welcome these researchers to New South Wales.

I remind the House that in the first round we brought back Dr Peter Currie to the Victor Chang Cardiac Institute, Dr Colin Dunstan to the Anzac Research Institute and Dr Bryce Vissel to the Garvan Institute of Medical Research. In the second round we brought back two scientists: Associate Professor Izuru Matsumoto, who will work at the University of Sydney to establish a brain bank and donor program for biomedical research, and Associate Professor Shane Grey, an internationally regarded researcher in the field of molecular and biochemical basis of type 1 and type 2 diabetes. We now have 10 world-leading researchers in New South Wales. They were brought here through our *BioFirst* award program. We are skilling up New South Wales and it is all about brain gain. The New South Wales health system and economy will benefit astronomically as a result of these measures.

HEALTH CARE COMPLAINTS COMMISSION INQUIRIES PROCESS

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning, and Minister for Natural Resources. Why did he support the decision of the Health Care Complaints Commission in 2002 to clear its backlog by referring complaints to local area health services for investigation, resulting in hospitals like Camden and Campbelltown investigating their own complaints? This is the document.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Gosford will resume his seat.

Mr CRAIG KNOWLES: As I provided an answer yesterday about the general context of that question, let me repeat that the way in which the Health Care Complaints Commission [HCCC] conducts its inquiries is determined by legislation. It is an independent body.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Murrumbidgee to order.

Mr CRAIG KNOWLES: That is clearly specified in section 81 of the Act. That is why I said yesterday that I support the Walker inquiry into this matter. As Bret Walker said, his intervention into these investigative matters could be regarded under the law as a fetter to, or perverting the integrity of, an independent investigatory body such as the HCCC. That is why he recommended legislation, that is why the Minister for Health gave notice of that legislation and that is why the Leader of The Nationals on radio today supported the legislation.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Blacktown to order.

Mr CRAIG KNOWLES: Any endorsement that I may or may not have given to any investigation is in the context of section 81 of the Act, which governs the independence of the Health Care Complaints Commission.

HEMP DRINK

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Fair Trading. How can she allow this drink, which is called "Hemp", makes outrageous claims about its benefits and clearly promotes the use of marijuana, to be sold in general stores across New South Wales?

Mr Carl Scully: Point of order: Clearly that is a breach of standing orders.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I cannot hear the Leader of the House. I ask him to repeat his point of order.

Mr Carl Scully: Many Speakers of this House have indicated that stunts like that are not permitted under the standing orders. The honourable member's question should be ruled out of order.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I uphold the point of order. I ask the honourable member for Burringuck to resume her seat. She may or may not be given another opportunity to ask her question.

Mr Brad Hazzard: Point of order: Many Speakers in this place have allowed the Premier to bring into the Chamber every possible prop to assist him when answering questions. All honourable members would remember the Premier coming into the Chamber with hats, magazines and books.

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

[Interruption]

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I place the honourable member for Wakehurst on three calls to order. The honourable member for Wollongong has the call.

REGIONAL FILM-MAKING AND TELEVISION INDUSTRY

Ms NOREEN HAY: My question is directed to the Minister for Regional Development, and Minister for Small Business. How is the State Government working with local communities to encourage commercial film-making in rural and regional New South Wales?

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: I thank the honourable member for Wollongong for her question and for her interest in the regional film industry in New South Wales. I am sure honourable members will be aware of my ongoing support for the New South Wales film industry. The New South Wales film and television industry is worth \$4 billion a year to our State's economy. In the 2001-02 financial year it generated 18,000 jobs in the State and a further 37,000 jobs flowed from the productions. That is 55,000 jobs created as a result of this important industry.

Film and television productions highlight our regional attractions to international and national audiences and create vital country jobs. People such as the honourable member for Wakehurst and the Leader of the Opposition have no understanding of the industry's importance in rural areas. I know from discussions with the honourable member for Lachlan and the honourable member for Coffs Harbour that they understand its importance, but the Liberal leadership team from Sydney certainly does not appreciate how important these jobs are to country areas. The industry builds an important local skills base and benefits our regional towns. It also supports regional businesses such as local carpenters, caterers, hotels and accommodation establishments.

The New South Wales Government strongly supports the regional film industry. Our support includes funding five film and television offices that act as one-stop shops for the industry. They provide information about locations, staffing and the skills available in the local work force and act as a vital link between the region and industry representatives. Honourable members will be interested to know that the Carr Government will provide up to \$300,000 a year over the next three years to encourage growth in our regional film industry.

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

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: Film offices around the State will be able to apply for funds from this New South Wales Government program. Since it began operations four years ago Film Hunter has helped deliver \$3.7 million to the local economy. It has created casual work for 843 people and permanent jobs for 28 people

in the region. During this time four local film and multimedia production companies have set up operations in the region. Film Hunter has hosted visits by more than 1,500 national and international industry representatives who checked out film locations. The region has featured in productions such as *The Matrix Reloaded* and *Bondi Tsunami Oz*. Television series such as *Home and Away* and *Fat Pizza* have also been shot in the region.

Northern Rivers Screenworks has been involved in a major reality television production on the North Coast. I know the honourable member for Tweed has taken a particular interest in this project. This year a German production and a second United Kingdom production of *I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out Of Here!* employed 45 local crew for 17 weeks. As a result more than \$1 million in wages was injected into the local economy. Two television commercials shot locally generated \$560,000 for the region's economy. Screenworks has also been active in generating local film activity. Some 1,150 delegates spent more than \$2 million when they attended the 2003 Australian International Documentary Conference and the Screen Producers Association of Australia (Fringe) Conference at Byron Bay. Screenworks was involved in both of these events.

Film Mid North Coast has operated since July 2002. Building on the success of the earlier Hastings Film Office, this region has generated business worth more than \$2.3 million. It has been involved in feature films including *Danny Deckchair* and *What Grown-ups Know* and the television production *A Place in the Sun*. The successful Film Illawarra unit has been operating for five years and is associated with the creative arts faculty at the University of Wollongong. It has worked with six major film projects and helped to generate hundreds of thousands of dollars for the local economy. The film industry has created about 25 full-time jobs in the region, not to mention much casual work for local small businesses. Feature films from the Illawarra and South Coast include *Mullet*, *The Man Who Sued God* and *A Man's Gotta Do* and the television documentary *A Fine Body of Gentlemen*. Episodes of *Home and Away* were recently shot in the Kiama area, generating a \$25,000 bonus for local businesses. My recent suggestion that Qantas should film its next advertising campaign not at Bronte pool but in the Illawarra resulted in a flood of inquiries to Film Illawarra. Just this week a Korean corporate commercial was shot at Windang, a suburb in the electorate of Wollongong. Since operations began less than two years ago Film Broken Hill has handled more than 37 industry requests.

Our regional film industry is good news for local business. It is a great way to encourage to regional areas visitors who are keen to see where a favourite film or television series was shot. It can have an astonishing impact on regional towns. Last year the honourable member for Dubbo and I visited the CSIRO radio telescope in Parkes. Since the release of the Australian movie *The Dish* visitors to the radio telescope have increased from 55,000 a year to almost 120,000. As a result, the New South Wales Government has helped a new small business on the site, the Dish Café, to create new local jobs. I assure honourable members that it is a great place to stop for a snack. Developing film and television opportunities is important for regional growth, and the industry has New South Wales Government support.

MR AND MRS MARINAN DEE WHY UNIT PURCHASE

Mr DAVID BARR: My question is directed to the Minister for Fair Trading. Can the Minister give an update on what is happening in relation to defective building work at 5 Delmar Parade, Dee Why?

Ms REBA MEAGHER: I thank the honourable member for Manly for his question.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Minister will be heard in silence.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: Following earlier representations by the honourable member for Manly inspectors from the Home Building Service inspected the unit of Mr and Mrs Marinan in Dee Why late last year.

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

Ms REBA MEAGHER: I am advised that a rectification order could not be issued due to the fact that the building work in question was dismissed by the developer prior to the project's completion.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Upper Hunter to order for the second time.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: I am pleased, however, to advise that the insurer of the building work in question has accepted the Marinan's insurance claim and is currently in the process of engaging a builder to undertake rectification works. In the meantime, the Home Building Service has uncovered other alleged defective work by the builder that is now the subject of an investigation to determine whether disciplinary action should be taken.

GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS PROGRAMS

Mr GEOFF CORRIGAN: My question is addressed to the Minister for Education and Training. What is the latest information about the teaching of gifted and talented students in New South Wales public schools?

Dr ANDREW REFSHAUGE: I thank the honourable member for Camden for his question and for his longstanding interest in education matters. New South Wales public school students continue to achieve and inspire academically, artistically, musically, and on the sporting field. Every day in our more than 2,000 government schools young people are accomplishing remarkable things and achieving amazing results. They are doing this thanks to their own dedication, the dedication of their teachers, and the success of programs that foster their gifts and talents. Mr Speaker, you announced earlier the presence in the gallery of students from the Chatswood High School 60-member concert band. Honourable members may have heard them playing outside Parliament House earlier today. I welcome Som Howie and Peta Nicholas, who play clarinet; Ben Lovell-Greene, who plays trombone; Geoffrey Ward and Ania Slee-wa, who were on the French horn; and Michael Smith and Owen Clarke, who are percussionists. Also in the gallery is John Morrison, a great supporter of and mentor to these remarkable young people, who is an expert jazz musician. He and his brother, James, say that the Chatswood band is the best youth concert band in Australia.

Also in the gallery is the highly talented Gavin Staines, a music director and teacher at Chatswood High School for the past 25 years. In 1999 Gavin was awarded an Order of Australia medal for his services to music in the Willoughby area and, in particular, for his services to music education at Chatswood High School. He is another example of great expertise and quality of staff in our government schools. Gavin Stains will take this fantastic young band to the International Youth Music Festival in Vienna on 12 July 2004. I am advised that Chatswood High School will be the only public school band in Australia to compete at this prestigious event to which one cannot apply but has to be invited to attend. It is a great tribute to the students that they have been invited to this fantastic international event.

Over the past 30 years the event has attracted more than 65,000 musicians from 50 different countries and it certainly represents one of the most important youth music festivals on the world calendar. The students, teachers and families involved should be very proud, as we are, that the extra time and dedication they have put in to foster the gifts and talents of students has paid off. Well done! Chatswood High School is to be commended for its efforts in promoting the music talents of its students. It is an extraordinary example of mutual support and demonstrates the benefits of investing time and effort into young peoples' talents.

Chatswood High School attracts large numbers of musically gifted and talented students. In fact, more than a quarter of the students at Chatswood High School are involved in extra curricular music programs. The outstanding reputation of the high-quality music extension programs has led to the significant support and involvement of many well-known musicians including: Don Burrows, James and John Morrison, Warwick Alder and Kevin Hunt. The Talent Development Project is one of the gifted and talented programs supported by the Government. It introduces talented young people to the entertainment industry, and provides them with valuable nurturing by industry professionals. The industry professionals work with students in monthly two-day workshops and provide advice, criticism, feedback, guidance, coaching, technical suggestions and counselling drawn from their enormous wealth of experience in the entertainment industry.

Fostering the gifts and talents of our young people is a major commitment of this Government. The Government will support the development of gifted and talented programs in all its comprehensive high schools by 2005. That means up to 15,000 more students will be able to benefit from new gifted and talented programs in all government high schools. These programs supplement the extensive programs already provided in selective and specialist high schools, such as Chatswood. Students with particular talents will be able to take part in these programs regardless of which high school they attend.

Last month I saw the incredible efforts of two art students from Fairfield High School who were aged just 15 and 17 years. They were among the youngest people ever to enter the Archibald Prize, with one presenting the first Archibald portrait of swimming legend, Dawn Fraser, a former member of this House. They are part of the highly successful Gifted and Talented Visual Arts Program, which began at Fairfield High School in 2001. Year 12 student Xue-Hong Li painted a portrait of Dawn Fraser, and year 10 student Tracey Lien entered a portrait of *Dolly* magazine editor, Virginia Knight.

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

Dr ANDREW REFSHAUGE: As high schools around the State look at expanding or developing their own gifted and talented programs they might look at Chatswood High School or Muswellbrook, Woonona, Duval or Willoughby Girls High schools that have specific programs that are worth mentioning. Muswellbrook High School has a five-year strategy for its gifted students. Under the scheme, students from local primary schools are selected to attend opportunity classes. They are chosen as they enrol in year 7 after undergoing rigorous tests in literacy, numeracy, science and general knowledge.

Last year Murray O'Keefe sat for the School Certificate while he was still in year 9. Year 9 students who are now designing their own courses in art, science and English, including the books they should read and the topics they should study and write about. At Woonona High School Wollongong a teacher has been made available for 17 hours a fortnight to work intensively with primary school students who have demonstrated special ability and interest in literacy, numeracy and science to bring them on faster. Duval High School Armidale introduced a gifted and talented program in 2003. The school has a history of nurturing its talented students. A number of them including Michaela Muldoon completed her higher school certificate in German while she was still in year 11 and achieved band 6, the top achievement band.

Another year 12 student, Arianwen Parkes-Lockwood, will be representing Australia as part of a group of young Shakespearean performers at the International Drama/Theatre and Education Association in Ottawa, Canada in July this year. Arianwen and fellow Duval students entered in a competition run by the Shakespeare Globe Centre and won the regional and State finals. That culminated in a group of 40 young actors, musicians and production students producing their own show in just 10 days. Willoughby Girls High School operates a full-time extension class. To get into this extension class students need to pass a rigorous test set by the University of New South Wales that examines the abilities of students in writing, English literature, mathematics and science. Through this program students get the opportunity to access a richer and more challenging curriculum, with more opportunities for creativity and independent work. I refer for example to year 10 students Steffi Rose, Pinar Ozer and Karolina Kuliowski, who are top of the year in English and science.

The Government has made a strong commitment to gifted and talented students. Every high school will have a gifted and talented program in 2005, but certainly we have a number of such programs now and those students from Chatswood High School have shown us clearly today what they can do under a gifted and talented program. We wish them well in Vienna later this year.

HEMP DRINK

Mr SPEAKER: I call the honourable member for Burrinjuck.

[Interruption]

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Burrinjuck will be heard in silence. She needs no prompting from the honourable member for Coffs Harbour.

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON: My question is directed to the Minister for Fair Trading. How can the Minister allow a drink called "Hemp" which makes outrageous claims about its benefits, and clearly promotes the use of marijuana, to be sold in general stores across New South Wales?

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

Ms REBA MEAGHER: As the honourable member for Burrinjuck would be aware, the manufacturers and promoters of any product that is marketed with false and misleading claims could be subject to heavy penalties for false and misleading advertising under the Fair Trading Act. I will ask the department whether an investigation is taking place.

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON: I ask a supplementary question. Given the Minister's answer, will she now move to ban the sale from general stores of Hemp brand products across New South Wales?

Ms REBA MEAGHER: I have already advised the House that I will seek information from the department whether an investigation into this product is taking place.

CAR HOONS

Mr BRYCE GAUDRY: My question is addressed to the Minister for Police. What is the latest information on car hoons?

Mr JOHN WATKINS: Honourable members would be aware of the ongoing work by NSW Police to tackle car hoons. I advise the House that high-visibility blitzes on car hoons will continue in 2004, with police taking reckless drivers out of circulation, and seizing their cars and licences. Recently a 12-hour Operation Vikings blitz targeted hoons in Strathfield, Yennora, Bankstown and Homebush.

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

Mr JOHN WATKINS: This operation against the dangerous, destructive and antisocial scourge created by car hoons saw 13 cars confiscated, three people arrested, and more than 50 vehicle defect and 35 traffic infringement notices issued. I am advised by police from Wollongong, St George, The Rocks, Newcastle and Waratah Local Area Commands that they will be conducting similar antihoon operations during 2004. Police work side-by-side with the Roads and Traffic Authority and the Environment Protection Authority in these high-visibility swoops on car hoons, who are just thugs with car keys. Some suburban streets have become a magnet for drag racers, maniacs doing burnouts, and ridiculously loud sound systems.

Such reckless behaviour serves only to send a message to police that car hoons could be involved in other serious criminal behaviour. That is why we have equipped police and other agencies with tough laws to strip these dangerous fools of their licences and to take their cars from them. We have sent out Operation Vikings police, and often specialist units like Task Force Gain and the Drug Squad, to maximise arrests. The Government's Traffic Amendment (Street and Illegal Drag Racing) Act allows police to impound vehicles used in drag racing, burnouts and donuts. Cars are impounded for up to three months, or forfeited in the event of a second offence. Results include: last year, around 280 cars were confiscated and 1,150 people were charged or issued with infringements for burnouts and aggravated burnouts, and between 1996 and 2003 around 2,200 cars were confiscated and 7,300 people were charged or issued with infringements.

The Government also introduced additional legislation in 2002 to ensure demerit points could be applied to car hoons. That was to ensure we could hit these dangerous drivers where it hurts—by taking away their cars or their licences. When they spend thousands of dollars on spoilers, mag wheels, paint jobs or pounding sub-woofers a fine is often not enough to deter their hoon behaviour. So, after repeated hooning, the only rubber these louts will be burning will be on the soles of their shoes. In addition to driving charges, police may also issue infringement notices for: cause/permit excessive vehicle noise, which incurs 2 demerit points; cause/permit offensive noise from vehicle sound system, 2 demerit points; and start/drive vehicle causing excessive noise/smoke, 2 demerit points. Our targeted operations will occur wherever hoon hotspots develop. Our local area commanders will work to ensure all members of the community can enjoy their surroundings free of such antisocial behaviour, dangerous driving and harassment.

Questions without notice concluded.

CONSIDERATION OF URGENT MOTIONS

New Market Expansion Program

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL (Keira—Minister for Regional Development, Minister for the Illawarra, and Minister for Small Business) [3.22 p.m.]: The motion that I propose this afternoon is urgent because the New Market Expansion Program, run through the Department of State and Regional Development, is of vital importance to a wide range of small businesses throughout New South Wales. Since January 2003 this valuable scheme has assisted more than 40 New South Wales businesses to break into new markets, giving them financial support at a critical stage of their growth. This means jobs, jobs and more jobs in regional New South Wales. The motion is urgent because this Parliament must endorse a scheme that delivers tailor-made marketing assistance to our hard-working small business people.

Director of Public Prosecutions and Mr Damian McEachern

Mr ANDREW TINK (Epping) [3.23 p.m.]: My motion is urgent because the Attorney General said today that the Director of Public Prosecutions had advised him that in the case of McEachern "there were no

valid grounds to lodge an appeal". And that advice was provided notwithstanding that the Director of Public Prosecutions had mucked up the matter procedurally by not having an appeal lodged within time. The matter is urgent because the Director of Public Prosecutions has a clear conflict of interest in providing any advice to the Government on the merits of an appeal when the Director of Public Prosecutions and his office had stuffed up procedurally by failing to be ready to lodge an appeal in time.

In any other field a person who was proposing to give advice on a matter that the person had mucked up procedurally would be said to have a conflict of interest. The Attorney General in this case ought to be briefing the private criminal bar to get an independent opinion on whether or not the McEachern case should have been appealed. This Parliament ought to know whether the McEachern case should have been appealed, and what grounds there were to appeal it, because the loss by the Director of Public Prosecutions of correspondence resulted in the office not being able to lodge an appeal in the required time. As a consequence, the Director of Public Prosecutions and his office have every reason not to provide accurate advice on whether or not there were grounds for appeal.

Could anyone imagine an embarrassed Director of Public Prosecutions saying, on the one hand, "Sorry, we mucked up; we did not lodge the appeal documents in time, or did not recommend an appeal in time," but on the other hand saying, "But, had we done so, there would have been great grounds of appeal"? It stretches the bounds of credibility to accept impartiality on the part of somebody who had stuffed up the lodging of appeal documents and provision of appeal advice to then be trusted when saying, "Oh, by the way, there would not have been any appeal allowable in that case."

We need proper oversight of the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. It is yet another example where the Director of Public Prosecutions cannot even control movement of correspondence within his own department. How can one end of the department not get to the other end of the department a red letter from the Attorney General—especially as half the Parliament had been talking about the problem? Goodness me, this is the type of file that should have had a huge red sticker on it saying, "Urgent. Handle with care. Get me instant advice. There's a 48-hour turnaround on this or the appeal will fail for being outside time." Instead, the file disappeared for 10 days! Even Australia Post, on its really bad days, does better than that. Even Australia Post's dead letter office can deliver letters more quickly than the Director of Public Prosecutions appears to be able to move correspondence on an appeal backwards and forwards in his department. I regret to say this is not the first occasion in the past 12 months that the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions has had this sort of problem. Time and again that office has grievously mishandled matters.

The matter is urgent because so many matters require general oversight to ensure that specific matters are better handled in future. In the Judge Helen Morgan case the Director of Public Prosecutions allowed an offender to avoid an appeal against his acquittal because the court was not told that intoxication of the accused was not a defence. That was in February last year. In September last year, in the Warren Sydney Wells case, Judge Berman said, "This is a case where the respondent has suffered significantly because of an incomprehensible submission by the advocate appearing for the DPP ... [and] were it not for the remarkable concession by the DPP at the Local Court ... I would have imposed sentences of full time custody."

The matter is urgent because on 16 December Justice O'Keefe said, in relation to a matter involving Garry Nye, that the DPP maliciously prosecuted Nye because "the DPP took over the prosecution and proceeded with it not because he thought the plaintiff was guilty but in order to bolster prosecutions against other defendants." We are still waiting for an answer as to why baby Jordan's case was downgraded from murder to manslaughter. We do not have the reasons for that decision, even though the judge said there was a strong case for a murder case to proceed. In the case of Leonard Alan Rowley, who killed senior constable Chris Thornton, the DPP said there was no evidence of alcohol. The judge said there was. Those cases alone demonstrate that the DPP requires oversight in a general sense because the job is not getting done properly at the moment. I notice the President of the Police Association in the public gallery. Police are on the record as strongly supporting such oversight of the DPP. It is high time there was oversight to ensure the DPP acts competently [*Time expired.*]

Question—That the motion for urgent consideration of the honourable member for Keira be proceeded with—agreed to.

NEW MARKET EXPANSION PROGRAM

Urgent Motion

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL (Keira—Minister for Regional Development, Minister for the Illawarra, and Minister for Small Business) [3.28 p.m.]: I move:

That this House supports the Department of State and Regional Development's New Market Expansion Program and notes its recent successes for small businesses in rural and regional New South Wales.

This exceedingly important scheme has delivered tailor-made, specialised marketing assistance to businesses all over New South Wales. From Byron Bay to Bathurst, from Kulnura to Kyogle, from Armidale to Adaminaby, the New Market Expansion Program has given dozens and dozens of emerging businesses a hand up at a critical time in their growth and development. The beauty of the New Market Expansion Program is that it can respond to the marketing needs of a business in a personalised fashion: the assistance is designed to meet a specific need at a specific stage of business development. For one company it may mean money to establish a web site. For another it may mean assistance to travel to a trade show or other events where they can show their wares and make new contacts. I saw the impact of this when this week I visited fly fishing rod manufacturer Strudwick Corporation, at Tuggerah on the Central Coast. This small, but growing, business has already established some export markets in this niche industry.

Strudwick already has a presence in New Zealand and the United States through selected retail outlets and sponsorship of competitive fishermen. It has identified significant export opportunities in the US, Europe, Japan and the South Pacific, and considers the most effective way to service these markets is through a marketing-focused web site. I am happy to say that the New Market Expansion Program is providing the company with financial assistance to enable it to establish such a web site. The web site will be designed specifically to help Strudwick market its product range to consumers, as well as domestic and international retailers. At the same time the company will develop an export marketing plan through the New South Wales Government's small business expansion program, but that is another story.

As everyone knows, new technology means that the location of a business matters less and less. Strudwick's new web site, funded by the New South Wales Government through the New Market Expansion Program, means that it will be able to break into new markets, which means jobs, jobs and more jobs on the Central Coast. Strudwick has been in operation for five years, and has experienced significant growth particularly in the last two years. It now employs six people. The company expects to increase its turnover by 10 to 15 per cent as result of increased market exposure, and take on one extra employee. The New South Wales Government recognises the importance of e-commerce to help maintain business competitiveness. All small and medium enterprises, such as Strudwick, need to assess their e-commerce potential, and the New Market Expansion Program is one avenue for assistance.

Other businesses have been assisted by the New Market Expansion Program to establish web sites or improve their e-marketing. These include the Cool Climate Garden Centre in Glen Innes, the Holbrook Veterinary Centre and Barnstaple Devons from the Gunnedah district. For Barnstaple, its upgraded web site means that the business is better able to market its product throughout Australia and overseas. Barnstaple Devons is the largest single producer of Devon bulls for seed stock sales in Australia. The new more comprehensive web site will enable this company to build on its competitive advantages and expand its reach both in the local and overseas markets. I recommend that honourable members take a look at www.devongenetics.com to see for themselves the value of the New Market Program.

Another great success from the New Market Expansion Program is Adaminaby company Nungar Knots. This home-based business is selling its halters, reins and bridles to the world via the wonders of the world wide web and, of course, the New Market Expansion Program. Its upgraded web site, www.nungarknots.com.au, is targeting Arabic- and Japanese-speaking buyers. This local company's plan to expand is great news for the Adaminaby community, courtesy of the New Market Expansion Program. Nungar Knots was founded in 1994 by Dan and Cecily Russell. It manufactures high-quality equine rope products including halters, lead ropes, reins and bridles. The company has already established an international reputation from its wholesale business, exporting its products to international markets in Asia, the Middle East and the United Kingdom. Just last week the company linked itself to a new US market in the Great Lakes area. It employs five people, and an increase in sales could see new jobs created locally. As I said, jobs, jobs and more jobs. This business already exports to seven countries. Its overseas sales increased by a staggering 19 per cent last year, an excellent result in anyone's language. Its multilingual web site will allow it to expand even further.

Another growing business to benefit from New Market Expansion Program funding for web site development and e-commerce improvements is Eastcoast Beverages of Kulnura on the Central Coast. Eastcoast Beverages expects to increase its turnover by 5 per cent and create two more jobs thanks to the assistance provided under the New Market Expansion Program. This extra financial assistance was designed to allow the company to better its important business tools like funds transfer, credit card facilities, stock ordering and inventory control. Access to e-commerce is a vital part of maintaining business competitiveness for small- and medium-sized businesses looking to expand and access new markets. Consider the case of Woy Woy company Pelena, which was helped to establish a web site and target markets in the South Pacific. The company specialises in hydroelectric and solar energy.

For companies like Pelena, well-placed marketing assistance at the optimum time means new markets, growth and jobs, jobs and more jobs. The New South Wales Government strongly encourages and supports growth and investment in our regional areas. Healthy, vibrant regional communities are vital. Our rural and regional industries and businesses benefit everyone in New South Wales. As I travel around the State as Minister for Regional Development I am encouraged by the vast array of businesses operating successfully in rural areas. Regional New South Wales is certainly a great source of innovation and investment. For that reason the Carr Labor Government actively supports our regional businesses and encourages investment. Our support spans a wide range of businesses. Through the New South Wales Government's New Market Expansion Program we are supporting small enterprises to succeed and grow.

The people behind small regional businesses are hardworking individuals. I never fail to be impressed by the commitment and cleverness of our regional business people. From farms to home-based operations these enterprising small businesses are busily establishing new markets. In many cases, as I have said, they are successfully targeting international export markets. They have embraced the opportunities of technology, as I have outlined, and the New Market Expansion Program also assists them to improve and expand their businesses in other ways. The New Market Expansion Program offers a range of marketing assistance. It is not aimed only at web sites and e-commerce, although increasingly those are important aspects of a successful business.

Just last month we helped West Gosford fishing tackle manufacturer Bacsoon to target anglers taking part in the Toyota Sportiva 2004 Interclub Game Fishing competition. Strategic marketing is an important part of growing a business, and it was important for Bacsoon to be at that Port Stephens event. The Port Stephens competition was a great opportunity for Bacsoon, a designer and manufacturer of a range of sports and game fishing equipment, together with stainless steel boating and fishing accessories, to showcase its products to keen anglers. The tournament is the largest of its kind in the Southern Hemisphere. Many international and Australian anglers attended the competition. Recently the company relocated from Sydney to the Central Coast. It is keen to expand its sales to areas like the North Coast of New South Wales and Queensland.

Bacsoon aims to increase its annual turnover by 5 per cent and create another local job as a result of increasing its sales. It has been in production for five years, and now employs three people. These companies are a great example of the success of the New Market Expansion Program, which is a key plank in the New South Wales Government's continuing solid commitment to regional New South Wales. This is money well spent because the program recognises that in business, as in many things, timing is critical. The New Market Expansion Program assists businesses to be in the right place at the right time, which means success, growth and jobs, jobs and more jobs.

Mr ANDREW STONER (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [3.38 p.m.]: Small businesses in regional and rural New South Wales are certainly ingenious. They are constantly producing innovative services and products. Mitchell Lyons and his wife, Tavia, run a farm near Molong in the Central West of the State. To diversify, Mitchell and his wife are now growing lavender and making some terrific lavender products ranging from soaps to perfumes—all sorts of products that are promoted extremely well through a web site. Through the Lyons' involvement with the Country Women's Association, Internet users have access to those products.

These young people are making their way in small business. They are diversifying their income and they are doing very well indeed. In the Oxley electorate one of my constituents is a leadlight expert at Bowraville. She has written a book on leadlight work and the book sells throughout the world through the Internet. At Kendall small business operators sell Norfolk punch. If anyone is travelling through that area, I recommend that they should drop in along Batar Creek Road in Kendall and meet Blair Montague-Drake and his wife, Rhonda. They have a terrific business and sell a variety of products ranging from Norfolk punch, which is a beautiful drink based on a non-alcoholic mediaeval recipe from a monastery and which is exported throughout the world, to herb teas and drinks such as Ginger Bliss, which is delicious. Blair is the most fascinating character one could ever meet. He has made his own way in business and is taking on the world.

Not far away at Rawdon Island, Stephen and Margaret Carle sell Roseneath products, including boiled lollies made from Australian bush foods such as lemon myrtle, which is grown on their own property. Their lollies are just terrific. Stephen and Margaret are also planning to export their lollies so the Minister's New Market Expansion Program may well be of assistance to them. Margaret Barlin lives near Kendall and sells a brand named Barbushco, which is a range of bush food products. I bought tomato sauce made from bush tomatoes; it is just sensational and is especially delicious with sausages. I might buy a bottle for the Minister.

Mr Gerard Martin: You have been doing some research.

Mr ANDREW STONER: Absolutely. The best products in the world are made in my electorate. Ray and Joanne Scott up near Comboyne sell macadamia nut products. They also are a young couple engaged in small business. They are extensively selling their products and are getting into new markets, which is what the program is designed to promote. The Nambucca Macnuts Co-operative is run very well by John Forrester in the Nambucca Valley. This is another regional business operation that is taking on new markets and selling a fantastic Australian native product, the macadamia nut. Up near Kempsey there is a group of Australian native flower growers who are forming a co-operative under association president Brian Sundin. There is a huge overseas demand for Australian native flowers. It is interesting that Australia produces only 10 per cent of the total market in Australian native flowers throughout the world. There is a huge demand for these flowers. Producers in Israel and the United States are growing them, yet Australia produces only 10 per cent of the products sold in the market. There is huge potential for expansion in the selling of this product. All of those native flower growers own their own farms and are growing species such as kangaroo paw, waratah and Christmas bell. There is massive potential for them to increase their share of the markets in the United States of America and throughout Asia.

It is possible that this program will complement some of the fine work that is being done by the Federal Government in bilateral trade talks and free trade agreements with the United States, Thailand and Singapore. The Opposition supports programs that are aimed at assisting regional and rural small businesses, including the New Market Expansion Program to which the Minister referred. I understand 40 businesses have been assisted since July last year through the program. It is good that innovative small businesses throughout regional and rural New South Wales—and the examples I have given are but a few—are getting some assistance. I suggest to the Minister and the Government there are other ways to assist regional and rural small businesses to expand, access new markets and become able to provide employment for rural and regional people. Recently this House debated a report produced by Professor Tony Vinson entitled "Community Adversity and Resilience", which noted that the most disadvantaged communities in this State are communities in regional and rural areas. That was the conclusion reached four years ago when a similar study was carried out, and it remains so today.

Clearly, more needs to be done. We need more proactive policies or affirmative action, if one wishes to put it that way, to assist the economic development of regional and rural areas and to provide employment. I am very firmly of the view that jobs are the only way to help people break out of the poverty cycle and all its attendant social disadvantages. It is incredibly important to assist people in the private sector to create jobs and obtain access to new markets, because their prosperity will result in social benefits in the areas that have been identified as the most disadvantaged—the rural and regional areas of this State. What can this Government do to more effectively assist small businesses? It could begin with reforms to this State's workers compensation scheme, which is simply not competitive with the schemes in other States.

Mr Neville Newell: Go to Queensland and see what you get out of it.

Mr ANDREW STONER: I suggest that would be premium rates that are a lot lower than those in New South Wales.

Mr Neville Newell: As long as you do not get hurt.

Mr ANDREW STONER: I am conscious of the fact that the honourable member for Tweed is a union man who does not understand small business. Has any member of the Government ever run a small business? I thought not. Workers compensation rates are a burden on small businesses in New South Wales. The Government cut an exemption for trainees from the workers compensation scheme. Previously small businesses, secure in the knowledge that a trainee's workers compensation protection would be met by the Government, were able to employ young people under traineeships. That is no longer the case because in last year's State budget the Government did away with that incentive. The result has been that small businesses do not employ young people because they have heard the horror stories of the workers compensation scheme and the impact that some cases have had on premiums.

On 1 September last year the Government imposed on small businesses a series of occupational health and safety recommendations that ranged from ridiculous to farcical and included extensive checklists that every business has to complete. The Government's idea of small businesses having electrical tradesmen put little tags on everything has cost those businesses a lot of money through red tape and has imposed a crippling burden on them. The cost of insurance for small businesses in this State is still too high. There have been some reforms to the insurance industry, but premiums have not been reduced. If the Government is fair dinkum about assisting

small businesses, it should do something about reducing the costs of insurance and workers compensation. This State has suffered massive cutbacks to TAFE, the major training institution for young people who may one day become small business operators. When small business operators are unable to employ trained people, they find it very difficult to compete, so the Government should do something about TAFE. Stamp duty is also too high in this State.

Mr Anthony Roberts: It is a disgrace.

Mr ANDREW STONER: As the honourable member for Lane Cove rightly observes, it is a disgrace. Stamp duty is a tax on economic activity. Every time a person buys a property or a vehicle, the Treasurer, Mr Egan, puts his hand out for some of the money. The Minister for Small Business has to demand more support in Cabinet and changes to other portfolios. Changes in Labor's policies on workers compensation, insurance, stamp duty, traineeships, occupational health and safety and TAFE will assist country small businesses to cope with the exigencies of doing business outside metropolitan areas. Such changes will also enable rural and regional small businesses to better compete with small businesses in other States. If members of this Government understood what it is like to run a small business and employ people, they would certainly change their policies.

For the benefit of the Minister, I reiterate that changes should be made to policies on workers compensation, stamp duty, traineeships, occupational health and safety, TAFE and insurance. The Opposition supports the New Market Expansion Program, but we would like to see some action taken in other policy areas. The Minister should do his job in Cabinet.

[Debate interrupted.]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Urgent Motion: Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Motion by Mr David Campbell agreed to:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to permit three additional speakers to speak in the debate.

NEW MARKET EXPANSION PROGRAM

Urgent Motion

[Debate resumed.]

Mr GERARD MARTIN (Bathurst) [3.58 p.m.]: I am pleased to support the motion for urgent consideration moved by the Minister for Regional Development, Minister for the Illawarra, and Minister for Small Business. The Leader of The Nationals challenged members of the Labor Government to state whether we know what it is like to run a small business. He did not declare his own record of running a small business.

Mr Andrew Stoner: Point of order: The honourable member for Bathurst is misleading the House. I established an employment and training company on the mid North Coast and I know a lot more about small business than he does.

Mr DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Bathurst has been speaking for only 10 seconds. There is no point of order.

Mr GERARD MARTIN: I thank the Leader of The Nationals for confirming what I said. I am delighted to support this motion because, as has been made quite clear, the New Market Expansion Program is of invaluable assistance to many businesses across the length and breadth of our State. As the Minister has said, being in the right place at the right time is crucial for business success and the specialised marketing assistance offered under the New Market Expansion Program takes our businesses to the world. By helping establish and improve web sites, the program gives our businesses international exposure. By assisting companies to attend important trade shows and other industry-specific gatherings, it makes sure they are well-positioned to make the contacts they need for business success. I am delighted that a Bathurst company, Parklane Interiors, was assisted by the New Market Expansion Program to expand its markets. Through the scheme this business, which makes blinds, was assisted with a push into the retirement villa market.

The business already manufactured blinds and curtains for a wide client base including hospitals, motels and home-owners. After winning a contract to supply blinds and curtains to a couple of retirement villages in the Central West, an opportunity was identified to supply further products and services to the developers of retirement complexes. The financial assistance given to this company will be used to develop marketing materials including a brochure targeting the retirement village and villa market. Owner Johnathon White also plans some direct marketing and a visit to a trade show to promote his new service. He expects to increase sales by 10 to 20 per cent as a result of this marketing activity. If the expected sales are realised, he will employ extra staff. Slightly further afield, Orange-based photographic company Imagemaker was assisted to develop a digital database and website to improve marketing.

It is great to see the New South Wales Government help small businesses, such as Imagemaker, stay abreast of technological developments with financial support. Imagemaker is keen to grow. It is investing in its future growth and the New South Wales Government is supporting that process. Imagemaker plans to grow by targeting the wedding and family portraits market outside Orange. By improving its marketing and using the internet, Imagemaker aims to increase its business by 10 per cent. The company has operated in Orange for the past 10 years. Another Orange company being assisted under the program is the Hopping Mad Brewery. Hopping Mad Brewery has been operating for just 11 months and it is keen to take on new markets and opportunities outside the region. The Government is providing financial support to help the company market and sell its boutique beers to premium markets in Sydney and Canberra.

Hopping Mad Brewery's products complement the local food and wine industry while building on tourism and business opportunities in the Central West. In the village of Molong, the program has assisted Lavandula Blue, a business based on a family farm, to market its lavender products, and furniture maker Melrose Innovations, another family farm-based business, to target markets outside the Central West with direct mail-outs to retail outlets. These are two very different operations, proof positive that the New Market Expansion Program is effective and very wide reaching. Further north, a small business based in Cassilis is being helped to market its products in Canada and the United States of America. Company owner Melissa Brown started the business in July 2002 using wool spun at the Nundle Mills and employing local knitters to produce luxury woollen blankets and throw rugs. Financial assistance from the Government will help this innovative small regional company expand its market internationally.

Missy Brown Australia currently sells its blankets and throw rugs via mail order, trade shows and craft fairs. With New South Wales Government assistance, the company can promote its woollen products via a new web site. Missy Brown has four local women knitting its products, and by expanding its market it will need more knitters. The Leader of The Nationals spoke about taxes. I remind him that in New South Wales 94 per cent of businesses, and those about which I have spoken, pay no payroll tax. Under this Government, businesses would pay 25 per cent less payroll tax if they expanded. So what the Leader of The Nationals said about taxation was inaccurate.

Mr DARYL MAGUIRE (Wagga Wagga) [3.53 p.m.]: Honourable members know that I, unlike many honourable members, have a background in small business. In New South Wales small business makes an enormous contribution to our communities. The New Market Expansion Program is recognised as helping small business, and it gives them the opportunity to market their products to the world. I recognise that money needs to be made available to the small businesses that are trying to get a foothold in markets throughout the world. Through the Internet those businesses can speedily access opportunities to sell their products, and that is important for people in rural and regional New South Wales. Previously the Minister has spoken about Vetafarm, in Wagga Wagga, a perfect example of a company that marketed itself to the world and received assistance from time to time. Over the years the company expanded—it now employs more than 20 people—and it will expand further. It markets products, including swabs and chemicals for that industry, to China.

Vetafarm used the Internet and other modern tools to promote its business. The Sydney branch of the Country Women's Association [CWA] came up with an excellent idea, developed a web site, and received \$3,200 assistance. I would like to see that kind of assistance go a little further, and I offer the following suggestions. Firstly, I would like to know how much funding the Minister has allocated for small businesses to apply for. Business that are given some funding can take advantage of that opportunity and market their products. There are wonderful companies in electorates. In my electorate, Yerong Creek Estate Winery, a boutique winery, tried to sell its product to Dubai a couple of weeks ago. A range of companies in my electorate would like access to such funding. I want to know how much is in the Minister's budget, how much the public can expect to be allocated, and how much they can apply for.

Secondly, the current CWA web site mentions the New South Wales Country Embassy. The Minister should take the initiative and move the Country Embassy to where it is more visible and more accessible, so that businesses will have the opportunity to display their wares to the general community. In that way businesses will be able to show the people of New South Wales what they produce and where their products can be purchased. That would be far better than having the Country Embassy on the twenty-seventh floor of Governor Macquarie Tower, or wherever.

Mr David Campbell: Obviously you have never been to the Country Embassy, because it is in George Street.

Mr DARYL MAGUIRE: I correct that: the Country Embassy is in George Street. Wherever it is, it ought to be more accessible. I ask the Minister to listen to my positive contribution to this portfolio area. If he wants to make a comment, he can respond. I have done much research through his press releases, although they do not say very much about the initiatives and successes that he has had. I have given him some credit today, so at least he could be polite and listen to my contribution.

Other initiatives can help small business. The Leader of The Nationals mentioned payroll tax, workers compensation and issues that country and city business feel are impinging on their development. Minister, there are things that can be done, and let us recognise that costs affect the way in which businesses can market their products. Businesses have written to me. Unfortunately, I do not have the time to read all the letters because we have agreed to increase the number of speakers who may contribute to this important debate. Whenever we can we should take the opportunity to tell the Government and the Minister that more can be done. Minister, lift your game and do it.

Mr NEVILLE NEWELL (Tweed—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.58 p.m.]: I am delighted to support this motion because I, like my colleague the Minister for Regional Development, know the value of the New Market Expansion Program. It is just one of the many areas in which his department and this Government are assisting small businesses. The honourable member for Wagga Wagga and the Leader of The Nationals referred to a number of other areas in which they thought appropriate action should be taken. If a member of their families or anyone else had an accident at work or was involved in an accident—and I trust that will not happen—I sincerely hope it occurs in New South Wales and not in Queensland. Both honourable members said that the Queensland system cost less than the system in New South Wales, but they omitted to mention that New South Wales workers have more protection.

The New Market Expansion Program provides targeted assistance to regional businesses to broaden their marketplace by developing the confidence, the networks, and the skills to pursue and take up new markets beyond their traditional markets and/or local economies. To qualify for such assistance a firm must be based in a region, it must have been in operation for two or more years, and it must have at least two employees. In addition, the company must be able to demonstrate at least one of the following: a potential for growth in sales, export potential or success, or import replacement potential. That last point, which is most important, is often overlooked. The activities proposed for funding must be part of a business expansion plan that focuses on new markets.

The program has also funded seminars—most recently, the Travelling Experts series. These seminars aim to provide regional businesses with access to expert speakers who make presentations on current business issues. The Travelling Experts seminars are held across the State and topics have included commercialisation of innovation, on-selling, and tourism issues. The Regional Retail Program, which is also funded under the New Market Expansion Program, provides targeted information services and hands-on follow-up services to retailers. The program was piloted in 2003 in conjunction with the Dubbo Chamber of Commerce and Lake Macquarie council. In 2004 the program will be conducted in the lower Hunter and in Port Macquarie, again in partnership with the Australian Retailers Association.

I would like to refer to some of the North Coast businesses that have been assisted under the New Market Expansion Program. They include two Byron Bay companies—camping accessory manufacturer 3 Dog Camping and Byron Bay Designer Teas. In both cases the companies have been assisted with selling their products over the Internet. Already the move into e-commerce has helped 3 Dog Camping win a contract to shift a container load of camping equipment to a company in Boulder, Colorado, in the United States of America. That followed a phone call made to the company in August last year when a prospective buyer told 3 Dog Camping that there was nothing like its product available in the United States. Now 3 Dog Camping has sent its first export order—a 20-foot container loaded with rooftop campers, equipment and so forth—to the United States.

Thanks to New South Wales Government's New Market Expansion Program, Byron Bay Designer Teas is now targeting new buyers. The company has developed inserts, educational tea brochures, in-store display posters, and promotional paper bags for the sale of loose-leaf tea, and it has established an on-line ordering e-commerce facility. Those two innovative local businesses plan to grow their businesses. The New South Wales Government supports their efforts to expand and target new markets via the Internet. It does not stop there. Rainforest Remedies, an Alstonville company that specialises in Australian native essential oil products, is set to expand domestically and internationally with help from the New South Wales Government. That company has been operating since 2000 supplying the bush food and essential oil industry with lemon myrtle products.

Lemon myrtle is a native of the Northern Rivers area and the oil is used in soaps, cleaners, shampoos, aromatherapy and pet care. The New South Wales Government is financially supporting the company's efforts to expand, with a new web site and improved promotional material and labelling to meet international requirements. The company now plans to export its body care products using the new web site. It also aims to expand its domestic market by targeting major supermarket chains. It is a terrific local product that is creating a local industry and local jobs. I refer also to an innovative North Coast company, Ecosilk Bags, at Kyogle. That company has been helped to market a range of shopping bags that could replace plastic bags.

The Government recognised that Ecosilk's efforts are great for the environment and it wants to help that company promote and market its product. Ecosilk produces high-grade nylon bags from a material commonly referred to as parachute silk. The bags' strength and lightness make them a suitable alternative to plastic shopping bags. Ecosilk bags are made in a small factory on a rural property near Kyogle. The company employs seven workers but plans to expand and increase its work force by an additional six staff. These funds will help the company to upgrade its web site and promote its products to national outlets. *[Time expired.]*

Mr RICHARD TORBAY (Northern Tablelands) [4.03 p.m.]: I thank honourable members for giving me the opportunity to speak about the Department of State and Regional Development and the New Market Expansion Program. I encourage the Government to continue this successful program. The Minister for Regional Development, who has been in his portfolio since the commencement of the Fifty-third Parliament, has visited my electorate on two occasions and will visit us in the near future. New South Wales is a large State and I am pleased that he is taking a special interest in regional and rural affairs. I acknowledge the fact that the Minister has visited my electorate on three occasions.

Mr Matthew Morris: Did he tell you he was coming?

Mr RICHARD TORBAY: The Minister did tell me he was coming. On the next occasion he visits he will be travelling on the new airline that is operating from Inverell. I look forward to celebrating the launch of that airline. I am sure the Minister is aware that several programs that have been implemented by the Department of State and Regional Development are having a significant impact in my electorate. I pay tribute to the local office in the Northern Tablelands and to Bobbi Ballas, one of the staff members in that office. She is a breath of fresh air: she refers issues from my office to the Department of State and Regional Development for discussion.

Honourable members have referred to other issues that will encourage regional growth and development. Positive discrimination, taxation incentives, and other opportunities are important in regional areas and would assist them to deal with many of the problems that have been highlighted in a number of reports, most recently the report authored by Professor Tony Vinson. The Department of State and Regional Development and its incentives are having a positive impact on small businesses in my community. We are exporting all sorts of products. Aquaculture is a strong growth area in the New England. Opportunities in smaller communities are being targeted by the Department of State and Regional Development, which I welcome.

Recently a delegation from Inverell discussed with the Minister opportunities in the Ashford community. That is central to the rejuvenation process of communities and it is something that can work. That community has put in a bid for \$100,000 of assistance. The efforts of this community and its council emphasise the importance of the Department of State and Regional Development. I hope that the bid is successful. It would be a wonderful example of how small communities with a "never say die" attitude can rejuvenate. These communities are not asking for a total handout from the New South Wales Government; they are saying, "We would like to establish a magnificent enterprise in a community that has suffered a great deal. We are prepared to put our money where our mouths are." and the council is saying it is prepared to do certain things.

Other entities that are associated with the New South Wales Government, such as Country Energy, have been helpful in providing a water supply for the Ashford community, and I hope that assistance is forthcoming from the Department of State and Regional Development. That will be a good example of how small communities such as Ashford can rejuvenate, which is central to the charter of the Department of State and Regional Development. I am pleased about the work that it is doing. When the Minister visits the Northern Tablelands area I look forward to showing him some of those achievements.

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL (Keira—Minister for Regional Development, Minister for the Illawarra, and Minister for Small Business) [4.08 p.m.], in reply: I thank all the honourable members who spoke in the debate. They all indicated clear support for the New Market Expansion Program and the work of the Department of State and Regional Development. I acknowledge that and thank them for it. Sadly, Opposition members, who could not help themselves, tried to undermine the process. It is particularly interesting that the shadow Minister for Small Business is nowhere to be seen. We suspended standing orders to allow additional speakers in the debate but the shadow Minister for Small Business has not appeared. That is a telling point.

Mr Daryl Maguire: Point of order: For the record, the shadow Minister for Small Business is caught up in a media interview.

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

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: It appears that some media stunt is more important to the shadow Minister than small business in regional New South Wales. It is important to focus on the clear success of small business in the regions and on the Government's programs in that regard. I acknowledge and appreciate the comments of the honourable member for Northern Tablelands, and I am humbled by his acknowledgement of my work in this portfolio. Most importantly, the honourable member acknowledged the efforts of the staff of the Department of State and Regional Development. I place on record my support for his comments because the staff interface with small businesses in regional New South Wales and do a great deal of work on the ground. I look forward to visiting Inverell and Armidale next Monday to discuss regional business opportunities.

The honourable member for Bathurst clearly showed in his contribution to the debate his understanding of the New Market Expansion Program and its importance to individual businesses in the Central West. I was impressed by the honourable member's understanding of support for businesses in general, not only those in his electorate. I could make similar comments about the honourable member for Tweed, who made an interesting, important, and valid contribution to the debate when he pointed out the differences between the robust workers compensation provisions for workers and business owners in New South Wales and those in Queensland.

I must also acknowledge the contributions of the Leader of The Nationals and the honourable member for Wagga Wagga, who also expressed support for the program. We were given an interesting tour of small businesses in the Oxley electorate. The honourable member for Wagga Wagga highlighted the importance of the Internet to small businesses in regional New South Wales. Sadly, the Federal Government and Telstra do not agree, and people continue to experience problems downloading information from the Internet because of the lack of broadband capacity around the State.

It is important to point out other business successes of the New Market Expansion Program. A well-known Gerringong winery tapped into the tourist market by targeting Sutherland shire and St George residents over the summer. The Willow Vale Estate's Crooked River Winery has received State Government support for its wine tourism campaign under the New Market Expansion Program. The Crooked River Winery employs six full-time staff and three to four casual staff as well as 25 to 50 seasonal workers. It expects business to increase by up to 50 per cent this year, largely as a result of this successful promotion, which will generate more local jobs. I am pleased that the Government has been able to support the winery. Most people know that the South Coast is a fantastic place to visit and this campaign will encourage them to explore one of our premier attractions. The Christmas period promotion involved letterboxing and advertising.

Another winemaker to benefit from the New Market Expansion Program is the New England company Wright Robertson, which is targeting new markets on the State's North Coast and in south-east Queensland with New South Wales Government support. This organic vineyard and winery in the Glencoe area—it is interesting that a Campbell is talking about Glencoe—is being helped to market its products and further develop an e-commerce web site. New South Wales Government financial support is helping the company to grow by targeting markets outside the region. This means jobs, jobs and more jobs for the regions.

Motion agreed to.

Pursuant to sessional orders business interrupted.

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

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL (Keira—Minister for Regional Development, Minister for the Illawarra, and Minister for Small Business) [4.15 p.m.]: I move:

That the House meet for despatch of business on Friday 2 April and Tuesday 6 April 2004 at 10.00 a.m.

Mr ANDREW TINK (Epping) [4.15 p.m.]: The aim of this motion in part is to facilitate an address by the Hon. Michael Egan to the House next Tuesday. I intend to move an amendment to the motion to make it clear that the same routine of business should apply on that day as applies on other Government Business days, and to give the Leader of the Opposition a right of reply to the address by the Hon. Michael Egan. When the Leader of the House moved the motion this week to allow the Treasurer to address this House next Tuesday he made no provision for what would occur on that day. The Opposition strongly believes we should have a full and proper sitting day. If the address by the Hon. Michael Egan is not to be simply a glorified private member's statement or a plea of guilty in relation to Treasury business and budget matters, we must have a fair dinkum sitting of the House. The sitting on Tuesday is either a stunt—and I believe it is—or it is a fair dinkum sitting day.

As things stand under the original motion of the Leader of the House, next Tuesday's sitting is no more than a glorified stunt to allow Mr Egan to give a speech in this place that he could make at a press conference out the back of the Parliament under a Moreton Bay fig tree. We must allow some sort of response, debate, and other procedures to justify the expense involved in recalling the House next Tuesday. The expense is extremely significant. I note that the House is to sit tomorrow and I do not know why Mr Egan cannot say whatever he has to say to the House then. This Government cries poor yet wants to spend tens of thousands of dollars bringing Mr Egan and the rest of us to this place next Tuesday. The upper House will not even sit next Tuesday. From go to whoa, this is a stunt to drag members back to the House at enormous expense—though we are led to believe the Government is under great budgetary pressure—to listen to Mr Egan. Mr Egan should say whatever he has to say behind a gum tree out the back somewhere. For all intents and purposes next Tuesday should be a normal sitting day. Anything else will be a complete and utter stunt. I move:

That the motion be amended by the addition of the following words:

"and that on Tuesday 6 April 2004 the routine of business be:

- (1) at 11.00 a.m. the Hon. M. R. Egan, MLC, Treasurer, Minister for State Development, and Vice-President of the Executive Council, be admitted to the House for the purpose of giving a speech of unlimited duration in relation to the New South Wales mini-budget 2003-04;
- (2) to be immediately followed by the Leader of the Opposition, who will be given equal time to reply; and
- (3) the remainder of the routine of business be as specified in the sessional order for other Government business days."

Mr Egan usually delivers the budget on a sitting day and we have question time, so it is beyond me why he should be allowed to slip into this place on Tuesday and the Government should be allowed to avoid scrutiny. If members are to be recalled at enormous expense at the behest of a budget-stressed Government, let us have a fair dinkum sitting day with proper accountability. We should have question time, and the Leader of the Opposition must be allowed to respond to Mr Egan.

Mr CARL SCULLY (Smithfield—Minister for Roads, and Minister for Housing) [4.20 p.m.]: For the clarification of the Opposition, Tuesday will be a normal Government Business day. We will have debate on bills leading up to the Treasurer's mini-budget at 11.00 a.m., then Government bills, question time at 2.15 p.m., an urgent motion, and private members' statements. The House will conclude at approximately 5.15-5.30 p.m. To put it into perspective, it will be a Government business day and we will be here working. The amendment is rejected.

Question—That the amendment be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 33

Mr Aplin	Mr Humpherson	Mr Slack-Smith
Mr Barr	Mr Kerr	Mr Souris
Ms Berejikian	Mr McGrane	Mr Stoner
Mr Constance	Mr Merton	Mr Tink
Mr Debnam	Mr O'Farrell	Mr Torbay
Mr Draper	Mr Page	Mr J.H. Turner
Mr Fraser	Mr Piccoli	Mr R.W. Turner
Mrs Hancock	Mr Pringle	
Mr Hartcher	Mr Richardson	
Mr Hazzard	Mr Roberts	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Hodgkinson	Ms Seaton	Mr George
Mrs Hopwood	Mrs Skinner	Mr Maguire

Noes, 50

Ms Allan	Mr Greene	Mr Orkopoulos
Mr Amery	Ms Hay	Mrs Paluzzano
Ms Andrews	Mr Hickey	Mr Pearce
Mr Bartlett	Mr Hunter	Mrs Perry
Ms Beamer	Mr Iemma	Mr Price
Mr Black	Ms Judge	Mr Sartor
Mr Brown	Ms Keneally	Mr Scully
Ms Burney	Mr Knowles	Mr Shearan
Mr Campbell	Mr Lynch	Mr Stewart
Mr Collier	Mr McBride	Mr Tripodi
Mr Corrigan	Mr McLeay	Mr Watkins
Mr Crittenden	Ms Meagher	Mr West
Ms D'Amore	Ms Megarrity	Mr Whan
Mr Debus	Mr Mills	Mr Yeadon
Ms Gadiel	Mr Morris	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Gaudry	Mr Newell	Mr Ashton
Mr Gibson	Ms Nori	Mr Martin

Pair

Mr Cansdell

Ms Saliba

Question resolved in the negative.**Amendment negatived.****Motion agreed to.****PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS****GURDWARA, REVESBY, OPENING**

Mr ALAN ASHTON (East Hills) [4.30 p.m.]: I bring to the attention of the House a function in my electorate held on 14 March to officially open the new Gurdwara building, a Sikh temple. I had the privilege of representing the Premier on that occasion. The original building for the Sri Guru Singh Sabha Gurdwara—Gurdwara having the meaning of temple—was opened in 1978 in River Road, Revesby, which is also in my electorate. It was then the first Sikh temple in Sydney. The foundation for the new Gurdwara was laid on 12 November 2000. The complex has been built at a cost of more than \$2 million, of which \$1.25 million was donated by the Sikh community. The building was dedicated to the mission of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the founder of Sikhism. I will not give the House a history of the Sikh faith because I am sure honourable members will be familiar with it.

While I represented the Premier on that occasion, the Hon. John Ryan represented the Leader of the Opposition. Councillor Helen Westwood, the Mayor of Bankstown, was there, as was Councillor Alan Winterbottom, the Deputy Mayor of Bankstown. Daryl Melham, MP, was also in attendance representing the Leader of the Opposition in the Commonwealth Parliament. Of course, representatives of the Indian and Sikh communities of New South Wales in particular but Australia generally also were present. I congratulate those who organised the construction of this fantastic building in Revesby, including the President of the Community Relations Commission, Mr Sukhvinder Singh; its Secretary, Mr Nirvair Singh; and the Assistant Secretary, Mr Harneek Singh. The original Gurdwara that was built in 1978 was virtually an outbuilding. Now, some 25 years later, the community has a new Gurdwara building worth more than \$2 million. Nearly 2,000 guests attended the official opening. The first Sikh community was established in northern New South Wales, and the first Gurdwara in Australia was built in Woolgoolga.

Mr Andrew Fraser: In the electorate of the member for Coffs Harbour.

Mr ALAN ASHTON: Yes, in the electorate of the honourable member for Coffs Harbour. I am sure he would recognise just how important that Gurdwara is. I and many other people have visited it at least once or twice. It is not only of great significance to the Sikh community but also a great tourist attraction in the electorate of Coffs Harbour. The early Sikhs came to Australia in the nineteenth century, and a new wave of Sikh migrants came in the 1970s. The majority of them were well-educated professionals and business people. That stands in contrast to some of the large number of migrants who have come to Australia in latter times under family reunion arrangements and for other reasons, such as wars and other problems in their countries of origin.

The 2001 census recorded that there were 8,604 Sikhs in New South Wales. This was an increase of 2,703, or 45.8 per cent, on the 1996 figure of 5,901. The majority, about 62 per cent, were born in India, but about 23 per cent were born in Australia. Obviously, the latter number of Sikhs will continue to increase. New South Wales has the largest number of Sikhs in Australia, and two-thirds of Sikhs in New South Wales live in Sydney.

Gurdwaras play a key role in both the Sikh religion and Sikh community life. The new Gurdwara at Revesby also has a school to teach culture and religion to the young members of the Sikh community, and it also has a library, which also will play an important part in the education of younger members of the Sikh community. Teachings of the history and foundation of the Sikh religion is very important, a fact that is recognised by the building of the new Gurdwara. Of course, it is traditional in New South Wales to recognise the importance of the Community Relations Commission and the principles of multiculturalism, which the House endorses. The ceremony was very interesting and well conducted. It was interesting to see the 500 or 600 people who had been inside the building come out and put their shoes back on, before going off to have lunch with our hosts. It was a wonderful day, and I congratulate the Sikh community of New South Wales, and particularly of south-western Sydney, who now have their own Sikh temple in the electorate of East Hills.

YOUTH WEEK

Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [4.35 p.m.]: I wish to speak on the National Youth Week initiative and the great rate of participation in the promotion of youth. I will mention a number of initiatives that have either taken place or are ongoing in the Hornsby electorate, starting with the Police and Community Youth Club. This active youth club is about to undergo a major redevelopment to include up-to-date interests for young people in my area. Fusion also is active in the Hornsby electorate. I pay particular tribute to Belinda and Steve Wade, who work hard with Fusion and youth in the area. I note that their baby, Phoebe, has some health issues at the moment. We wish Phoebe all the best.

Many council activities are devoted to youth, as well as the local chamber of commerce, which is very much focussed on promoting youth. This Friday and Saturday, in National Youth Week, it has put together the final stage of Youth Learning the Biz, about which I have spoken in this House before. Some 72 school children are involved with a great number of local businesses. Further, the chamber of commerce has promoted the formation of the junior chamber of commerce, which also is a wonderful initiative.

At this point I should mention that I am a member of three Rotary clubs in my area. I am an honorary member of Hornsby Rotary Club, and of the Waitara and Berowra Rotary clubs. Each of those Rotary clubs participates in youth initiatives that are designed to promote youth, and enable youth to gain certain experiences in their area. Of late, there have been a number of exchange students. One of those, Del, has returned to Thailand. Ben is the Rotary exchange student from Hornsby. Marie Greune and Andreas Reisseger from

Waitara Rotary Club are about to go off on a safari. They are well-loved members of the Waitara Rotary Club. Waitara Rotary Club participates in what is called "Community Connections", which includes a number of different groups, but also Studio ARTES, about which I have spoken as well. This is a group promoting arts for young adults with disabilities, and giving them skills for the workplace. The Rotary Club of Waitara also is involved with the Waitara Public School.

I would now like to return my focus to Rotary, and to mention that the world's first service club was the Rotary Club of Chicago. That club was formed on 23 February 1905 by Paul P. Harris and three friends. Interestingly, as I was finding out a bit more about Rotary, I discovered that the name "Rotary" was derived from the early practice of rotating meetings amongst its members' offices. There are at least 1.2 million Rotary club members around the world and some 30,000 Rotary clubs in 162 countries. They participate greatly in the promotion of youth. In January the Berowra Rotary Club sent a student to the Rotary Youth Leadership Awards [RYLA] at Vision Valley. For one week a number of young people from the ages of 14 to 30 participate in camps or workshops as part of RYLA. Recently I visited the St Ives Driving Centre where the Rotary Youth Driver Awareness Program, also known as the U-Turn the Wheel Program, gives year 11 students the opportunity to participate in information days as a preliminary introduction to driver responsibilities. I congratulate all the people in my area who are focused on youth and provide them with opportunities. Many great young people live in the Hornsby electorate. *[Time expired.]*

MS BARBARA MCCARTHY MEDICAL NEGLIGENCE ALLEGATIONS

Mr GRANT McBRIDE (The Entrance—Minister for Gaming and Racing) [4.40 p.m.]: I draw to the attention of the House the medical negligence case of Ms Barbara McCarthy, a resident of The Entrance. Every citizen has the democratic right to be represented in this House and I am here today to exercise that right on behalf of Ms McCarthy. Dealing with a legal problem or going to court can be confusing and distressing for most people. But for Ms McCarthy it has been a nightmare that has dominated her life for nearly two decades. Ms McCarthy alleges she suffered damage as a result of treatment she received from Dr Iain Kidd and the Newcastle Western Suburbs Hospital in August 1984. The background to Ms McCarthy's complaint is that she was admitted to the Newcastle Western Suburbs Hospital in 1984 for a termination of pregnancy and blood transfusion. She was again admitted to the hospital in 1984 to undergo an abdominal hysterectomy.

During the recovery period her treating doctor, Dr Iain Kidd, prescribed intra-muscular injections of an iron supplement known as Inferon, which were administered by the nurses on duty at the time. Following this treatment Ms McCarthy has experienced significant and disabling pain in the right buttock area. She asserts that she incurred nerve damage as a result of those injections, and subsequently commenced civil litigation against the hospital. Ms McCarthy commenced legal action in the District Court and, on appeal, was given the opportunity to settle the case. However, she refused the offer on the grounds that her legal representative would take a large proportion of the settlement amount, which would leave her with little to compensate her for the pain and suffering she had endured.

Ms McCarthy believes that justice has been denied to her. She alleges that hospital records were altered and that crucial evidence was not tendered to the court and, therefore, her case was prejudiced. Ms McCarthy claims the witnesses were not cross-examined appropriately and that important information was withheld from the court. After difficulties with various legal representatives, Ms McCarthy represented herself in the High Court and was given only 20 minutes to put her case to the court. The appeal was unsuccessful. Ms McCarthy believes that she was badly represented by the legal profession, and now all avenues to pursue her claims have been exhausted. Ms McCarthy is now concerned that hospital records appear to have been misplaced. New South Wales Health has advised Ms McCarthy that the original hospital records have not been returned.

The Court of Appeal has advised that the records were returned to New South Wales Health in February 2002. I am advised that the New South Wales Privacy Commissioner is conducting a preliminary assessment of Ms McCarthy's complaint concerning the hospital records. Ms McCarthy alleges that the medical records relating to her admission to the Newcastle Western Suburbs Hospital in 1980 and 1984 have been altered. She alleges that her medical records were altered by the hospital to avoid liability. In correspondence provided to the Privacy Commissioner specific reference is made to dates being changed on the nurses' notes, and misleading and incorrect information being added onto the nurses' notes. This is an unfortunate case of an ordinary person exercising her rights before the legal system and what can happen when that person does not have the opportunity to obtain the best legal representation available.

COFFS HARBOUR SCHOOL CROSSINGS SUPERVISORS

Mr ANDREW FRASER (Coffs Harbour) [4.44 p.m.]: I again bring to the attention of honourable members the pedestrian crossing at Harbour Drive, Coffs Harbour, that is utilised by students attending Coffs Harbour Christian Community College and Coffs Harbour Primary School. I have raised this matter in this House on previous occasions and I have spoken to and written to the Minister. I have received responses from the Parliamentary Secretary. The last response I received from the Parliamentary Secretary was dated 19 March and stated in part:

The traffic lights were installed at the location in question, to increase the safety of pedestrians, and in particular school children. In this regard, the traffic lights provide a much safer crossing than that provided by the previous zebra crossing.

The previous zebra crossing had a Roads and Traffic Authority attendant on duty both morning and night. The children who use the crossing morning and night are aged between 5 and 11. These children are now expected to cross Harbour Drive, a four-lane road, without any adult supervision. I have received correspondence from two constituents, Mrs Kim Bowden and Mr Brett White. Mrs Bowden wrote to me on 12 February in these terms:

My six and a half year old came home this afternoon very concerned as he and a friend had almost been hit by a car flying through the intersection.

He said that the first time they crossed was okay but the second time he and a friend had to jump back to avoid being hit as a car came flying through even though the "little man" was green.

How the RTA can make such a decision is beyond me. Expecting young children to have the awareness and judgment to anticipate whether a car will stop and at what rate it is travelling to know whether to keep walking if the man is green or not is just too much.

Also the RTA puts out leaflets, TV ads and even hold a walk safe to school day promoting the fact that ALL children under ten years old SHOULD be supervised when crossing roads and walking to school yet they make a decision that completely contradicts these statements ...

How much is the safety of our children worth? Also this is not just a quiet country road that has little through traffic but a four lane extremely busy thoroughfare. I sat in my car near the intersection for 10 minutes early this week and the amount of traffic that went through that intersection was phenomenal.

I hope something can be done to find a solution.

On 25 March Mr White wrote to me saying:

My son Jackson White attends Coffs Harbour Christian Community College ... Yesterday the 24th of March 2004 he crossed the Harbour Drive with his friend and other children from the school that caught the bus. He explained to me when I collected him in the afternoon "that while crossing the road in the morning a car nearly hit his friend and made loud noises screeching the tyres". Now this is close enough for me! ...

But the drivers of the vehicles don't seem to realise this that this is a crossing operated and used by 5 to 11 yr old children.

Is this the first incident as the next might be a bit closer and I certainly hope not my child! This was close enough as the tone of his voice showed when he described the incident to me ...

Today I noticed that the Walk and Don't Walk signals on the lights are damaged and were not working ...

My request is for the person to be returned to the crossing not only to help the children cross the road but also to warn the drivers of the vehicles that there is a "crossing" be cautious and prepare to stop!, whether the lights are working or not!

Late last year I met with the principals of the schools, Mr Peter Sales from the Christian Community College and Mrs Elaine Norman from the Coffs Harbour Primary School, and Mr Peter Collins from the RTA. I spoke with the Minister and we agreed that the solution was not perfect. Unfortunately, the buses are unable to go into Curacoa Street and turn around. The RTA will allow it, but the bus operators are not keen to do it. It would cost council a substantial amount to upgrade that area of the road to enable buses to turn around. We now have proof that this crossing is an area waiting for an accident to happen. I do not want to see these young children maimed, injured or killed because the RTA, due to budgetary pressures, removed the pedestrian crossing supervisor. I implore the Minister for Mineral Resources, who is at the table, to refer this matter to the appropriate Minister and ensure that the crossing supervisor is replaced. I know that he has young children. He would not want his children put in danger, and I do not want the children in my electorate put in danger. I implore the Minister to fix the problem. [*Time expired.*]

YOUTH ROAD SAFETY

Mr MATTHEW MORRIS (Charlestown) [4.49 p.m.]: I draw to the attention of the House the recent road safety chat conducted by the Stop and Go Program co-ordinator of the Eastlakes Youth Centre in my electorate. The morning's program focused on the importance of educating drivers about road safety matters. On that occasion, the target group was young drivers. I acknowledge that all members of the House realise the importance of road safety, particularly the need to ensure that our young drivers are given the tools to ensure that they are safe on our roads network. The tools to which I refer are a combination of formal education, development of driving skills and practical experience. All elements are important: Collectively, they help to ensure that our drivers are well prepared to navigate the network of roads across this nation.

The program included presentations by staff from the John Hunter Hospital and driving trainer Mr John Andrews, who manages the local driver training centre. Mr Andrews emphasised the need to better inform new drivers and provide them with the knowledge and skills they need to ensure that they do not become statistics. During the course of the program, students from Hunter Sports High School conducted a debate to assist in highlighting driving-related issues. Two debates were conducted. The first was "P Means Pick On Me", and the second was "Girls Are Safer Drivers Than Boys". Because the debating teams were a little unbalanced, I joined in to assist in the good and healthy debate on those two issues, clearly demonstrating that boys are better drivers than girls!

The Stop and Go Program has been in operation since 2001. Visits to a number of schools throughout the lower Hunter region have reached out to well over 1,000 students and members of the community. The programs have been developed to cover aspects of driving and are often tailored to target particular issues for specific groups. A call has been made to have road safety programs or workshops made part of the high school curriculum. I support that suggestion because, as a community, we must take every possible step to ensure that young people are well prepared for their years ahead as drivers.

This program is the only one of its kind in Lake Macquarie and surrounding regions. It could easily be used as a benchmark for many other regions. I cannot stress enough the importance of preparing drivers before they are allowed out onto our roads. Too many people are killed on our roads. We must implement every measure possible to significantly reduce or, better still, eliminate deaths on our roads. The Government has progressively implemented positive changes to the licensing system to educate new drivers and provide them with more experience. For example, the motorcycle licensing process involves a formally structured training and education program to prepare new riders. The program has well and truly proved its worth.

The question is whether the motorcycle licensing system could be introduced as part of the licensing process for motor vehicle drivers. I think it could be, and it should be. There should be no difference between the level of training required for driving motorcycles and the level of training required for driving motor vehicles. After all, both have the potential to kill the operator and/or other road users. I thank Mrs Yvonne Elliot for inviting me to participate in the road safety program. I regard that type of forum as extremely beneficial. I recognise the contribution made by medical staff from the John Hunter Hospital and thank them for their terrific work under tough circumstances: They often have to deal with serious trauma suffered by patients as a result of motor vehicle accidents. I thank Mr Brent Davidson from the *Newcastle Herald* who chaired the proceedings. I acknowledge the contribution made by local community members and students who participated during the morning session. Educating drivers is of paramount importance. Programs of driver training are crucial in helping to prevent the loss of life through motor vehicle accidents. I hope there are more programs of that type in the future.

SOUTH COAST RAIL SERVICES

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK (South Coast) [4.53 p.m.]: This evening I wish to discuss my concerns regarding impending cuts to the South Coast rail services as revealed in the draft timetable which will become effective later this year. For many months there have been rumours regarding the proposed cuts, with rail workers visiting my office on an anonymous basis to inform me about the proposals to cut rail services. Rumours to that effect had been circulating since February this year. With this in mind, I requested my colleague the Hon. Don Harwin to ask the Minister for Transport Services in the other place, Michael Costa, to give assurances to the people of the South Coast that CityRail services from Kiama to Bomaderry would continue, and that the frequency of services would not be reduced.

Mr Costa's answer was perplexing to say the least. On 26 February he indicated that he was not aware of the concerns expressed by the Hon. Don Harwin. After continuing rumours some weeks later and with

increasing concern among South Coast rail users, the question was again asked in the other place. Again the response was an arrogant dismissal of the question—and, of course, the people of the South Coast. The Minister avoided the question on two occasions when he must have been aware that services would be cut. In my view he has misled this Parliament and the people in my electorate of the South Coast and in the electorate of Kiama.

Cuts have already been made to CityRail services between Sydney and Bomaderry. Residents are now expressing their outrage and disappointment regarding this situation. Earlier this year the member for Kiama, Matt Brown, gave an indication that he had been assured by the Minister there would be no cuts but is now backing away from those statements, even apparently indicating that bus services replacing the train services is acceptable. It is not acceptable at all. The cuts will affect a number of regular rail users who now are writing to me to describe the ramifications of these cuts on them or those they represent. Local newspapers are now full of letters outlining the feelings of residents in the Kiama and South Coast electorates who describe their own particular circumstances and the problems which they will face.

People have also written to the Minister for Transport Services and have received replies regarding the cleanliness of trains when the questions related to the retention of rail services. That is odd, to say the least. One resident, Mr Tearle, wrote to me because he was concerned about the responses from the Minister. He regularly catches a train to Albion Park, but it appears there will be no return train trip in the afternoon. I suppose he could hitchhike or rely on the proposal for buses, but this also concerns him because in the past buses that were supposed to link up with trains have simply not turned up or have been so late that elderly residents have been left stranded. That is an appalling situation. I have also been contacted by Shoalhaven Advanced Industries [SAI], an organisation which facilitates employment of people with disabilities in Nowra.

The general manager, Judith Reardon, outlined her concerns about the draft changes and the adverse impact on the employees as well as the families and carers of the employees of SAI. Ms Reardon protests particularly about the reduction of evening services that will affect many of the clients of SAI who travel to and from Sydney for independent and organised day outings. The proposed changes will reduce their opportunity to enjoy concerts, fireworks and other evening events held in Sydney. That is also an appalling situation. The letters keep streaming in to my office and people are clamouring to sign a petition which I presented in the House this week. Approximately 600 signatures have been collected already. People are calling in to my electorate office for petition signatures sheets so that they can photocopy them and circulate them through the community. Newspaper are literally full of letters to the editor expressing outrage at the situation.

I call on the Government to consider the effects on students who travel to the University of Wollongong and will not have the opportunity to return by rail in the evening and the effects on the elderly who find great difficulty in changing from trains to buses and back to trains again. They have to travel regularly to Sydney for medical appointments. The Government should also consider the effects on employees of SAI and all other users who rely on this service on a daily basis. I call on the Government to reverse its decision on the proposal for cuts and reinstate the services to the people of the electorates of Kiama and South Coast.

I suggest that the honourable member for Kiama join me and the constituents of his electorate in calling on the Government to change its mind about cuts to rail services on the South Coast. The cuts simply do not make sense. Cuts to evening and weekend rail services will affect adversely every aspect of life and people of all ages in my electorate. The protest will not stop here. The rage, ill-feeling, disappointment, disgust and disillusionment with this Government is growing daily in every possible avenue. I call on the Government to quickly change its mind on this issue.

COUNTRY ENERGY EMPLOYEES SERVICE

Mr NEVILLE NEWELL (Tweed—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.58 p.m.]: It gives me great pleasure to draw to the attention of the House the significant service of Country Energy employees who are based at Tweed and Murwillumbah. Nineteen Country Energy employees have achieved between them 295 years of continuous service to Country Energy and its predecessor organisations, Northern Rivers Energy, which became NorthPower and subsequently Country Energy, which is currently the far North Coast electricity supplier. The longest-serving employee, Mr Ross Clarke, who is the project manager for far North Coast, is stationed at the Murwillumbah Field Service Centre and has achieved some 30 years of continuous service. Ross has described the major highlight of his 30-year career as the comradeship that he has enjoyed with Country Energy and its employees. An incident that is prominent in his memory occurred in 1998 when a line of severe storms struck the Tweed and he and his workmates worked around the clock to restore power to the community.

Employees with 20 years service include Peter Caley, the Customer Service Advisor, who is situated at the South Tweed Field Service Centre. Peter relocated from Grafton when the South Tweed office was reopened in March 2003. Also with 20 years service are Gary Coppin and Darryl Longhurst, who are line workers, and Phillip Green, the Area Co-ordinator of Tweed, who has said that his most notable memories are also of comradeship, especially with his south-east Queensland counterparts in Energex. Tweed Country Energy workers cross the boarder to help restore power when south-east Queensland, including the Gold Coast and surrounding areas, are hit with severe thunderstorms and bear the brunt of tropical storms that may have missed the Tweed. Phillip and other long-time employees have mentioned another plus in their career, that is, the mentoring and guidance they can offer the apprentices, especially the two new apprentices in Murwillumbah and the three in the Tweed.

Another 11 employees are celebrating 15 years service and two employees have achieved the 10-year mark, and all of them are from the Tweed and Murwillumbah. Those employees are the backbone of the business and their accumulated knowledge and experience is demonstrated in the strength of Country Energy's network and the level of customer service they endeavour to supply on a daily basis. Members of that select group, many of whom started out as teenage apprentices with the predecessor organisations to Country Energy, have provided an excellent quality of service to our local area through the many storms that the far North Coast seems to attract. The latest example of those workers and emergency crews working beyond the line of duty was on Thursday 18 March, when they were called on to attend to the damage caused by a severe electrical storm that wreaked havoc on Murwillumbah. That storm hit during the early evening, at approximately 6.15 p.m., and the gale-force winds unroofed homes, uprooted large trees and brought many power lines to the ground.

Five houses were destroyed in Bray Park, and the other worst hit areas were Bellevue Heights, Old Lismore Road, Eungella Road and Byangum Road, all to the west of Murwillumbah. The emergency power crews worked late into the night and next morning to restore power. The next shifts worked solidly on the Friday and over the weekend to cut the many fallen trees from powerlines. I also commend the State Emergency Service workers that sent crews from Mullumbimby, Ballina and Lismore to assist their comrades. The rescue squads and bushfire brigades attended at least 50 call-outs on that evening alone. That is an example of the work those dedicated crews face in their line of work. Earlier this month Country Energy held award ceremonies for eight regions in New South Wales, and throughout the year it will continue to hold milestone ceremonies across the regions, in 110 facilities statewide.

All up, the organisation has 600 long-standing employees celebrating 12,000 years of service collectively—which is the equivalent of 2.8 million working days—including 18 individuals who have had more than 40 years on the job. That is a rarity these days, given that the average male will change jobs or his career path approximately four times in his working life. With the lack of employment opportunities and especially full-time employment—a major problem on the far North Coast—the apprenticeship program that Country Energy has in place is a bonus for our local youth. Even though Country Energy values its long-term employees as it has done throughout the year, the organisation has created full-time jobs with its August 2002 announcement of 25 additional line workers. In conclusion, I take this opportunity to congratulate the 19 Tweed and Murwillumbah long-term employees of Country Energy and wish them many more years of solid service in this vital and often dangerous occupation.

PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADE

Mr ANDREW STONER (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [5.03 p.m.]: The Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] plans to widen the Pacific Highway between Bloomfield Street and Hill Street, South Kempsey. That section of the highway carries a high volume of traffic and sometimes there is congestion in the mix of local traffic and through traffic, particularly in the transport of heavy freight between Brisbane and Sydney. That is a problematic part of the Pacific Highway and the RTA's efforts to alleviate traffic problems are generally welcome. However, local residents are very concerned about the impacts of this proposal on that section of highway, where there are nine silky oak trees of great historic significance. The trees were planted during World War II by the women of Kempsey, as a memorial to the soldiers who did not come home to the Macleay area.

The RTA proposes to remove some of the trees to enable road widening, and that has upset many Kempsey residents. The trees have been well cared for by local residents, particularly those in Lachlan Street, which runs parallel to the Pacific Highway. Recently I met with residents of Lachlan Street, including Dick Graham, Greg Mayhew and Mrs Field. They represented all the residents of the street who will be affected by the widening of the highway. The residents are of the view that the RTA's plan is of questionable benefit. They

pointed out that as soon as the traffic moves past that section the road reverts to a narrow single lane, and just around the corner the Kempsey traffic bridge impacts on the volume of traffic along the Pacific Highway. The plan will do nothing to alleviate traffic flow.

On top of that there is a plan for the Pacific Highway to bypass Kempsey to the east. Again, I question whether the RTA ought to go ahead with its plan. On the other hand the plan will impact greatly on the quality of life of local residents. Already the constant stream of trucks shakes the windows of the residents in Lachlan Street. The RTA's plan will move the traffic closer to their houses, and without trees there will be more noise and more bright headlights shining into the living rooms and bedrooms. Twenty-eight driveways will be affected and residents' access will be greatly restricted. Also, there are serious safety concerns about the safety of young children, given that heavy volumes of traffic will pass by the front yards in which they play. In addition, there are concerns that the RTA's plan will impede funeral-related traffic associated with the nearby East Kempsey Cemetery.

The RTA traffic plan is of doubtful benefit in improving traffic flow, especially with the impending bypass, the numerous disadvantages to the amenity of life of local residents, and concerns about the beautiful silky oak trees that greet travellers as they near Kempsey. I have raised these concerns with the RTA and understand that the regional manager, Peter Collins, has met with local residents. However, no assurances have been forthcoming about the future of the historically significant silky oak trees. Additionally, no assurances were given about the amenity and quality of life of residents, residential access and so on. On 23 January I wrote to the Minister for Roads but have received no response, and that is why I raised this matter in the House today. The people of Kempsey are waiting for a decision to be made. They want the Government to treat their concerns seriously. At this stage they have hanging over their heads a great deal of uncertainty about their quality of life and concerns about the silky oak trees alongside the highway.

PARRAMATTA RIVER CLEAN-UP

Ms TANYA GADIEL (Parramatta) [5.08 p.m.]: I bring to the House great news for Parramatta residents and all who live along the Parramatta River and around Sydney Harbour. In December last year I was approached by local residents who were concerned about environmental and health risks associated with a section of the bank of the Parramatta River between O'Connell Street and Marsden Street, Parramatta. I inspected the site with residents and was shocked to find used syringes and debris that had not been properly disposed of by drug users. Situated within the centre of Parramatta itself, this site ought to be a pleasant and safe environment. Although a sharps waste disposal unit was found at the site, it was clear that on a rising tide the syringes could easily have found their way into the river.

The site was clearly an environmental and health hazard and had to be cleaned up immediately. The residents who brought the site to my attention had been cleaning up the area on a regular basis, but were fighting a losing battle. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to those residents who work so hard to clean up the site, and to keep Parramatta River clean. It is thanks to them that I learned about the site, and was able to act upon strategies to clean up the riverbank. In January this year I formed a roundtable comprising Parramatta's Lord Mayor, Paul Garrard, and representatives from Parramatta council; Parramatta Mission's Reverend Brian Smith and representatives from the Western Sydney Area Health Service; Parramatta Park Trust; NSW Police, as well as the Upper Parramatta River Catchment Trust, to find an effective solution.

As a result of those discussions, Upper Parramatta River Catchment Trust initiated the project with the support of Parramatta council, NSW Health and the Heritage Office. This area is an important heritage site for the Parramatta district, so careful work and planning were required to restore the riverbank as a safe area for residents. Last week I visited the site with Dr Stephen Lees, executive officer of the Upper Parramatta River Catchment Trust, to inspect the work that had been completed. I was really impressed with the changes. The project had resulted in the removal of weeds, syringes and rubbish to make the site accessible and safe for local residents. The place was unrecognisable.

An avenue of poplars, which will be a feature of the new site, was unearthed in the clean-up process. Also uncovered were items of heritage significance, including a staircase leading from the old hospital down to the riverbank, and an old furnace. Once completed, the site between O'Connell and Marsden streets will form a recreation site and a pedestrian link between historic Parramatta Park and the Parramatta central business district. The site will also provide greater access to Parramatta stadium and Parramatta swimming pool. Comprehensive plans have been made for the future maintenance of the site. A Landcare group from the periodic detention centre at Silverwater will be engaged in the ongoing work.

The Upper Parramatta River Catchment Trust will provide supervision for maintenance work, whilst tools and mowers will be donated by Parramatta city council. Plans are also being prepared for a cycleway through the site and along the Parramatta River and Toongabbie Creek. This facility will link the Parramatta CBD with Parramatta Park, Westmead hospital and eventually Blacktown. Parramatta City Council has been working for many years to clean up the banks of the Parramatta River and to make the area accessible for residents by opening up parks, walking paths and cycleways. The stretch of land between O'Connell and Marsden streets is an important link in the pathway stretching along the banks of the Parramatta River.

Since January this year, the roundtable formed for the clean-up of the site has achieved a great deal. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to all those people and organisations that worked tirelessly to make this project such a success. They include Dr Stephen Lees, executive director of the Upper Parramatta River Catchment Trust, Parramatta council and the Western Sydney Area Health Service. It is through projects such as these that the Government can work with local councils and the local community to make the area a safer and more environmentally friendly place. The banks of the Parramatta River have become a beautiful recreational site through projects such as this. I encourage honourable members to take the time to visit the area. It is a spectacular place and it looks all the better after all the work that has just been done.

CENTRAL COAST AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER (Gosford) [5.13 p.m.]: Today I refer to concerns relating to a serious problem that is currently facing residents on the Central Coast—and a problem about which it appears that this Government is totally unwilling to do anything. Last year, during the Government's campaign for re-election, the former Minister for Health, the Hon. Craig Knowles, promised to provide rural New South Wales with a further 230 ambulance officers over a four-year period. To the best of my recollection, the discussions to secure these additional places were undertaken by the health Minister and representatives of the Health Services Union.

A rural staffing task force was then created by the Health Services Union to identify where additional ambulance officers were most needed. The task force isolated the Central Coast as the area in greatest need due to 30 per cent increases in workload over the previous five years. The rapidly growing Central Coast was identified as an area where additional staff were needed immediately and that if staff were not provided the problem would grow rapidly, with dire consequences. The task force identified that the Central Coast should immediately receive 40 of the 230 agreed staff numbers as it does not have an adequate relief factor—the night shift ratio on the Central Coast is one fully staffed ambulance for every 30,000 residents. In addition to simple staff per resident figures, the Central Coast is known as having a high number of retiree residents prone to acute and chronic pain, injury and illness, dramatically increasing the workload for on-duty ambulance officers.

Two weeks ago a document was released by the management of the New South Wales Ambulance Service that stated that the Central Coast would receive only 24 of the 40 staff numbers recommended by the rural staffing task force. According to the union that would mean more incidents of drivers coming from Kurri Kurri or Cessnock, in the north, or from St Ives and Wahroonga, in the south, into the Central Coast to treat and attend to patients. That situation will become more and more serious as the months go by, ambulance response will suffer and patients will suffer as a result. Under this Government ambulances are waiting for up to four hours at Gosford hospital's emergency department to discharge patients.

The Government has made into an almost yearly ritual its condemnation of ambulance services on the Central Coast. The people of the Central Coast are entitled to an adequate and effective ambulance service, and one that is properly and well staffed. The present staffing ratios are simply too low to cope with the high demand and usage on the Central Coast. Morale is already low at Gosford hospital. The reduced number of ambulance staff necessary to attend to emergency and chronic cases compounds the continuing shortage of doctors and nurses. The people of the Central Coast have been promised millions of dollars for staff increases but they have now been informed, as ambulance staff have now been informed, that the numbers that were promised to them simply will not appear.

The Government announced plans to encircle Gosford hospital with 3,000 people in blocks of units 10 storeys high. This is its so-called city link program. The chairman of the Central Coast Area Health Service has admitted that that will leave Gosford hospital with very little room to extend in the future, as any room that could be used for upgrades, new wings or new departments will be taken up by housing for the additional 3,000 residents. His only solution has been to suggest that Gosford hospital's future lies in its ability to become a teaching hospital. The crisis facing Gosford hospital is serious, but the crisis facing the ambulance service is also serious.

We have excellent ambulance staff on the Central Coast and the people of the Central Coast have become accustomed to having highly efficient, dedicated ambulance personnel at Gosford hospital and its associated hospitals. We do not, however, have enough of them. We were promised an increase of 40; but we will get only 24. That means that we are barely getting 50 per cent of the number that were promised through the recommendations of the rural staffing task force. I ask the Minister for Health to revisit this matter and to provide an adequate number of ambulance staff for the people on the Central Coast.

SENIORS WEEK

Ms ANDREWS (Peats) [5.18 p.m.]: All across New South Wales, from 14 to 21 March, celebrations were held as part of Seniors Week. All honourable members are well aware of the enormous contributions made to our local communities by our senior citizens. Former Labor Premier Neville Wran introduced the inaugural Seniors Week in the 1970s. Premier Wran, in response to a question asked by the then honourable member for Coogee, Michael Cleary, on 16 March 1978, said it had taken former New South Wales governments far too long to recognise the contributions made to the State and the nation by our senior citizens.

The Premier complimented the honourable member for Coogee, who had been instrumental in formulating the proposal for what had become known as Seniors Week, which that year was to be held between 26 March and 1 April. The Premier concluded his response by stating that the Wran Government proposed to make a feature of Seniors Week each year. Twenty-six years down the track Seniors Week is still going strong. In my electorate of Peats, which I am honoured to represent in this place, it has been a long tradition for the State member to host a barbecue and concert during Seniors Week. On becoming the local member in 1995 I continued that fine tradition. My predecessor, Tony Doyle, who represented the Peats electorate with distinction from 1985 until his untimely death in 1994, was renowned for his work on behalf of senior citizens. The Premier, speaking in this place on 2 May 1995 to the motion of condolence for the late Tony Doyle, said:

Tony's work for older people was well recognised. In fact, on that score, many of us recall the huge celebrations he organised for older people on the Central Coast—the great barbecues and gatherings.

It might interest Opposition members to know that the Seniors Card introduced by the State Government in 1993 was a proposal stolen from the then Labor Opposition's policy on ageing formulated in 1991. The Labor Opposition spokesperson for senior citizens at that time was the then member for Peats, Tony Doyle.

During Seniors Week 2004 I had the great pleasure of hosting the annual barbecue-concert on Monday 15 March at the Ettalong Beach War Memorial Club. I place on record my appreciation to the club's management and staff and to the board of directors for their assistance and co-operation in organising this event. Each year the club makes its auditorium available free of charge to enable the barbecue-concert to be held. I also place on record my appreciation to my electorate office staff, Mrs Suzanne King and Mrs Megan Howdle, for their great liaising and organising skills and for their assistance in staging this event.

This year, like last year, the barbecue-concert was a huge success, with more than 700 people in attendance. Of course this event would not be such a great success without the invaluable contributions and hard work of a number of people. I shall take this opportunity to name some of them. Mrs Rose Kinney, a most compassionate constituent of mine, has generously devoted many years to caring for the senior citizens and the homeless in the Woy Woy peninsula area. Rose's contribution to the annual barbecue-concert is enormous and began when Tony Doyle was the local State member. Rose virtually takes over management of the club's kitchen on the day and ensures that everyone is served a square meal.

Other volunteers who willingly give of their time on the day are Dot Skinner, Dulcie McKeown, Bill and Ann McGilchrist, Barbara Brennan, John Gifford, Bev Thompson, Jim Hughes, Frank Jenner and Pat Molin. Until his untimely death over a year ago, Pat's good husband, Bob, was also a regular, hard-working volunteer at this function. I should also mention that this Saturday, 3 April, Dot Skinner and her husband, Ivan, will celebrate their fiftieth wedding anniversary. I extend my congratulations to them on that special occasion and wish them well for the future.

A pleasing feature of the annual barbecue-concert is the involvement of the local high school students from Brisbane Water Secondary College. The students do an excellent job waiting on tables, and their good manners and pleasant dispositions are appreciated by the senior citizens. I thank the principals of the college—Pat Lewis, David Beattie and Frank Gasper—for allowing the students to participate in this event. This year we were also fortunate to have the services of students from the Alternative Learning Centre, which is located in the police and community youth club at Umina Beach. The students were accompanied by Senior Constable Renae

Jackson. She and Senior Constable Paul Hanna do an excellent job caring for, and working with, the young people of the Woy Woy peninsula. The highlight of the day's proceedings is the concert, and I acknowledge the tremendous effort of Mr Chris King in putting together a very entertaining and varied program. I thank all those who were involved in staging the 2004 barbecue-concert for senior citizens. [*Time expired.*]

Mr BRYCE GAUDRY (Newcastle—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.23 p.m.]: I thank the honourable member for Peats for making that very positive contribution about Seniors Week and the barbecue and concert that is held each year in her electorate. I also thank her for paying particular tribute to Tony Doyle, who initiated the event. The honourable member thanked many people in her electorate for their positive work but she did not thank herself. I think it is appropriate to recognise the work of the honourable member for Peats for seniors across her electorate. The area is an acknowledged retirement destination and the fact that 700 people attended the barbecue and concert speaks volumes about the organisational ability of the honourable member, her electorate office and the committee members involved. It also speaks volumes about the work of the honourable member for Peats in her electorate.

WILLOUGHBY CIVIC PLACE MASTER PLAN

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN (Willoughby) [5.24 p.m.]: Before I speak about an issue of immense importance to the Willoughby electorate, I take this opportunity to congratulate all those locals who put themselves forward as candidates in the recent council elections in both the Willoughby and the North Sydney local government areas. I also formally congratulate those who were successfully re-elected and those who were elected for the first time. As the State member for Willoughby, I look forward to having a strong working relationship with them in the future.

Last Saturday the residents of the Willoughby city local government area [LGA] were asked to vote in an indicative poll to gauge the level of support for Willoughby council's Civic Place master plan. The Civic Place master plan provides detailed plans for new development in the heart of the city of Willoughby. Although counting is not yet completed, it is estimated that between 55 per cent and 60 per cent of voters are in favour of the specific master plan. With the poll for Civic Place behind us and with the indication that a majority of residents are in favour of the master plan, I wish to place some comments on the record.

For the benefit of honourable members, the Civic Place master plan includes a new concert hall seating 1,000 people, a 500-seat theatre, a 600 square metre exhibition hall, a 120-room boutique hotel, retail shops, visual arts spaces, underground car parking, a 5,000 square metre public library and much-needed open space. The area earmarked for the development falls within Anderson and Archer streets and Victoria Avenue and Ferguson Lane—an area literally in the heart of Chatswood. There has been much debate in the community in recent months as to the merits or otherwise of the master plan, and as the State member for Willoughby I made a conscious decision not to participate in the public debate until after the poll was conducted. I made this decision because I did not wish my comments to be interpreted as politicising or attempting to influence what was essentially a major issue in the local council elections.

The development of Civic Place is one of the most significant issues to face the ratepayers of Willoughby in the past 50 years and, frankly, it was unfortunate that the poll was conducted in the manner it was. It is difficult to interpret from a straight yes or no answer how comfortable ratepayers are with various aspects of the plan. Feedback that I have received from ratepayers across the Willoughby LGA suggests that an overwhelming majority want Civic Place to proceed, but many people have justifiable concerns about some aspects of the proposed master plan. While the poll has indicated that the majority of residents support the master plan, I think it is incumbent upon Willoughby council to address some of the justifiable concerns that have been raised by various community organisations, including the Willoughby Ratepayers Association.

I state at the outset that I share the view that our community needs a modern Civic Place that will form the heart of our civic, cultural and social activities into the future. However, I wish to place on record several concerns that I have about the process to date and about the master plan. First and foremost, I am concerned about the level of financial risk that each ratepayer in the city will have to bear. The income streams and other revenue sources earmarked to offset the \$115 million cost of the project are based on assumptions that may not materialise. Some of these assumptions are based on the premise that there is adequate demand for all the facilities earmarked for construction. Therefore, I believe there needs to be greater involvement by the private sector. I would have preferred a process that more transparently and openly allowed for registrations of interest when compiling potential options for the site. Greater private sector involvement will undoubtedly relieve ratepayers of their current high-risk exposure and ensure that the council has the benefit of a range of expert input and advice.

The information distributed in the final weeks before the election under the heading "Costs" included information about likely revenue streams but scant information about how the \$115 million figure was arrived at. An independent assessment of the costs and project assumptions should be made public. This will alleviate to some extent concerns about cost blow-outs. I also believe it is in the public interest to ensure that there is formal consideration of the relationship between the Chatswood transport interchange and Civic Place. The proposed major development of the Chatswood transport interchange and the Civic Place master plan must complement each other. An associated issue is the need to cater for transitional arrangements during the construction phase to ensure minimal disruption to residential amenity and existing businesses.

I am passionate about my local community, which I have the honour of representing in this place. As residents of the Willoughby electorate and ratepayers of Willoughby council we have an enormous opportunity to create a heart, a Civic Place, which will stand us in good stead for generations to come. But along with this opportunity comes the responsibility to ensure that proper processes are in place to minimise the risks to ratepayers and to ensure that there is an open and transparent process that utilises existing expertise within the private sector. We should question aspects of the master plan about which we are unsure and demand that we get the best option available—especially as, under the current arrangements, the ratepayers will bear the brunt of the risk. Willoughby council has embarked on a project of a size and scale that the city has never seen—and is not likely to see again for a long time. It is our right as ratepayers to demand a thorough and robust process.

BATHURST REGION COUNCILLORS

Mr GERARD MARTIN (Bathurst) [5.29 p.m.]: I place on record the outstanding contributions to local government of a number of people who stood down before the local government elections last weekend. From Bathurst City Council Ian Macintosh retired after 8½ years as mayor of Bathurst. He was unusual in that all of his service in local government was as mayor. Ian is a man of vision who set the bar high in achievements for his council. I had a good working relationship with Ian, who comes from a more conservative background than I do. We worked very co-operatively and positively together on many programs.

Some of the major projects achieved while Ian was mayor were the expansion of the Chifley Dam, which doubled the size of the water supply for Oberon, a \$30 million project split evenly between the State Government and Bathurst council, and the redevelopment of Mount Panorama, for which we were able to secure \$10 million from the Government and Bathurst council contributed \$4 million. I know Ian is disappointed that his pleas to the Federal Government and its half promises have not been realised by way of a contribution. Ian was present at the opening of the \$7.5 million Memorial Entertainment Centre at Bathurst, which is a great cultural asset. Ian has advised me that there are plans in place for a technology park. Ian's wife, Pauline, also played a very important role.

Geoff Spring retired from Bathurst City Council after one term. He was very active in the community, he deputised at many functions and he was a great advocate of local government. I had the pleasure of meeting his wife, Sue. Lisa Schofield, a young lady in her 20s, also retired after one term. Al Ritchie from Lithgow City Council has also retired after one term. He has been involved in the Lithgow community as headmaster of the high school for many years and as an excellent singer with the musical society. He has been involved in Tidy Towns and the Beehive Centre and, together with his wife, Fay, has made a wonderful contribution to the Lithgow community.

John Davis from Blayney Shire Council has been mayor for the past 10 of his 20 years service and has now stood down. He has been elected to the neighbouring council of Orange, where he may well end up being mayor. He operates a number of businesses in Orange. Blayney is a progressive shire council and John has left it financially sound. The community weathered the closing of a major abattoir. John was aided by his good ally Jim Newman, a local businessman and farmer. John is a very straightforward and honest man who was always prepared to do his best. Peter Smith also stood down after one term. Peter was a very committed and able headmaster of Blayney High School and was involved in the community. Peter will be missed, and it is unfortunate that he stood down because of the pressure of his job.

A very colourful and large Bob O'Bernier from Oberon Council has called it a day in local government. Bob has a tough exterior but he also has a soft side. He is honest and straightforward and has a great sense of humour. He was very committed to his community. Unfortunately, just prior to the election the Rylstone Shire Council was dismissed after a section 730 inquiry. But I particularly pay tribute to the long-serving mayor, Peter Hall, who has been on the council for approximately 20 years. When I was mayor of neighbouring Lithgow City Council I had a lot of contact with Peter and his wife, Jenny. Peter is incredibly dedicated. He has a rural

background with a farm at Glen Alice. Peter spent tireless hours working for Rylstone shire, one of the smaller population-based shires in our State. It is a great sadness to Peter that his local government career has been put on hold because of the dismissal of the council, but I hope he returns to local government.

One of Peter's great allies at Rylstone Shire Council was Peter McQuiggin, a local businessman who has served on the council for many years and has been involved in just about everything in the community in Kandos and Rylstone. All those people have made a wonderful contribution to their communities and they are one reason why local government is such a vibrant organisation. In many cases the co-operation between adjoining councils has been outstanding. They all deserve our congratulations on their wonderful job in representing their communities at the grass roots level.

Mr BRYCE GAUDRY (Newcastle—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.34 p.m.]: The honourable member for Bathurst and the honourable member for Willoughby have both paid tribute to local government councillors who have served for a long time in their electorates. Local government is the level of government closest to the community, and councillors do an enormous amount of work to meet the needs of their communities and to grapple with some major structural changes that occur in all communities, particularly in the country, as mentioned by the honourable member for Bathurst.

KU-RING-GAI COUNCIL ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [5.34 p.m.]: I wish to raise issues relating to the council elections in Ku-ring-gai last weekend. First I want to inform the House that 89 per cent of Ku-ring-gai residents voted against a referenda question that proposed that four-storey and five-storey developments be allowed adjacent to single-storey homes. That result was consistent with my repeated calls for the Government to relent on its current interface arrangements. I urge the assistant planning Minister to heed these residents' views when she makes her decision on Ku-ring-gai's local environmental plan 194.

But my primary purpose in speaking is to argue the case for fundamental and far-reaching reform of Ku-ring-gai council's electoral arrangements. I want to argue for the introduction of a directly elected mayor, for an end to Ku-ring-gai's existing flawed ward system, and for a stop to the practice of dummy groups running to support other candidates. The two-member, five-ward system that applies uniquely in Ku-ring-gai is a deeply flawed arrangement as it entrenches a winner-takes-all result. That is, a group that receives 50.1 per cent of the vote in any of Ku-ring-gai's wards will win both councillor positions.

If in that ward there was only one other group on the ballot paper and even if it had received the other 49.9 per cent of the vote, it would miss out on a position despite being preferred by almost one out of every two residents. This non-representative and antidemocratic winner-takes-all approach is reason enough to scrap Ku-ring-gai's existing ward system. But there is another reason: Ku-ring-gai wards have unequal populations. At the lower end, Comenarra ward has just 13,621 voters. At the top end Wahroonga ward has 15,007. Democratic electoral systems should operate on the principle of one vote one value. To achieve that principle, wards—or in our case electorates—should be of equal size.

Voters in Ku-ring-gai's council elections did not cast equal votes—the votes of Wahroonga ward residents were worth less than those of Comenarra ward residents. Put another way, to win 50.1 per cent of the vote—and both council positions in Comenarra—required a potential 6,814 votes, assuming of course everyone voted and there were no informal votes. But in Wahroonga it required the team to win an additional 690 votes and get 7,504 residents to achieve the same percentage of support.

Options for reform of the current flawed ward system must be put to residents. In my view the options should include abolition of wards altogether and the election of all councillors across the entire municipality, the introduction of three three-member wards and the introduction of nine single-member wards. My own preference is for the latter option. It is after all the system applying at a State and Federal level. It is the model that improves transparency and accountability by ensuring that residents and councillors are able to build a relationship in a way that cannot occur in multimember wards. This model would also do away with groups as it requires candidates to run on their own. One of the major problems of the existing system is that it works against those candidates wanting to run alone as genuine Independents.

A factor further worsening this year's elections was the State Electoral Commission ruling that candidate how-to-vote cards had to indicate a first and second preference, even though a valid vote was a ballot with just the number "1" above the line. This ruling accentuated the proliferation of dummy groups. Such groups

occurred in a majority of wards in Ku-ring-gai, that is, groups of candidates whose sole purpose was to channel preferences to another group. The practice operates on the basis that many people simply do not know any of the candidates in local government elections but due to compulsory voting are required to vote and their preferences can be captured and directed. It is a practice designed to hoodwink voters generally, and is especially aimed at trying to confuse older voters in particular.

At my local booth the secondary group did not even bother to turn up to staff the booth. But because they were group A they benefited from the donkey vote and scored 12 per cent of the vote. Some of those responsible for orchestrating this device openly boasted to me about it on polling day. They also made clear to me the ultimate goal of the exercise: to deliver a certain six out of ten votes, a clear majority, to ensure the election of Councillor Laura Bennett as mayor at the annual mayoral elections throughout this council term. I am pleased that the scheme did not work. The electorate made an informed choice, and in most instances all such candidates and their supporters were soundly beaten.

That brings me to my last area of local government reform: the need to allow residents to directly elect Ku-ring-gai's mayor. This model has existed in Willoughby for some time and last weekend was introduced in Hornsby. It allows residents a chance to choose who will lead their council and their community. It removes the incentives for dummy groups springing up in wards during council elections. It ends the annual deals that characterise the election of mayors by councillors under the existing annual mayoral election arrangements. I thank all those who put themselves forward for election on Saturday. Democracy works only if people are prepared to stand for election, to compete for office and, if elected, to serve their communities.

As I told one of the candidates last week, whatever the result, I was, and I remain, committed to working professionally with all councillors to advance the interests of the Ku-ring-gai community. Madam Deputy-Speaker, it will not surprise you to know that that does not imply blind obeisance. Of course there will be differences of opinions from time to time, but I am committed to trying to work constructively with my council in its dealings with the State Government, particularly in relation to planning issues. Again I ask the Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning to heed the referenda questions that accompany those elections.

ST DAVID'S UNITING CHURCH, HABERFIELD

Ms ANGELA D'AMORE (Drummoyne) [5.39 p.m.]: This evening I wish to bring to the attention of the Chamber an important celebration I attended as State member for Drummoyne at St David's Uniting Church, Haberfield, for the milestone 135th anniversary of the first service at St David's and the admission of St David's Church onto the State Heritage Register. The Reverend Dr Alan Russell, official guests, and the congregation of St David's Uniting Church had the pleasure of participating in the celebration of these two significant events.

To commemorate the events a special service was held on Sunday 28 March 2004. The service was a blend of traditional and contemporary musical features performed by duet Ms Kim Warth, teacher at Haberfield Public School, and Mrs Genevieve McCrea, Church Council member, soloist and organist Barbara Crossing, Church Council member, and a choir comprising Jeanette Shean, Elder, Thelma Hatfield, Gloria West, Kaye Payten, Amy Fernando and Lila Ankeshian. The guest preacher was Reverend Dr Bill Ives, former Moderator of the Uniting Church, and Minister of St Stephen's, Sydney. The scripture readers were Mr Ken Ramsay—a direct descendant of David and Sarah Ramsay—Mrs Kaye Payten, Elder, and Dr David Goldman.

Following the service there was an exhibition of photos and documentation of St David's early history in the Ramsay hall and a barbeque in the grounds. Also in attendance was John Murphy, MP, who is the Federal member for Lowe, Victoria Thorp from the Heritage Council of New South Wales, Kaylynne Jacobsen, who is the principal of Haberfield Public School, Mark Bonanno of Ashfield council, members of the Ella Community Centre, members and friends of the Ramsay Family Association, and members of the Ashfield and District Historical Society. It was with great appreciation that the congregation recognised the honour given them by the New South Wales Heritage Council in registering the significance of the property. I take this quote from the Heritage Council:

The St David's Uniting Church site is of State significance as one of a few surviving examples of a church precinct retaining its original church, hall and private burial ground, all of which is an individual item of high significance located with a relatively expansive and attractive landscaped site.

Historically, the grounds on which the church stands at 51 Dalhousie Street, Haberfield, formed part of an original grant of land to Mr Bayley in 1803, known as the Dobroyde estate. The land was sold in 1826 to Mr

Lord and given as a dowry to his daughter Sarah Anne on her marriage to Dr David Ramsay. The Ramsay family in 1861 built a school known as Yasmar, which is where the current hall stands. The word Yasmar is the Ramsay surname spelt backwards—a bit of historical information. In 1867 Reverend Mackenzie became the first pastor of the church, and the Ramsay family donated the four acres of land on which the church and hall currently stand. The foundation stone was laid on 28 April 1868, and the church opened eleven months later, on Good Friday 26 March 1869.

A special acknowledgement goes to the secretary of the church, Mrs Alison Goodman; the treasurer, Mr Adam Griffith; the event organiser, Yvonne Goldman; the children's ministry, Heather Thompson; and the music team, comprising Doug Robson, Phil McCrea, Christo Sarantacus and Melanie Robson. St David's Church operates the Ella Community Centre, which was founded in 1975 as a result of a gift from Mr Henry Ella, a long-time member of St David's Church.

The Ella Community Centre continues to provide excellent services to the inner west community through loyal and dedicated staff and volunteers. I particularly acknowledge manager Sandy Bowden and Rosemary Musson, chair of the Ella Community Centre board. The centre provides young people with intellectual disabilities a range of individual services for varying degrees of impairment; assistance to residents in nursing homes, by organising a group of 50 volunteers who visit nursing home residents who would otherwise not have a visitor; day activities for the elderly, to provide respite for carers of people who are frail, aged or who suffer from dementia; and much needed before and after school care for working parents.

At the service Reverend Dr Alan Russell highlighted the St David's project appeal. Due to the considerable amount of heritage restoration work required, the church is seeking \$60,000 from the community. The church is applying for a heritage grant of \$60,000, but an equal contribution is required by the church. It has called on the community to assist with the project by making a donation in the 135th anniversary year, and all moneys raised in the community will be of great help to the ongoing services of the congregation in Haberfield and the inner west. I wish the congregation of St David's Uniting Church well in its endeavours, and I am confident that the target will be reached from the generous community we have in the inner west.

Mr BRYCE GAUDRY (Newcastle—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.44 p.m.]: The honourable member for Drummoyne has put to the Chamber a decisive discourse about the importance of St David's Uniting Church to the history and social fabric of the Haberfield area, the involvement in the church of the Ramsay family, and the work done in the community by the Ella Community Centre. A history of 135 years is very significant for an institution in any community, but particularly so as it remains active in the community. It is good to see that history of association of the church with the community recognised not only by the member but also by the placing of the building and its surrounds on the State Heritage Register. I thank the honourable member for bringing that matter to our attention.

BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr THOMAS GEORGE (Lismore) [5.45 p.m.]: Tonight I wish to express some of the frustrations experienced by private builders, plumbers, electricians and other tradespersons. I have received a letter from John Inglis, and have been approached by Jim Cravigan and Tom Roache, regarding the problems they have experienced as three individuals in the building industry. I can do no better than to read the letter that John Inglis wrote to me entitled "Why you won't be able to get a builder soon". Referring to the Continuing Professional Development regulations recently introduced by the Office of Fair Trading, he wrote:

The new regulations, which come into effect on March 1, 2004 apply to all contractors in the building trades and require the completion of 100 points of professional development over 3 years with a minimum of 25 points per annum in order to renew a contracting licence. Details of these regulations can be found on Fair Trading's website.

Discussions with fellow tradesmen in the area have established that one builder is looking at \$3000 in course fees per annum, plus time to do the courses.

For example a TAFE Certificate III in Business Administration is worth 10 points. This course is an 18 week, one day per week course with fees of \$600. If I get five points for industry experience (contracting) I will need to do three of these courses or their equivalents every year for the rest of my working life to maintain my contracting licence. That works out to one day per week training, not including homework.

At present I am charging \$45/hour. If you assume one day per week training, plus course fees, plus \$3000 in associated oncosts per annum (vehicle, meals, books etc) this Continuing Professional Development will cost me \$23,520 per annum. That is my gross profit per annum.

As I understand it these new regulations have been brought in to address quality control issues in the building industry. Over the past five years the government regulated inspection and testing regime has been dismantled and has been replaced with self-inspection or outsourced private certification of building work. No tradesman will dispute the fact that the quality of work has plummeted under the new regime and the reasons are obvious.

In the old days, cutting corners was not an option as your work was inspected by the regulating authority, and continued breaches would result in a letter asking you to show cause as to why you should keep your licence. Now, no-one is looking over your shoulder and the main driver on a job is the cost. Even the SAA Wiring Rules were changed in 2000 from a prescriptive (thou shalt do it this way) to an outcome-based (take our advice and please yourself) format.

To put it in perspective, it is the same as sacking every traffic policeman in NSW and expecting every driver to personally guarantee that they will abide by the law.

The only time that they come to the notice of the authorities is when they cause a serious accident. To continue the analogy, the authorities have noticed that the law is being broken and instead of reinstating the police they are requiring every license holder to go to school one day a week. For the rest of the week the license holders will be trying to make up lost ground.

How fast will they go? How many people will let their license lapse and keep driving? How many people will give up altogether?

Apart from the obvious failure in policy and the cost imposed on already struggling small businesses there are the practical considerations. I believe there are about 5000 electrical contractors in the Northern Rivers. If we all decided to do the Certificate III Business course at Lismore, Keen St would be grid-locked every Wednesday. If the plumbers and the brickies and the chippies and the plasterers and the tilers all wanted to do the same course there is not an oval in Lismore big enough to accommodate us.

These new regulations have to be rescinded. They are costly, impractical and do not address the issue.

That is the feeling of John Inglis of Lillian Rock, who sent his views to me. Similar concerns have been expressed to me by other contractors in the area who ask that this policy be reviewed.

Mr BRYCE GAUDRY (Newcastle—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.50 p.m.]: The honourable member for Lismore read out a complex letter, and I am sure he will take the matter up with the relevant Minister. The contents of the letter, which have been read into *Hansard*, will certainly come to the attention of the Minister.

WARRINGAH COUNCIL FORMER GENERAL MANAGER MR DENIS SMITH

Mr DAVID BARR (Manly) [5.50 p.m.]: A report from a recent ICAC investigation into Glen Oakley, a senior State Government executive, recommended that he be prosecuted for obtaining money by deception under section 178BA of the Crimes Act and for obtaining money through false or misleading statements under section 178BB of that Act. Mr Oakley used false qualifications to obtain senior public service jobs. The circumstances of Glen Oakley's case are similar to those relating to the former General Manager of Warringah Council, Mr Denis Smith, who was recently sacked from Joondalup Council in Western Australia for faking his curriculum vitae [CV].

On 27 October 1997 Mr Smith applied for the position of Director, Services Group, at Warringah Council. He claimed he held tertiary qualifications in Business Management, Environment Management, Urban and Regional Planning, and Surveying. He also claimed he had acquired a postgraduate qualification, Bachelor of Business (Management), from the University of Technology, Sydney in 1990, as well as other postgraduate qualifications from the New South Wales Institute of Technology. His application was successful.

On 23 February 1998 Mr Smith applied for the position of General Manager at Warringah Council. He again claimed he held formal tertiary qualifications in Business Management, Environmental Management, Urban and Regional Planning, and Surveying, including a postgraduate qualification, Bachelor of Business (Management), University of Technology, Sydney, and a postgraduate diploma, Environmental and Pollution studies, Faculty of Science, New South Wales Institute of Technology, among other qualifications. Mr Smith admitted in evidence given in a District Court trial held last year that he does not possess a bachelor degree. The records section of the University of Technology, Sydney confirms that the university has been unable to identify a graduate by the name of Denis Ian Smith. Mr Smith was subsequently appointed to the position of General Manager. The mayor at the time issued a press release about his appointment, and stated:

"His educational qualifications consist of a Diploma in Town & Country Planning, Post Graduate Diploma in Environmental & Pollution Studies and a Bachelor of Business (Management) from the University of Technology, Sydney."

Mr Smith's salary was approximately \$200,000 per annum and increased each year until his resignation in late 2001. At the time of his exit from Warringah Council he was on a total remuneration package of \$218,630.87. Controversy about Mr Smith's academic qualifications led to an inquiry being held by the Western Australia

Legislative Council into the appointment process for council chief executive officers in that State, with particular attention given to Mr Smith and Joondalup Council. In evidence given to that inquiry Mr Smith again admitted that he does not hold a bachelor degree. In that inquiry he said:

With my wife's assistance I set out a summary of my CV and I forwarded that to Management Recruiters. That CV incorrectly referred to a Bachelor of Business from the University of Technology.

So Mr Smith has obtained senior positions in at least two councils by using a false CV. That clearly demonstrates serious flaws in the recruiting processes at those councils. The ICAC report into Mr Oakley stated:

There are public expectations associated with public office: that the appointee is qualified for the position, and that he or she is honest. Falsifying qualifications is a fundamental breach of these expectations; a candidate or incumbent who does this is unfit for employment in the public sector. Additionally, effective and ethical leadership of public sector organisations requires CEOs to set an example. Mr Oakley's behaviour falls far short of the required "tone at the top" that is essential to building organisational integrity.

The same can be said for Mr Denis Smith. At the very least, Mr Smith's misrepresentations as to his academic qualifications demonstrate that he is not a fit and proper person to lead a large public institution, such as a council. He should never be employed in this role again.

COMMONWEALTH AGRICULTURAL CONFERENCE

Mr TONY McGRANE (Dubbo) [5.55 p.m.]: I bring to the attention of honourable members the vital issues raised at the twenty-first Commonwealth Agricultural Conference held in Albury last week, which I attended with the honourable member for Bathurst and the honourable member for Albury. It was one of the most involving and informative seminars I have attended for a long time, with high-profile speakers and participants from Australian and international governments plus the top echelon of elite businesses in Australia. Australians are increasingly recognising the social and economic importance of efficient water usage. My electorate of Dubbo is dependent on water for agricultural and industrial uses, and it has a key flow-on effect to the economy and to infrastructure development.

Fresh water is vital for drinking, sanitation, industry, urban development, hydro-power generation, inland fisheries, transportation, recreation, and many other human industries. It is also vital for nature. The Albury conference provided an opportunity for all Commonwealth member States to discuss water efficiency and practical methods to best manage our most precious of resources. It highlighted world's best practice farming methods, environmental issues, and water's vital role in future world trade. Water is priceless, and therefore needs to be well managed with necessary controls at all levels. The value of water needs to be recognised throughout all communities, not just in farming and production areas. It is a simple message but one that is so often ignored. Water management issues are often used as a political football, with political parties and groups pushing their own agendas to score points.

The Albury conference stressed the message that politicians must listen to what their communities say about their water needs and think outside the square and make decisions to ensure water quality and quantity in the future. Of particular interest were speeches and presentations from representatives of African member States, who discussed drought issues and subsistence farming. Their stories demonstrated how drought crosses demographic and social barriers. We consider how it affects the livelihood of large producers or irrigators, for example, but at a grassroots level in some African countries the average farmer is simply trying to produce enough food to feed his family. The drought is just as damaging in both situations, and water efficiency measures are equal in value.

We live on the driest continent on the planet yet we utilise farming methods that were originally designed for a completely different environment and therefore we rely on water. For that reason we must be more water conscious to ensure maximum efficiency and viability of production. Water management is a complicated issue with apparently many simple solutions. The most obvious solution is to educate people about efficient water usage. The Albury conference focused on the role of legislators in developing water policy. Water is an ecological, economic, and social issue that needs to be approached from a broad and involved perspective.

The only way to progress and protect our water resources is to have a legislative and management review. New ideas and directions must be considered, and the broader community needs better involvement. The input must cross boundaries to provide a holistic approach to water management, taking into account scientific, economic, and community considerations. Current legislation must be reviewed to incorporate and

apply new ideas and initiatives, and promote a proactive rather than a reactive approach to water issues. Why do we need to wait for a big drought to investigate methods of drought-proofing farms? Why are flood emergency strategies developed as a consequence of flood damage rather than as a method of crisis prevention? The Commonwealth Agricultural Conference was not just a talkfest: it was a genuine forum to highlight concerns surrounding our most valuable resource. We have the knowledge and the technology in Australia to move towards sustainable water systems and usage. The challenge for us as legislators is to provide the framework and drive for these best practices to be applied.

Mr BRYCE GAUDRY (Newcastle—Parliamentary Secretary) [6.00 p.m.]: I compliment the honourable member for Dubbo on his very thoughtful presentation following his attendance with other members at the Commonwealth Agricultural Conference in Albury, which focused on efficient water usage. The conference recognised that it is an issue not only for Australia and commercial farming but also for farmers in other countries who are involved directly in subsistence farming and the maintenance of life in a difficult and arid continent. The honourable member for Dubbo emphasised the scientific underpinning, and the economic and social issues surrounding the establishment and sustaining of communities.

The honourable member for Dubbo referred also to the role that water plays in production based on the need to retain environmental flows in our rivers and riparian systems. There is no doubt that at both the Commonwealth and State level the focus on water usage and better environmental use of our precious water resource is most important. Nothing could be more important when one considers the aridity of the Australian continent overall. It is great to see the honourable member for Dubbo and his parliamentary colleagues with him in this House taking such an avid interest in this fundamental topic not only for the community but also for legislators. I thank him for bringing this matter to the attention of the House tonight.

Private members' statements noted.

The House adjourned at 6.02 p.m. until Friday 2 April 2004 at 10.00 a.m.
