

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Thursday 6 March 2008

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

The Speaker read the Prayer and acknowledgement of country.

ROAD TRANSPORT LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (CAR HOONS) BILL 2008

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

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of Motions

General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) given.

GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS (INFRASTRUCTURE REGISTER) BILL 2007

Agreement in Principle

Debate resumed from 6 December 2007.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS (Lane Cove) [10.04 a.m.]: It is with much pleasure that I acknowledge and pay tribute to the wonderful teachers and administrative staff who provide a great learning experience to the thousands of children who attend schools in my electorate of Lane Cove, which has 22 schools. I try to visit each school at least two or three times a year and I attend as many school presentations as I can. Last year I was fortunate to be able to attend 20 of the 22 school presentations and saw firsthand the high level of talent and intellect of students in both our independent and non-independent government schools.

I wish to list the 22 schools in my electorate and their principals: Holy Cross College, Garry Williams; Hunters Hill High School, Judith Felton; Marist Sisters College, Sister Fidelis McTeigue, SM; Riverside Girls High School, Judy King; Ryde Secondary College, John Hughes; St Ignatius College—my old school—Shane Hogan; St Joseph's College, Ross Tarlinton, the first lay principal of that college; Artarmon Primary School, Louise Green; Boronia Park Public School, Marilyn Tor; Currambena School, Julianna McCarthy and Christina Hill, the conveners; Gladesville Public School, Judi Partland; Greenwich Primary School, Heather Thomas; Hunters Hill Public School, Brad Newhouse, acting principal; Lane Cove Public School, Bob Lamaro; Lane Cove West Public School, Judy Doherty—the school was the recipient of a recent grant; some wonderful buildings are being erected around Lane Cove West, though not enough around my electorate and there is a lot more to do, but we are heading in the right direction in Lane Cove—Mowbray Public School, Anna Blakeney; Our Lady Queen of Peace Primary School, Margaret Morgan; and Putney Primary School, which has had some wonderful work done to it in my time, and principal Rhona Russom.

Ms Linda Burney: Is there more to do?

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: There is still more to do. The list continues with Ryde East Public School, Jane Law; St Charles Primary School, Chris Hingerty; St Michael's Primary School, Steven Conlon—I was there recently to present the Student Representative Council badges to school leaders—and Villa Maria Parish School, Julie Cunneen. We are undertaking a very interesting project in Lane Cove at the moment that I put together. In the lead-up to Anzac Day, the school leaders of my local schools are going to sell \$2 Anzac Day badges to all the pupils of the schools. As you would be aware, Mr Speaker, the old and the bold of our local RSL sub-branches are getting older and a little less bolder—though some may say a lot older and a lot bolder.

All the schools in my electorate have agreed to partake in this project and it will provide a level of leadership to those school leaders. Half of the money raised will go to the local RSL sub-branches to help with

the welfare of the local members. I wish to pay tribute to the schools and the school leaders for partaking in that project, which will raise some \$10,000 for my three local RSL sub-branches. This is a marvellous act and a way of looking after the welfare of our diggers. Once again, I pay tribute to the principals and teachers in the schools in my electorate for the magnificent job they do. I am sure that those present—

Mr Geoff Corrigan: Point of order. I am reluctant to interrupt the member for Lane Cove when he is talking about the wonderful schools in his electorate, and what the Government is doing to assist them, but we are supposed to be talking about the Government Schools (Infrastructure Register) Bill. I assume the member will be returning to the leave of the bill shortly.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Lane Cove will confine his remarks to the leave of the bill.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: Rightly so, but I think it is important to acknowledge that these principals and teachers often work under very difficult circumstances due to the failings of the infrastructure and the lack of funding to our schools by this State Labor Government. I notice that the former Minister for Education and Training is present in the Chamber. I congratulate her on providing toilets for the local school of the member for Baulkham Hills, Mr Wayne Merton. The name of the school is—

Ms Carmel Tebbutt: Crestwood.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: I thank the former Minister. I know she could never forget Crestwood Public School because the member for Baulkham Hills did a wonderful job. Well done to the former Minister for providing those facilities. I also thank her on behalf of Lane Cove West Public School, which has done very well, and I look forward to the current Minister allocating some funds for the Hunters Hill Public School. Our teachers and staff do a wonderful job under very difficult circumstances. While all our schools need a level of infrastructure renewal as well as new infrastructure, I draw to the attention of the House the plight of Hunters Hill Public School. I have written to the current Minister for Education and Training because the school has run out of classrooms. Over the past six years enrolments increased from 295 to 365 and the Government reduced class sizes. The school cannot afford to lose any more playground space by erecting demountable classrooms and is presently using a small after-school care space as a classroom.

The Hunters Hill Public School received more than 60 kindergarten enrolments this year and is expecting more next year. This flies in the face of the Government's reasons for attempting to shut down Hunters Hill High School, a proposal resisted very strongly by colleagues and former colleagues in this House. Apparently people in Hunters Hill and local surrounds were no longer breeding and had suddenly become old, and that was why the Government had to sell that conveniently located harbour-side real estate! The reality is that both the Hunters Hill Public School and the Hunters Hill High School are now flourishing and we have reached the stage where antiquated and very small out of school hours care facilities are being used as classrooms.

I pay tribute to the parents and citizens association of the Hunters Hill Public School that has provided \$25,000 for plans for two new classrooms to assist the department. Because there is insufficient room to expand and a desire to avoid taking up playground space, the classrooms have to be constructed on top of existing buildings. Development application approval is expected from the Hunters Hill Council for construction. Despite what people say, Hunters Hill is not necessarily a totally wealthy area. There is a large selection of public housing and many people are doing it tough in my electorate, particularly under the administration of the current State Government. Over the past four years the parents and citizens association of the Hunters Hill Public School has raised \$300,000, which is effectively half the cost of the expansion project.

Any normal government would realise that sooner or later it will have to build the classrooms because it is the sensible thing to do. The cost to the Government in three years time will be at least \$600,000. Alternatively, the Government could take the opportunity presented by the hardworking community having provided half the funds, build the extra classrooms now, and save itself \$300,000. I hope the departmental head and Government members can see the sheer sense of building now for \$300,000 to avoid paying upwards of \$1.3 million in approximately five years when the Government will be forced to undertake the construction. The project has been given high priority by the department's northern Sydney region asset management unit. The local community has raised significant funds. A local community should not have to do that, but that is what the Hunters Hill community has done.

There are more and more examples across Sydney of local parents and citizens associations taking up the task of raising funds for small and incidental projects for which effectively the State Government should be

providing funds. Everybody knows there is a black hole in the budget. Unfortunately we are not sure when schools will be provided with computers by the Federal Government, as promised by the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd. I commend to the House the wonderful work of the Hunters Hill Public School and its community. I state for the record that all schools in my electorate need additional funding, but the case for the Hunters Hill Public School is even more urgent.

Mr ROB STOKES (Pittwater) [10.13 a.m.]: I support the Government Schools (Infrastructure Register) Bill 2007 because it will substantially increase the transparency and accountability of the Department of Education and Training by requiring the director general to keep a register of government schools capital assets, including all buildings and demountable classrooms. Compilation of the register will include the preparation of status reports outlining the status of capital assets of government schools and triennial school building plans for building and maintenance work. The reports will be publicly available by being tabled in Parliament and published on the department's website. There is a clear need for better management practices and basic management principles for schools. The private sector has already adopted asset management principles and practices, but not the State Government.

A key and central issue in New South Wales is the condition of our school grounds, specifically our school classrooms. I cite some examples in my electorate of Pittwater to illustrate there is a crying need for the Government to have a clear vision of schools' infrastructure requirements and for more money to be spent on capital assets for schools. Pittwater is a coastal electorate and its schools, which I am proud to represent in this place, face very real environmental risks. Barrenjoey High School has a constant problem with concrete cancer because it is situated very close to Avalon Beach. The Terrey Hills Public School is situated very close to bushland, and a demountable classroom that is more than 60 years old is so honeycombed by white ants that it has become dangerous to enter parts of the building. I have put my fingers on the walls of that building and can verify that beneath the coat of paint, there is simply nothing.

Fencing is also needed for schools that back onto bushland in my electorate, such as the Elanora Heights primary school and the Bilgola Plateau primary school. Recently the *Manly Daily* reported that at the Pittwater High School, which is an agricultural high school, animals belonging to the school had been stolen because people were able to access the field at the back of the school where there is no fence. I have reported the incident to the Minister for Education and Training and have requested that fencing be provided. I have provided the House with just a few examples, and I could continue to explain why more public investment is needed in our public schools.

Mr Geoff Corrigan: You have 12 minutes, Rob. Keep going!

Mr ROB STOKES: As the member for Camden has encouraged me to provide more examples, I refer to the Bilgola Plateau Public School because the main pathway to the school is so eroded that it has been closed off and students are forced to use the path that is adjacent to the main driveway. Obviously it is less than ideal for students to walk up a driveway to go to school. I have cited a few examples to illustrate the need for a clear and transparent register of infrastructure requirements related to capital assets of schools so that the public will be able to see where money needs to be spent and the department is able to gain a clear vision of where work needs to be undertaken.

A poignant example of the Government's failure to manage its education assets is the former Seaforth TAFE that served the Pittwater electorate for many years. Although Seaforth TAFE is located in the Manly electorate, which is farther south on the northern beaches, it is one of the closest TAFE campuses to my electorate. The building has been vacant for 10 years and has not been disposed of. It is lying dormant and represents a total waste of government and public assets. Seaforth TAFE is still perfectly intact. It reminds me of the old Parliament House building in Canberra because it is a time warp from 1997. Nothing has been removed. The carpets, curtains, tables, chairs, computers and the library are still fine, and everything that is needed for an education and training facility is still there. All we need to do is get the key, reopen it, put some TAFE teachers in there and start teaching young people, those entering the workforce, and those undertaking more training to facilitate progression of their careers.

The Teachers Federation access bans are the only barrier to the New South Wales Government entering Seaforth TAFE and ripping it apart. We should all be very thankful for that. Seaforth TAFE needs only minimum funds and the appointment of some TAFE teachers to reopen for business. I acknowledge the good work that has been done fighting for Seaforth TAFE by my colleague the member for Manly, Mike Baird, and community members Don Moller and Susie Colvin who live in my electorate and Doug Price and Jim Bannister

who live further down the beaches. The few examples I have given demonstrate the need for this bill. It is most important that the public has access to information about the state of our schools, school funding needs and where the money should be spent. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr CRAIG BAUMANN (Port Stephens) [10.20 a.m.]: The Government Schools (Infrastructure Register) Bill 2007 seeks to revise the role of the Director-General of the Department of Education and Training to include keeping an infrastructure register in relation to public schools that details the status of capital works, building plans and maintenance works and publishing this information on the Department of Education and Training website. The bill proposes good management practices and basic management principles in relation to schools. The state of school assets in New South Wales, particularly classrooms and school grounds, is a key issue. It is certainly a key issue in my electorate of Port Stephens.

Prior to the last election I was privileged to be in attendance when the then Minister for Education and Training opened school halls at Raymond Terrace, Anna Bay and Soldiers Point public schools. Irrawang Public School at Raymond Terrace is a great little school with dedicated teachers and good students. A very high number of Department of Housing families attend the school. A school must have 500 pupils for a school hall to be constructed. The enrolment at Irrawang Public School falls a few short. Although the school has a covered playground, the area floods in inclement weather and the schoolchildren have to gather in uncomfortable conditions. The Government needs to be flexible, particularly in regional areas where few alternate infrastructures, such as halls, are available in the community.

Wirreanda Public School is located in my hometown of Medowie. Recently I was alarmed to learn that school capital works projects promised by Morris Iemma's Labor Government in the lead-up to its crushing defeat in Port Stephens have not started. The Labor Government came to Port Stephens exactly 12 months ago announcing \$37 million in capital works projects for Port Stephens schools. Most of these were cynical repeat announcements of past projects. But the Government has failed to deliver on new funding commitments at Wirreanda, leaving students, parents and staff in the dark about the future of the much-needed improvements. Wirreanda Public School was promised four new classrooms, including electrical upgrades and floor covering, to replace the demountables that are currently on the site. Last year they were promised new classrooms. The school term began on 30 January this year, but students at Wirreanda are still using demountables. I am led to believe that no work has commenced on the new classrooms, and they will not be completed until the beginning of next term. As planning has not yet started, I find that hard to believe. Morris Iemma's Labor has given the Port Stephens community no reason to have any faith in its promise.

The Labor Government has mentioned the upgrades at Wirreanda Public School only once since the former Minister for Education and Training announced them 12 months ago during debate in this place following the budget. No funds were specifically earmarked for the project in the 2007-08 budget papers. The people of Port Stephens and the students and parents at Wirreanda Public School deserve an answer from the Government. This is an excellent example of why the school infrastructure register, proposed by the Leader of The Nationals, will benefit students, teachers and parents. The Government's bloated bureaucracy cannot effectively keep track of infrastructure needs. Rather than planning for the future, the Government is continually responding to crisis after crisis. Its approach to capital works in schools is no different. With foresight and investment, the pressing need for classroom construction in regional areas can be avoided. Instead, the Government seems content to allow school infrastructure to degrade, only to reach for the cheque book come election time. This is no way to administer our State and falls well short of expectations in the community.

As I said earlier, I come from the town of Medowie. When I moved there in 1985 the population was around 2,000. It is now 8,000 and with the Lower Hunter Strategy it will probably go to 20,000 in the next few years. The two government schools in Medowie are Medowie Public School and Wirreanda Public School. There is a pressing need for a high school in Medowie. In 1995 the then Minister for Education and Training came to the area to celebrate the centenary of education in Medowie. As mayor I was happy to announce the proposed Virginia Chadwick High School, although the Minister was not that happy about it at the time. Obviously nothing much has changed.

The Department of Education and Training has land earmarked for a new high school. Medowie is a fast-growing area with many young families settling there because of the low cost of land. At present, the children have to be bussed to the nearest high school, which is 12 kilometres away in Raymond Terrace. I call upon the Government to at least commence plans to construct a high school in this region. We all know how long the planning and approval processes take. The people of Medowie would feel happier if the Government at least commenced plans for this much-needed high school. In September last year the Minister for Small

Business accused the Opposition of lack of vision for bringing forward this bill. The Government lacks vision. It lacks the ability to see past its own petty squabbles and pork-barrelling and do what is right for the people of New South Wales. Effective maintenance of school infrastructure is all about looking ahead to the future. This bill will achieve that aim

Mr GREG APLIN (Albury) [10.26 a.m.]: I support the Government Schools (Infrastructure Register) Bill 2007. In the previous Parliament I supported the need for the introduction of such legislation. I will reiterate the overview of the bill so that members understand this legislation. The object of the bill is to establish a requirement for the Director-General of the Department of Education and Training to keep an infrastructure register in relation to government schools. The register is to comprise reports on the status of the capital infrastructure of government schools and three-yearly plans on building and maintenance work in those schools. School status reports and school building plans are to be prepared by the director general and published on the Department of Education and Training website.

This type of reporting is long overdue. The maintaining of an infrastructure and maintenance register for all public schools throughout the State will greatly assist school communities, who will not be faced with the pressure of applying, either to the Federal Government or the local member, for infrastructure or maintenance. At present there is no system in place whereby this work is undertaken. I regularly visit and inspect the 54 schools in my electorate. When I contacted the 40 or so public schools in my electorate, the parents and citizens associations spoke to me about the problems that are regularly visited at their meetings but receive so little attention. It was not hard to find information, of which the Government seems unaware.

I refer to a situation that was brought to my attention. In May-June 2007, I contacted the parents and citizens association at Culcairn Public School. Following consideration of the points I raised, the association wrote to me and said, "Our longstanding issue is the condition of our toilets." I was aware of this issue, as we had been discussing it for some time. The association told me that the toilets finally had been listed for works. I remind the House I am talking now about July 2007. The parents and citizens association further said in the letter that it did not know when the works would take place.

As I knew this bill was before the Parliament today, I checked with Culcairn Public School whether in the intervening period since I had written in May 2007 and their reply to me in July 2007 the works listed had finally been undertaken, as promised. I indicate that I also had raised with the Government the matter of the school toilets. It will come as no surprise to the Parliament to learn that the work has not yet been undertaken. That is another example why this register must be put in place and this reporting system is so essential. The register will elevate essential works to the top of the priority list and ensure that the work is done. What works can be more important at public schools than the toilets?

Another problem raised by Culcairn Public School Parents and Citizens Association related to a canteen it operates, only two days a week, to provide a service to the school community. That service is provided from a Department of Education and Training demountable building. The canteen provides a healthy alternative for students' lunches, and the fittings within the canteen part of the hall where it is situated are becoming tired and worn from many, many years of service. The benches, which are made of timber and laminate, are becoming worn and chipped. Obviously, that is a health hazard, particularly with the serving of food. The association pointed out that it is harder to keep the benches clean and germ free, which I am sure we would all insist is a main priority when serving foodstuffs. It also pointed out that the area does not have any cupboards, just some shelves and curtains to cover the utensils, pans and crockery.

The school is looking at raising funds by whatever means possible, through fetes, fundraising in the community and any grants that are available to refit the canteen so that the facilities can be brought up to a clean, safe and healthy standard. They need assistance in raising those funds. This is an important element in schools infrastructure reporting. The President of the Culcairn Public School Parents and Citizens Committee, Cheryl Webster, is concerned that as the demountable is a departmental building it could potentially be taken from the school at a moment's notice. This is where there needs to be certainty. A government schools infrastructure register would possibly enable the work to be undertaken a lot quicker than it is currently and give parents some certainty that the upgraded facilities would remain in the school for the indefinite future and not be subject to removal at the whim of the Government.

Let us look at another school in the Albury electorate. Lavington Public School Parents and Citizens Association advised that the assembly hall is far too small to fit in all the students. This problem has grown over a period. Lavington Public School, being the largest public school in Albury, has been facing this problem not

just in the past few months or years; the problem has been growing over a long period. Again, the infrastructure register we are discussing would certainly take account of the problem and ensure that the needs of the school are catered for, because there would have been intelligent progression in looking at enrolments over a longer period and reacting to those increasing enrolments.

The Lavington Parents and Citizens Association also pointed out that three classrooms are very cramped, and they are weatherboard buildings. With the extremes of temperature, that is a problem in the Albury electorate. The school has an inadequate electricity supply, with only a few outlets in some classrooms and some situated too high, which is an occupational health and safety issue. These sorts of problems are not being taken on board by the Government but are only too evident when one asks the parents and citizens association. There is no adequate special projects area at Lavington Public School. Art and craft lessons are held in a semi-open weather shed. Is this appropriate? Most members would argue that that is clearly not appropriate in this current day and that we should be providing adequate facilities for arts and crafts lessons within adequately covered areas indoors.

There is too little general assistant time for minor maintenance. Again, that is something that needs to be taken on board under this bill because maintenance is vital to public schools. The President of the Lavington Parents and Citizens Association, Wendy Schulz, wrote to me in June of last year about deficiencies such as the inadequate office area for executive and interview rooms and the unsealed parking area not being separated from the playground. These sorts of problems, which are encountered at schools across the State, need to be addressed. They can certainly be taken on board by the introduction of the Government Schools (Infrastructure Register) Bill.

Let us move on to Tumbarumba primary school. Towards the end of last year Tumbarumba parents and citizens wrote to me expressing concern about the infrastructure of their school, particularly the condition of the infant toilet section. They said that the toilets—I inspected them with the teachers and parents—are very old and in urgent need of an upgrade. Parents and teachers have been concerned for several years. We are not talking about months; we are talking about years of concern, years of inadequate maintenance, and years of lack of reaction from this Government to address issues that are considered vital by the teachers and parents of Tumbarumba primary school. The toilet facilities are antiquated. Students need to pull a chain to flush the toilet, and younger children have difficulty stretching to do this. The system is also rather outdated and probably would not be acceptable in the city environment. The parents and citizens wrote:

You would appreciate that we feel that these toilets pose not only a health problem, but are not environmentally friendly, using a vast amount of water.

In this modern age, when the concentration is on reducing the quantity of water flowing through the toilet system, one would think that a dual flush system would be the way to approach toilets and to upgrade the ones at Tumbarumba primary school. Water is regularly running away due to the very old plumbing. Again, that should be on the register and should be addressed as a priority. As pointed out by the parents and citizens, this problem has been regularly reported to the Department of Education and Training. They understand that there is a priority list but they simply wish that something will be done.

The school also has a problem with drainage. This goes to the heart of planning and maintenance of infrastructure. Again, I believe that if the problem were on the register it would be addressed much more quickly than is currently the case. The drainage problem relates to the newly erected covered outdoor learning area [COLA], which lies between the administrative building and the library. This COLA has been a huge bonus to the school and allows students to participate in activities outdoors in extremes of weather. Unfortunately, the piping allows the water to drain away by running down onto the cement inside the covered outdoor living area, thereby creating a major slip hazard. One can only say that that is an oversight. It should have been incorporated in the structure at the outset but it is currently a problem. If that problem were on the register not only would it be addressed immediately as a major health hazard; the problem would not have occurred in the first place because a more efficient system would have been incorporated in planning the COLA.

Towards the end of last year Albury Public School Parents and Citizens Association advised me of some outstanding capital works. The existing toilets need to be upgraded. Naturally, as they had not been upgraded since 1971 they showed their age and were dated. The President of the Albury Public School Parents and Citizens, Peter Mitchell, told me that the toilets and taps leak, which is of great concern. Again, considering the dry conditions we have been experiencing in the Albury electorate, the wastage of water is unsustainable and

should be corrected immediately. If this were reported on the register it would draw an immediate response. The school music room requires heating and the windows are in poor condition. Given the extremes of temperature to which I referred earlier, it is only a minor maintenance issue but it simply escapes the Government's notice. If it were on the register it would be attended to and ticked off.

The playground surface needs replacing. Tree roots are lifting the concrete in certain areas. The old wooden sleepers the children sit on during recess and lunchtime are becoming dangerous. If all these issues were reported they would receive attention. It is no surprise that I support all of the proposals in the bill. Corowa High School Parents and Citizens Committee has raised with me the issue of the car park adjacent to the school hall. Currently it is dirt and gravel, and turns to dust, mud and potholes, depending on the weather. Given the number of activities held in the Corowa High School hall, that is unacceptable. The President of the Parents and Citizens Committee, Jenny Pfeiffer, regards that as a major issue. The sealing of the car park is a priority.

Again, it may be listed as a capital works projects, but unless it is on a register and continually revised and checked it will not make it to the top. Ms Pfeiffer said that sealing the car park is the major priority within the school at present. She wrote to me last year. Of course, there has been no word from anybody as to whether it will ever be attended to. Albury High School has a new performing arts centre. Fortunately, it came through as a result of some of the Investing in our Schools moneys from the Federal Government last year. I was able to attend the opening of the performing arts centre and to see that great structure. The Albury High School Parents and Citizens Association wrote to me in June last year stating:

What we would like to achieve before our next summer—

this has not yet happened—

is an *adequate evaporative cooling system* for the main space in the Centre.

Colleen Johnson, the secretary of the parents and citizens association, wrote to me in June 2007 stating:

Without such cooling, you can imagine the sapping effect our summer heat will have on student performances.

Something I am glad to say is achieving some priority in the Albury area is building a security fence around the school. Albury High School is one of the few remaining schools without such a fence and the school is subject to wanton vandalism. Building a fence needs to be made a priority to avoid school windows being smashed, including in the performing arts centre, which has suffered such vandalism. The Hume Public School canteen has been commenced following my writing to the Minister. The Parliamentary Secretary acknowledged the work undertaken by the parents and citizens association in fundraising and advised me that the canteen would be completed. That is one of the few cases of work actually being undertaken. Usually the response is, "Your representation has been received and will receive attention in due course". But in that case the canteen was completed. Unfortunately, however, the preschool at Hume Public School requires refurbishment. These and other issues that come to our attention regularly from public schools in the Albury electorate and throughout the State emphasise the need for the introduction of the infrastructure register. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr GREG PIPER (Lake Macquarie) [10.41 a.m.]: I express in-principle support for the Government Schools (Infrastructure Register) Bill 2007. I note that the bill seeks to create a register covering the status of capital infrastructure and three-yearly reports on building and maintenance. Within Lake Macquarie there are 18 public schools and three high schools spread from Kulnura in the south through to Boolaroo and Biddabah in the north, and they serve varying wide communities and have varying immediate major capital works and maintenance needs. One thing they generally share is frustration with the delivery of maintenance.

Parents and parents and citizens associations do a great job in supporting teachers and school principals in pursuing improvements. Often their frustrations would be reduced if they had greater confidence their problems and needs would eventually be resolved. Many of the needs have been discussed. I am sure they are shared by the communities represented by members from both sides of the House, including the Independents. They involve leaking schoolrooms, damp libraries, fencing, drainage, toilet problems, car parks, bus bays and the infrastructure enabling children to go to school safely and return just as safely. These are all very important things.

I do not wish to criticise the Government: I recognise that the Government has increased the total education budget this financial year by around 5 per cent. There will be 24 new major capital works, about

\$300 million in minor capital works for special needs students—and of course they are extremely important—and over the next four years around \$1 billion will be spent on school and TAFE maintenance. The proposed register will benefit school communities, the community at large and the Government in the longer term. The cost of establishing the register, estimated at about \$500,000, represents about 0.05 per cent of the \$1 billion budget. The establishment cost will be a one-off and the ongoing maintenance of the register should not have much budget impact.

Clearly, this is an issue of basic governance. The Government should support the recommendations in the Vinson report—a report from a person who enjoys good standing with the Government and with the community in general because of the work he has done over the years. The bill is sensible and it will save the Government expenditure in the longer term. It will certainly reduce the frustration about the delivery of capital works and maintenance for schools.

Mr ANDREW STONER (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [10.45 a.m.], in reply: I thank the many members who contributed to debate on the Government Schools (Infrastructure Register) Bill 2007, specifically the members for Tweed, Murray-Darling, Hawkesbury, Wagga Wagga, Cronulla, Wakehurst, Lismore, Davidson, Bega, South Coast, Goulburn, Hornsby, Orange, Manly, Mount Druitt, Wollondilly, Wyong, Marrickville, Monaro, Strathfield, Fairfield, Macquarie Fields, Pittwater, Lane Cove, Port Stephens, Albury and Lake Macquarie. It is obvious from that long list of contributors to this debate that this is an issue of concern to all members. It is a shame that all members did not step up to the plate to raise issues concerning the needs of local government schools.

The Opposition put forward this private member's bill because we believe in a very strong public education system. One of the issues affecting the competitiveness of public education in what is now a competitive environment is the state of the infrastructure. We put forward this constructive bill to address one of the major problems currently being experienced in public education. Establishment of an infrastructure register was a key recommendation in the report of the inquiry into public education chaired by Professor Tony Vinson when he handed down the report a few years ago and its establishment is probably even more necessary now.

I recently conducted a public education tour of country regions, holding a number of public forums to which the school communities—teachers, parents, students, employers, who all have a stake in public education—were invited to come along to talk about public education issues. I also visited—and I thank the Minister for his agreement to this—a number of schools and TAFE facilities. They included Gunnedah High School, Kingscliff High School, Buninyong Public School near Dubbo and Richmond River High School at Lismore. In my travels I observed Dubbo Public School, which was adjacent to one of the public forums.

Teachers and parents expressed concerns about the state of the facilities in those schools. At Gunnedah High School I witnessed home economics and manual arts rooms—I am sure there are more recent terms for those subjects but I am showing my age a little—in which the equipment was, I estimate, 30 to 40 years old. High school students, who are learning subjects leading to their possible choice of vocation, are using equipment that they will not find in industry. There were stoves that I have not seen around since probably the sixties or seventies and lathes and other equipment in the manual arts room that I am sure would not meet contemporary occupational health and safety standards.

I do not denigrate Gunnedah High School—it is a good school with good teachers who achieve outstanding results—but it could do a lot better if the Government maintained and upgraded its school infrastructure. The member for Tweed, who is in the Chamber, and I met to visit Kingscliff High School, a terrific school. Many outstanding champions have attended that school. I am a surfer and the Tweed is the centre of excellence for surfing. The current world women's champion, Stephanie Gilmore—still a young woman in her rookie years—

Ms Linda Burney: Nineteen.

Mr ANDREW STONER: She is 19 years old. She won the world championship. Chelsea Gorges comes from the Tweed. Nick Fanning attended Kingscliff High School and other world champions in surfing attended that school. There success is a result of the beautiful environment of the Tweed and the teachers who have instilled the philosophy that students ought to shoot for the stars. And some have achieved. I hark back to the reason for this bill. The standard of infrastructure at Kingscliff leaves a lot to be desired. The school had no covered area in which students could meet. The parents and citizens of the school raised the funds to install sails, at enormous expense, because the Department of Education and Training does not believe in sails and will

not fund them. Because of the lack of management data on school facilities the department does not have priorities.

With the inclement weather on the coast, the sails have not provided a solution: the member for Tweed can confirm that it has rained most of the year. Kingscliff is a large school that offers many subjects. It was terrific to see the young ladies undertaking a ballet class. The class was held in a tin shed with no airconditioning in the middle of summer. Fibreglass batts had been put in the roof to ease the heat but I felt sorry for the students enduring those terrible conditions. There is basically a cesspit in the middle of the school, which again is an unresolved issue. It is a stormwater run-off area for the surrounding area of Kingscliff, which is a hilly area on a headland. The council is responsible for the large stormwater pipe that ends in the middle of the school grounds and floods the area. It looks like a cesspit because rubbish and oil are washed into it.

The department has fenced the area but the fence has corroded and collapsed and it is a disgusting mess. It is not on the department's radar to fix it. An environmental learning area could be established in that coastal wetland environment. There are birds et cetera and the students could grow native plants. This unremediated area is ugly and dangerous—partly because the department does not have the necessary data on which to ascertain priorities for upgrading public schools. I visited Buninyong Public School, which has strong support from the indigenous and non-indigenous communities. I give the Government a tick because no infrastructure issues were raised in relation to that school. That school was recently built—I dare say construction having been commenced during the term of the previous Coalition Government.

Ms Linda Burney: I do not think so.

Mr ANDREW STONER: It is true. The Minister for Fair Trading should visit country areas and look at the commencement date of construction of any new schools. This Government has not made a lot of investment in country schools. Richmond River High School is a beautiful old school located in an area that regularly floods. The school is built on stilts—except for some learning facilities in the lower area that were condemned by the department after the last series floods. The department would not fix them so it bolted the doors of the classrooms and they are left to rot with mildew and mud, and the smell is totally unacceptable. They will rot away. The classrooms in a heritage building have large windows designed for the past that no longer open and shut properly. Instead of fixing the windows, the department nailed them shut. However, it gets very hot in Lismore in summer and the conditions in the classrooms are appalling with no airconditioning.

The staff and parents and citizens have sought to upgrade the railings around the high verandas, with bitumen below. It is an occupational health and safety issue, but the department could only provide money for fencing around the school instead of what is basically a fence around verandas. The number one priority of the school will not be funded by the department, but a fence that will act as a sieve in the next flood will be provided. It will catch all the logs and debris that come down the hill until the fence is knocked over. That is unbelievable, something out of *Yes Minister*. The problems are caused by a lack of professionalism in school infrastructure management, the very item identified by Professor Tony Vinson. Dubbo Public School has a demountable that is covered by a tarpaulin tied to a fence just off Wingewarra Street, a main street in Dubbo, in full view of the public. The tarpaulin was installed in about Easter last year. Water from the series of storms that came through Dubbo in December and January got under the tarpaulin and short circuited the electrical system in that demountable.

The teachers asked the department to fix the roof and the power but the department said that it would either fix the roof, leaving the building with no power so it cannot be used a classroom, or it would fix the power, leaving the electrical system to be short circuited by the next storm. That is nonsense. Again, it comes back to the Government's lack of professionalism in managing information about infrastructure upgrade priorities. It is a debacle that schools have not yet been repaired as a result of the series of storms that swept through western Sydney earlier this year. The tardiness in addressing that matter has led to even more damage to school facilities. Children have to endure Third World conditions at public schools in the Blacktown area. That is an outrage.

I mentioned that public education is facing many challenges. One of the main issues relates to the state of the infrastructure. There is no doubt that more and more parents are choosing to pay to enrol their children in the non-government system. As a former student of government schools, I think that is sad and it should be addressed. From 1997 to 2007 there has been a 3 per cent decline in government school enrolments compared with a 19 per cent increase in enrolments in non-government schools. I know that in recent days Minister Della Bosca has been crowing about increased enrolments in government schools. That is not true; there was a slight

increase in enrolments in high schools and a decline in primary schools. The truth is that over 10 years there has been a 3 per cent decline in enrolments in government schools compared with a 19 per cent increase in non-government schools. That situation must be addressed.

One of the major planks of Mr Rudd's policy leading up to last year's Federal election was the so-called education revolution. He has obviously identified education as an extremely important issue. Anyone who argued against that point would not be worthy of public office. However, the only manifestation of the so-called revolution has been the purchase of computers for high school students. How does that translate in a practical sense? Because of the decrepit state of many government schools in New South Wales those students will not be able to power up their computers as the electrical systems are not up to the task. Again, this issue could be addressed by having a proper handle on the state of infrastructure in government schools.

Mr Rudd's other major policy decision about education has affected the one thing that enabled local government schools to address their own infrastructure shortcomings that have not been properly addressed by this State Government. I refer to the \$1.2 billion Investing in Schools Program. The former Coalition Federal Government recognised those shortcomings. Every parents and citizens group, and every teacher and principal I speak to says that it was a fantastic program and that they got their covered outdoor learning area, airconditioning or upgrades to playground equipment because of it. Mr Rudd has pulled the plug on that \$1.2 billion program. Will this State Government pick up the slack? Based on its track record over the past 13 years, methinks not.

This bill is simply about implementing a good, basic management principle; that is, keeping track of the infrastructure assets of a very large organisation—in this case, the Department of Education and Training. This is an important issue in the competitive environment in which public education finds itself. Some of the parents I speak to say that the appearance of the school is an important factor in their decision to enrol their child at a non-government school. When one drives past a non-government school with its beautiful gates and hedges and modern-looking buildings and then past some of our government schools that have been left to crumble one can understand those sentiments. There should be a lot more to those decisions. The teaching staff are the top indicator in educational results, and the staff in government schools are generally outstanding. Parents should scratch the surface a little more, but appearance is an important factor. I mentioned the decline in government school enrolments, and the Government must do more to address that issue. Supporting this bill would be a start.

Mr Geoff Corrigan: Is that your final point?

Mr ANDREW STONER: Does the member not want to debate public education? I note that the member for Camden, who has interjected, has not bothered to contribute to this debate. I do not know why he has not gone in to bat for the public schools in his electorate. He tells me to wind it up because he does not want any further debate on the issue. That is an insult to the schools in his electorate. Perhaps he will think twice about not contributing and then interjecting with a smart alec comment because he does not want to hear the truth about public education. Shame on him!

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! The Leader of The Nationals will be heard in silence.

Mr ANDREW STONER: In concluding, I note that the Government will oppose this bill, and it has provided various nonsensical reasons for doing so. The member for Wollondilly, who is in the Chamber, has a good knowledge of public education, having been a principal for a long time.

Mr Michael Daley: Better than you!

Mr ANDREW STONER: You might be surprised, old mate. The member for Wollondilly supported the need for this bill, but then went on to say some bizarre things, such as, "It's not a bad idea and infrastructure needs to be fixed up. But I will not support it. Leave our schools alone!" If the member thinks our schools should be left alone and be allowed to continue to crumble he has the wrong end of the pineapple. The member for Mount Druitt said that the infrastructure register would be used to rank schools. That suggestion is quite rank because that is absolute nonsense. It is not about ranking schools but about identifying priority needs for maintenance and upgrade. The proposal came from an independent party, Professor Tony Vinson. That reason is a nonsense as well.

The other reason the Government offered for not supporting the establishment of the infrastructure register was the enormous cost involved. Again, that is nonsense. Off-the-shelf packages for the maintenance

and tracking of assets and infrastructure can be purchased very cheaply. If the Government were to establish such a register it would achieve huge long-term savings as a result of avoiding double handling, departmental staff changing and not knowing what went on in the past and having to find paper files, and school communities getting different stories every time they contact the department. Infrastructure assets would be managed in a professional and contemporary way, just as occurs in other large organisations. I look forward to Government members who are serious about improving public education again making it the first choice for parents when enrolling their children. This is one issue that members can use to make heroes of themselves in their electorates. They can cross the floor and support a bill that has independent support and the support of every school community in New South Wales.

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

The House divided.

Ayes, 38

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

Noes, 44

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

Pair

Mr Hazzard

Mr Koperberg

Question resolved in the negative.

Motion negatived.

Bill not agreed to in principle.

**PARLIAMENTARY ELECTORATES AND ELECTIONS AMENDMENT (TRUTH IN
ADVERTISING) BILL 2007**

Agreement in Principle

Debate resumed from 25 October 2007.

Mr MIKE BAIRD (Manly) [11.17 a.m.]: In resuming my speech on the Parliamentary Electorates and Elections Amendment (Truth in Advertising) Bill 2007 I continue in the same vein in which I was proceeding when the debate was adjourned. The member for Ballina has raised a very valid point with this bill, but events that have taken place since it was last debated suggest that it is almost ludicrous that we are debating the principle of truth in political advertising. To illustrate the growing public distrust in politics I point to Roy Morgan's survey, Image of Professions, which this year found that only 16 per cent of people over 14 years believe members of Parliament have high standards of ethics and honesty. Soon after last year's State election a Labor member was quoted in the *Sydney Morning Herald* as saying that the New South Wales Government's strategy was to "bombard the other guy and distract everyone from your own abysmal record." The people of New South Wales deserve better than this.

The Opposition has been accused of not having a plan, but we are picking up an idea that is working. That idea, as identified by the member for Ballina, is working in South Australia. Section 113 of the South Australian Electoral Act 1985 makes it an offence to authorise, cause or permit inaccurate or misleading political advertising. If the advertiser of such material is found guilty, he is fined and the Electoral Commissioner can request the advertisement to be withdrawn from publication or retracted. The South Australian legislation works. It has been tested before the Full Bench of the Supreme Court of South Australia, where it was found not to impede the implied right of freedom of speech and was therefore constitutionally valid.

Last year the South Australian Liberal Party was instructed by the Electoral Commissioner to change a television advertisement. It took out a reference to South Australia having the worst hospital waiting list and changed it to the worst emergency times. This is not a political issue. It should be above politics; it should be bipartisan. I am happy to point out that in this instance a Liberal Party advertisement needed to be changed. Under the system proposed by the member for Ballina, the commissioner can do two things: he or she can request a withdrawal and/or a retraction and, if the retraction is refused, can impose a fine. It is quite a simple legislative concept.

False advertising in business is clearly unacceptable. In 2001 funds manager AXA ran an advertisement that featured financial commentator Ross Greenwood, whom I know—he is a very good guy but has a very average golf swing. He spoke in the advertisement about "Heading upwards in an elevator", which implied that AXA's past returns were a predictor of future returns. The Australian Securities and Investments Commission investigated the company and found that the advertisement was misleading. So the advertisement was withdrawn and money was returned to people who had invested on the basis of the advertisement. The process is transparent. The aim of advertising is to inform the public of product, policy and process. In this context AXA acknowledged that and withdrew the advertisement in line with its responsibilities.

In 2004 Optus agreed to withdraw its advertisements that offered broadband deals for \$39.95 after Telstra claimed they were inaccurate and misleading. The Federal Court informed Optus that future advertisements for the deal must state clearly that the rate is available only to customers who switch their home phone service to Optus. That is constructive input to correct information that could be construed as misleading. Food advertising to children is another area of concern and, as the shadow Minister for Youth Affairs, it is very important to me. Each year advocacy group the Parents Jury shames companies for deceptive food advertising.

Last year thousands of parents criticised an advertisement for Karicare Gold Toddler Formula as being the most misleading because it promoted the idea that its product was better than cow's milk, despite the fact that it is derived from cow's milk and has added sugar. If we have a corporate principle of truth in advertising and a principle of providing truthful information to the public about political policies why are we debating the concept of false advertising? During last year's State election campaign a \$1.4 million advertisement was run that featured Jack Thompson promoting the Government's \$1 billion desalination project. Members may remember that advertisement and the image of Jack Thompson with his boots on. He claimed that the desalination plant would be fully powered by green energy and would not create any extra greenhouse gases. The Leader of The Nationals complained to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission because the

Government's own project report states, "The desalination plant and infrastructure will be powered by electricity sourced from the grid".

What is wrong with an advertisement being put to an independent regulator to ascertain whether or not it is truthful? One cannot argue against that proposition. Members of the public should not have to rely on the spin of political parties. I do not point to any particular party. Members who do not support the principle of truthfulness should be ashamed. I refer also to the advertisements with respect to the member for Vacluse. There was an intense campaign attacking his business career and the fact that he represented a wealthy area. He was also accused of plotting to sack nurses. In truth, the Coalition had no plan to sack nurses. If that had been the case, clear and concise advertisements could have been run to that effect. But if it was not the case, to do so was deceptive and misleading. We certainly had no plan to do that. Our plan at that point was to return services to the front line—more nurses, police and teachers.

I cannot understand why any member would not support this bill and wish every advertisement to be truthful. The member for Ballina should be commended for introducing this bill. We need to restore people's faith in the political process. Over the past few weeks many people have begun to lose faith in all members of Parliament. This is a chance for all members to stand for something, and for the Iemma Government to do what is right. Just because a good idea comes from one's opponent does not mean it should be dismissed. This is a chance for the Iemma Government to head in the right direction.

If the Government does not support the bill, it will almost have to redefine the meaning of "winning". I had the opportunity to do this recently when my daughter Kate competed in a cross-country race, which she had a chance of winning. Like any parent, I was pumped up and excited. In training she had come very close to the girl who had won the race for the past three years. She headed off, full of hope, and ran past a group of parents, including me. She was in the leading pack when her good friend fell and tumbled off to the side of the track. At that point Kate stopped, went back and helped her friend, while the pack continued on. Kate did not win the race—but did she? As a father and parent, I have never been prouder than I was of Kate that day.

The issue for members to decide is how they want to win. If members win on the basis of promoting misleading or deceptive advertising, they are letting down themselves, their communities and the Parliament. They are shamefully dishonouring the faith of the people who elect them to this place. I commend the bill to the House. If members do not support the bill, they will be showing complete and utter contempt for those who elected them to this place.

Mr GEOFF CORRIGAN (Camden) [11.26 a.m.]: It is a pleasure to speak on the Parliamentary Electorates and Elections Amendment (Truth in Advertising) Bill 2007. Like the member for Manly I have never circulated any false advertising material, and neither, I am sure, has any Government member. Therefore, the Government opposes the bill. I understand the intention of the bill, which makes it an offence for a person to authorise, cause or permit the publication of an electoral advertisement that contains a statement purporting to be a statement of fact that is inaccurate and misleading to a material extent. The offence is to apply to State and local government elections. The bill provides for the Electoral Commission to be able to request, and the Supreme Court to be able to order on the application of the Electoral Commission, that a person who commits the offence withdraw the offending advertisement from further publication and/or publish a retraction.

The broader regulation of the content of election advertising is a vexed issue in Australia. It has been the subject of a number of parliamentary inquiries and considerable public debate. A common criticism is that regulatory efforts to encourage truth in political advertising might be desirable but are simply unworkable in practice. In 1984 a Commonwealth law introduced by the Australian Democrats that established such a scheme was in place for just eight months. The law was repealed by the Labor Government prior to the Commonwealth election at the end of 1984 following a recommendation to that effect by the Joint Select Committee on Electoral Reform.

The Government considers that the proposed scheme raises a number of concerns in that it may compromise the neutrality of the Electoral Commissioner, who may become the subject of criticism for allegedly acting partially. The bill proposes to prohibit only statements of fact that are inaccurate and misleading to a material extent. It does not prevent statements of opinion from being false and misleading. The Government recognises that it would be almost impossible, and highly undesirable, to regulate statements of opinion. The prohibition on false and misleading statements of fact can therefore be easily circumvented. Candidates and parties would have considerable latitude to rephrase a statement of fact as a statement about their belief or opinion. The bill is therefore likely to be of little or no effect.

Further, there is some doubt as to whether such a legislative scheme would be constitutional, given the implied constitutional guarantee of freedom of political communication. Although I acknowledge that members opposite referred to the South Australian Supreme Court, the issue has not been determined authoritatively by the High Court. The Government considers that the scope in forcing the proposed offence may be limited because decisions by the Electoral Commissioner or the Supreme Court in relation to political advertisements may not be made in time to be useful. It is worth noting that one of the amendments contains a defence where the person could not reasonably be expected to have known that the statement to which the prosecution relates was inaccurate or misleading.

We need only look at the last Federal election in the seat of Lindsay. Karen Chijoff and Jackie Kelly were apparently unaware of what their husbands were doing. I know that some people have found this hard to believe, but I accept that they did not know. That is one of the real problems when we are given no defence. The defence is that the person did not know. For example, a Ballina or Manly supporter might put out a document that the party knew nothing about; it could happen. There is a word for these sheets they put out, but I will not use that language in the Parliament. These documents go out without the party's knowledge or authorisation, and therefore the party could be prosecuted or taken to court under the proposed amendment. For all these reasons the Government opposes the bill.

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

INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY

Debate resumed from 28 February 2008.

Mr GEOFF CORRIGAN (Camden) [11.30 a.m.]: When debate on this motion was adjourned I was speaking about the amendments to section 94 and the implications of them. As I pointed out on that occasion, the section 94 reforms for growth centres councils—which the Government proposes to take over via infrastructure for both the north-west and south-west growth sectors—are different from the changes being made to the section 94 levies for all councils. The Government does not propose to take over the section 94 levies. The levies will still be in the hands of councils, but they will have to be used for the defined purposes. The Government, in an effort to reduce building costs and the cost of land, changed what some of the levies can be used for. There is some evidence that the housing market is picking up. I spoke about that on the last occasion when I referred to my discussion in a hotel with a concrete truck driver. I also note that the Housing Industry Authority reported substantial growth in building approvals in November 2007, which were up by 66.7 per cent, and projected steady growth in housing starts in New South Wales of around 8 per cent over 2008-09.

[Interruption]

The member can argue with the Housing Industry Authority; the member does not have to talk to me about it. I note that the second part of the motion of the member for Hawkesbury notes the struggle of small business operators such as bricklayers, concretors, electricians and other associated tradesmen throughout Western Sydney directly affected by a depleted housing market. I can speak with some authority on this: two of my sons are carpenters. Indeed, last weekend my youngest son, James, had to work overtime, such is the demand for his services at the moment. My other son, who lives in the Illawarra area, also has plenty of work. Because they are excellent tradesmen, they get plenty of work. That is what happens with good builders: they also get plenty of work. One of the advantages for tradespeople is that their skills are portable. I agree with the member for Hawkesbury that some tradespeople are now moving interstate.

I know a team of bricklayers from Narellan who are now working in Western Australia, taking advantage of the construction and housing boom in that State. They go over there for three months at a time, then come back home for a month. They are playing football over there; they are all young and they are enjoying themselves. But they are looking forward, when the housing cycle in New South Wales starts to pick up, to returning to New South Wales, back to their homes in Camden and Narellan, and doing work there rather than going interstate. There is nothing wrong with having portable skills. Information technology specialists move around the world. Tradespeople are the same: they have those skills, they can move around the country, and they come back and settle down where they want to. Mostly they will come back to where they were born, but sometimes they move around the country—so what, that's life.

Recently the Government has proposed a raft of improvements to the State's planning systems, and those changes have been on public exhibition. I note that most councils have taken the opportunity to put submissions to the Government in relation to those proposed changes. The changes are designed to make the system simpler and fairer for working families, cut red tape, reduce delays and reduce holding costs, which will also provide a significant boost to the housing and construction sector. So there is a looming challenge for members opposite. As I asked the member for Hawkesbury on the last occasion: What are the Opposition's policies on planning reform or on infrastructure delivery for new release areas for that matter? Perhaps in his reply the member for Hawkesbury can tell us what those policies are so that we have an opportunity to criticise them—rather than the member criticising the Government but offering no alternative solutions.

[Interruption]

The member for Hawkesbury has developed more policies since he has been off the Opposition front bench than he did when he was on the front bench. Will the Opposition continue to neglect policy development to take cheap shots at the Government or will Opposition members listen to the community and their constituents, many of whom struggle to get their development applications through council for the simplest renovations? These are the measures the Minister for Planning has adopted to enable people who want to do a simple renovation to get it done, and get it done simply and easily. Speaking from experience with my local council, it does an excellent job. It took five days to approve a pergola. That it is how it should be with every council but, unfortunately, it is not. In some areas, noticeably those with harbour views and the more affluent areas, people argue about seemingly every little application. I encourage the Opposition to work with the Government in a constructive fashion to improve the State's planning system for ordinary families. We look forward to hearing the Opposition's arguments.

Mr MICHAEL RICHARDSON (Castle Hill) [11.35 a.m.]: I am pleased to support the important motion moved by the member for Hawkesbury regarding developer levies. I do so because of what is happening not just in my area in north-western Sydney but also across the State. There has been a significant downturn in the housing market, with new home starts down to 29,000 a year when an extra 40,000 are needed. Last year new home starts were at their second lowest on record. We need to ask why that is the case. New home starts are now only half the number of four years ago. Rental vacancies are now down to 1 per cent, which significantly pushes up rental costs. Despite this situation, the new home market remains depressed.

In The Hills area house prices are flat, according to a front-page article in *The Hills News* of last week under the heading "Lots of sales but there's little growth". If we look at some of those prices, we find that last year in Castle Hill there was just a 2 per cent growth in house prices, Carlingford house prices were up by 3 per cent, Baulkham Hills house prices were up by just 2 per cent, Bella Vista house prices dropped by 5 per cent, Cherrybrook house prices were up 2 per cent, Dural house prices were down by 5 per cent, Glenwood house prices were up just 2 per cent and Kellyville growth was absolutely static. That is consistent with what has been happening in The Hills area. Indeed, the law of supply and demand suggests that that should not be happening. If there is a shortage of housing, prices should be rising. Yet, while the new house prices are going up, existing house prices are either stagnant or falling. Why is it so? Because of the take from the Government: the high level of developer levies.

The Urban Development Institute of Australia has identified this issue as being a major problem. In a press release dated 26 April 2006 the institute said that in Victoria the combined levy is below \$30,000 per lot. This includes local government levies and State Government levies. What is the levy in New South Wales? According to the Urban Development Institute of Australia, the total levy could be \$115,000—and that is before Sydney Water infrastructure charges of up to \$20,000 per lot are added to the bill. So we are talking about close to \$140,000 in New South Wales compared with less than \$30,000 in Victoria. And we wonder why people are fleeing Sydney! It is all down to what the Government is doing. The fact is that the developers simply cannot produce a block of land at a reasonable price. Where is the infrastructure levy going? In 1998 we were promised a railway line in The Hills to be delivered by 2010.

Mr Brad Hazzard: How many times have you been promised that?

Mr MICHAEL RICHARDSON: It has been reannounced four times round and the first sleeper has still not been laid. Homebuyers in Kellyville, Beaumont Hills and Rouse Hill are paying for something they are not getting. The member for Camden said that the Government was going to drop the Government infrastructure charges from \$33,000 to \$22,000 per lot. We are talking about \$10,000 off a potential \$135,000 bill. It is a drop in the ocean in comparison to what is needed.

[Interruption]

Would the member for Drummoyne like to put on the record what she just said?

Ms Angela D'Amore: Are you saying that is not significant?

Mr MICHAEL RICHARDSON: An amount of \$10,000 out of \$135,000 is not significant when one considers that in Victoria the charge is less than \$30,000 per lot. The Government wants to get the \$10,000 back by making a naked grab for section 94 funds. The Government is going to specify what local infrastructure councils can charge developers, including local roads, local bus infrastructure, parks, drainage, local community infrastructure and land for other community infrastructure. The Government claims these changes will save an average of \$25,000 per lot, but the money has to come from somewhere. Those facilities are needed. The member for Camden spoke about the fact that we did not want Rolls-Royce facilities, we want Holden Calais facilities instead. Frankly, a Trabant or a Lada is about all we are going to get if the Minister ever gets his hands on section 94 funds. Would you trust the Minister for Planning to look after local needs and local communities? He would be too busy using the money to cut his mate's costs—all at arm's length of course. [*Time expired.*]

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER (Terrigal) [11.40 p.m.]: I commend the member for Hawkesbury for his timely motion to deal with what is becoming a serious crisis in New South Wales. The member for Hawkesbury has shown a strong interest in ensuring that the people in his electorate and, indeed, across the State have the opportunity of affordable housing. The member for Hawkesbury is to be commended for moving his motion. The starting point with affordable housing relates to interest rates. Last Monday the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, acknowledged—and I give him due credit for it—that the latest rise in interest rates is his responsibility and all future interest rate rises are his responsibility. As the member for Hawkesbury said, "Well said, Kevin!" It is Kevin's responsibility. It is up to him to make sure that the economy of this country is so well run that we do not need further interest rate rises, that the inflationary pressures can be contained by Government monetary control and that his Government brings the upward pressure continuing on interest rates to a halt.

At a State level the facts are very simple. The Labor Government has been in power since 1995 and has allowed a situation to develop where Sydney faces an ongoing housing crisis, the likes of which we have not seen since the end of the Second World War. The driving forces behind the housing crisis are not complex but actually fairly simple. The first is the short supply of land. The State Government constantly issues plans and constantly makes announcements about the release of land but it does not happen—the land is not released.

[Interruption]

We just heard the lovely, sweet voice of the member for Drummoyne. The member for Drummoyne always has a contribution to make and we are interested in her contribution on Canada Bay Council and developer contributions. It just so happens that there are developer contributions to the Canada Bay Council and the member for Drummoyne is right there in the middle of it. If she wants to interject further we will have more talk about those contributions. There is the strangulated issue of land, which the State Government fails to release in a service way. Sydney Water's infrastructure charges are not only enormous, as was described by the member for Castle Hill, but the time delay in carrying out the necessary head works is extraordinary. It is those two factors, interest rates and the supply of land, that make the infrastructure grossly delayed.

The third point relates to the charges imposed as infrastructure levies by the New South Wales Government. The estimation of \$115,000 quoted by the member for Castle Hill, and \$100,000 quoted by various other economists analysing the situation simply makes new land unaffordable. No-one is going to be able to make a profit from the release of land and no-one is going to be able to afford to buy land when the starting cost is a \$100,000 contribution to the New South Wales State Government. Where is the money going? The issue of section 94 contributions, which has been only partially resolved by the Minister for Planning, was about the Minister and the Treasurer—who stands behind him—getting up to \$1 billion held by the councils in section 94 contributions.

It was the ultimate hollow log. The State Government saw a hollow log worth \$1 billion and wanted it. There was never any plan as to how it was to be expended on infrastructure or as to how it was to be used to provide necessary services anywhere in New South Wales. The money was just to go into the consolidated revenue of the New South Wales Government. There has never been a plan for the infrastructure finance received produced by the Minister for Planning. At this level, we now have every single cost driver as the responsibility of either the Federal or State Labor governments and the people are suffering. Who is leaving

Sydney and the State by the thousands? The good hard-working families who can no longer buy a home under Labor!

Mr BRAD HAZZARD (Wakehurst) [11.45 p.m.]: I agree with the member for Terrigal, who indicated that this is a timely motion moved by the member for Hawkesbury. At the moment people are suffering badly as a result of a convergence of factors due to the failings of the Federal and State Labor governments.

Mr Michael Daley: What about interest rates?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: What about interest rates? The member obviously did not listen to his Prime Minister this week when he finally acknowledged the truth. Kevin Rudd has finally acknowledged that he takes responsibility, which is actually different from Government members in this place. For 13 years it has not taken responsibility for anything.

Mr Michael Daley: Nor did John Howard with 11 interest rate rises in a row.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The noisy cacophony of ignorance! The issue that the member for Hawkesbury raises is, indeed, a problem. In New South Wales we have enormous pressure on the housing market. There is an urgent need for housing. The media is full of the fact that people are feeling the pressures of interest rates but they are also feeling the lack of availability of housing. The problem is, as the member for Terrigal has said, the simplistic response we receive from the New South Wales Labor Government, "We are making land available. There is land all over the place." But the land is not practically available and that is the issue. If one looks at the boulevard of broken dreams assessment of the relative costs of house and land packages across Australia one sees that it is very interesting. I turn the page 14 of the document. Two years ago the broad hectare house and land costs in north-west Sydney were \$579,240. Of that—and the member for Drummoyne should listen carefully and intently to this—

Ms Angela D'Amore: I am listening.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: But she has to learn as well. She has to take it on and learn.

Ms Angela D'Amore: Do not be patronising.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Well, she has not shown much capacity to learn at the moment otherwise she would not be sitting over there with the Labor Party. She would be over here fighting for her constituents. Of the \$579,240, the Government charges were \$198,670, or 34.8 per cent. The majority of those funds are State Labor Government charges. In south-west Sydney the broad house and land cost was \$544,115 and the Government costs were \$166,481. The member for Drummoyne is very quiet now, is she not? Yes, she is. Why does she not speak up on behalf of her constituents and say that it is time that the Minister for Planning and the Premier did something to bring these charges down?

In the south-west sector that represents 30.6 per cent in government charges. Again, the majority of that amount is State Labor charges. Adelaide is a lovely part of the world. In Adelaide the government charges on a broad hectare house and land package average 21.3 per cent. I remind the few Government members who are in the Chamber for this debate that government charges represent 30.8 per cent and 30.6 per cent in the north-west and south-west sectors of Sydney respectively and 21.3 per cent in Adelaide. Last year AV Jennings told its shareholders that it did not intend to do much work in New South Wales because of the pressures placed on it by the State Labor Government.

Mr Ray Williams: Why would they bother?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: That is exactly what the company said in its annual report. It will target less aggressively taxed States. It will not target New South Wales, Morris Iemma's State. It has gone to Queensland and Victoria. On the Gold Coast a house and land package costs \$391,775. What taxes are included in those costs? I remind the House that the charges total \$196,670 for the north-west sector of New South Wales. On the Gold Coast they are \$84,000—a fraction of the charges imposed in this State—representing 21.5 per cent.

The New South Wales Government is hitting people so hard with levies and charges that it is hindering any serious opportunity in the north-west or south-west sectors—or anywhere else in New South Wales while the Minister for Planning or Labor are in charge—to bring land and house packages to the market. Recently the

Government allegedly hit local government by removing councils' ability to impose certain levies. However, it did not provide any alternate funding to local government. So the Government is kicking local government as it goes through its task. The Government is utterly useless in bringing house and land packages to the market.

Mr PHILLIP COSTA (Wollondilly) [11.50 a.m.]: To put my contribution into perspective, first, I have been in local government for 20 years; second, I have worked on the Sydney Metropolitan Plan; third, I was the president of Macarthur Regional Organisation of Councils [MACROC] and represented the south-west sector; and, fourth, I have intimate knowledge of the issues being debated today. Only this week I met with the fine people of Campbelltown City Council, who represent an area directly impacted by section 94 and the levies in the south-west sector. Members must not lose sight of the reason the levies have been imposed. I will give an example. Approximately 100,000 houses are to be developed in the south-west sector. Most of those residents, particularly the early ones, will use the Campbelltown main line to get to work. That will require additional infrastructure to move those people from that sector across to the main line. That expense has to be covered and the levies will help towards those costs.

Mr Ray Williams: From our area.

Mr PHILLIP COSTA: From the money collected in the south-west sector. We must ensure that the infrastructure is in place. Responsible governments plan ahead. The Sydney Metropolitan Plan is the first real plan in any period of government that looks 30 years ahead and works towards putting infrastructure in place before communities settle in the area. The levies have had an impact. The Minister has observed that impact and action has been taken. Development is occurring in my own backyard. Some great developments are occurring in the south-west area. More greenfield sites need to be released. There are plans to do so and those sites are coming online.

Despite all the doom and gloom from the Opposition, the world is not coming to an end. Many factors impact upon the release of land. One, of course, is the rollout of infrastructure. People move to areas that have infrastructure in place. The south-west sector has grown rapidly as a result of the M5, particularly the M5 East, which has connected our community to the city with quicker travelling times. As a result, we have seen unprecedented development in the past decade. The infrastructure levy is necessary. Earlier this week a productive meeting was held with Campbelltown City Council. We will work with the council in relation to section 94 and how the levies are applied. The Government wants to work in partnership with local councils.

In that regard, Camden and Campbelltown councils have been working with the Government to ensure that future residents of the south-west sector will have the infrastructure they need and deserve when they settle in as members of the local community. I do not understand why the member for Hawkesbury has problems with the action that was taken by the State Government. We are moving very quickly to resolving the land rollout. We will reach the target. There are some issues about supply. I believe the Government is adequately dealing with those issues. As I said, the levies have been addressed. The implication of costs has more to do with the capacity of the industry to roll out as quickly as we need it; it is not just about the levies.

For example, the State infrastructure levies for a development in the Wilton area were about \$55,000. Those blocks are on the market this year. That is a great development that is going ahead nicely. A company is looking at developing a few hundred houses at Warragamba. Developments are occurring in Appin. They will all be hit with levies. But that has not stopped development going ahead, particularly at Wilton. I do not support the motion moved by the member for Hawkesbury. The Government has taken appropriate action and is heading in the right direction. We will come to a sensible solution in the end.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS (Hawkesbury) [11.54 a.m.], in reply: I thank the member for Castle Hill, the member for Terrigal, the member for Wakehurst, who is the shadow Minister for Planning, the member for Camden and the member for Wollondilly for their contributions to the debate. I firmly believe there is no greater or more important issue to the majority of people in this State than the affordability of housing for New South Wales families. Not only are families who are seeking new accommodation in favourable areas such as The Hills or Hawkesbury areas concerned, but also parents of children who are faced with the distinct possibility that the great Australian dream of home ownership in New South Wales is further away from being achievable than at any time in the history of this country are concerned.

That is why I moved my motion. I believe the greatest impediment to housing affordability at this point in time is the infrastructure levy imposed by the Minister for Planning on new blocks of land in the north-west and south-west sectors of Sydney. As I said when I moved my motion, the infrastructure levy has been reduced

but not removed. The levy should and must be removed to allow a sustainable and orderly amount of new housing land to be brought onto the market. Today the Government reannounced the south-west rail line. Councils in my area have asked repeatedly where the money from these new infrastructure levies will be spent. So far, they have failed to get an answer. I asked this question of the Minister for Planning, but he failed to answer. People in the north-west of Sydney firmly believe that the money raised from the infrastructure levy imposed on developments in the north-west of Sydney will be spent on infrastructure in the south-west of Sydney.

That point has been highlighted today by the reannouncement of the south-west rail line. The Minister for Transport has failed to give a definite answer on the timing of the north-west rail line or exactly what this rail line will encompass. We are starting to get the big picture. It now seems to be the case that we will not see a north-west rail line and our money will be spent on the south-west rail line. People who can afford to move into the north-west sector will be most upset when they discover that not only will there not be a rail line to Rouse Hill but that their money will be spent on the south-west rail line. Not only is the imposition of an infrastructure levy unfair, but the distribution of the funding is completely absurd. Unlike section 94 contributions, which must be spent in the area where the money was raised, it seems that money raised via the infrastructure levy in the north-west of Sydney will be spent in another area of Sydney.

The member for Camden referred to carpenters, electricians and plumbers having to move around the country to access work. He said, "That's life". Struggling people such as employees of the concreting company in Camden he spoke about that had to go to Perth to get a job would be really pleased to hear about their local member saying, "That's tough. That's life"! That is the sort of contempt we are treated with by the Government. The Government is broke and cannot afford to build basic infrastructure such as the northwest rail line and provide necessary health and education services for the newly released areas. But that is no excuse for further burdening new home buyers with another tax on their new home, as the Minister for Planning has done. The sole purpose of the infrastructure levy is to claw thousands of dollars of cash out of hardworking families in the north and south-west of Sydney who are already suffering through further interest rate rises.

The State Government has squandered billions of dollars of ratepayers' money through its appalling economic management. The Minister for Planning and the Treasurer are now inflicting further unnecessary pain upon people wishing to purchase a new home. The great Australian dream of owning a first home is beyond many people because failed Ministers have completely mismanaged our economy. The planning rollout for new housing has been deplorable. Because of the State Government's failure the people of New South Wales are not getting a fair go. They are not getting a fair go because the infrastructure levy is bringing housing development to a halt, and the longer it takes to bring new land for housing onto the market the higher land prices become.

The economic mismanagement of the Government, combined with abysmal planning and insufficient rollout of land for new housing, is the reason housing is now unaffordable. If new land had been brought onto the market sooner demand would not have outstripped supply, which has happened for nearly a decade. People are leaving this State in droves because they cannot realise their dream of affording a home. They have also lost faith in this deplorable Government, which has imposed a burdensome infrastructure levy.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 37

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

Noes, 46

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

Pair

Mr Piccoli

Mr Koperberg

Question resolved in the negative.**Motion negatived.****TAMWORTH REGION EDUCATION FACILITIES****Mr PETER DRAPER** (Tamworth) [12.10 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) notes the community consultation part of the Vision 20/20 consultancy process looking at future education delivery in Tamworth has concluded, with a recommendation to build a new school for special purposes on a greenfield site;
- (2) notes that the consultants will return to Tamworth on 25 and 26 May 2007 to present their final recommendations to school principals, the broader community and the reference panel; and
- (3) calls on the Government to include funds to construct a new Bullimbal school in the next State budget.

That consultancy process examined future education delivery in Tamworth and concluded last year with the project aiming to identify what public education services needed to be provided to meet the educational requirements of our community to 2020. This project was inclusive, it was designed to be participatory and it was based on engagement with all stakeholders. The resultant report is based on this consultative process, which included a large number of stakeholder consultations, world cafés and deliberative forums. The message that came through strongly was that Tamworth continues to be a regional success story, attracting more people and developing a robust economy based on agriculture, commerce and equine and country music activities. Education provision must reflect this situation.

It became clear very early in the process that schools in Tamworth will play a leading role in developing the young adults of the future and ensuring positive learning outcomes for all students, whether or not they proceed to tertiary education. Preparation for school and transition from primary to high school were identified as very important issues to address through the project. Ensuring that all students are school ready and that issues with learning difficulties or other barriers to full participation are identified and addressed prior to children starting school are paramount in ensuring good outcomes for all students. It is crucial that early and effective intervention is available for families that need additional support with parenting, health and community services. This is essential to ensure good educational outcomes for students.

The excellent quality and experience of learning attained by students of Bullimbal School for Special Purposes and Parry School are well recognised, and that was highlighted throughout the process. A clear need for these schools to expand and have their facilities upgraded was a prominent issue, with teachers and parents

identifying a need to develop the schools as centres of best practice. The state of the school buildings and facilities is of great concern to the community, as is the capacity of both schools to cater for the growing demand for their services. Both have highly passionate and very talented teachers who deliver wonderful outcomes despite the limitations imposed by the physical nature of the schools. It is incumbent upon the Government to work with the education community of Tamworth to provide facilities that will allow it to progress as a centre of education excellence. The Government should work towards providing continuing improvement in the outcomes and experiences of education for all students in the region who have learning, behavioural or emotional difficulties.

Bullimbal School is located in north Tamworth, near the Tamworth Rural Referral Hospital. This school provides a caring, supportive and stimulating environment for children with moderate to high physical and intellectual disabilities. All staff in this outstanding school—who are very passionately led by Mal Donald—are dedicated and expert in the special needs of each student. They are supported by an active and supportive parent group. My grandmother, Mary Riley, was the first principal of the school back in the 1950s when it was established on another site and was known as the Tamworth Handicapped Children's School. She remained in that role for some 27 years, and still is a passionate advocate for giving people with disabilities the best opportunities. I take this opportunity to wish her a very happy ninetieth birthday on 16 March.

As a child who often visited my grandparents, I spent many happy hours with my grandmother at the school. I learnt that every child has the right to the best possible education, no matter what disabilities they may have. Sadly, however, the buildings have not substantially changed since my grandmother's days there. The Tamworth 2020 Learning Project identified several issues that must be resolved to allow Bullimbal school to meet its full potential. Despite having a significant waiting list to access its services, the school site allows no scope to expand the current level of enrolments, which is leased by the Department of Education and Training from a neighbouring respite care service, the Challenge Foundation. Lions Club volunteers built the school in the 1950s and, despite a number of minor renovations, the school is cramped, with little outdoor play area and limited adaptability within the small classrooms. Occupational health and safety for both staff and students are also a major concern. Currently 33 students are enrolled at the school—its maximum capacity.

As I highlighted previously, the Bullimbal school staff are dedicated, but they are working under quite difficult conditions. The school community works extremely closely with people in other government departments who assist students with day-to-day difficulties they may encounter, and many of these people have contributed significantly to the school. During 2006 Mrs Darien Homing, who is a speech pathologist from the Department of Aging, Disability and Home Care, was given the director general's award for her contribution to public education. Mrs Homing has assisted students at Bullimbal for 20 years. She was nominated by the school for the wonderful contribution she has made to the students, and also to the many other students with disabilities at the city's many fine public schools. This is a terrific example of cooperation between the Department of Education and Training and other government agencies. It also highlights the efforts of Bullimbal staff to deliver the best for their pupils.

In all, the school is served by the equivalent of 13.326 staff, some working on a part-time basis. All the teaching staff at Bullimbal hold either a degree or diploma in education and or a masters in special education. The school is structured to provide five classes of between six and eight students, with the classes organised around the ages of the students and their support needs. The staff are totally committed to delivering the best outcomes for students. Those completing year 12 are assisted in organising their applications for post-school funding with the Department of Aging, Disability and Home Care. In 2006 the students completing year 12 were successful in gaining places with Challenge Incorporated in Tamworth. Students at Bullimbal are involved in a wide range of activities to broaden their life experiences. In 2006 they participated in the biannual Creative Arts in Public Education Regional Spectacular. Three students in wheelchairs were involved in the stage two massed dance performance, assisted by four students from Tamworth Public School. Eight senior students were involved in choreographing their own routine to complement the stage five massed dance.

All the Bullimbal students have also been involved in a number of video projects, and sport is also an important ingredient in providing broad educational experiences. The school holds an annual sports carnival, utilising the facilities of the Riding for Disabled grounds in Tamworth. Students participate in a variety of events. Bullimbal pupils are also involved in other activities and excursions. They provide the students with an opportunity to develop and expand their skills and to reinforce the concepts that they develop in class programs. The hard work and dedication of school staff in implementing these programs has resulted in students achieving great results towards outcomes as stated in their individual learning plans. At the end of the last school year two students were awarded their School Certificate in Life Skills and two students were awarded their Higher School

Certificate in Life Skills. Those results are a great credit to the students, their teachers and their parents, who combine to provide a rewarding educational experience.

Since I first raised the issue of a need to rebuild Bullimbal School for Special Purposes the New South Wales State Government has committed to this project in the 2007-08 budget, indicating a completion date of 2010. Strangely, during the recent Federal election campaign the Australian Government also committed the same level of funding. It is now critical that this funding is delivered and that work on providing suitable facilities for this key component of regional education delivery is expedited. Facilities at Bullimbal are markedly outdated and it is widely acknowledged by parents, teachers and staff that they do not meet the needs of students. It is of great concern that waiting lists are unable to be reduced due to size constraints at the present facility. Mainstream schools cannot support high-needs students. Additionally, the students need a large playground area to expend their energy as well as a sensory playground and room to encourage them to respond and engage. I can see many benefits in their being co-located. The proposal, which I am very supportive of, is to rebuild Bullimbal on the site of Tamworth High School.

One of Bullimbal's greatest strengths is its independence from other schools. It has a separate funding structure and does not compete with mainstream classes. I support community calls to have Bullimbal developed further as a centre of best practice. It is a vital place providing specialist support and training to Tamworth and the wider region, but we need to get construction started as quickly as possible. Four schools—Bullimbal, Parry, Tamworth High School and Tamworth West Public School—have had major issues with their premises. I fully support the longstanding position of Tamworth West that it deserves to be assured the school will remain open, and I will continue to lobby the Government to make sure that happens.

Similarly, I also recognise the need for a major investment in infrastructure at Tamworth High School and I will continue campaigning, but Bullimbal is the main priority at the moment. As I have said before, action is urgently needed to redevelop the school. It cannot take on additional students and there is a crying need for that to happen. In summary, we are all aware of the dedication of staff and parents, the success of the programs and outstanding achievements by the students. Both State and Federal authorities have committed to building a new school and I believe that should occur as quickly as possible so that this vital education service can meet its full potential.

Mr STEVE WHAN (Monaro—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.20 p.m.]: Although the Government supports most of the motion, I move:

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

- (3) notes that the Government has allocated funds to construct a new Bullimbal school.

That updates the motion. As the member for Tamworth would acknowledge, this motion was formulated quite a long time ago and the process of bringing the motion on for debate takes some time. In that time there has been quite a lot of progress, which is to the credit of the Tamworth community and the member for Tamworth. I congratulate him on the work he has done on the issue. The people of Tamworth have been engaged in an exciting project examining the best way to deliver public education in their city. A discussion paper prepared by the Department of Education and Training, Planning for the Future of Public Education in Tamworth, dealt with the role of each school within the area and encouraged people to think about a community of schools rather than individual facilities. Since then the department has been engaged in a broad community consultation process led by external facilitators and it has become known as Tamworth Learning 2020. It is pleasing to be able to inform the House that a number of recommendations arising from the consultation process are underway. The member for Tamworth acknowledged those in his speech.

The Government has already committed to a new facility for students at the Bullimbal School for Specific Purposes. Planning for the construction of the new facility on land adjacent to Tamworth High School has commenced and members of the Bullimbal community are being included in the planning process. I acknowledge the comment by the member for Tamworth that he wants to see that proceed as quickly as possible. All members have that attitude when they have particularly important projects in their electorates. The Tamworth Learning 2020 project has provided an invaluable opportunity for the Tamworth community to shape the future of educational delivery in one of our very important regional centres. The Government commends the local member for his involvement in this project and recognises his family's longstanding association with the Bullimbal school as well.

The member for Tamworth highlighted that Tamworth is a healthy, growing regional community. Recently the Rural and Regional Taskforce visited Armidale and talked to a number of people. The member for

Tamworth contributed as well. Rural areas have a number of interesting approaches to education. I commend the community for the way it has looked at the delivery of educational facilities. Education should be a whole-of-community issue and recognised as more than just a formal education compact. It is all about a broader range of people being involved, making connections into the community and with the community as well as with industry and a range of other players.

One of the interesting things we heard about at the Rural and Regional Taskforce consultations was the Gwydir learning model—another interesting model for community and council involvement with education providers to meet local needs. I hope we can share such positive models with the rest of New South Wales to overcome education access issues. I am pleased that since the motion was formulated the Government has provided resources to allow construction of the new facility. There is always more to do but a lot of good work is being done. I highlight the Government's upgrading of science laboratories in rural areas. A new school in the area I represent has brand-new science laboratories. They are a terrific advance on the laboratories we had when I was in high school and when we spent most of our time playing with the Bunsen burners and hoping that the teacher did not see us.

Mr Alan Ashton: Weren't they the great days?

Mr STEVE WHAN: The good old days—and those little asbestos mats. The new laboratories are terrific. Teachers can move the kids from the desks with the Bunsen burners while they teach. There are terrific innovations, some simple things—

Mr Barry Collier: Did you make rotten egg gas?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I cannot quite remember that. I do not want to go any further, on the grounds that I might incriminate myself. A terrific innovation in the new facility was the simple idea of having a mirror over the desk the teacher is using. It is angled so the kids can view what the teacher is doing with the experiment. A number of science laboratories will be upgraded during this term of government as part of our investment in an area that is very important for skills development. We have probably all heard that one of the areas of skill shortages in teaching is maths and science, and there is an overall shortage in Australia of science skills. We need to invest in science facilities. Food technology rooms are being upgraded so that they are more like commercial kitchens. In many areas represented by rural members the hospitality industry is a growing and important part of our employment base. Trade schools can also improve country skills and education development. I recently had the pleasure of visiting with the Premier in Queanbeyan one of the first trade schools to be completed.

Mr Peter Draper: There's one in Tamworth as well.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Again, that is a credit to the work of the member for Tamworth. For a long time The Nationals took the seat for granted until an Independent member was elected who stood up for the electorate and made sure its voice was heard. The performance of the member for Tamworth was endorsed at the last election. Of course, Country Labor representatives would be a step forward—but I will not become too political. Trade schools are addressing specific skill shortages. With those trade schools operating, the kids will be able to start their vocational education and finish year 12 as well.

The one at Queanbeyan High School will be focusing on metalwork, which is an area of real shortage in our region. I am sure that will be a great boost. There are separate welding bays, areas for heavy machinery and industrial standard machinery. Those are the sorts of things that are happening around regional New South Wales. The motion is a terrific opportunity for the member for Tamworth to highlight the importance of the Vision 20/20 work being undertaken in Tamworth. It is an exciting step forward for public education in that city. I commend the member for Tamworth for moving the motion. The Government has pleasure in supporting it, as amended.

Mr ALAN ASHTON (East Hills) [12.30 p.m.]: I, too, make the point that the member for Tamworth moved this motion in May last year—which is not that long ago in terms of parliamentary sittings dates and times. I congratulate him on bringing it forward. The original motion notes the community consultation process, puts forward a case for improvements in schools in the Tamworth electorate—particularly Bullimbal—and calls on the Government to increase funding in the next budget. The amendment moved by the Parliamentary Secretary acknowledges the fact that funding has been provided, that work is underway—as the member for Tamworth stated—and that things are looking very good.

I make the point that moving a positive motion and taking appropriate action, rather than merely complaining all the time, achieves results. It is important to involve the community in the consultation process, get the entire electorate onside and involve inspectors, departmental officers and the school community. It is not always possible to meet all deadlines because most members—for example, the member for Tamworth, the member for Miranda, the member for Menai, who is in the chair, and I—want similar things. Rather than competition, I prefer the community model. I acknowledged in conversation with the former Minister for Education and Training, the Hon. Carmel Tebbutt, that we probably cannot afford to have in a single electorate several schools that specialise in the same areas. Increasingly, we will need to consider particular community interests in electorates and regions—this approach will be more appropriate in country areas—and allow particular schools to specialise in different areas in order to cater for everyone. I congratulate the member for Tamworth on his success and his great representation of the electorate of Tamworth.

Mr ANDREW STONER (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [12.33 p.m.]: As shadow Minister for Education and Training, I think it is worthwhile to support the motion moved by the member for Tamworth. I was recently in Tamworth and conducted a public education forum, which unfortunately the member could not attend. However, there was wide representation from the Tamworth school community, including teachers, parents and people from government and non-government schools. The future delivery of public education in Tamworth is important to the community. Longstanding issues need to be resolved, particularly the fate of Tamworth South Public School. There is a proposal to construct a new school because the existing facilities have probably reached their use-by date. I have toured the Tamworth South Public School, and it is in need of a major upgrade. It is situated in a busy, commercial area of Tamworth, which is not an ideal environment for large numbers of young students and parents.

A unique opportunity has been presented to the Government to get it right and devise an integrated, holistic plan for the development and future of public education in Tamworth. During the public education forum teachers expressed a concern that those who consulted on Vision 20/20 did not listen to the education community and that many opportunities for a fresh start with respect to the location and delivery of school services in the Tamworth district had been lost. Teachers had no confidence at all in the process. I note also that, in seeking to progress the matter, the member for Tamworth has called on the Government to include funds to construct a new school at Bullimbal. I have spoken with the member for Barwon, who was a former teacher and principal, and he has impressed upon me that this is an urgent project. The issue has been ongoing for 65 years and it is still not resolved.

This morning I argued that school infrastructure needed urgent attention because parents must choose whether to enrol their children in government or non-government schools. From observation of local school facilities and feedback I have received from parents, this is a factor in Tamworth. If public education is to be the first choice of parents in Tamworth—as it should be of parents throughout New South Wales—infrastructure must be addressed urgently by way of an integrated strategic plan for education in that district. I note the Government's amendment, which effectively waters down the motion. But, as the member for Tamworth has accepted it, the Opposition will not quibble on that point. We support the motion in the interests of public education not only in Tamworth but in all country regions.

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES (Barwon) [12.37 p.m.]: I support the motion. Historically, I was born and bred in Tamworth.

Mr Steve Whan: Historically? Was it a long time ago?

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES: Yes, it was. I attended four schools, both primary and secondary, and later in my career I returned to teach in a local combined secondary school. I keep in touch with a large number of people in the teaching profession in my hometown of Tamworth.

Mr Peter Draper: Name them.

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES: There is Anne Jacobs, the former principal of Tamworth West Public School, who lobbied us a couple of weeks ago. Tamworth is a regional centre and it is important to support our regional centres. Education is one issue that continues to raise its head. As the member for Tamworth knows, in the past 20 or 30 years—I am not sure how long he has been in the area—there has been excellent development, particularly in the non-government schools sector. It is excellent that the Government is getting on the front foot and considering a review of government schooling in general.

I know Bullimbal well, as I grew up in Tamworth and am involved with the local teaching fraternity. The school has been there for more than 60 years, and was known for quite some time as the Tamworth special school. The school must be relocated to a new site. That is critical not only for the people of Tamworth but also for those who are making life choices about whether to stay in, or move to, our country towns. I support all those in the Tamworth community who are working to develop a new greenfields site for the new Bullimbal school. The staff—many of whom have worked at the school for years—make an outstanding contribution to the education of children with special needs and to the town as a whole. Anything that will move the project forward is a plus.

The member for Monaro referred to some of the initiatives regarding education, particularly special education. The Gwydir learning initiative, which grew out of the Wialda community, has now been taken up as a best practice model by the State Government, which I certainly support. However, the initiative struggled to gain recognition in the early stages. In many cases, schools, particularly a school at Wialda, worked closely with the community with regard to vocational education and training. It was a partnership between the community and the schools.

One of the things the schools did—which the bureaucracy struggled with at the time—was to allow input by, and consultation and direct engagement with, the community regarding the operation of the schools and how they took on young people in what was a shared responsibility for their vocational education and training during their secondary school years. The project has reached the point where many of the schools involved, including the school at Wialda, are now training centres for larger towns in the area, such as Moree. So the Gwydir learning initiative is a good model and a good partnership.

As the member for Tamworth said, in many cases it is legitimate that special education schools remain independent and self-governing to a large extent. The push to integrate some students with special needs into mainstream education, particularly in rural areas where we do not have a lot of choice, is a matter of concern. I meet regularly with teachers and principals—indeed, I will meet with the Teachers Federation when I return to my electorate next week—to discuss the integration of special education into mainstream schooling and how this does not necessarily meet the needs of students and their families. The issue needs to be looked at.

There is a case for special education schools such as Bullimbal to be established in many of our rural communities, particularly the larger centres. We are seeing families relocate out of mainstream centres such as Moree to larger centres, and even to coastal and metropolitan cities, in order to obtain services for children with disabilities and special needs. In short, much needs to be done with regard to special education and students with difficulties who have special needs. I commend the Tamworth community for pushing the issue forward, and I urge the State Government to implement this project as soon as possible.

Mr PETER DRAPER (Tamworth) [12.42 p.m.], in reply: I thank the members representing the electorates of Monaro, East Hills, Oxley and Barwon for their contributions to this important debate. It is wonderful to see united support for something as important as the redevelopment of Bullimbal Public School. The school has offered major opportunities for students with disabilities, both intellectual and physical, for many years. As I said earlier, I am extremely proud that my grandmother was the founding principal and had 27 wonderful years assisting young people in our local area.

Bullimbal is an example of what one can do when one works with the local community. By working with the community we were able to deliver Gunnedah a brand-new hall for which the residents had fought for decades without success. Having attended the Gunnedah South hall on a number of occasions now, I know how valuable the hall is for the Gunnedah community and how much the broader community appreciates it when they hold functions, presentations and other such events at that school.

I thought it was a shame that the shadow Minister for Education and Leader of The Nationals sought to politicise the motion, because it is non-political; it is something that deserves support from both sides of the House. I have to say that his education foray into Tamworth has not left him with the information and education that he was seeking, because he was quite critical of Tamworth South. Tamworth South is a wonderful school. It is in very good condition. It is very capably and passionately led by Chris Shaw, who continues to assure me that he is the luckiest principal in the country because he gets to teach at that wonderful school every day. I think the Leader of The Nationals may have meant to refer to Tamworth West school. Tamworth West has been under a cloud for many years. I have been fighting to make sure that that school remains open, and I will continue to do so.

Bullimbal school has been a standout example of what can be accomplished in education for people with a disability. Some of its students have experiences that would be the envy of many students in other schools. In 2006 a senior class went on a week-long excursion to Darling Harbour. The students got to plan the excursion; they got to go on computers and have a look at where they were going. The excursion provided them with a whole range of activities across their key learning areas of science, English, mathematics, technology and applied science, human society and environment, and creative arts. The students gained a great deal. It is wonderful that in this day and age we can offer our young people opportunities such as that. But that would not happen without the passionate and dedicated staff that Mal Donald leads at Bullimbal school.

I will not take up the five minutes allocated to me simply for the sake of it. I thank the Government for moving its amendment, which does not water down the motion but simply reflects reality. The reality is that the Government has now provided the necessary funding for the redevelopment of Bullimbal school and we are now in the consultative process. I simply urge the Government to ensure that we continue down this positive track, that the money is forthcoming, and that we see construction commence as soon as possible.

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

Amendment agreed to.

Motion as amended agreed to.

IRRIGATOR WATER CHARGES

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS (Murray-Darling) [12.46 p.m.]: I move:

That this House calls on the Government to waive fixed water charges for all New South Wales irrigators.

Since I gave notice of this motion, which was about a year ago, some things have changed. I acknowledge that during the past 12 months, which has been a difficult time for irrigators on the Murray River particularly, through the work of the previous Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Water, Phil Koperberg—I recognise his support for irrigators in that area, particularly those on high security allocations—and through a very fine balancing act in this critical situation with storages in the Hume at their lowest level for many years, we have been able to secure an allocation of water that has managed not only to maintain permanent plantings but to produce a crop, which is a great outcome. Despite all the pressure and stress that people have been under, we have managed to come out the other end with a good result for those high security irrigators.

The problem we face in the southern Riverina, where we have general security irrigators, is a little different. With the indulgence of the House I would like to speak about the history of the southern Riverina irrigation area, in which there are currently about 1,600 irrigators. About 80 years ago the Government—which should receive credit for its actions—produced a great example of regional development. It saw the opportunity to secure water and it realised that there was a benefit in using that water for irrigation. The Government then conducted surveys of the area and produced one of the best-channelled irrigation systems in the world.

As a consequence, the broadacre farms were reduced to small allotments and those small allotments started to receive irrigation. With that irrigation the allotments were able to grow a number of crops in a small, concentrated area to produce a good income for the irrigators. But obviously the worst drought in 100 years has affected irrigators in the southern Riverina. As a consequence the irrigators have, for the first time, received zero water allocations. Their water allocations have been suspended, even though the allocations carried over from their accounts. Southern Riverina irrigators have experienced difficult times indeed. Unless there is some major inflow into the Hume Weir, irrigators face potentially another year of zero allocations. That places them in a very poor position.

The annual bill for fixed water charges—the basic charges imposed by the State Government and Murray Irrigation Limited—on an average irrigated block is about \$15,000. Farmers are relying on Federal Government support to live and to remain on their farms, so all members will recognise that a bill of that size is debilitating in the current circumstances. The fixed water charge has two components: the State Government charge and the Murray Irrigation Limited charge. What is now Murray Irrigation Limited was part of the State's public water infrastructure until it was decided to privatise the irrigation companies. Members should be aware that irrigation companies are not-for-profit organisations. They supply water, maintain channels and support the irrigation activities of the area. Murray Irrigation Limited was separated from the State Government through privatisation, and the efficiencies derived were of great benefit to the Government.

By the time the farmers receive their next fixed water charges they will have accumulated accounts of about \$45,000, but they have received nothing for that money. Farmers have obviously been borrowing more and more. Last year the Government offered to allow farmers to delay payment of the charges. In theory that sounded pretty good but in reality it just delayed the inevitable. When we come out of the drought farmers will lose their interest assistance and will face huge debts that they will try to maintain through their farming operations. It is a serious situation. We must focus on the plight of irrigators. If this were to happen in a capital city it would be on the front page of newspapers every day and people would be searching for a solution. The irrigators in the southern Riverina have a voice through an organisation, and I hope through me, but the Government needs to consider removing the charges and putting money back into Murray Irrigation Limited.

As far as I know, Murray Irrigation has used all its reserves to date. The staff are working four days a week—and their hours may have been reduced even further. In 2007 180 landholders paid no charges to Murray Irrigation. So it will obviously become more and more difficult for Murray Irrigation to continue to run the organisation and maintain the economy that supports it. The spin-off for communities that rely on the income generated by Murray Irrigation is a very important consideration. We are seeing a whole-of-area deterioration. The economy is falling apart not only because irrigators cannot produce crops and generate income for the area but because an organisation that employs a substantial number of people cannot sustain employment and get the support it needs in order to maintain channels, improve conditions and get things in better shape for when we come out of the drought.

The average farming family will have fixed water charges of \$15,000. Most of them will also receive a shire rates bill of \$2,800 and a rural lands protection board bill of \$500. Families will perhaps make enough to live on, but it will be subsistence at best. They have to maintain some sort of lifestyle, but the bills keep coming in and they are watching their borrowings increase year by year. I call on the Minister to examine closely the plight of the irrigators affected and try to understand their difficulties. I am sure that funding of about \$5.4 million would alleviate most of the problems in the southern Riverina.

Mr BARRY COLLIER (Miranda—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.55 p.m.]: The Government opposes the motion. In recent days the Minister has talked to irrigators about many issues, including the matters raised by the member for Murray-Darling. I understand the Minister will continue to consult widely with water users about this and other issues. In September 2006 the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal [IPART] set water charges for the four-year period 2006 to 2010. For the majority of water consumption, water charges are based on a two-part tariff comprising a fixed or access entitlement component and a usage component.

The setting of charges is an independent and transparent process, removed from Government. In making its determination, IPART took into consideration submissions from all stakeholders and the public, including those of the water users themselves. IPART determined that the share of water management costs attributable to water users was 66 per cent, with the remainder attributable to the Government. IPART set a transitional price path towards recovering these costs from water users over the four-year period of the determination. This means that the actual share of costs recovered from water users averages around 50 per cent over the four-year period, with government funding the balance of these services.

The revenue collected from water charges is used to fund essential activities carried out by both State Water and the Department of Water and Energy in managing the State's water resources on behalf of water users and the community. I mention at the outset that charges for bulk water services are based largely on a two-part tariff of fixed entitlement and actual usage. I am advised that in 2006-07 the fixed charges of about 79 per cent of the State's water customers were less than \$1,000. In a drought, when water allocations are low or nil, revenue from usage charges is significantly reduced. This places an even greater reliance on the revenue raised from fixed charges to fund the increased requirement for essential activities, such as compliance, licensing administration and water monitoring, during this time.

Those opposite will argue that we waived general security fixed charges in the Lachlan, so we should do the same for the rest of the State. In 2006-07 the Lachlan Valley was the only major regulated valley in the State to have experienced zero general security water allocations in three of the previous five years. While other regulated river valleys in the basin have had periods of zero allocations in the previous two years, they have had access to water in years prior to 2006-07. I am advised that currently all regulated valleys except the Lachlan and Murray have full high-security allocations and some general security water. If other valleys were to face similar exceptional circumstances the Government would consider what measures may be appropriate.

This Government is not unsympathetic to the plight of the rural sector. When the drought was at its height in October 2006, the Iemma Government announced the extension of a range of existing drought

assistance measures and new measures to assist farming communities manage the drought. These measures included emergency household support, mental health services, transport subsidies and assistance for small businesses. To date, the Government has committed more than \$370 million to drought assistance measures. Make no mistake, in late 2006 the Government and the State were facing an unprecedented situation caused by the vagaries of nature, not by political decision making. The Murray River system was suffering from the lowest recorded falls in its history and there was a severe shortage of water. In December 2006 only 34 gigalitres were collected from inflows—the lowest monthly figure on record. The real threat was that some rural communities would run out of water.

The Government acted quickly to implement emergency measures to secure town water supplies in the Murray and Murrumbidgee areas, as well as water for stock and domestic purposes. The Government had to make tough decisions to reduce allocations in the Murrumbidgee and Murray valleys, suspend water sharing plans and reduce water for the environment. An emergency response team made up of more than 50 Department of Primary Industries personnel was put in place to help farmers and irrigators. In January 2007 the Government announced a new \$20 million assistance package for struggling southern irrigators to alleviate some of the pain from the suspended water allocations and to tide them over until the rains finally came. Of course, many in the south-west of the State are still waiting for rain. The Government has been proactive in assisting the rural community throughout the drought period. We made the tough decisions during the time of an election campaign while the policy-bereft Opposition did not hesitate to take cheap shots at the farmers' expense.

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES (Barwon) [1.00 p.m.]: I support the motion moved by the member for Murray-Darling. When the member first brought this motion before the House almost 12 months ago the State was experiencing unprecedented times, particularly many of the towns that the member and I represent. The member for Murray-Darling and I represent two of the 93 electorates in the State, which represents 61 per cent of the State. We cover an area ranging from the Victorian, South Australian and Queensland borders and all places in between. Most of the irrigation areas in New South Wales are in our electorates. We are also subject to the vagaries of our Queensland counterparts. As the previous speaker said, 2006 were unprecedented times. I acknowledge the Government's work in helping towns to secure water supplies. Four towns in my electorate ran out of water. Water had to be carted to places like Goodooga and Byrock, and the department gave reasonably clear and concise directions to irrigators and town communities. The fact that our towns were able to get through that plight augurs well for the commitment and work of interdepartmental bureaucracies.

Barwon consists of the four major regulated rivers—the McIntyre, the Upper Barwon or where the Darling starts, the Gwydir where I live and the Namoi in the Macquarie. Most of our irrigation schemes in the north are slightly different from those in the south because we do not have irrigation schemes. Our farmers or irrigators deal directly with State Water. I am talking mainly about regulated water, which is water coming out of dams. State Water has a responsibility to deliver water to the offtake point. Most of the channels and storages within those valleys I have just mentioned are run by the farming entities themselves. So the farmer or irrigator is responsible for the offtake once the water reaches the river. The previous speaker was correct when he said that the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal is the responsible mechanism for pricing. There are fixed water charges and shared water charges. Yesterday I joined a delegation of the Gwydir Valley irrigators in a meeting with the Minister. I believe the Minister will be open to ongoing discussions with the industry. As we speak, the New South Wales irrigators are meeting with their State counterparts to form a national irrigators association. Governments at all levels will be able to better deal with a consolidated body.

The State has had good rain, particularly in the last three or four months, and dams are starting to fill. However, the water allocations are minimal, less than 10 per cent in all the valleys in my electorate, bar the McIntyre Valley. The Minister and the Government have been told that it is not a case that the irrigators cannot or will not pay. In times of plenty, when there is plenty of water and high security can be delivered, irrigators can pay more because they can project and will have a higher income. That is how the agricultural sector works. In unprecedented times, as we have just had, things get tough because farmers, particularly irrigators, do not have cash flow and they have to try to reduce fixed costs. The Government has been asked to spread the costs over a period, to review the costs imposed by IPART and to see if we can work out a sensible solution.

The northern part of the State, the area that I represent, is different to the south, which has a lot of small irrigators. In the north fewer irrigators cover a larger area and the farmers tend to be major producers of cotton and grain. The average fixed water charge is much higher. In some cases, corporate family farms are paying up to \$200,000 in fixed charges. That is the difference when four to five families are located on the farms. In places like Moree where I live, the shire has lost nearly 2,000 people out of a population of 15,000. Warren, Burke and Wee Waa are not dissimilar. We have to keep those communities viable and keep the families located in the

area. If farmers are not viable, ultimately the community pays more for food. It is a value chain that we all recognise. I urge the Government to support the motion and keep an ongoing discussion.

Mrs DAWN FARDELL (Dubbo) [1.05 p.m.]: I support the motion moved by the member for Murray-Darling and congratulate the member on bringing this issue of water charges for irrigators before the House. Although this motion was brought before the House about 12 months ago, it is still pertinent today. Other rural members and I have made many representations in this House on behalf of our constituents, in particular, in my electorate of Dubbo the Lachlan Valley and Narromine irrigators. Apart from water charges for irrigators, there has been a great deal of confusion about local government separation of water to real estate and related charges. To pay for their irrigator licences, which entitled them to a substantial allocation of water, people have had to go to the bank to renegotiate the mortgage on their property. Many people would consider that a heavy burden.

For many irrigators, challenging their assessment and the charges, and the lack of support from the Government was too much. Many irrigators, particularly in Narromine, had to purchase additional allocations. State Water assessed its allocations without averaging it fairly over previous years. In some cases, they now have to purchase back the water that they were originally entitled to under their licence. So they are further out-of-pocket. Additional financial burden is always an issue during times of drought. The State has experienced a very severe drought. Irrigators and rural producers have also had the emotional burden. The example has been given in the House before where the wife, who used to work alongside the spouse on the property, has had to seek employment in town to obtain some form of income for the family. With a spouse working, many farmers did not qualify for government assistance. In many cases sons have left properties to go to work in the mines. Will they ever return?

The member for Barwon and the member for Murray-Darling and other members have spoken in the House about rural suicide, which is still happening. The National Association of Loss and Grief, which has a large agency in Dubbo, had 40 referrals at the beginning of this year. The situation in that area is appalling. So when we say that the drought is over and the rain has fallen in many areas of the State, the drought is over when it comes to water but not finances. Recently in Sydney a taxi driver who took me to the airport asked me about the drought. The only way I could explain it to him was to ask him to imagine working five years without receiving a regular income. That is what the irrigators and producers in my area have faced. Since this motion was first brought before the House decisions have been made about water charges. The support was not as swift as the support that was given to the racing industry. It is all about whom you know. The former Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Water advised at one stage that water charges could not be waived any further. A reply to a representation I made on behalf of a person in the Lachlan Valley stated that the State Water Corporation has a hardship policy and that, should I be aware of anyone experiencing difficulty in paying fixed water charges, I should advise that person to urgently contact State Water to see what options may be available. Any person who comes to me is suffering hardship—people do not see their local member if everything is going wonderfully—and I give assistance on that basis. The Minister for Water recently visited regional New South Wales: he impressed all the rural and regional councils in my area. He listened to my constituents who spoke on matters relating to his portfolio, which now covers all water matters.

Some time ago I asked the Premier a question about the separation of the water and infrastructure portfolios and who was in charge of what, because it has caused great confusion to local members and their constituents. I am pleased to see that one portfolio now covers all areas. I believe only one Minister should administer water and water infrastructure. I fully support the motion moved by the member for Murray-Darling. This matter must be kept on the books, not because things have changed and the State Government has given various support and drought assistance, which I very much welcome, but because we could very easily experience drought again. We have had rain recently, but we could go through another period of drought for which we must be prepared so that we are not caught out again. We should be on the front foot and have some sort of plan to meet our needs.

Mr STEVE WHAN (Monaro—Parliamentary Secretary) [1.10 p.m.]: I acknowledge the positive comments of the member for Murray-Darling and also the member for Barwon—although I did not hear all of his contribution—about the work carried out by the former Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Water in the interim after the motion was moved. The situation has changed somewhat since then, probably not as much as we would have liked, because although parts of New South Wales have had rain, water allocation will continue to present a serious challenge over the coming years. As the member for Monaro I see what is going into some of the inflows—not so much the inflows that affect the area of the member for Barwon, but certainly those in the areas represented by the members for Murray-Darling and Murrumbidgee. Although we

have slightly better levels in our lakes this year than we did this time last year, it is not much better. According to Snowy Hydro we had an overall increase: the lake levels did not drop as expected in January because of the inflows in December. However, we are still well below average and our water storages in the Snowy, at least, are still around their lowest levels since construction of the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme.

The level of water in Lake Eucumbene is critical for people in the Murrumbidgee and Murray-Darling irrigation areas. At this time last year it was bumping around 16 per cent of lake levels there; this year it is only about 3 or 4 per cent higher than that, which means it is still around 20 per cent. Even though we had a good ski season last year we did not get follow-up snow in August and September, which would have helped to get the inflow into the lakes. Even though the situation is a bit better than it was last year, it is still going to be a challenge for many irrigators over coming years unless we get good sustained rain in the catchments for those major storages. As the member for Monaro, it is something I hope for and I know that other members representing country electorates are also concerned for it to happen.

As Chair of Country Labor I have heard from many people about fixed water charges. I know that is something that concerns those who are paying fixed water charges. I discussed this matter with the former Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Water, on a number of occasions, as I know others in this place did, and he certainly did his best to ensure that there were easy mechanisms for people to defer those charges if they were unable to pay them. He met with many people and understood the hardship they were facing, and that is the action that he took. The deferral of the charge is something I hope people are taking advantage of if they need it. But, obviously, there is an argument on both sides.

It is possible to say that you should not have to pay these charges because we are in drought, but there are also a lot of precedents that say you have to maintain capital infrastructure in good condition for use when we get decent rain and decent water storage levels. The pricing authorities have put forward that legitimate, but difficult, argument. The Government has to consider how it allocates money and, as was outlined by the Parliamentary Secretary, government has provided a lot of money for drought relief. Through Country Labor and through the work of groups such as the Rural Taskforce we have tried to make sure we continue to focus on the areas of need with the limited funds available.

I was pleased to hear the member for Dubbo talk about the positive response to the visits around rural New South Wales of the Minister for Water. I am also very pleased to hear that during his visits the Minister talked mainly about town water supplies and sewerage schemes, and I welcome his broader role in this whole area of water allocation. I look forward to representing Minister Macdonald at the Murray-Darling Basin ministerial meeting, at which the Minister for Water will be the lead Minister for New South Wales. I am sure that, having spent so much time in the last few months travelling around the State meeting rural communities and hearing about their water needs, he will bring an educated perspective to the meeting. Farmers will face further difficulties if rain is not more widespread and sustained in the next couple of years than it has been recently. The State Government will continue to work with farmers to help them through difficult times.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI (Murrumbidgee) [1.15 p.m.]: I support the motion moved by the member for Murray-Darling and congratulate him on his continued advocacy on behalf of his constituents along both the Murray and the lower Murrumbidgee rivers. I have represented private irrigators within a large section of Murray irrigation and along the Murray River, and I am well aware of the difficulties they have been facing over the past few years with zero or very low water allocations. In fact, for the nine years I have been a member of Parliament they have had a decent allocation for only two or three of those years. It has been very, very tough for them, particularly in the Murray.

Those tough situations have now extended right across country New South Wales: the Murrumbidgee, the Lachlan, the Namoi, the Macquarie and the Darling, particularly the Barwon-Darling we have heard so much about, and seen some of the consequences, particularly in Bourke, of the downgrading of some of those farms because of zero water allocations. Zero water allocations for an irrigation farm obviously means a very limited ability to earn any income. It is galling for those farmers who still have to pay substantial fixed charges. I do not believe any other business would accept having to pay huge fixed charges without delivery of the product they are actually paying for.

On top of those fixed charges, and I know this was part of the debate a couple of years ago, the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal [IPART] determination will result in fixed charges in some parts of New South Wales increasing by as much as 85 per cent over a four-year period. The Government previously said that IPART is independent—it makes recommendations about fixed charge increases—and that true to

some extent, but the Government has the ability to say no to IPART's recommendations. It was argued on this side of the Chamber and by the crossbenchers that the Government should reject the recommendations, the same way it rejects increases to State Rail charges. The Government has rejected those kinds of recommendations in the past. If increases are to occur the Government could have made them much less than IPART had recommended.

It is a very difficult period for irrigators; there is no doubt about that. I believe one of the consequences, particularly with many of the reforms that are taking place, will be more farmers going out of business. Two constituents came to my office last Friday. One was a citrus farmer who said he has had enough, that he is going to bulldoze all his citrus trees, sell his water, just keep a few megalitres on his farm, just live there and get a job in town. The very next constituent I saw was a broadacre general security irrigator who also said that he had had enough; he was going to sell his water allocation and then sell his property as a dryland farm. He is a young, progressive farmer—the sort of farmer we need for the future of New South Wales and Australia. He has had a gutful. He said that fixed charges were the last straw for him. In addition, he faced an unenviable situation last year that was forced on him by New South Wales Government decisions.

The Government announced that Murrumbidgee irrigators would have access to 17 per cent of their water. That young farmer worked out that he could grow a certain tonnage of corn and he forward contracted the crop based on that allocation. A month or two later, the Government announced that the allocation would be cut to 10 per cent. Now, 18 months later, that farmer is still in court and could be faced with paying a couple of hundred thousand dollars to wash out those contracts because of a decision that had nothing to do with him. That was entirely a decision made by the Government, which acknowledged that it made an error in calculating how much water was available. These are the real consequences of government decisions. For the Government to say that it cannot afford the \$15 million required to waive fixed water charges across New South Wales for a year is nonsense. It easily found \$25 million to delay the narrowing of Epping Road for the Lane Cove Tunnel operators to avoid fallout during the election campaign. If it could find that money, surely it can find \$15 million for struggling irrigators in country New South Wales.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS (Murray-Darling) [1.20 p.m.], in reply: I thank the Parliamentary Secretary and members representing the electorates of Barwon, Dubbo, Monaro and Murrumbidgee for their contributions. I state at the outset that I am not blaming the Government for the drought. I represent people who are in a very difficult situation. The Parliamentary Secretary mentioned the \$25 million package given to irrigators and split between the Murrumbidgee and Murray valleys. General security water users have an opportunity not to use their full allocation; they can put the water they do not use into a bank—and it is as safe as a bank. Carryover water is like money in the bank.

At the beginning of the season, irrigators were allocated their carryover water. When a farmer knows what area he will farm, he starts preparing it by spreading fertiliser and seeds, and irrigating. However, the crop was planted and the Government said, "Sorry, but that absolutely guaranteed amount of water must be decreased." The farmer must then turn off irrigation cells and that investment in fertiliser, seed and water is lost, and the area under crop is reduced. The compensation package was purely to recognise that loss—no more or less—and I thought it was fair. Thankfully, most of the irrigators affected were compensated.

The Parliamentary Secretary also said that general security irrigators in the Murray irrigation area were given some general security allocation. Yes, they were. However, irrigators on a channel cannot run them in these circumstances, so they are isolated. They will not get the allocation because it will not come down the channel. They were able to put that water back into the marketplace, which was good—it gave them a few dollars for Christmas. However, ultimately, they could never access it. We have had a double drought and we are heading for a triple drought. I ask members to imagine watching a relative going downhill but still having the pride to try to hold his head up high only to be busted by this trap.

They have no alternative and they cannot irrigate their farms. Unless the drought is well and truly broken, they cannot go back to dryland farming either. Suddenly they receive a bill for \$15,000 on top of their other bills, another \$15,000 bill arrives and another one is coming this year. If it were the son, daughter or daughter-in-law of any member in this House he or she would be crying blue murder about their having to fork out \$45,000 for nothing. They have not received a cracker. They have simply increased their debt by \$45,000. The Government has provided some assistance with interest if that debt increases, but this cannot go on. When the drought is over they will still have the debt and they will have to service it. They will have to try to farm their way out of it, which will be very difficult.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 36

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

Noes, 48

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

Pair

Mrs Hopwood

Mr Koperberg

Question resolved in the negative.

Motion negatived.

[Assistant-Speaker (Ms Alison Megarrity) left the chair at 1.32 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]

RETIREMENT OF PAUL MULLINS

Ministerial Statement

Mr MORRIS IEMMA (Lakemba—Premier, and Minister for Citizenship) [2.15 p.m.]: After nine Premiers, 10 elections and probably 10,000 pieces to camera, it is time to say goodbye to an old friend, Paul Mullins—Mullows—and there is no more appropriate place to do it than here on the floor of this House because this place has been his whole life. Even though he never once sat here as an elected member—Paul has never won a single vote—he, nonetheless, has been a central part of our democracy for more than 30 years and I think it is right that we take time to honour him today. Reporters stand at the threshold between government and the people, and Paul has served the interests of the people and the interests of our parliamentary system well. He always understood that the vast majority of people who come into this Parliament are good characters with

decent motives. He always understood the humanity of this place and to me that made Mullows not only a good bloke but also a better journalist.

Mr Andrew Stoner: Did you see his Christmas video about you?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: I did see the video. I enjoyed it very much and I have to say it was one of the better ones of the Parliamentary Press Gallery Christmas parties.

The SPEAKER: All reference to the video is out of order!

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: Yes, Elvis is still alive! Paul's career in the Parliamentary Press Gallery began around the time of Watergate and it is fair to say that he has seen it all, including the member for Murrumbidgee missing those \$40,000. He saw the last days of Askin and the old Labor men such as Jack Renshaw and Pat Hills, the rise of modern titans Wran and Carr, the age of the Independents and minor parties—Mullows has seen them all, known them all and won the respect of them all. Mullows might be a good bloke but he has never claimed to be a saint. Ask old Tom Lewis, briefly Premier in 1975 and early 1976. Paul was with Premier Lewis in a light plane, dive bombing the flames during a major bushfire when he started to feel airsick. Sitting behind the Premier he looked everywhere for a sick bag but there was none in sight. The only option was the Premier's very expensive tweed coat slung over the back of his seat.

I recount another great story from those days. There was a new freelancer in the gallery with a few tickets on himself. This ambitious young Turk, in very typical fashion, said something to which Mullows took exception. Next minute the offender was on his back on the ground. This was not the first or the last time that Malcolm Turnbull has come off second best! Laconic, trustworthy, calm and professional, in doorstops with Ministers, he always made a point of ending with the same respectful phrase, "Thank you, sir" or "Thank you, ma'am"—old-school class, old-school style professionalism. He enjoyed the odd spritzer in the parliamentary bar on a Friday. Through his long tenure in this place Mullows earned affection and respect by the truckload and so it is with genuine emotion and regret that we say: Goodbye Mullows. You made a difference. You left your mark. You will be missed. "And that's how the main players have seen it today."

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai—Leader of the Opposition) [2.22 p.m.]: The Opposition is happy to respond to the Premier's ministerial statement to pay tribute to Paul Mullins. I am happy to lead on behalf of the Opposition for no other reason than the issue that the Premier omitted, which is that Paul Mullins, in addition to his media career, was once a North Sydney first grade rugby league player. For those of us who still regret the demise of the North Sydney Bears, since 1999 Paul has been a constant reminder of that once great team, which had not managed to win a premiership since 1922. As the Premier said, Paul Mullins has seen many Premiers and Leaders of the Opposition through this place—too many Leaders of the Opposition, frankly. So far he has seen only three Leaders of the Opposition become Premier, but we are working on that.

As a former President of the Press Gallery, Steve Chase, noted in the publication last year, Paul Mullins used to say—in a variation of the "your politics is local" comment—that the State round was a great one for a journalist because if a local story did not start in Parliament it finished up there in one way or another. Throughout his time in this place Paul Mullins has seen enormous change, including enormous change in this building. I listened to an interview with Paul Mullins on commercial radio when he was asked about his experiences. He listed his favourite Premiers, the man he calls Nifty as his first and Nick Greiner as his second. He also talked about the dining room. One of his former colleagues, Peter Sinclair, said to me:

Those of you who never worked in the old building don't know what you lost with the changes.

The media lost its own dining room, which overlooked the Speaker's Garden which was then located on the eastern side of the building.

The Press Dining Room was not a large dining room but it was plenty big enough to accommodate those who wanted to avail themselves of the splendid service: the white tablecloths, the snowy serviettes, the waiters whose sole job it was to minister to the attentions of the hungry and thirsty journalists, the phone number for the bar written in pencil beside the phone on the wall and the prompt delivery of trays of beers. In one corner of the dining room stood the massive steel cabinet in which the meals were kept warm if the House was thoughtless enough to interrupt journalists' mealtimes.

Mr Speaker, you will remember that they were the days for journalists, pre Michael Costa. They are the things that members of Parliament no longer enjoy in this place. I want to correct the Premier in relation to Paul Mullins' decision to use Premier Tom Lewis' pocket on a plane trip. It was in fact a plane trip to Dubbo to turn the first sod of the Western Plains Zoo, which Tom Lewis was so heavily associated with. With him on that

famous day was John O'Hara, a significant journalist in the history of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and someone known to this side of the House, Tom Lewis' press secretary, Jim Jolly, who has been seen here in more recent times. Paul Mullins is one of the characters who has come through this place. He is someone who has had the respect of all people. The immediate past president of the Press Gallery, Alex Mitchell, emailed me today to make the following point:

When news bulletins threatened to be swamped by celebrities and trivia and generally dumbed down, "Mullo" never flinched from telling it reliably and dramatically from Macquarie Street.

Alex Mitchell concluded his email by saying:

He's a legend of the Press Gallery but not, regrettably, at North Sydney where he played unrecognised rugby league.

One of Paul's great mates, one of his continuing tennis mates and a former head of the *Daily Telegraph* bureau here, Peter Grimshaw, describes Paul as:

... from the old school ... a journalist who would not betray a confidence just to get a story. You could talk to him off the record without fearing that it would appear in the media the next day. And that is why he was able to remain so popular for so long at Parliament.

On a personal level Peter said:

He is an incredibly loyal friend who will do anything to help a mate. He is generous and will never forget a friend. On top of that—

I disagree with him here because I would add the member for upper Hunter to this comment—

he is probably the best company you can have in a social setting with his array of stories both true and exaggerated!

As the Premier said, this is a bloke who, from your first press conference in this place, always addressed you as "Sir", no matter what he really thought about you at that time, and he is a man of great skill. He produced a documentary on his favourite Premier, Neville Wran. It was called *Wran—The Man Behind the Image*, unkindly dubbed at the time "the image behind the image". Within a short time of Paul Mullins starting in this place, another great institution finished. *Blue Hills* finished after 32 years on ABC Radio. Paul Mullins has given great service to this place. He is one of the few journalists to last so long. Only three members of Parliament have served for longer in this place—Michael Bruxner, Joe Lawson and Jack Renshaw. Paul Mullins will always be part of the history of this place. He leaves us with the goodwill of all those on this side of the House.

The SPEAKER: On behalf of the House I join the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition in congratulating Paul Mullins on his fantastic career. As has been said, he is the longest-serving journalist in this place, and a former president of the Press Gallery, with 33 years reporting from Macquarie Street, from Askin to Iemma. On behalf of all members and, I am sure, many former members who could not be here today, I make this presentation to Paul Mullins. I am reluctant to invite Paul to the "bar", because he may get the wrong idea! On behalf of all members of the New South Wales Parliament I present to Paul Mullins a certificate of service, which has on the back the signatures of all members.

QUESTION TIME

MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND DR GRAEME REEVES

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: My question is directed to the Premier. Given the refusal of the Minister for Health to act on calls by the member for Bega last September for an investigation into claims of patient mutilation by Dr Graeme Reeves, when will the Premier stop protecting his Labor mates, put the public interest first and sack the incompetent Minister?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: The instance of this vile creature, who has abused his position of trust and caused so much suffering and distress, is the subject, firstly, of a police strike force investigation and, secondly, a Health Care Complaints Commission investigation, both old and new. The questions and concerns raised as to the issue of this creature lying and cheating his way through the health system—as Judge Maguire said in the Medical Tribunal hearing, "lie and cheat"—and continuing to practice are legitimate.

The concerns started in 1990 when the first batch of cases—around 10, I am advised—were investigated by the then health care complaints body, culminating in a decision in 1996 of a referral to a hearing

of what was called the Professional Standards of the Medical Board. From there the system failed to ensure that this creature was rubbed out. Why that occurred and why this creature was still able to continue is the subject of investigation by a police strike force and the Health Care Complaints Commission. I have no difficulty whatsoever in having a special commission of inquiry investigate this matter as well—

Mr Barry O'Farrell: Point of order: My point of order is Standing Order 129. I appreciate the Premier's answer to date, but he has not answered why he will not take action against a Minister who did nothing for five months?

The SPEAKER: Order! No point of order is involved.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: No-one is going to be making excuses for the verification system of 2002. Since the reforms of 2005 there is mandatory checking. Changes have been made to ensure that there is mandatory background checking so that creatures such as this do not continue to work. We expect to receive further information and details from an examination of the circumstances surrounding Dr Reeves, this vile creature who has abused his position of trust.

SOUTH-WEST SYDNEY RAIL SERVICES

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: My question is directed to the Premier. What is the Government doing to improve rail services for the commuters of south-west Sydney?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: I thank the member for his question and his advocacy of better rail services for his constituents. This morning I was happy to join the member for Macquarie Fields in the latest milestone in delivering one of our most important infrastructure projects: the south-west rail link. I am pleased to update the House on a final budget approval by the Budget Committee of \$1.36 billion for 13 kilometres of track, three additional railway stations, the redevelopment of Glenfield—where the member and I were this morning—1,600 car spaces—

[Interruption]

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

[Interruption]

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Willoughby will remain silent.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: —with geotechnical construction work started. I am pleased to provide the information to the member that the design tender has been let, the construction tender will go out in July and the project is on track to be delivered in 2012. As a result of this project, not only will the residents of south-west Sydney receive a modern, more reliable, faster and more efficient rail service, they will also be able to benefit from four additional train services per hour in peak on the East Hills line and the line running through Granville.

This project runs in parallel to the East Hills to Kingsgrove quadruplication, with contracts signed and construction underway. That project will provide the residents of south-western Sydney with an even faster rail service to the city. The reason for this project is the more than 100,000 homes that will be built in the south-west of Sydney over the next two decades. This morning's milestone is an example not only of getting on with the job of delivering infrastructure but staying ahead of the game—that is, delivering the infrastructure as new communities are built.

DR GRAEME REEVES APPOINTMENT

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: My question is directed to the Minister for Health. Given there are 45 entries on the New South Wales Medical Board's file on Dr Graeme Reeves, including a 1997 finding of serious unsatisfactory professional conduct and impairment and a doctor's letter dated 2000 claiming Dr Reeves is "displaying unpredictable behaviour, dysfunctionality and an unsatisfactory manner with staff and patients", how could the Government have allowed this man to continue mutilating women across the State?

Ms REBA MEAGHER: In relation to the appointment of Dr Reeves in 2002, I am not going to make any excuses for the Southern Area Health Service. It failed to perform background checks on a candidate who

the Medical Tribunal found lied and cheated his way into a job. This Government has changed the way doctors are employed in area health services and from 2005 it has required the mandatory checking of doctor's credentials. The Government changed the way that doctors are recruited, so they can no longer lie and cheat their way into positions of trust in hospitals and area health services. The Medical Board also undertook changes to the way it handled its business in relation to doctors who were under scrutiny. In 2006 the processes of the Medical Board became more transparent and it included on its website a list of doctors and their registration, any conditions attached to their registration and—

Mrs Jillian Skinner: Point of order: My point of order is Standing Order 129. I referred to a letter in 2000 and the Minister is talking about 2006. My question was: How could the Minister have allowed the doctor to continue working for this long?

The SPEAKER: Order! The question and the Minister's reply are in order.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: The first point I want to make is to provide reassurance that this cannot happen again. Changes have been made so that doctors can no longer lie their way into jobs. In fact, the Medical Board has also provided a greater degree of transparency so there is more information available to employing authorities such as hospitals and area health services. There have been considerable changes and we continue to act. That is why last week I introduced legislation to strengthen section 66 of the Medical Practice Act to enable the Government to take swifter or emergency action against those doctors who are doing the wrong thing. The Government has also introduced legislation that will mean that the Medical Board can give consideration to similar fact evidence. One of the issues that appeared time and time again in the case of Dr Reeves was a pattern of conduct that seems not to have triggered action by the Medical Board. People in the street are reasonably saying, "That is not good enough. How can a pattern of conduct develop and the oversighting authority not take action?"

[Interruption]

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

Ms REBA MEAGHER: I agree with those concerns. That is why last week we introduced changes in this House. I hope that the Opposition will support those changes.

Mrs Jillian Skinner: No changes have been introduced yet. You have not second read it.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition has asked a question to which the Minister is clearly responding.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: The New South Wales Medical Board should be giving consideration to the pattern of conduct and the series of complaints, which build to paint a picture of a doctor that does not meet the test of trust and performance that patients should reasonably expect of their health practitioners. They are the changes that the Government is constantly driving to ensure higher standards for the medical profession. Deidre O'Connor has been appointed to review all of the circumstances in relation to the appointment of Dr Reeves and the decisions of the Medical Board in relation to him. If required, she will make recommendations for further changes to strengthen disciplinary procedures for the medical profession.

I can also advise the House that NSW Health has referred all of the matters relating to Dr Reeves to the special commission of inquiry. It is appropriate that the special commission of inquiry look at the systemic issues that may have existed in 2002 that enabled this person to continue to practise. Importantly, the special commission of inquiry will be able to give independent advice that, in fact, sufficient change has been made to prevent a similar situation. If it is found that is not the case, the inquiry will be able to make recommendations about additional changes that need to be made. I finish on this note: We have heard much from the member for Bega and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. Most interestingly, yesterday they both came into Parliament to excuse why they had not raised these matters sooner. Both members told the Parliament yesterday that they had known about these issues—

Mr Andrew Constance: Point of order: The Minister has just misled the House. It was 26 September last year—

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

[*Interruption*]

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

[*Interruption*]

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

[*Interruption*]

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Bega to order for the third time. I direct the Serjeant-at-Arms to remove the member for Bega.

[*The member for Bega left the Chamber, accompanied by the Serjeant-at-Arms.*]

Ms REBA MEAGHER: Both the member for Bega and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition told this House yesterday that they did not want to raise these matters when they were informed about them because they did not want to jeopardise a civil case. That is misleading. If they were concerned about the recruitment of doctors, the standards of doctors and disciplinary procedures, nothing should have prevented them from raising their concerns with me via a meeting, letter or telephone call. They chose not to do that.

Mrs Jillian Skinner: Point of order: I regard the Minister's remarks as a substantial attack on me personally. She has made serious allegations that are untrue. I ask that the Minister have the courage to move a substantive motion against me and I will debate her any time.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition is entitled to ask the Minister to retract her comments. I ask the Minister to respond.

Ms REBA MEAGHER: I stand by the comments I have made about the remarks made by the member for Bega and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition in Parliament yesterday in which they justified not raising these issues when they knew about them.

The SPEAKER: Order! Before I call the member for Marrickville, I remind the Deputy Leader of the Opposition that she may use other forms of the House to pursue that matter.

SYDNEY CRIME PREVENTION PARTNERSHIP

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: My question is addressed to the Minister for Police. Can the Minister update the House on the joint efforts being undertaken to reduce crime in the city, Kings Cross and Surry Hills?

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: It gives me pleasure to inform the House of the creation of a Crime Prevention Partnership for the city of Sydney. This new partnership will bring together three of Sydney's local area commands in a targeted response to deal with issues specific to the area. These local area commands—City Central, Kings Cross and Surry Hills—are three of the busiest in Sydney. They are similar in nature, with high-density living and large numbers of licensed premises. As they have common problems, it makes sense to use a combined approach. The Crime Prevention Partnership will allow the sharing of resources to target these problems and better coordinate strategies to address them. Specifically, the new Crime Prevention Partnership will address drug and alcohol problems around licensed premises, as well as community concerns surrounding homophobic violence in Oxford Street.

The House may recall that in November last year I held a forum into homophobic violence. The Government is committed to working with the community in and around the Oxford Street precinct. Although it is not an easy task, the Government is committed to it. The types of strategies that the Crime Prevention Partnership will investigate include the rescheduling of transport services to stop people loitering around licensed premises; replacing glasses with plastic cups in problem venues; altering the operating hours of licensed premises to reduce alcohol-related antisocial behaviour; using new powers under the new liquor laws to close problem premises; and improving lighting and closed-circuit television coverage. The community is also recognised in the partnership. In fact, it plays an important role in this process. Each command will establish a special precinct committee, which is a community forum that enables consultation and engagement.

The first chair of the Sydney Crime Prevention Partnership is Superintendent Donna Adney, currently the Surry Hills local area commander. She has been widely recognised for her superb work. The deputy chair of the Crime Prevention Partnership will be a representative of City of Sydney council. I publicly thank the council for its hard work and dedication in making the Sydney Crime Prevention Partnership a reality. The Lord Mayor of the City of Sydney was present at this morning's formal announcement of this multi-agency initiative. I thank the Lord Mayor for her public support of this election commitment by the Iemma Government. The Sydney Crime Prevention Partnership will hold its first meeting later this month, initially meeting on a monthly basis. This initiative is part of the Iemma Government's commitments under the State Plan to drive down personal and property crime and antisocial behaviour to make our communities safer.

Earlier today it was my pleasure to host a function to recognise New South Wales police officers for their outstanding efforts running crime prevention programs. As the Minister for Police, I am delighted with the success of the New South Wales Police Force at the Australian Crime and Violence Prevention Awards. The New South Wales Police Force has a great deal to be proud of after winning the top award for a project that is aimed at tackling youth issues in Macquarie Fields. Macquarie Fields police established Camp IMPACT to tackle problems with local youths. Their success has won them a National Police Medal and National Certificate. The Crime Prevention and Violence Awards recognise outstanding government and community projects that prevent and minimise the impact of crime and violence.

The New South Wales Police Force initiatives that were recognised today won two of the four national award places, with the pioneering Domestic Violence Intervention Court Model receiving a National Certificate commendation. Clever programs such as these will keep police driving down crime and antisocial behaviour across the State and ensure safer communities. These types of programs, undertaken in collaboration with local communities, fit under the banner of the Crime Prevention Partnerships, which was celebrated at the function this morning. I take the opportunity to congratulate the New South Wales Police Force and express my pride in being the Minister for Police.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

ELECTION CAMPAIGN DONATION REFORMS

Mr ANDREW STONER: My question is directed to the Premier. Following his rhetoric about cleaning up campaign finance in New South Wales in the wake of ICAC's investigation into corruption in Wollongong council, will the Premier now give his personal commitment that his proposed reforms will be implemented ahead of the New South Wales local council elections six months from now?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: I reiterate my personal commitment. The reform will take place—

Mr Andrew Stoner: When?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: In this Parliament. The council elections are due to take place in September and this Parliament sits for many months before then. The reform will be introduced and it will be in place to take effect before the local government elections and State elections. We will make our laws consistent with the Commonwealth laws. I am meeting with the Federal Minister after question time and we will cooperate in national consistency when it comes to greater disclosure and donations. Our reforms will be in place and any additional measures that we accept and undertake as a result of the inquiry will be incorporated also. Let us be very clear about this: The Opposition can come here with all its hypocrisy about funding disclosure—

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

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: But the reforms will take place and we are interested in making sure that the change leads to reform, not just change for the sake of it.

SYDNEY SUPERBOAT GRAND PRIX

Ms ANGELA D'AMORE: My question is directed to the Premier. What is the Government doing to promote major events in Sydney?

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

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: There are lots of sitting days between now and September, so just relax. The Superboat race to take place in Sydney has caused considerable comment this morning in relation to the proposal of the Botanic Gardens Trust to charge a fee to recover its costs in providing facilities for patrons attending the event. I am very pleased to inform the House and the member for Drummoyne, who has taken a strong personal interest in this, that following community concern about this proposal I have asked my department to ensure that the Botanic Gardens Trust does not charge a fee for this event and that the facilities are still provided.

If a case is made for a fee to be charged for future events like this one, we are happy to hear it, but not in circumstances where a fee is imposed without consultation and at short notice to the public. We will not see members of the public inconvenienced in this way. We understand the cost issues as far as the Botanic Gardens Trust is concerned and we will ensure that the trust is reimbursed. I have instructed my department to work with the agencies involved to ensure an assessment is made of the costs involved, whether it is the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority, the maritime agencies or the Botanic Gardens Trust. We need to ensure that the costs for major events are assessed and a decision is not made, like this one, at short notice, causing community concern and inconvenience to the public.

I understand that the motivation behind the proposed fee was to recover the cost of providing services for the event. However, I reiterate: if there is a case to charge a fee in the future, we are happy to hear it but, given the amount of community concern about this, we have stepped in to ensure that no fee will be charged. This is an important event. We want this to be part of a world series Superboat Grand Prix event. It is a fledgling event and we want to see it succeed. We will do everything possible to ensure it succeeds and that everyone has an enjoyable time.

MINISTER FOR POLICE AND MR JOE SCIMONE

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: My question is directed to the Minister for Police. Following his answer last week that Joe Scimone was just another member of the Australian Labor Party and an acquaintance from whom he has drifted apart, but that this statutory declaration states that the Minister had a cosy private one-on-one lunch with him straight after the State election last year, can the Minister inform the House how many times, when and where he has met with Joe Scimone since becoming Minister for Police?

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

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: I acknowledge the question and I will undertake to review my diary and see if, in fact, there was a lunch of the nature that has been referred to. The member for Murrumbidgee has waved a piece of paper around, which may or may not be a statutory declaration. Who knows what it is. But I will review my diary.

DISABILITY SERVICES: STRONGER TOGETHER

Mr GRANT McBRIDE: My question is addressed to the Minister for Ageing and Disability Services. Will the Minister update the House on the latest results and plans for improving services to people with a disability?

The SPEAKER: Order! Opposition members will cease interjecting.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: The members opposite are obviously quite interested in the Iemma Government's plan Stronger Together, backed by \$1.3 billion in the first five years.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Lane Cove will stop agreeing with the Minister.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: Stronger Together is delivering the long-term practical support that people with a disability want and need. It is delivering for people like Zeinab Ghazzoui. Zeinab is a young woman with an intellectual disability. She left school a few years ago and entered our Transition to Work Program. That program works with young adults with an intellectual disability who can enter the workforce but who need some additional training to make that happen. Late last year I visited Zeinab at her workplace at Vodafone in North Sydney.

She took me on a tour of Vodafone and introduced me to her work colleagues. She told me what her responsibilities were and she spoke quite enthusiastically about her role at Vodafone. It was clear that Zeinab's

colleagues valued her as well. It was clear that she was an integral member of the team. One of the things I loved, and it has stuck with me, is that Zeinab told me how she goes home every night and tells her family everything that happened that day. Zeinab has got a connection to a workplace, a connection to a community and she is a valued member of that community.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Coffs Harbour to order. I call the member for Baulkham Hills to order. I call the member for Lane Cove to order.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: It is important that our Transition to Work Program, which is one of the new initiatives under Stronger Together, continues to deliver for young people with an intellectual disability. Today I am releasing results from Stronger Together that show the Iemma Government is not only meeting its commitments under this program but is, in fact, exceeding them in many cases. Let me give a few examples. It is not surprising that the members opposite do not want to hear about improved services for people with a disability.

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

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: Let us recall that the Opposition is the side of Parliament that went to the election without a policy on disability services.

[Interruption]

That is their predictable baying, Mr Speaker.

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

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: Not only did they not have a policy on disability services, they kicked out the one member who knew anything about it. They kicked him out of the Parliament and kicked him out of their party. They are hopeless.

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

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: And the Opposition has put a two-year moratorium on developing a new policy.

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

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: It is not good enough, nor appropriate, for some of the most vulnerable members of our State to have an Opposition that goes to an election without a policy and then puts a two-year moratorium on developing one. Under Stronger Together we are getting on with the job. Let us look at respite services.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Terrigal to order. The member for Wakehurst is urging me to remove the member for Terrigal, but I will not do so at this stage.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: Respite is an incredibly important service. It gives parents and carers a much-needed break. It also gives a person with an intellectual or physical disability the opportunity to socialise more widely and to have a different experience. Under Stronger Together, the Government promised to deliver 600 new respite places by June 2008. By December 2007 it had delivered 1,062 new places. Therapy places provide children with speech pathology and adults with a disability with the opportunity to access physiotherapy and occupational therapy. Under Stronger Together, the Government promised to deliver 750 new therapy places by June 2008, and by December 2007 it had delivered 1,000.

Attendant care is an important program for people with high support needs. It enables them to live at home, to continue to work or study and to stay with their families and to be part of the community. Under Stronger Together, the Government promised to deliver 90 new attendant care places by June 2008, and by December 2007 it had delivered 95. These figures show that the Iemma Government is delivering on its commitments. There is more to come to support people with motor neurone disease and children with autism.

The Government is also continuing to roll out supported accommodation places, with 241 new places being provided. It is continuing to deliver innovative services that strengthen families through the Intensive

Family Support Program and the Family Assistance Fund. Last year I visited the electorate of Marrickville with the local member. We met a family who had a daughter with autism and son without a disability. They had not had a family holiday since their daughter had been diagnosed, so they used the Family Assistance Fund to go on a holiday to Noosa. They had what many Australian families would consider a normal experience by using the fund. That is important. Not only were they able to give their daughter a holiday but also their son. We must recognise that children without a disability are often significantly affected by having a sibling with a disability. Through the Intensive Family Support Program and the Family Assistance Fund we are able not only to support children with a disability but also to strengthen the family around them.

Last Friday I visited the Central Coast. I met with the member for Wyong at Hamlyn Terrace, where we announced the site of the State's first residential aged care facility for people with an intellectual disability, who are living longer and healthier lives due to improved health outcomes. They deserve the type of supported accommodation that caters to their age-related conditions. It is important that they have access to the type of supported accommodation we would all expect in our 70s, 80s and 90s. This represents a \$33 million investment in the Central Coast. It will provide 100 beds at a residential aged care facility and a respite service operating out of the same site. I hope in the next few weeks and coming months to be able to announce the site of a 20-bed facility for younger people with an intellectual disability close to the Hamlyn Terrace site.

Members can see that the Government is getting on with honouring the commitments made under Stronger Together. The numbers are impressive, but behind those numbers are people like Zeinab Ghazzoui and the family I met at Marrickville. We are improving these people's lives because they are accessing the community, employment, training and opportunities. This Government is supporting and strengthening families so that a child with a disability in New South Wales can grow up in the family home and adults with a disability have the best chance to be part of this community. This Government will get on with the job of rolling out Stronger Together.

GAY AND LESBIAN MARDI GRAS

Ms CLOVER MOORE: I direct my question to the Premier. Given that the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras generates more than \$45 million for the New South Wales economy and given the success of the thirtieth anniversary parade last Saturday, will the Government consider funding this hallmark and significant event?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: I thank the member for her question and place on the record the Government's appreciation of her longstanding support for this event. As the member is aware, the establishment of Events New South Wales and the appointment of its board are designed, first, to produce a calendar of major events for New South Wales to receive support and, second, to have that schedule of events become regular major events for this city. They cover cultural, sporting, business and artistic fields and they will get the State back into the business of major events. The Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras has been a major and very successful event for three decades. I undertake to pass the member's question and request for support of this major event to Events New South Wales and to provide a response when I receive that advice.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Ms ALISON MEGARRITY: I direct my question to the Minister for Women. What is the Government doing to support women for this year's International Women's Day?

Ms VERITY FIRTH: I thank the member for her question and acknowledge her longstanding interest in promoting and supporting women in New South Wales. International Women's Day, which will be celebrated on Saturday 8 March, is a wonderful opportunity for the entire community to celebrate the achievements of women. It is also an important occasion to focus on how much further women have to go to achieve true equality. This year International Women's Day is particularly significant because it is the 100th anniversary of the first ever women's day march. In 1908, 15,000 female textile workers, many of them migrants, went on strike in New York. They were agitating for voting rights, better working conditions and shorter working hours. It is interesting to note that members opposite cannot listen.

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

Ms VERITY FIRTH: In March 1928—20 years later—the militant women's movement initiated the first International Women's Day march in Sydney. The women's demands included gender pay equity, reduced

hours in retail work and the abolition of piecework. While women have clearly come a long way in the intervening 80 years, it is sobering to reflect that issues such as gender pay inequity are still with us. The theme of this year's celebrations is 100 years of active women in paid and unpaid work, reflecting the importance of women's achievements in the paid workforce and, of course, in the unpaid workforce—that is, the work they do representing their communities and bolstering their families, often in a very under-appreciated manner.

Figures released last month by the Australian Bureau of Statistics show that the average New South Wales woman now earns \$361.60 a week less than the average New South Wales man. Women's wages in 2008 are still a mere 66.9 per cent of men's wages. I would like members opposite to listen, because that figure has fallen consistently by almost 3 per cent a year since the introduction of WorkChoices. As we know, the member for Goulburn spoke about this very issue to the Senate committee that examined the WorkChoices legislation. WorkChoices has been incredibly damaging for women's wages, and that is now borne out in the statistics. I look forward to the new Federal Government repealing that draconian legislation and establishing a new framework to improve gender pay equity.

The earnings gap between men and women has continued to increase. This reflects just how difficult it is for many women to balance their paid work and family and community responsibilities. Australian Bureau of Statistics figures reveal something that we are all very well aware of, that women are also spending more time on unpaid work than their male partners—they are spending a lot more time doing domestic labour than their male partners—an average of 36.5 hours per week compared with the figure for men of just over 20 hours per week. So, it is time to fix that as well. As I have travelled around the State meeting hundreds of women during our regional Cabinet consultations I have been struck by the amazing work that women do, especially in regional and rural communities. They really are the glue that holds their communities together, especially in times of drought. It is important that we honour these women and pay tribute to the work they do.

One of the ways that the Government marks the achievements of women is through the Woman of the Year Award. The winner of this award will be announced I thank everyone who participated in this process by nominating a woman from their local area. One hundred women from a wide cross-section of the community have been nominated and 12 finalists have been chosen from women making a contribution to the diverse range of activities in our community. The finalists include women from rural and regional New South Wales. Seven are Sydney based and the other five reside outside Sydney. Two are outstanding young women and three of the finalists are Aboriginal women.

I take this opportunity to place on the public record who these women are and to talk a little about their achievements: it is a nice thing to do to mark International Women's Day. Pam Boney was the first of the final nominees. She is a member of the Murrawari tribe and has been actively involved in both setting up and contributing to a number of Aboriginal community initiatives, including the Bush Babies Program in Orange. Skye Bortoli is a 15-year-old conservation activist from Port Stephens—people might have seen her in the newspaper—who is dedicated to ending commercial whaling practices. She headed a delegation of three Australian schoolgirls who went to Alaska to speak at the International Whaling Commission.

Jean Cinis is a dedicated volunteer worker for the Western Sydney Regional Public Tenants Council, who supports a wide range of housing clients with complex needs. Captain Josephine Clark—this nomination was of particular interest as I have done a number of regional radio spots about Captain Josephine Clark—is the harbour master and marine pilot of the port of Eden. She is the first woman harbour master in New South Wales and only the second in Australia. Janny Ely is a Wiradjuri woman who is a pioneer in empowering Aboriginal women in south-western Sydney through her tireless involvement in the community and in education and women's services.

Catherine Hall gained her Bronze Medallion in surf lifesaving in 1980 and is still actively involved as the education and training coordinator of South Maroubra Surf Life Saving Club, and a patrolling surf lifesaver. Dianne Madden is the founder and president of Camp Kookaburra in the Sutherland shire, which provides networking and support for children aged 8 to 12 years living with a parent, brother or sister affected by mental illness. Bev Manton, a member of the Worimi nation, is a strong and respected advocate for community development, particularly in relation to employment, housing, health and education. Bev is currently chairperson of the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council.

Melinda Medway has worked to provide new, innovative employment opportunities for rural women and youth in the Gunning district, which is severely drought affected. Alice Oppen has drawn attention to the issues of family planning and sexual and reproductive health and set up two charitable trusts in the Sydney

region, including the Women's Plans Foundation. Tegan Wagner, with great determination, courage, and leadership, has used her experience to change how our society understands and responds to sexual assault. Ruth Wilson is an exemplary worker in unpaid work, an innovator and instigator of exceptional programs, particularly for the New South Wales Jewish community in Sydney and the Southern Highlands.

I think I have the support of the House in saying that these are 12 exceptional women, absolutely dedicated to their communities and doing work well above and beyond what they need to be doing. One of these very deserving women will be announced as the 2008 New South Wales Woman of the Year at the Premier's reception for International Women's Day tonight. I know that I speak for all members when I congratulate all the finalists on their outstanding efforts. Of course, I invite all members to attend tonight. All members of Parliament were asked to nominate a woman from their electorate for the award and Ministers were also asked to nominate one woman from their portfolio area. For the first time nominations were also sought from the community, so we had a really good spread of women this year. The awards highlight the work that so many extraordinary women in our community are doing every day. It is a humbling experience to hear their stories and appreciate the diverse and extraordinary contributions these women make.

Question time concluded.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT (CLIMATE CHANGE)

Report

Mrs Karyn Paluzzano, as Chair, tabled report No. 54/01, entitled, "Report on Conference Attendance, 12th Annual Conference of Parliamentary Public Works and Environment Committees, Darwin, 19-21 September 2007", dated March 2008.

Ordered to be printed on motion by Mrs Karyn Paluzzano.

PETITIONS

Hawkesbury River Railway Station Access

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

Pymont and Ultimo Bus Services

Petition requesting improved and expanded bus services for Pymont and Ultimo, received **Ms Clover Moore**.

Public Library Funding

Petition requesting increased funding for public libraries, received from **Mr John Turner**.

Tumut Renal Dialysis Service

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

Hornsby Palliative Care Beds

Petition requesting funding for Hornsby's palliative care beds, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

Morisset Hospital Services

Petition requesting funding for a general public hospital to service the Morisset area, received from **Mr Greg Piper**.

Swansea Police Station

Petition requesting that Swansea police station be staffed 24 hours a day and 7 days a week, received from **Mr Robert Coombs**.

Licence Laws for Older Drivers

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

Pet Shops

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

Electricity Infrastructure

Petition requesting the retention of the infrastructure and systems for generating and retailing electricity as public assets, received from **Mr Greg Piper**.

Alcohol and Drug Services

Petition requesting increased funding for, and expansion of, inner city alcohol and drug services, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

DR GRAEME REEVES APPOINTMENT

Personal Explanation

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER, by leave: I wish to make a personal explanation in response to comments made by the Minister for Health during question time which were clearly designed to smear my reputation. They were untrue. The Minister suggested that I did not raise concerns about the mutilation of Caroline Dewaegeneire as quickly as I should have. Had I done other than I did, I would have been betraying a commitment I made to the patient not to jeopardise her court case. The Minister should return to this place and offer an apology not only to me but also to the member for Bega, who was discharged from the Chamber because he was so upset about the matter. The Minister also misled the House in saying that she had introduced amending legislation. She has not; she has only given notice of it.

JUDICIAL COMMISSION CONDUCT DIVISION: APPOINTMENT OF COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL (Keira—Minister for Police, and Minister for the Illawarra) [3.17 p.m.], on behalf of Mr John Aquilina: I move:

That, pursuant to clause 4 of schedule 2 of the Judicial Officers Act 1986:

- (1) this House nominates Ken Moroney and Martha Jabour as community representatives for appointment to a panel of the Conduct Division of the Judicial Commission of New South Wales; and
- (2) a message be sent requesting the Legislative Council's concurrence in the nominations.

Last year the Government passed amendments to the Judicial Officers Act 1986 to enable the appointment of two community representatives, one of whom will sit on each inquiry into judicial misconduct by a Conduct Division. The Government's reforms provided for the appointments in the most open way possible, by providing that the two community representatives be nominated by Parliament. The Government is pleased to nominate Mr Moroney and Ms Jabour as the community representatives. The Government is committed to ensuring greater transparency and accountability in the process for dealing with complaints and matters involving the impairment of judicial officers. Today the Government is delivering on this commitment.

Under part 6 of the Judicial Officers Act any person may complain to the Judicial Commission about matters that concern or may concern the ability or behaviour of a judicial officer. As an initial step, the commission as a whole conducts a preliminary examination of a complaint received. If the commission does not dismiss a complaint or refer it to the head of jurisdiction the complaint must be referred to a Conduct Division for further investigation. A separate Conduct Division is established for each complaint referred by the Judicial Commission. A Conduct Division previously consisted of a panel of three serving judicial officers or two serving officers and a retired judicial officer. Following the Government's reforms, any future Conduct Division will consist of a community representative and either one serving and one former judicial officer or two serving judicial officers. The two community representatives will rotate sittings, subject to availability.

The nomination of the community representatives will expire when those persons resign, become legally qualified or are replaced by Parliament, or following a State election. The Act requires community representative nominees to be people of high standing in the community and also provides that they may not be legally qualified or members of the Judicial Commission. In this regard I am pleased to outline the high regard in which the two nominees are held. Ms Jabour is Executive Director of the Homicide Victims Support Group and has held that position since 1993. The group is one of the largest homicide victims support groups in the world, helping tens of thousands of people who are directly and indirectly affected by the worst categories of crime. Ms Jabour is also a current serving member of the New South Wales Sentencing Council and the State Parole Authority. She has previously served on the Serious Offenders Review Council. She will bring to her new role a great deal of experience.

Mr Moroney is the former New South Wales Commissioner of Police, whose service to this State has been significant. He has been recognised by way of numerous honours and awards. Operationally, Ken Moroney has been recognised for his service during the Strathfield massacre, the Thredbo landslide, the 2000 Olympic Games and the 2001 Christmas bushfires. He is a recipient of both the national medal and the Australian Police Medal. In 2006 he was appointed as an officer in the Order of Australia in recognition of his distinguished service to policing. He served as the twentieth New South Wales Commissioner of Police from May 2002 to August 2007. The appointment of community representatives to the Conduct Division builds upon recent changes to the Judicial Officers Act introduced by the Government. These reforms updated and streamlined complaints handling by the Judicial Commission and provided for mechanisms to deal with a judicial officer who may be suffering impairment. The nominations of Ms Jabour and Mr Moroney will further strengthen public confidence in the process for dealing with complaints relating to judicial officers in our legal system. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr GREG SMITH (Epping) [3.22 p.m.]: The Opposition does not oppose the nominations, nor did it oppose the amending legislation that went through the Parliament about June last year. However, the former Attorney General gave an undertaking that any appointment of community representatives to the Conduct Division would be in consultation with the Judicial Commission. I refer to a speech by the Chief Justice at the opening of the law term of 2007 in which he expressed concern about the appointment of community representatives, particularly if appointed by the Executive Government. The nomination by Parliament certainly is a change from that. The Chief Justice set out his reasons for opposing the concept as follows:

First, although the Judicial Commission has a role with respect to sentencing, a Conduct Division has nothing to do with sentencing and I cannot envisage a situation in which it would.

Secondly, every Conduct Division must be impartial and seen to be so. No person with any kind of agenda should be appointed to a Conduct Division. I reiterate that, notwithstanding my opinion that no case has been made for this change, the concept of a non-lawyer participating in the decision making process of a Conduct Division, is not in itself necessarily offensive to the principle of judicial independence. Indeed such participation occurs now in the deliberations of the Judicial Commission itself with the four non-judicial representatives of the Commission.

At the end of his speech he said:

I am pleased to inform you that, in response to my letter to the Premier, the Attorney General has informed me that, if re-elected, the Government will undertake consultations about the details of the proposal. The Attorney expressed his opinion that the Judicial Commission should be involved in the selection of the two "community representatives" and in determining who should sit on a particular matter.

I trust that in the course of such consultations the judiciary of this State can rely, as we have in the past, on the support of the legal profession to maintain the principle of judicial independence.

On Tuesday, when the Premier announced the Parliament's nominees to the Conduct Division, no mention was made of any consultation with the Judicial Commission. Therefore, a question was asked today in the other place of the Attorney General in the following terms:

Does the Attorney General recall the Chief Justice confirming in his speech to the opening of the law term annual dinner in January last year the former Attorney General had given assurances that if the Government was re-elected the Judicial Commission would be involved in the selection of community members of the Conduct Division of the Judicial Commission? Does he recall the Chief Justice indicating in that speech that the former Attorney General had also given an assurance that the Judicial Commission would be involved in determining which community member would sit on a particular matter? In the light of the Premier's announcement in the other place on Tuesday of the Government's recommendations that Mr Ken Moroney and Ms Martha Jabour be appointed as community members of the Conduct Division of the Judicial Commission, can he indicate to the House whether the Government has abided by the commitment of his predecessor? Has the Judicial Commission been consulted and involved in the selection of the community members and will it be involved in determining who will sit on a particular matter? If not, why has the Government changed its positions on these matters?

I do not have the Attorney's answer but effectively it was that the Judicial Commission had not been consulted and that it would be left to the Judicial Commission to decide which community representatives sit on which panel. This is a gross breach of a commitment made by the former Attorney General to the Chief Justice of this State after he had publicly raised concerns about what appeared to him to be likely interference with judicial independence. Although we support the use of community representatives on the Conduct Division, we do not support a breach of undertakings. Clearly, the Judicial Commission should have been consulted. It has not been, and this Government will have to wear the consequences.

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL (Keira—Minister for Police, and Minister for the Illawarra) [3.27 p.m.], in reply: I note that the Opposition supports the Government's appointment of two community representatives to the Conduct Division of the Judicial Commission. That is as it should be. The Government gave a commitment that the names would be put before the Parliament for recognition. The member for Epping referred to question time in the other place today and I draw his attention to what I am sure was a comprehensive answer by the Attorney General. The Government has amended the legislation that provides for the establishment of community representatives on the Conduct Division of the Judicial Commission.

That legislation has been agreed to by the Parliament and the Government is now moving to implement it by putting forward the names of two people who, without any shadow of doubt, have the capacity, experience and commitment to make a significant contribution. The member for Epping introduced a range of esoteric matters, which was interesting but not to the point. As I said at the commencement of my reply, I note that the Opposition supports the appointment of these two people. I wish them well in their work on behalf of the community, and I commend the motion to the House.

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

Motion agreed to.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Private members' statements, by leave, taken forthwith.

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

THE HON. KEVIN ROZZOLI, AM, FORMER MEMBER FOR HAWKESBURY

SCOUT MOVEMENT 100TH ANNIVERSARY

Mr RAY WILLIAMS (Hawkesbury) [3.32 p.m.]: Two important events have taken place in the electorate of Hawkesbury over the past few weeks. On 26 January a predecessor as member for Hawkesbury, the Hon. Kevin Rozzoli, was awarded the Order of Australia Medal for his service to the New South Wales Parliament. Kevin's contribution to the community in roles involving environmental protection, health and welfare, and educational organisations have earned him the respect and accolades he so richly deserved. Kevin has been chairperson of the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre for over 30 years and also chairperson of the Haymarket Foundation, which is an organisation operating in Sydney providing medical welfare and accommodation services to homeless people.

Kevin continues to occupy his time working on behalf of the Hawkesbury region and has also completed a book, *Gavel to Gavel*. The book offers an insider's view of Parliament and is the first of its kind on this topic. It explains the complexities of the New South Wales Parliament and gives wonderful recollections of significant events that happened during Kevin's time as Speaker of the House. I congratulate Kevin and thank him for his continued efforts on behalf of the area he represented so well as the State member for Hawkesbury. I also thank him for his friendly advice and continued support.

On Sunday 24 February scouts across the world celebrated their 100th birthday. What began as a simple dream to give young people the opportunity to enjoy the wonders of the outdoors and to teach them important survival techniques to survive in the bush has now become the largest youth movement in the world. Lord Baden Powell, the "Scout Leader of the World", who developed and dedicated his life to the scouting movement, simply wanted young people to be happy and to enjoy themselves outdoors. Baden Powell would have certainly been a happy scout leader on Sunday 24 February, when just under 30 million scouts, cubs and joeys across the world celebrated the 100th birthday of the movement he started.

I was privileged to join the Mayor of Hawkesbury, Councillor Bart Bassett, and the Federal member for Greenway, Louise Markus, at celebrations to honour this memorable occasion. The event was organised by Phyllis McAlpine, the District Leader, who was also joined by Neville Henderson, the Regional Leader Scouts for the area. The local event was held at McQuade Park, in Windsor, with scouts, cubs and joeys from across the Hawkesbury area joining in the festivities on the day, which commenced with a flag-raising ceremony. Water slides, obstacle courses and boat races provided great fun for the many young people who were present at the celebrations.

Indeed, the event proved that the scouts are more relevant today than at any other time. I say this not to diminish in any way the scouting movement of previous years but, rather, to highlight the importance of scouting for young children and the benefits of partaking in healthy outdoor activities and exercise. With obesity rates at an all-time high among our young children and housing densities now limiting the size of home backyards, it is important that we promote the benefits of scouting as a way for young people to remain healthy. As a youngster I was involved in cubs, but I was also fortunate to grow up on a farm and therefore had the benefits of living in a rural area and being able to camp out on weekends. My mates and I loved to sit around the campfire, enjoying a good feed of freshly caught rabbit. We did it regularly but we largely took the experience for granted. We were certainly not concerned about obesity while we traipsed through the bush, avoiding the many black snakes we encountered. Nonetheless we were undertaking healthy activity without actually recognising it—which is something that, unfortunately, so many young children in our cities now miss out on.

Although my local council of Baulkham Hills supports the creation and maintenance of playing fields and establishes as many as possible to keep up with the demands of new sporting clubs in the Hawkesbury electorate, many young people do not participate in sports. So it has never been more important to support and promote the benefits of organisations such as scouts and guides, which continue to provide healthy benefits to our children. I congratulate all scouts on their achievements and wish them a happy 100th birthday. I also commend the many leaders and parents who give up their time as volunteers and who are essential in the organisation and running of these associations. On behalf of our future younger generations, I encourage scouts and leaders to continue over the next 100 years the dream and the success begun by Baden Powell. I am sure they will.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order! The member for Hawkesbury introduced two subjects into his private member's statement. The Chair allowed him some latitude, but will not do so again.

MS ERELLA MACAULAY, AM

COUNCILLOR KATHIE COLLINS, OAM

Mr JOHN AQUILINA (Riverstone—Leader of the House) [3.37 p.m.]: I wish to extend my congratulations to two people from the Blacktown area who have received Order of Australia Awards. They are either from the local government area of Blacktown or have been associated with it over the years. First, I wish to speak about Ms Erella Macaulay, whom I nominated for the award in October 2006 because I felt that such recognition was long overdue. I first came to know Ms Macaulay in late 1977 after I was elected the Mayor of Blacktown. At that stage she already had a distinguished nursing career, having been appointed matron of Blacktown District Hospital in 1964. I was very much impressed by her outstanding work and leadership in the nursing field.

In those days Blacktown hospital, which was founded in the early 1960s, was bursting at the seams trying to cope with a rapidly increasing population. As matron, Ms Macaulay was faced with the task of not only coping with the needs of a rapidly growing hospital but also obtaining adequate nursing staff to meet the hospital's needs—and those nursing staff were in very short supply. Ms Macaulay pursued all avenues, including making overseas contacts, which resulted in one of the first influxes of Filipino nurses in Australia. She devised courses for the accreditation of those Filipino nurses so they could meet Australian standards. In addition, Ms Macaulay was keen to promote nursing and upgrade the profession's standards. She worked closely with the then Hawkesbury Agricultural College, which is now a campus of the University of Western Sydney, to modernise nursing education and prepare for it becoming a university discipline.

Ms Macaulay did a substantial degree of the work that resulted in the establishment of the degree of Bachelor of Nursing at universities throughout New South Wales. I would like to acknowledge her pioneering work in that regard. Over the years Ms Macaulay has done a tremendous amount to bring nursing into the twentieth century and to make it a university discipline and therefore give young people a clear career path in

the profession. As a result of this work Ms Macaulay was nominated by the Hawkesbury Agricultural College for a position on the Nurses Education Board. Upon my election as the State member for Blacktown in 1981, I continued to have an even stronger relationship with Ms Macaulay. We conferred often about the hospital's administration and needs.

My predecessors as members for Blacktown, namely Mr Jim Southee and Mr Gordon Barnier, both now deceased, indicated to me on numerous occasions their great admiration for the pioneering nursing work Ms Macaulay performed at the then fledgling Blacktown hospital. This admiration was also shared by the then Federal member for Chifley, Mr John Armitage, whose electorate included Blacktown hospital. Ms Macaulay's retirement function was one of the most moving events of its kind. Tributes to Ms Macaulay's work came from far and wide. Recently I was concerned to note that following her retirement nothing had been done to ensure that her extraordinary commitment and professional capacity were formally recognised. So it was with that intention that I moved to gain recognition of her work. I am very pleased that Ms Macaulay was recognised with an Order of Australia Award, presented at the Order of Australia Awards presentation on Australia Day this year.

I also wish to express my congratulations to Councillor Kathie Collins, who is a councillor on Blacktown City Council—a position she has held for many years—and who also received an Order of Australia Award at this year's Australia Day Awards presentation. I have known Councillor Collins for approximately 30 years, going back to the mid 1970s when we both did community work on behalf of St Patrick's Parish, Blacktown. In those days Councillor Collins was an active volunteer and would always be seen working hard on behalf of the elderly and the youth of the parish. In 1976 she became the secretary of St Patrick's Soccer Club in Blacktown, which in those days was already a large club in a young, growing area. Councillor Collins has continued to work hard on behalf of the club during the past 30 years, and in about 1990 she was made a life member.

Councillor Collins was also heavily involved with Blacktown Little Athletics, having been elected as secretary of the organisation in 1980. In recognition of her work she was appointed life member of Blacktown Little Athletics many years ago. Because of her community activities Councillor Collins was encouraged to run as a representative of her ward on Blacktown City Council. She was elected to Blacktown City Council in 1991 and served until 1995. She was subsequently re-elected in 1999 and again in 2004. She was an extremely active person on the council, undertaking many additional tasks, such as coordinator of the Clean Up Australia Day Blacktown campaign—she was very active in that role last Sunday—co-chair of the Blacktown City Support Advisory Committee; the mayor's representative on the Western Sydney Academy of Sport; and chairperson of several other Blacktown City Council committees, as outlined in her curriculum vitae, which is readily available on the Internet.

OFFICE OF FAIR TRADING LICENSING REQUIREMENTS

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK (South Coast) [3.42 p.m.]: I speak in support of a business in my electorate, and workers within that business, who have been treated unfairly by officers from the Office of Fair Trading in my view. I contacted the office of the Minister for Fair Trading in December last year to outline the problems but as yet I have not received a response. The problems first arose when a garage door fitter working for the Shoalhaven Door Centre in Nowra was visited whilst at work by a senior building investigator from the Office of Fair Trading and received an infringement notice for the offence of "do unlicensed work". The infringement notice was for an amount of \$500 and subsequently the business was also fined.

The contractor in question queried the existence of such a licence and was informed that he could actually be fined \$44,000 and that the investigator was doing the contractor "a favour"—a remark that I consider grossly inappropriate, harassing and intimidating. The worker requested how he could apply for the necessary licence and was informed somewhat dismissively by the investigator to look on the website. That might have been appropriate if we accept that all workers have access to the website, but they do not. The contractor had never been informed that he required such a licence, regularly attends conferences and receives industry newsletters in which the Office of Fair Trading has never indicated the need for a licence to fit garage doors. The fitter subsequently made inquiries as to how he might obtain a licence and learned that he would have to complete a TAFE course for the appropriate training in the fitting of garage doors.

However, after contacting TAFE he was informed that no such course existed. He was advised, however, that he could complete a course in building but that there was no module dealing with the fitting of garage doors. This situation is completely ludicrous. It shows that the entire exercise undertaken by the Office of

Fair Trading is about revenue raising and will result in innocent, hardworking individuals facing financial hardship. In relation to the accreditation of garage door fitters, the contractor was also informed that he would need to procure a letter from the manufacturers stating that he had been trained by them and was competent to do the job. However, it appears that the manufacturer, B&D, does not provide accredited training for fitters, although its advertising says otherwise. So far then, to acquire a licence to fit garage doors, the installer needs to complete a TAFE course that does not exist and to gain a letter from the manufacturers stating that they have trained him in a course they do not provide.

I now turn to the department's website, to which the installer and the business owner were directed. There is indeed an application form on the website for a contractor licence, building consultancy licence, qualified supervisor certificate or tradesperson certificate. In an attempt to gain an appropriate licence to avoid further fines for the business and his workers or builders, the business operator completed the forms and presented them to the Office of Fair Trading representative in Nowra, who said that the forms were no longer used and therefore obsolete. So much for the department's website! The installer contacted the Infringement Processing Bureau by lengthy letter, conveying to it the farcical situation. He has recently been informed that the fine will stand. The imposition of the fine was reconsidered but he must still pay it.

The fitter and the business owner are understandably furious about the chain of events and have contacted colleagues in the Nowra area—garage door fitters and those in the business industry—none of whom knew anything about the required licence. They have cooperated in the past with the rigours of various licensing requirements. They currently hold green cards, forklift drivers licences and certificate IV business certificates, to name just a few. Something like eight or nine licences are held by the installer alone. The installer also has a certificate IV in workplace training and has not in the past avoided any of the requirements to work in this area, which he has done for about 15 years. He has trained 20 or more fitters in the past. The fitter also informed me that he is willing to contribute to regulation reforms that would clarify requirements for those in the industry.

There are other young men in the area who face similar fines but who have no idea how they should comply with a regulation the requirements of which have not been adequately provided by the department. They have not been given appropriate advice by a department whose officers seem only to know how to fill out infringement notices and cause enormous anxiety amongst hard workers in the South Coast electorate—and I expect beyond. I request that the Minister for Fair Trading thoroughly investigate the situation and counsel at least her staff as to their treatment of honest, hardworking people in this industry and others. I also ask that this fine—which is the subject of correspondence that I sent to the Minister last December—and all other fines that have been issued be revoked until she clarifies the regulations. Finally, I call on the Minister to reform her department and ensure that her staff incorporate advice and assistance into their dealings with people rather than engaging in their hitherto intimidating and harassing behaviour. The Office of Fair Trading has demonstrated anti-business and anti-worker attitudes and needs to address the situation I have described with a sense of urgency.

NEWCASTLE PORT DEVELOPMENT

Ms JODI McKAY (Newcastle) [3.47 p.m.]: I bring to the attention of the House the recent initiatives of the New South Wales Government in supporting the development of the port of Newcastle. Newcastle is one of the world's largest coal export ports, setting a new record for coal exports last year of 80.8 million tonnes. This record would have been even greater if not for the devastating storms experienced last June. The performance is set to continue, with the port achieving a new half-year record of 44.5 million tonnes for the second half of 2007 and a record month for coal exports in December, with 8.3 million tonnes shipped.

The New South Wales Government is working with the coal industry to achieve the continued growth of the Hunter coal industry. In January, the New South Wales Government signed a 35-year lease with the Newcastle Coal Infrastructure Group for the development of a new coal loading terminal at the port of Newcastle, with a capacity of up to 66 million tonnes per annum. This project is expected to make a \$1.5 billion contribution to our gross domestic product and create up to 5,000 jobs across New South Wales. In addition, in April last year the Government approved the expansion of the existing Port Waratah Coal Services coal terminal from 102 million tonnes to 140 million tonnes per annum. These new developments are important steps towards meeting the world's demand for Hunter coal, which continues to grow due to the quality of the coal available in the Hunter. Hunter coal has an international reputation that we in the region are very proud of.

The size of the demand, and how fast it has grown, means the industry needs to find new ways to manage coal exports from the region. On Monday 3 March the Australian Consumer and Competition

Commission issued a draft decision to authorise the common user provisions required to manage coal exports from the Hunter. This will provide a fair allocation system for managing coal export systems until the end of 2008, giving the coal industry a chance to decide how to manage coal exports in the long term. I welcome the Hon. Nick Greiner's involvement in helping the coal industry to reach an agreement on this long-term plan. The former New South Wales Premier was in Newcastle yesterday for the Hunter Valley coal chain logistics meeting.

It is important to note that the port of Newcastle enjoys a strong future beyond coal. The New South Wales Government's Ports Growth Plan identifies Newcastle as the location of the next major container terminal once Port Botany reaches capacity. Port Botany experienced a massive 12 per cent growth in container trade last year—that is twice the forecast level of growth. If the container growth through Sydney continues to accelerate at that rate Newcastle may be in the container business far earlier than we originally expected. The former BHP site at Mayfield, now called the Intertrade Industrial Park, is the strategic site for container stevedoring in Newcastle. The master plan identifies 30 hectares for a container trade future, and that future is getting closer.

Premier Iemma announced last year that the New South Wales Government, through the Newcastle Port Corporation, will commit \$22 million to the project. In January I announced a national call to tenders to carry out the multi-million dollar redevelopment of wharf infrastructure at the Mayfield site. That project includes a 265-metre berth due to be built on the site plus the construction of eight hectares of hardstand behind the wharf on the Hunter River. The hardstand construction may include facilities such as covered or uncovered storage, cargo and container storage areas, services and amenities. The project will facilitate trade growth and allow the port of Newcastle to establish new functions complementary to other New South Wales ports. The continued diversification of the port will also be assisted by the Government's announcement to consolidate ownership of Newcastle port lands with the Newcastle Port Corporation. Consolidation of government land ownership at the port will strengthen its position as a world-leading coal export port.

The Government has begun transferring ownership to the Newcastle Port Corporation, creating efficiencies for the port and the Hunter region. Consolidation will see 470 hectares of land pass into Newcastle Port Corporation ownership. This includes the 90 hectares of waterfront land at the Intertrade Industrial Park, including the future container terminal. Proponents of investment now will be able to deal with a single entity that is able to assist with land and waterside requirements. Cutting red tape in this way means greater efficiency and reduced costs. The Newcastle Port Corporation is also working on a 20-year development plan aimed at helping the coal industry, including the new coal terminal project that is due in 2010.

Further, the plan will prepare the port for other opportunities to diversify its business. One new venture worth noting is the alignment of Cruise Hunter to the auspices of the Newcastle Port Corporation. This successful regional project has relocated to the Newcastle Port Corporation to allow further development of this niche market. So far it is working well, with international cruise ship visits contributing almost \$1 million to the Hunter economy in the first quarter of this year. All these initiatives are aimed at improving the port's competitive advantage, helping to achieve growth and diversification. Once completed the expansion of the coal industry and the continued diversification of the port are expected to provide up to 12,000 new jobs and increase gross domestic product by \$1.5 billion per year. This is further evidence that the Iemma Government is getting on with the job and delivering results in Newcastle.

BURRINJUCK ELECTORATE MEN'S SHED MOVEMENT

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck) [3.52 p.m.]: The Men's Shed movement brings particular benefits to the electorate of Burrinjuck. A large number of homes in Australia have a shed. They may be a well laid-out, large expanse where hobbies or crafts are pursued or a tiny tin shed crammed with things that might come in handy one day. Whatever their size, shape, degree of tidiness or use, they are invariably places where most Australian males feel a certain degree of comfort. However, in today's society there is escalating concern about men's health issues, social isolation, loneliness, depression, domestic violence and a lack of male-to-male companionship. For isolated men, particularly in rural areas, it is often very difficult to find someone with whom they are comfortable talking about such issues. This is particularly evident as men reach retirement age and stop working full time. Many find themselves seeking a new purpose or direction in life. In the area covered by the Greater Southern Area Health Service, about 120 men took their own lives between 2002 and 2005. It is a disturbing figure. The Men's Shed movement aims to address this situation by providing a non-threatening space where men can talk, share skills, swap ideas, solve problems or just discuss life in general.

The Men's Shed concept is relatively new. It has been around for only about a decade, but it is expanding rapidly. The common theme in all sheds is about men feeling useful and contributing to their communities, learning or sharing skills, making friends, networking and availing themselves of health information programs and opportunities. I understand there are about 220 Men's Sheds Australia wide. In the electorate of Burrinjuck there are Men's Sheds at Young, Grenfell, Cootamundra, Cowra, and Boorowa. Perhaps the newest of these is the Men's Shed in Cowra, which officially opened its doors on 17 February 2008. The establishment of the Cowra Men's Shed was a community project undertaken by the Rotary Club of Cowra, but the operations of the shed are self-funded, with money being raised by a volunteer committee headed by chairman Doug Beer and vice-chairman Bill Bundy. The Cowra Men's Shed is particularly keen to involve young men in its activities to help bridge the age gap and allow the older men to pass on skills they have learned over a lifetime.

I dropped in recently to the Cootamundra Men's Shed and had a cuppa with members Keith Cahill, Jim Lyster and Ron South. My young son, Hamilton, has benefited from their skills, as he has the use of a set of beautifully crafted steps to get to places that he sometimes should not and a handcrafted trolley for carting his toys around the house. I have had many dealings with the Grenfell Men's Shed, particularly in relation to its ongoing requests for assistance and visits from Greater Western Area Health Service staff. I have raised its problems on many occasions during question time. I reaffirm the significant need by Men's Sheds throughout New South Wales for support from health services on mental health matters. Frequently, friends and companions at the Men's Sheds can identify the early signs of depression. A close working relationship between the Men's Sheds and local community health services is vital to making sure that early treatment is obtained.

The Young Men's Shed was started in 2006 following the success of the sheds in Cootamundra, Boorowa and Grenfell. Lambing Flats Enterprises donated a shed in Mackenzie Street for use by the group. I commend that enterprise for its generosity in donating such an important facility. The Young Men's Shed is seeking funding to upgrade tools and equipment. I hope the Government supports its request for funding. The Boorowa Men's Shed resulted from an initiative by local community nurse Kay Nash, whose hard work has assisted the Boorowa group to achieve success. I was happy to assist the Boorowa Men's Shed to obtain a \$20,000 grant to purchase equipment for the shed. Before the grant, the shed contained a few handsaws and screwdrivers. Now the men at Boorowa Men's Shed are planing and sawing away to their hearts delight. My electorate office is equipped with some wooden children's chairs and a table, which youngsters use while I meet with their parents. This furniture was skilfully constructed by the Grenfell Men's Shed and is a valued, decorative, useful and sturdy addition to my office. I frequently chat with Boorowa Men's Shed president Hugh Darling and hear the fantastic things being achieved by the club's members.

I commend to the House the Men's Shed concept, of which I am a great supporter. The sheds are places where blokes can go to have fun and do practical things. They generally focus on physical, hands-on activities. At these places new friendships and mateship can be developed. Most importantly, they provide a venue to address the significant number of men's health issues in communities. Men's Sheds are for males of every age and ability. I congratulate the magnificent volunteers in the Burrinjuck electorate who run the Men's Sheds on their contribution to the wellbeing of the community. I hope that my ongoing requests for funding for additional equipment and tools for these wonderful Men's Sheds are met with favourable consideration by the Government.

APOLOGY TO THE ABORIGINAL STOLEN GENERATIONS

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.57 p.m.]: On 13 February 2008 I was proud of Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's eloquent and courageous apology to the Aboriginal nation—a step toward reconciliation—when he said the most important yet simple word "Sorry". We will remember this event because as Australians we cherish the nation of a fair go for all. We Australians celebrate our courage, our generosity and our pursuit of peace. But in the years and decades when our character was being shaped, we denied Aboriginal Australians the wisdom of those virtues that now define us. Two hundred and twenty-seven years after white settlement, Aboriginal Australians still face significant, indeed appalling, levels of disadvantage. Australia's current status on the world stage necessitates our righting the wrongs of this tangled indigenous web.

The State Labor Government is deeply committed to taking timely, substantive and effective actions to reduce indigenous disadvantage here in the nation's oldest and most populous State. In the spirit of the apology of 13 February 2008 and as a reminder of the first apology given to Aboriginal people in this place by the New South Wales Parliament in 1997, our State Labor Government has committed to genuine bipartisanship with our

Aboriginal brothers and sisters. The range of programs the State Labor Government is deploying to tackle Aboriginal disadvantage is summarised in the New South Wales State Plan and the Two Ways Together Aboriginal Affairs plan for 2003 to 2012. Two Ways Together builds upon the New South Wales Government's 10-year plan to improve the wellbeing of Aboriginal people. It focuses on the seven priority areas identified by Aboriginal communities as the most important to their future wellbeing: health, housing, education, culture and heritage, justice, economic development, and families and young people.

Two Ways Together is changing the way government agencies deliver services to Aboriginal people and reinforces the need to work together with Aboriginal communities. We are proud that the policy changes of the Federal Government are strongly aligned with the approach adopted in New South Wales, by developing a partnership between the New South Wales Government and peak representative Aboriginal groups, including the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council, the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council, the Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat, the Aboriginal Housing Board and the Aboriginal Justice Advisory Council.

It is important also to note the unanimous resolution of the December meeting of the Council of Australian Governments to close the life expectancy gap within a generation, halve the mortality gap for children under five within a decade and halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade. As a State and as a nation we now have the will and political momentum to right the wrongs of decades of wilful neglect. Let us all work together with our Aboriginal brothers and sisters to build stronger, safer communities and to grow community resilience, which has at its core the recognition of, and respect for, Aboriginal identity as shaped by culture, heritage, language, song, dance and spirit. This is our chance to explore and reflect on our past and on our future. Let us embrace the generosity of Aboriginal people, who have trusted us with their stories and allowed us to share and celebrate in this moment of pride for our nation, and with it a new dawn in our journey towards true reconciliation.

PENNANT HILLS ROAD, THORNLEIGH

Mr GREG SMITH (Epping) [4.02 p.m.]: Thornleigh is a beautiful suburb under threat. Thornleigh is located at the northern end of the Epping electorate and the notorious Pennant Hills Road, which carries an enormous amount of traffic, intersects it. Unfortunately, the eastern side of Pennant Hills Road has become a battleground, with commercial developments impinging on the many homes and families located in that area. A continuing planning fiasco is the Officeworks development on Pennant Hills Road. Shoddy supervision of the terms of the building consent by a private certifier caused serious encroachment on a home located next door. As a result, Hornsby Shire Council has had to re-zone the homeowner's property as commercial in order to add some value for re-sale. Work on the site has constantly been controversial. Although the customer entry to the Officeworks site is in Thornleigh Street, its loading dock is in Station Street, which is closed to outgoing traffic onto Pennant Hills Road.

The Aldi development on Pennant Hills Road, if approved, will seriously damage the amenity of surrounding streets and hundreds of families who live there. Despite the fact that a large Woolworths supermarket is located close by on the eastern side of Pennant Hills Road, Aldi has lodged a development application to build another large supermarket in one of the busiest parts of Pennant Hills Road, which will inundate Station Street and surrounding streets with cars and trucks. This has infuriated local residents, who are also furious that Hornsby council sent letters over the busy Christmas period with limited response time and only to some residents—those on only one side of Station Street received them. The locals have formed a protest group called the Thornleigh Residents Action Committee.

At a recent home meeting of 30 or so residents, which I attended, one of the Station Street residents, Mrs Teresa Lahood, said that residents were angry and concerned that what had been a safe street for children would be made dangerous due to the traffic that Aldi and Officeworks would generate. She told Bill Aitken of the *Monthly Chronicle* that she was concerned also that the council was believed to be considering rezoning the area for multistorey home units under the council's long-term home strategy, which is being forced along by the State Government. Such development would place an unacceptable strain on traffic in the area, aggravated by the Pennant Hills Road gridlock. Mrs Lahood complained that residents needed certainty and support from the council to plan for their future and that of their families.

For the council or the court to approve the Aldi development or any other traffic-generating development on Pennant Hills Road, particularly at Thornleigh, would be to betray the hundreds of families in

that area who are already under siege from—or even blitzed by—the almost unending convoys of B-doubles and other trucks and traffic that are forced to use Pennant Hills Road daily because the Iemma Government continues to avoid solving this problem. This is both a Federal and a State problem, which was highlighted again on Tuesday at 11.45 a.m. when a truck overturned on the F3 at Moonee Moonee, forcing the closure of all northbound lanes for an hour. It was the third F3 truck crash in three months. According to today's *Hornsby Advocate*, the truck was travelling north when a tyre blow-out caused it to hit a wall and flip on its side. The driver was taken to Gosford Hospital and remains in a stable condition.

There is no other route across the Hawkesbury except the Hawkesbury Bridge at Brooklyn or the punt at Wisemans Ferry. There needs to be another crossing. Mahla Pearlman, Chief Judge of the Land and Environment Court, who is commissioned with investigating proposed remedies to the Pennant Hills Road situation, recommended a tunnel. The locals object to this proposal because tunnels have a bad name these days—and it would probably be the longest tunnel in the southern hemisphere if it went ahead. She also recommended that the Roads and Traffic Authority investigate quickly the feasibility of a second route over the Hawkesbury because of other problems in the area. Last year bushfires closed the Hawkesbury Bridge and some roads leading to the bridge flooded. We cannot afford to have only one crossing. The residents of Thornleigh are objecting to the way they are being treated. Thornleigh is being turned into a second-class suburb, which should not happen to such a beautiful part of the world. It is a picturesque area in the beautiful garden electorate of Epping.

MATER DEI SCHOOL AND CAMPBELLTOWN HOSPITAL STAFF

Mr PHILLIP COSTA (Wollondilly) [4.07 p.m.]: It gives me great pleasure to speak once again about two important institutions in my electorate. We must recognise the great work of the hardworking staff in our public hospitals, particularly Campbelltown Hospital. I thank Mr Frank Pitt, the Principal of Mater Dei School—a school for students with special needs—who wrote to me regarding the need to access the emergency department of Campbelltown Hospital when a young man from the school injured himself in the playground. Mr Pitt wanted me to know, as the local member, that he had written to the hospital staff and thanked them for the quality of care, compassion, patience and understanding shown by doctors and nurses, particularly those working in the paediatric department at Campbelltown Hospital. Mr Pitt applauded the staff for their care and understanding of the young man's needs and for the compassion shown to his parents upon their arrival at the hospital. The quality of medical care was outstanding and the accommodation for the young man and his family was very much appreciated. For this, Mr Pitt thanked the staff of Campbelltown Hospital most sincerely.

The Mater Dei School celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 2007. It is a school for students with special needs and takes young people from across our region. It is an outstanding school with highly trained and dedicated teachers and it has very strong community support. Many wonderful people have served at Mater Dei over the years: principals, teachers, teachers' assistants, social educators in the boarding school and group homes, physiotherapists, speech pathologists, nurses, administrators, benefactors, clergy, directors and members of the school board, and a variety of helpers from the wider community. They have all made a significant contribution to those young people in need. The Mater Dei philosophy is "inclusion for all into the wider community". All at Mater Dei strive to make this statement a reality for the children every day of their lives. The Sisters of the Good Samaritan, who have served the poor, the marginalised and the disadvantaged, established Mater Dei in 1957 as an orphanage.

The Bishop of Wollongong approached the Sisters to establish a school for girls with intellectual disabilities. The Sisters undertook this very difficult task, but today Mater Dei is for all children and is delivering a wonderful service in my community. The school's recognition of the quality of service that Campbelltown Hospital offered to one of its students is very welcome. The hospital's service to the region is not always recognised. We should remember that our public hospitals deliver an outstanding level of service, and this is one very fine example of that. This is not the first time I have mentioned the quality of the nursing staff and doctors at Campbelltown Hospital. Last year I mentioned the hardworking mental health services and the work that those wonderful people do in my local hospital. It is great that I have been able to mention the paediatric unit tonight, and I commend the staff for their hard work. I look forward to many, many more years of great service to the Macarthur region by Campbelltown Hospital.

TOURISM

Mr DONALD PAGE (Ballina) [4.12 p.m.]: I bring to the attention of the House the dismal State of the tourism industry in the Ballina electorate, the North Coast and, indeed, across New South Wales. In my

electorate of Ballina we have just experienced an extremely difficult tourist season due to persistent rain and floods. The flood in the Richmond River in January led to a fish kill of enormous proportions, forcing the closure of the river to recreational and professional fishing. This, together with a long period of wet weather, did enormous damage to the local tourism industry. An economic impact survey undertaken by Northern Rivers Tourism estimated a loss of \$18.2 million to the tourism industry in the Northern Rivers region. The wet weather and flood—which was declared a natural disaster—experienced during December and January are clearly unfortunate. There is little anyone can do to change the weather.

However, Northern Rivers tourism businesses have been further affected by the general malaise in the tourism industry across the State. Numerous reports have been produced by industry bodies and reported in the media about the downturn New South Wales tourism has been experiencing since the 2000 Sydney Olympics. This Labor Government has severely neglected the tourism industry in this State for a long time. Sydney is the only Olympic Games city to experience a tourism downturn after hosting the largest event in the world. For regional tourism, Sydney is the gateway for many overseas tourists. This Government has consistently cut its tourism promotion budget over the past eight years so that it is now 11 per cent lower in real terms than it was in its 2001 budget. The Government's budget cuts are clearly reflected in the declining number of visitors coming to New South Wales, which is down from 33 million in 2000 to 27 million in 2006.

The failure of the New South Wales Labor Government to promote New South Wales in Victoria, Queensland and overseas has obviously affected regional areas such as the North Coast. The New South Wales Government is aware of the sorry state of the tourism industry. That is evidenced by its commissioning of the John O'Neill review into Tourism New South Wales early in 2007. The Government has had the report of that review since late last year and the industry is anxiously awaiting its release. I wonder why it is taking the Government so long to release it. Could it be so critical of this Government that the Premier's office is rewriting sections of it to get the Government's spin on the document? I call on the Government to release this important report immediately so that its recommendations can be acted on to lift the tourism industry in New South Wales out of its long slump.

Of course, the state of tourism on the North Coast and in regional areas generally is directly linked to what is happening in New South Wales as a whole. Certainly, the figures do not look good. Domestic visitor expenditure by visitors to New South Wales has fallen by 14 per cent since 2000, New South Wales tourism budget expenditure per visitor is the lowest of all States and Territories, and New South Wales has failed to increase its share of total State and Territory tourism budget expenditure since 2002-03. While New South Wales tourism has been in the doldrums, our neighbouring States have been increasing their market share. Victoria's tourism industry is booming. This is the result of the Victorian State Government's increasing its tourism budget by 44 per cent during the same period that the New South Wales Government decided to cut its tourism budget in real terms by 11 per cent. Consequently, New South Wales has lost market share and Victoria and Queensland have increased their market shares.

A recent Tourism Business Alliance report recommends that the New South Wales Government increase its tourism marketing budget by \$20 million a year above the current level with the aim of increasing New South Wales tourism's current market share. I strongly support this recommendation because it will increase the number of visitors, both domestic and international, to New South Wales. This will in turn lead to an increase in investment, innovation and employment in the tourism industry, including in regional areas such as the North Coast. Returning to the situation in the electorate of Ballina, I was pleased to see the Federal and State governments announce a \$600,000 tourism recovery package for the North Coast following the recent floods. Local State Nationals members lobbied for this assistance package, as did Federal members.

Northern Rivers Tourism has now met with Tourism New South Wales and they have decided that the way forward is to establish a project management committee and to appoint a project manager for the allocation of this funding to appropriate activities. They plan a marketing campaign, public relations and other activities over time to boost North Coast tourism. I encourage Northern Rivers Tourism and Tourism New South Wales to get on with promoting tourism on the North Coast as soon as possible because people involved in tourism are hurting badly. They need something positive to come from this funding and they need it quickly. It is now March and Easter is only two weeks away and the New South Wales school holidays are only five weeks away. They should be out there promoting the North Coast as soon as possible. I sincerely hope this is not another example of this Labor Government's inaction and neglect of an industry that should be the lifeblood of this State and the North Coast region.

PARRAMATTA FERRY SERVICE

Ms TANYA GADIEL (Parramatta—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.17 p.m.]: I will update the House about my community's concern about the Special Commission of Inquiry into Sydney Ferries by Bret Walker,

QC, and specifically the recommendation to cut the ferry service to Parramatta. The New South Wales Government is yet to decide on the fate of Parramatta's ferry service. When I last spoke on this matter in the House in November I indicated that the recommendation was completely unacceptable to me and the Parramatta community. I can advise the House that nothing has changed: I still find it unacceptable and so does my community. Since I addressed the House on this issue last, a community campaign has been undertaken that has seen me join forces with the local council and the Parramatta Chamber of Commerce. In addition, 7,000 people have signed petitions calling on the Government to reject the Walker inquiry recommendation about ceasing the Parramatta service. Those petitions have been collected by me, Parramatta City Council and the chamber of commerce.

These wads of paper signify a community's anger. The sheer number reflects that almost 25 per cent of families in my electorate will absolutely not cop a decision to stop our ferry service. We want it and we need it. I call upon the Government to pay attention to our demand to keep our boat afloat. Parramatta is a thriving city. The State Government's own plans indicate that there will be unprecedented growth, with 30,000 new jobs in the next 25 years and 20,000 new residents. The State Government has invested heavily in Parramatta. We have moved the police headquarters and the Attorney General's Department, and Sydney Water is also on its way. A decision to axe this service will be a slap in the face for the Parramatta community and, indeed, for Western Sydney. It will seriously undermine the faith that my community has placed in this Government. In 2004 the then Minister for Transport made a commitment that the ferry service would stay as a tourist service, which is the current situation. Again, on 10 November 2004 in the Legislative Council, the Minister said:

In relation to the ferry service itself, I have been stating for months that there is no plan to cancel the RiverCat services.

He further stated:

I have consistently put the position—and there is no change to it—that there is no threat to the RiverCat services.

I specifically call upon the former Minister for Transport and the now Treasurer to ensure that our ferry service is retained. I have researched this matter and I know that the RiverCats operated as a commuter service for less than 12 months. At the time, New South Wales Maritime imposed speed restrictions after it became apparent that the RiverCats were causing environmental damage. Indeed, it is not hard to see the legacy of seawall and land erosion at Queens Park wharf. The RiverCats began to travel to Parramatta in 1994 and the then Coalition Government purchased them. It is all well and good with the benefit of hindsight to say that it bought the wrong type of vessel, but I do not want to apportion that type of blame.

We now know that the top of the river is narrow and shallow and that after rain debris is washed over the weir making reliability an issue. We also know that were the river to be dredged again, as it was in the early 1990s, heavy metals and toxins would be stirred up in the riverbed causing damage to the river's ecosystem. However, we also know that the people of Parramatta are passionate about this service; indeed, the people of Western Sydney are passionate about it. We demand that it be kept, at the very least as a tourist service just as was promised in 2004. I sincerely thank the 7,000 people who signed the petitions. This is people power at its best. I thank the Parramatta Chamber of Commerce—in particular, the president, Roman Dechnicz—Parramatta City Council, the Lord Mayor, Paul Barber, and the Federal member for Parramatta, Julie Owens, who have worked hard with me on this issue to ensure that our community is well informed about what is going on.

MR ROBERT QUIRK, AGRICULTURAL SCIENTIST

Mr GEOFF PROVEST (Tweed) [4.22 p.m.]: Once again, I am 100 per cent for the Tweed. Today I wish to speak about a person whom I consider to be 100 per cent for the Tweed, the local canegrower and agricultural scientist Robert Quirk. Robert Quirk has lived in the Tweed Valley and has run a 200-hectare cane farm in Duranbah for more than 45 years. Running the farm has presented several challenges that Robert has had to contend with—the volatility of the region's soils with its high acid sulphate content makes it difficult to grow and sustain crops. However, through extensive research and testing, Robert has developed a method that allows reductions of 25 per cent for chemical use—sprays and pesticides—and 80 per cent for heavy metal and acidity discharges while at the same time increasing production by a whopping 38 per cent to a total of over 150,000 tones of sugarcane harvest each year.

The processes and findings that Robert has developed in this field of agricultural science have proven to be real breakthroughs and have led to Robert receiving numerous accolades from his peers and from Government bodies. In 2006 Robert was the recipient of the sixteenth McKell Medal, the most prestigious Australian award for excellence and achievement in the field of natural resource management. Named after the

former New South Wales Premier Sir William McKell, who himself made significant advances in the study of soil health, Robert's award was presented by the former Minister for Agriculture and my Nationals colleague the Hon. Peter McGauran, who observed of Robert's work that, "Many of the practices Mr Quirk has developed are now considered world's best practice for farming acid sulphate soils."

Receiving the McKell Medal was not the first time Robert's work was formally recognised. In 2001 he was the recipient of a Churchill Fellowship to investigate ways of eliminating acid content from water leaving his property. This led to Robert presenting a series of conferences and lectures on his findings in the United States of America, The Netherlands and China. Robert's work in agricultural science has interested many political leaders, farmers, students, engineers and media from around the world. Recently, a BBC film crew visited Robert's farm to film a segment for an upcoming documentary. Several weeks ago the Discovery Channel sent a film crew from Singapore, because Robert has been able to significantly bridge the gap between scientists and farmers of this great nation. He has produced real, positive results. Fish are living in his creeks where years ago there had never been any.

Robert has also briefed 11 PhD students on soil health, with many of the practices developed on his farm being considered world's best practice for farming volatile soils. In the past Robert has worked with researchers and has been invited to speak at the Australian National University, the University of New South Wales, Southern Cross University and the CSIRO in Canberra. Aside from his excellent achievements in developing new and sustainable farming practices, Robert is also a prominent figure in the Tweed community. He often hosts visiting politicians—the Hon. Ian Macdonald, Minister for Primary Industries, has been to his property on a number of occasions and has spoken very highly of Robert. He also hosts scientists and is a regular contributor to various local media outlets, including *The 7.30 Report* and ABC Radio.

Robert was a Tweed shire councillor from 1987 to 1991 and a member of the regional committee for farming for the future. Robert also spent some 18 years as a member of the Junior Chamber of Commerce, more than 35 years on the Tweed River Cane Growers executive committee and more than 15 years as a member of the New South Wales Cane Growers Council. On behalf of the Tweed community I extend my congratulations to Robert Quirk. Robert is a very humble person but he has been able to produce significant results that have seen no fish kills in the last floods. I thank him for the valuable contributions he has made to the Tweed community in his capacity as a local councillor and his contributions as a committed member of many local community groups. Robert is always out there working hard for the community, an unsung hero, and I thank him for his efforts.

Mrs BARBARA PERRY (Auburn—Minister for Juvenile Justice, Minister for Western Sydney, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Citizenship) [4.27 p.m.]: I acknowledge the contribution made by the member for Tweed and add the Government's congratulations to Mr Robert Quirk. It is very clear, as the member pointed out, that he is indeed Tweed and everything about him is about the Tweed. Mr Quirk's love for the soil, his love for farming and his love of espousing that to the wider community deserve the international acclaim and recognition that he has been given.

Not only is he prominent and leading the way in relation to sustainable farming for the future but he also has contributed to the community in so many other ways, as the member for Tweed has pointed out. This includes as a councillor and as a community member who obviously does good works around the community. I know he would not want to be acknowledged in this way, just like many of our great community members, but people such as Robert Quirk typify what it is to be an Australian and Australian ingenuity. There is no other place like this in the world. I join with the member for Tweed in honouring Robert Quirk, a great community member and a great citizen of the world.

CAMP KOOKABURRA

Mr BARRY COLLIER (Miranda—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.29 p.m.]: I draw the attention of the House to an inspirational program and its inspirational president. The program is called Camp Kookaburra and its president, Dianne Madden, is in the gallery tonight with her daughters, Alison and Leanne. I had the honour of nominating Dianne as the 2008 Miranda Woman of the Year and she is here in Parliament House as one of 12 finalists in tonight's New South Wales Woman of the Year Award. Camp Kookaburra is a not-for-profit program aimed at children living in families having a member affected by mental illness. Children living with a parent, brother or sister who has a mental health issue often support them in many ways. These children are the hidden carers and have a greater responsibility of care in their everyday life than other children of the same age. For these children, that usually means special day-to-day challenges and extra work.

Camp Kookaburra provides these children with a break from their caring role. It gives them support and very importantly allows them to make new friends and interact with other children in similar circumstances. In creating and developing Camp Kookaburra, Dianne drew on her own life story. She is the child of a parent with a mental illness. She tells me that her first recollection of being a carer to her mum was when she was aged five. There were numerous times throughout her childhood when her mum was in and out of care. By the time she was 12 both her siblings had left home, leaving Dianne alone and often without support. Of course, in those days mental illness was something to be hidden, something one did not talk about. I first met Dianne in 2001 when she was seeking community support for her idea of organising a camp for children in the Sutherland shire who were living in a family affected by mental illness.

Camp Kookaburra aimed at more than giving these children a break from their caring roles over a weekend. It sought to provide an opportunity for them to meet other children in similar circumstances, to talk freely about their situations and to create a support network for them. It aimed at letting kids have fun; it aimed at letting kids be kids. Dianne started lobbying to raise the \$3,000 needed to run the first camp in 2002. Superintendent Reg Mahony, the then Miranda Police Local Area Commander, Senior Constable Debbie Wilson, the Miranda Police Youth Liaison Officer, and Mary Bills from the Sutherland Shire Carers Support Network were—and remain—very supportive. I was also pleased to obtain a State grant of \$1,500 from the then health Minister, Craig Knowles, to assist.

Sixteen children attended that first Camp Kookaburra—the first of its kind in the Sutherland shire—under the supervision of volunteer camp leaders, including off-duty local police, all of whom gave freely and generously of their time. Since 2002 the three-day camp, two fun days and a family picnic day have been held annually with support from volunteers and the local community. Camp Kookaburra now has a strong committee, but the prime mover has always been its president, Dianne Madden. Her enthusiasm, tireless work and commitment have been key factors in ensuring the continued success of the program.

Dianne approached me late last year to seek financial assistance with this year's camp. Following representations to Minister Paul Lynch I was delighted to obtain a State grant of \$12,000 in January to help fund the 2008 camp. The seventh Camp Kookaburra will be held in the Royal National Park starting tomorrow and going through to Sunday. There will also be two fun days in June and September and a family picnic day at Gunnamatta Bay on 7 December, which the State grant will also help to fund. This weekend 70 children aged 8 to 12 years, accompanied by 42 volunteer leaders, will attend the camp in the Royal National Park. The real benefits of Camp Kookaburra are best understood from the comments of the children who have attended. One child aged 11 wrote:

Like many of the children at Camp Kookaburra I live with a person with mental illness in my family. In my case it is my mother and every morning when I wake up I start a day of caring. I think the hardest part in my day is not the caring itself but facing my friends who don't understand my life at all. I think going to Camp Kookaburra helped me realise that I am not alone and that there are other kids going through the same thing as me. I also made a lot of friends who understand and had a terrific time which is a great relief from full time caring. Camp Kookaburra was terrific and I hope there are plenty more camps and activities.

Following the report of the \$12,000 State grant in the *St George and Sutherland Shire Leader*, I received a letter from a shire grandmother acknowledging the wonderful work of Dianne and the Camp Kookaburra volunteers. She wrote of her own grandchildren's experiences as follows:

Until they went to camp and met other children who were also caring for a mentally ill parent they didn't know that they weren't the only ones in this situation. Until they met caring adults who taught them how to have fun, and who counselled them, and let them know that people actually did care about them they thought they were completely alone.

Dianne Madden's vision has become a reality, one that is making a very real difference to children. It has successfully grown from 16 to 70 children and includes children from St George and the shire. Dianne and her volunteers, such as Senior Constable Debbie Wilson, continue to give of themselves. Dianne continues to promote Camp Kookaburra and dreams that one day it will be a national program. If anyone can fulfil this dream, I am sure that Dianne can! I congratulate and thank Dianne and all the volunteers and supporters—including her daughters—who have helped make Camp Kookaburra such an ongoing success over the years. I am sure the House joins me in wishing them all the very best for the seventh Camp Kookaburra starting tomorrow.

In the meantime, I congratulate Dianne on being chosen as a finalist in the 2008 Woman of the Year awards and wish her all the very best. We will know the name of the winner later tonight but, whatever the result, I am privileged to have a person of the calibre of Dianne Madden in my electorate of Miranda. I am

honoured to have been able to nominate her for Woman of the Year and am grateful for her work with Camp Kookaburra.

Mrs BARBARA PERRY (Auburn—Minister for Juvenile Justice, Minister for Western Sydney, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Citizenship) [4.34 p.m.]: I note that the member for Miranda has given a wonderful dissertation about an incredible woman, Dianne Madden, who is present in the public gallery with her supporting daughters. She will be attending an event to celebrate International Women's Day. I know that Dianne probably would not want this sort of recognition because it is the work she does day in, day out. On behalf of the House I say thank you to Dianne for her vision and for caring for those very special kids, who are amazing young people.

I cannot imagine what it would be like to grow up caring for a parent with mental illness. Through Dianne's suffering, she is now helping others and that is often how these stories begin. I hope her vision of this project becoming nationwide occurs during her lifetime. It is noble and wonderful and I wish Dianne every success. Minister Lynch has a great commitment towards mental health and it is wonderful that he has supported the program. Even though the grant is a small amount, it will go a long way towards making the lives of some kids very different for a couple of days. I say thank you again to Dianne and the team of volunteers who assist her. I say with heartfelt genuineness: Dianne, you are amazing.

PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADE WARRELL CREEK TO URUNGA

Mr ANDREW STONER (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [4.35 p.m.]: I raise a number of concerns expressed to me by many residents of Nambucca Valley concerning the Warrell Creek to Urunga upgrade of the Pacific Highway. They have approached me because they feel that their concerns and pleas are falling on deaf ears with the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA]. They feel the consultation undertaken in relation to the route was a farce; that all along there was a predetermined route and that the various forums were just an exercise in making people feel that they had an opportunity for input when in fact they did not.

There are three main areas of concern: firstly, the Old Coast Road; secondly, flood impacts on Macksville; and, thirdly, the late change to the route in the vicinity of Warrell Creek. The route north of Macksville approximates Old Coast Road but it takes out the maximum number of residences possible. I am told that the impacting of a residence does not count as an impact under the RTA's criteria. It states that there is no social or environmental impact because residents will be compensated, but surely there is both a financial and a social impact. I ask to Minister to clarify this.

The route in this section actually looks as though the RTA has joined the dots, the dots being houses along Old Coast Road. Therefore, around 12 months ago I asked the Minister for Roads to look at an alternative route proposed by the residents, some of them being professionals in relevant fields such as engineering. The RTA undertook a cursory review of the alternative route, and conceded that it was better in terms of noise and impact on property and residences but said that it was worse in relation to environmental and road safety issues. Knowing the area very well, I find that assessment quite unusual, to say the least, and so do the residents, who feel that again it is an exercise in justifying a predetermined position after the event.

This perception is reinforced by the fact that the RTA never put forward the final refined route as part of the value management study, which had the opportunity of input from the community. Further, when residents queried the 250-metre wide corridor that affects their homes after initially being told that it was 160 metres wide, they were told it was on a map. When they asked for said map, one was given some time later, and the RTA was forced to admit it was only produced after the request. Other flaws include the use by the RTA of dated aerial maps, which did not show all the residences that would be affected.

I ask the Minister to now arrange an independent assessment of the RTA's preferred route and the residents' alternative route involving genuine input from the community. The route to the south of Nambucca River traverses the Gumma flood plain. The RTA proposes to install fill to around five metres height across wetlands and fine alluvial sediments of unknown depths. Long-time locals who have observed numerous flood events assure me that these works, which, incidentally would not be authorised on private property under State legislation, would significantly exacerbate the impacts of flooding in Macksville. The RTA has not disputed this assertion. I urge the Minister to revisit this route decision in the light of these genuine concerns.

Finally, in relation to the Warrell Creek section of the upgrade, the RTA, after having decided on a route in that vicinity in the late 1990s, suddenly last year decided to add that section to the larger Macksville to

Urunga project but cancelled the original route decision in favour of new options for the upgrade route. That, of course, has had an impact on residents who bought property in the interim and who built based on government information about the original route. These residents have effectively been misled by the Government and are now in limbo. They cannot sell their properties because their property values have been affected.

However, they are being told that they cannot get compensation until work starts, which could be up to 10 years away or not at all, even if the new four-lane expressway runs right past their door. These residents are under a great deal of stress as a result of the Government's late decision to change the route. I ask the Minister, if he will not vary the decision to move the route near Warrell Creek, to give a commitment that he will fast-track the purchase of all affected residences. That will enable all of those affected—whether by noise, amenity or pollution and those properties that are physically impacted—to get on with their lives, to move elsewhere and to start afresh.

RURAL FIRE SERVICE AWARDS

Mr GERARD MARTIN (Bathurst) [4.40 p.m.]: I acknowledge the presence in the public gallery of Mimi O'Reilly and her husband, Hugh O'Reilly, prominent citizens of Bathurst. Mimi is here for the International Women's Day awards. She is the nominee from the Bathurst electorate. I welcome them to the Parliament. Last Saturday I attended the national service medal and long leave service awards organised by the Cudgegong district brigade for members of the New South Wales Rural Fire Service. The event also included the official opening of the new Rylestone rural fire station and the handover of a category one tanker to Clandulla brigade and a category seven tanker to Rylestone brigade. The ceremony was attended by the 21 brigade members who were recipients of either national or long service medals. They were joined by their family and friends, fellow brigade members and, as guest of honour, Commissioner Shane Fitzsimons, the Commissioner of the New South Wales Rural Fire Service, who was in the company of District Manager Mark Ryan.

I was invited to make some introductory remarks on behalf of the Minister for Emergency Services, the Hon. Nathan Rees. I passed on the Minister's congratulations to the recipients and the Government's thanks to the brigade members who selflessly give their time to protect their local communities. I pointed out to those present that over the past decade the Government has increased funding to the Rural Fire Service fourfold. The standard of equipment, from tankers and appliances down to volunteers clothing, is first class and allows the volunteers to carry out their work as efficiently and safely as possible.

Commissioner Fitzsimons addressed the gathering and gave a very informative address about the scope of work carried out by the Rural Fire Service. He particularly emphasised its impressive international reputation, reminding those present that the New South Wales Rural Fire Service is the largest volunteer fire service in the world and is recognised for its professionalism and expertise. He also told the gathering that its members conduct training and consultancy services for many overseas countries, particularly throughout Asia. The commissioner reminded the recipients of the significance and integrity of the medals they were about to be presented with, and confirmed that they are part of a national award system coordinated from Canberra.

Brigade members who received awards of either the national medal or long service medal were Claire Andu, Jim Baxter, Jackie Bucan, Rob Burlington, Robert Cooke, Reg Franks—who received a long service medal for 50 years continuous service, which by any measure is an outstanding record—Barrie Hewitt, Joe Horner, Daniel Jackson, Micheline Jackson, Phillip Jackson, Roly Mach, Eric Merrett, Helen Merrett, Jeffrey Moncrieff, Shane Price, Peter Roberts, Jeffrey Rodgers, Tom Sheppard, Alan Wales, Meg Wales and Peter McPherson.

It is significant that increasingly women are becoming involved in the Rural Fire Service, including in frontline activities and executive positions. In the past it has been pretty much a men's domain but increasingly women are playing an important role in the service. I am reminded of the significance of that given that this week we celebrate International Women's Day. It is good to see that their contribution to the Rural Fire Service is being acknowledged. Many of the Rural Fire Service groups are husband and wife groups. Indeed, families are now also becoming involved, and many generations of families are following through to join their local bush fire brigade.

As part of the ceremony the commissioner opened the new fire station at Rylstone, which is an impressive building. A lot of the funding for that fire station has been raised through the Rural Fire Fund. But, as we know, much of the funding has also been raised by the hardworking volunteers and local businesses and

organisations that support the Rural Fire Service. The tanker handover which Commissioner Fitzsimons carried out was accepted by Phil Jackson, the Clandulla brigade captain, and Shane Price, the Rylstone brigade captain, accepted the award. It was a very rewarding day. I know that the family and friends who were there with the brigade members enjoyed seeing these people receive recognition for their outstanding work.

PORT STEPHENS POLICING

Mr CRAIG BAUMANN (Port Stephens) [4.45 p.m.]: This week I was pleased to congratulate the Northern Region Police Commander, Assistant Commissioner Lee Shearer, on her proposal to reform the distribution of Hunter Valley local area commands to better suit the needs of this growing community. In particular, I welcomed the proposed dedicated Port Stephens Local Area Command, which will effectively halve the size of the large, unmanageable Lower Hunter Local Area Command, taking the pressure off the region's overworked general duties police officers, and provide residents of both the Port Stephens and Lower Hunter communities with more acceptable police response times.

Local area command boundaries have been an important and contentious issue in my electorate of Port Stephens. When I say "contentious" I do not suggest there is any division within the community on this issue. Indeed, I can safely say that the Port Stephens community is united wholeheartedly behind a positive change in the way their policing services are delivered. The contention on this issue stems entirely from the Iemma Labor Government's lack of foresight and vision and its ineptitude, and its police Minister's callous denial that any commitment towards the desperately needed changes was ever made. But today is not about reflecting further on the failures of the police Minister with regard to Port Stephens law enforcement resources; today is about congratulating Assistant Commissioner Lee Shearer on using her role in influencing New South Wales Police policy to effect positive change. At the recent *Sydney Morning Herald* roundtable into New South Wales public administration John Mant, a lawyer, planner and former chief of staff to Gough Whitlam, made this pertinent reflection about the public service in New South Wales:

People in government behave as their organisations require. If we want to change policies, then we actually have to change structures, and the nature of jobs in those organisations.

In the exemplary states of Victoria and South Australia heads of government departments collectively pursue solutions.

The public service culture in New South Wales has become averse to pursuing solutions. This is not surprising, given our political culture in which this Government's Ministers frequently lay the blame for their own shortcomings at the feet of senior public servants and demand their resignations in place of actively pursuing systemic reforms. Assistant Commissioner Lee Shearer's active pursuance of a solution to the problem of effective law enforcement resource management in the Hunter Valley should be the model for other government departments. But our Ministers are more concerned about ducking and covering from public scrutiny than actually helping the people of New South Wales.

The last 48 hours demonstrate that leadership within our public sector agencies, such as the police force, can overcome the political roadblocks thrown up by the Iemma Labor Government. The opposition to a dedicated Port Stephens Local Area Command, from the police Minister and the Government members, is entirely political. It is not logistical or financial; it is political. Former police Minister John Watkins made an election commitment to facilitate a dedicated Port Stephens Local Area Command should his party, the Labor Party, win government. This promise was then broken by police Minister David Campbell. And now, faced with a proposal by the New South Wales Police Force to adopt these changes, his recalcitrance continues.

If the police Minister refuses to listen to the community, and refuses to listen to his most senior public servants—public servants with years of experience as police officers under their belts—the question must be asked: Who is the police Minister listening to? The same question must be asked of the Hunter members of Parliament who refused to support my motion calling for the establishment of a Port Stephens Local Area Command. The member for Newcastle, in particular, was quick to support the proposal in today's *Newcastle Herald*. But when similar changes were mooted here in Parliament she toed the party line and backed her Ministers who continue to refuse these reforms.

The police commissioner will review the Hunter's local area command structure at the end of this month. For the sake of the people of Port Stephens I hope the proposed reforms are adopted. The current structure of the Lower Hunter Local Area Command, at 8,000 square kilometres, is unmanageable. Port Stephens continues to grow. My home town, Medowie, in particular has experienced a trebling of population in the space of a decade. Across the region, people are attracted to the Port Stephens sea change because of our

pristine environment and coastal amenities, which make the area a haven for young families and retirees. These people deserve effective policing. They deserve to feel safe in their homes.

Time will tell the outcome of these proposed reforms, but I am proud to say I have been calling for them since I first stepped foot in this Chamber. I am proud we have a senior police department management, with the vision and the will to make the changes that are necessary. I am not proud, however, to share this Chamber with those who would use important community issues such as this to score political points. I look forward to the outcome of the review into Hunter policing requirements, and I will continue to lobby for the changes the community so vocally requests.

WINDALE SHED

Mr MATTHEW MORRIS (Charlestown) [4.50 p.m.]: Few countries can make claim to the great social contentment Australian citizens have been privy to since Federation in 1901. This is not to say that Australia is without its adversities. However, I can say that if our long-term national strategies are well defined we will then have an opportunity to put in place the mechanisms to rise above the nation's challenges in the twenty-first century. A requirement of this is the clear identification and analysis of trends and services that contribute to the greater wellbeing of our country, community and people. When it is completed, we will have a strategic agenda to harness and implement State services which demonstrate clearly defined benefits to our communities. Today I am here as an advocate for such a service, the Windale Shed.

It came into existence as a result of socially conscious members of my community who pride themselves on making a difference. The Australian Bureau of Statistics reports five years after retirement as a peak death period for men. Providing unemployed and retired men with a structure based on the principle that men do not talk face-to-face but rather talk shoulder-to-shoulder can address varied social challenges. The shed has become a leading example of a concept that benefits society. The shed commenced operations in January 2007, in conjunction with the promotion of men's health issues. It has over 40 members working five days a week on community-based programs.

Under the shed's tutelage, projects such as mentoring 80 youths and giving opportunities to over 500 high school students to participate in try-a-trade days return to the community economic and social stewardship. Another advantageous example under the shed's structure is activities for youth at high risk. Teenagers, perhaps lacking the stability of family guidance, are supported by the older members and under their leadership gain self-confidence, prestige and wisdom to help them turn their lives around. As the shed continues to prosper with its humanitarian element, a pilot program creating satellite sheds allows residents of Catholic Care aged homes to improve the quality of life of elderly men in those environments. Catholic Care Newcastle has sought funding to auspice another four shed projects to replicate the Windale project and continues to help set up and assist other shed communities throughout New South Wales.

Today there are 69 sheds in New South Wales being utilised by over 2,800 men. In the Hunter area alone seven sheds have formed the Hunter Valley Shed Cluster Group. This association aims to collectively fundraise, market and share resources whilst assisting other communities to establish shed facilities. The Hunter Valley Shed Cluster Group is currently preparing an application to become an incorporated association and will operate within the requirements of the constitution and in accordance with the rules of the New South Wales Office of Fair Trading. Several similar cluster groups are forming around New South Wales, with a meeting of 22 sheds held in Lane Cove on 28 February 2008. From these cluster groups the Men's Shed Association shall form later this year. That association will then become part of the Australian Men's Shed Association. The Victorian Men's Shed Association has received over \$2 million dollars in government funding to assist in the development of important community health projects.

All members of the Windale Shed are non-paid volunteers. The Hunter Valley Community Group is currently seeking initial financial assistance to establish websites, and to cover the expenses of stationery, communications and promotional material for distribution throughout the health network. There is an identified need to provide committee members, who are located at the geographic extremities of the Hunter Valley, with financial support toward out-of-pocket expenses for transport and other relevant costs as they assist in the development of new sheds and projects. All services and programs that contribute to the self-confidence and wellbeing of the community are to be applauded. The shed at Windale has grown from a small local project to a national leader. I place on record my great appreciation to David Helmer, who is the shed coordinator, and the Police and Community Youth Club.

CHURCH POINT DEVELOPMENT

Mr ROB STOKES (Pittwater) [4.55 p.m.]: The noted environmentalist Aldo Leopold summed up the central challenge for humanity as being how to live on a piece of land without spoiling it. A local example of this dilemma is being confronted by the community of Pittwater in relation to Church Point on the Pittwater. The unique position of Church Point means that it has always been an area of contested land use. Originally called Chapel Point, it came to be known as Church Point with the erection of a Methodist church in the nineteenth century. The deep water at Church Point meant that it was a good site for loading and unloading ships, and a substantial wharf was built there in 1885. The development of offshore communities at Scotland Island and along the western foreshores of Pittwater meant that the wharf at Church Point became a vital lifeline for these communities.

The development of Pittwater Road and increasing populations at Bayview, Church Point, McCarrs Creek and offshore have resulted in increasing numbers of cars travelling along and parking on the narrow stretch of land between the Pittwater and the Bayview escarpment. These pressures have been exacerbated by pressures for more and more development, including ad hoc State environmental planning policy [SEPP] 5 unit developments on the mainland, continued subdivision, and an increase in the permanent population offshore. This is yet another reason why a massive offshore development at Currawong cannot be countenanced. Would members opposite please tell the Minister for Planning that he must not allow the development at Currawong to proceed? Today poor Frank looked as if he needed a hug, so please give him a hug as well.

Church Point is also a place of great aesthetic appeal. To look from Church Point reserve across to Scotland Island at dawn or dusk can be nourishing to the soul. Church Point has long been a place for passive and active recreation, as well as providing habitat for birds and for fish nurseries in the seagrasses offshore. Church Point has also served the community as a watering hole and as a place to mark special occasions. I have lost count of the number of twenty-first birthday celebrations and wedding receptions I have attended at the Pasadena on Church Point.

So many conflicting land uses and so much change over a short period are a recipe for a very challenging management environment, especially when the land involved is a narrow strip with an escarpment on one side and deep water on the other. A growing population generates an increased need for parking and an increased need for parkland. Herein lies the central challenge for the land manager of the Church Point reserve, Pittwater Council. Church Point is Crown land. I understand that all members in this place have received representations from the Bayview-Church Point Residents Association seeking their assistance in achieving increased public recreation at Church Point by way of the plan of management process currently underway for the reserve. I emphasise the importance of ensuring that a significant portion of land, in fact as much public land as possible, is made available for recreation at this unique and precious place.

Some other important principles should be addressed by the plan of management. Firstly, and most importantly, Pittwater Road at Church Point is a very dangerous stretch of roadway. School kids leaving the bus to join the Church Point ferry must cross a sharp corner, almost blind to oncoming traffic. Cyclists using this popular stretch have nowhere to go to avoid collision. There is a real need to ensure sufficient parking, not just for visitors but also for the offshore community so that they can get home safely at night. The level of parking available should not be so great that it is an encouragement for more cars to be used but there should be a reasonable level of access. Public transport must also be a major part of any solution. We need to ensure that boats are tied up securely and that people can access them safely. The commuter wharf at Church Point presently resembles Shanghai harbour in the 1930s—it is a real mess. We need to enhance public access to the waterfront by moving as much parking as possible across the road from the water. It is a crying shame to have a public car park on waterfront land, and we need to minimise this as far as is reasonably possible.

I know that the community and Pittwater Council have been working hard over a long period to seek a workable consensus on how best to care for Church Point. This has not always been an easy process, but everyone involved is well motivated, cheerful and positive. I commend the Bayview-Church Point Residents Association and Frank Makin; Church Point Reserve Association, Peter Altona, Kathy Kubany and Ray White; Pittwater Council—former councillor Bob Dunbar and Mark Erickson; the Scotland Island Residents Association—Bill Gye, Ian Souter, Sharon Kinnison, Greg and Louise Roberts, Paul Purvis and so many others; and Western Foreshores', Michael Weaner. Church Point has always been a place of great beauty and a place of conflicting uses. But the very conflicting uses that have forged the character of Church Point have continued and developed to the situation where if left unchecked public safety will be threatened and the amenity of the waterfront undermined.

MRS DENISE BANNON PREMIER'S COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD

Mr ALAN ASHTON (East Hills) [5.00 p.m.]: I sing the praises of Mrs Denise Bannon from Milperra, who recently received the Premier's Community Service Award. All members of Parliament have the opportunity to recommend someone for the Premier's Community Service Award, as I did on this occasion on Mrs Bannon's behalf. Denise Bannon meets the highest of criteria for such an award and two weeks ago she and her extended family shared morning tea in my office to celebrate. Mrs Denise Bannon is well known to me and to the Federal member for Banks, Daryl Melham, for her many years of tireless volunteer work in our community. All members have people like Denise Bannon in their electorates. It is pleasing to be able to officially recognise them with a plaque and certificate from the Premier's Department.

Mrs Bannon lived in Padstow following her marriage. She moved to Cootamundra for a couple of years, where she did volunteer work for various organisations. She has always been one of those who took the view that she would do the work and others could help her out, even at times of ill health. She gives her husband, Peter, credit for supporting her to undertake community work. When she lived in the Riverina she was a member of the church group Eastern Star, a Cootamundra Anglican community that organised fundraising and charitable works. Mrs Bannon continued to play an active role when she moved back to Milperra in my electorate. She enrolled her daughters in the Brownies and Girl Guides. Of course, if your children join those organisations before long the parents have a job. So she became active in those clubs. Mrs Bannon foresaw the expansion of the area and the lack of facilities for young people, and in 1970 played a key role in founding the Panania RSL Youth Club Netball Club.

Over time at this club she was president, senior vice-president, social secretary, delegate to the youth club and umpires' convener—becoming an umpires' convener is looking for trouble—as well as a coach, manager and umpire. She received her State C umpire's certificate through the Bankstown District Netball Association and umpired at representative carnivals across Sydney. Later Mrs Bannon initiated and formed the Panania RSL Youth Club Softball Club. She spent many years playing an active role in that club and holding just about every executive position. She coached, managed and umpired and was elected president of the then Bankstown District Softball Association. For many years she was involved in ballroom dancing, which was an additional sport at Panania RSL Youth Club. Like today's soccer mums or cricket mums, she was a taxidriver for many of the participants.

For a time Denise Bannon lived in Darwin, where she discovered a great love for Aboriginal people and Aboriginal culture and worked on Aboriginal community radio. So popular were she and her husband that in the company of several female elders she was initiated as a Tiddah sister by Roxy Musk, an Aboriginal elder. Later she continued her community radio work with an Afternoon Breakfast Show on Radio 2SSER in my electorate. She also continued her involvement with Aboriginal people. In 2000 Denise Bannon was a torchbearer in the Sydney Olympics torchbearers relay. Currently she is the president of the View Club at Revesby, a Smith Family charity-based club that is attended by retirees and elderly female citizens. She is a parish council member of St Mark's Anglican Church and undertakes the most important job of cleaning the chapel. I recognise and place on record the great work of Mrs Denise Bannon from Milperra as our community award recipient for this year.

NORTH HEAD DEVELOPMENT

Mr MIKE BAIRD (Manly) [5.05 p.m.]: The time has come to put a line through any more developments on North Head. Urban consolidation comes at a cost, but there is a point at which there should be no more. North Head has reached that point. Since 1960 the Australian Institute of Police Management has been located at North Head, one of the most environmentally sensitive pieces of land in the country. The Australian Federal Police proposes a \$20 million redevelopment of the site. There is enormous community opposition to the proposal. I pay tribute to the Federal member for Warringah, Tony Abbott, who has long fought against this development. Before the Howard Government's defeat at the last election Mr Abbott had a proposal before Federal Cabinet to overturn this development. Peter Garrett now has the opportunity to do so.

The development application is currently with the Minister for Planning. Last year the Minister declared the site as State significant. This development has all the hallmarks of Currawong, which the member for Pittwater continues to fight against for his community. The Minister for Planning must listen to the community. They lined from one end of the northern beaches to the other to stop any more developments on both sites. I reiterate my submission to the department that it must reject the development proposal. This unnecessary development should not go ahead. The police college is situated in the middle of a pristine national

park, part of the North Head complex. It is the home of the only penguin breeding colony on the mainland of New South Wales. It is also the home of another endangered species, the long-nosed bandicoot. The police college sits above Spring Cove, which is Sydney Harbour's only aquatic reserve, and next to Collins Beach, which is of great national significance as it is the place of the first meeting between early settlers and indigenous Australians.

The proposed development is completely inappropriate. The Australian Federal Police proposes to spend \$20 million building a three-storey complex with 55 hotel suites, 47 car spaces and a large entertainment deck directly above the largest concentration of breeding penguins in the national park. Throw in a couple of poker machines and it would replicate establishments in Las Vegas. Yet this development is proposed for an area as significant and precious as North Head. The demolition and construction would destroy a critical habitat area for approximately 60 pairs of little penguins. The foraging area of the long-nosed bandicoot would be destroyed to build a car park. Twenty-one mature trees, some up to 30 metres high, would be cut down to make way for buildings and car parks. Finally, increased contamination from additional buildings, roadways and car parks would pollute the aquatic reserve at Spring Cove, which is very much at odds with the New South Wales Government policy of no net increase of pollutants.

Clearly, the development should not go ahead. It is an unbelievable demand on the community to give up a site of such historical and environment significance to support these types of developments. It is even harder to understand because the Australian Police College has an alternative site. It has already relocated to the former School of Artillery site up the road. It is located on far less sensitive land, it is secure and it is available. The Australian Federal Police should remain there. A couple of weeks ago I joined a group of residents to demonstrate our heartfelt concerns for the future of this headland. Residents of all ages scrambled across the rocks and carefully erected signs opposing this proposed monstrosity in this precious spot. It was in the middle of the day and hot, yet everyone was determined to stand up for the environment. They did not lose their focus.

Two of the warriors of that group were Ellie Griffin, who is 12 years old, and Angelika Treichler, who is a little older. Angelika is the leader of community volunteers who day in and day out do incredible work as penguin wardens. Most nights when the penguins are breeding they stand by their nets to keep them safe from dogs or passers by. Every day after school for the past four years Ellie, who I stress is just 12 years old, visits the penguins. As she says, "They are just so special." She was brought to tears at the thought that they would be damaged by this proposed development. I call on the Minister for Planning and his department, who have the power, to reject the Australian Institute of Police Management development application. The development is inappropriate and unnecessary and is strongly opposed by the entire community. If the Minister governs for all the people of this State, whom he represents, the people all the way from Manly to the end of Pittwater oppose this development and the development at Currawong. It is in his hands. The Minister for Planning has the chance to do the right thing and we call on him to do so.

CASULA HIGH SCHOOL

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields) [5.10 p.m.]: Every day in my exciting and diverse electorate great things happen. Many of these achievements are never publicly reported or acknowledged. This applies especially to some of our schools. For this reason I bring the achievements of Casula High School to the attention of the House. I was privileged to visit the school recently and meet some of the students and staff. Opened in 1973, Casula High School is set in an attractive bushland setting. The school is a proud local comprehensive school and has a strong school community that takes great pride in the success of its students. Damian Ellis, the principal, leads the school by example, with fairness, compassion and care, and I thank him personally for the wonderful work he does for our community. To walk around the school is to witness a harmonious community that genuinely cares for its young people.

I found the dedication of the teachers inspiring: they were kind, knowledgeable, enthusiastic and welcoming. When I ask students what makes a great teacher, they say it is someone who is enthusiastic and knowledgeable about the subject, who is enthusiastic and knowledgeable about the students, and who is fair. That obviously applies to those teachers I was fortunate to meet on the day of my visit. This school clearly lives up to its motto, "Courage, Courtesy and Concern". About 40 language groups are represented in the school and many people on the staff are bilingual. As one of the most multicultural areas in Sydney, Casula serves as an example of how people from all nationalities and all walks of life can come together to form a harmonious, vibrant community; and how, as Robert Manne stated:

We [may] all be nourished by the interplay of traditions and cultures that [meet] on Australian soil.

It was great to see that some of the students whom I met on my last visit to Casula Public School in 2007 have taken their place at Casula High School. I am sure every member of this House would agree that one of the most rewarding experiences for a parliamentarian is watching the development of the young people in our local community over the course of our parliamentary terms. The Higher School Certificate results at Casula High School are exceptional. All streams of education are catered for at the school and it has a strong program for gifted and talented pupils. It also has a powerful vocational education and training program in hospitality and business services. The school is clearly committed to the integration of information and communication technologies in student learning. The link with business through the support of the Australian Business and Community Network and Rabobank is an exciting new development. I look forward to helping the school secure new science laboratories.

I was fortunate to meet Lisa Campbell, the head teacher for mathematics, and Catherine Argyle, the head teacher for English. With the help of Jaye Crawford, who teaches legal studies, I hope to be able to take a year 10 class this year to discuss politics. But I expect to see better behaviour from the students than I see at times in this place! Ken Silburn, the head teacher for science, has won a Premier's scholarship and a Quality Teaching Award. His experience in studying the ways that Americans have forged ahead in their use of technology in an educational setting deserves the widest possible audience from all members of this House. I was also fortunate to meet Maria Petroska, one of the school captains, and Stephen Savitsky, one of the vice captains. They are two most inspiring, intelligent, pleasant and open-minded young people. They give me enormous optimism for their future, for my electorate and for Australia.

As I walked to the car with Damian Ellis, he reflected that in the final analysis schools are about our young people and our future. As a health professional, I know that 14 years can be added to the lives of each of those young people by three simple health messages: do not smoke, keep the weight down, and do 30 minutes of activity each day for life. There is no more fruitful or more cost-effective way for any government to spend our public money than on educating our future citizens. Education is not a matter of Left or Right, Labor or Liberal. Members will agree that public education is vital in improving the lives of all Australian people and in ensuring a better future for our children. I commend this wonderful school, its students and its teachers to the House.

PET RESTRICTIONS

Ms CLOVER MOORE (Sydney) [5.15 p.m.]: Tonight I speak about a subject that is of great importance to my constituents, as well as constituents across the State: the importance of pets in our lives. Australia has the highest rate of pet ownership in the world. Four out of five Australians have owned a pet at some time, almost two-thirds of Australian households currently own pets, and there are about two million companion animals in New South Wales. Pets give pleasure, they teach responsibility and they love and are loved in return. Pets also contribute to our physical and mental wellbeing. The Baker Medical Research Institute in Victoria estimated that pet ownership saves Australia up to \$2.2 billion a year in health care.

Despite these proven benefits, pet owners are often made to feel like second-class citizens through overly and unnecessarily restrictive policies. Inner-city pet owners are particularly disadvantaged because they are less likely to own a private car, are more likely to live in apartments and rent, and they have less access to private open space. Many inner-city residents do not have cars and rely on public transport to get around. But they face major restrictions when travelling with their pets. CityRail imposes a complete ban on pets on trains—excluding assistance animals—and the State Transit Authority allows pets on buses at the discretion of the driver, which, in practice, results in most pet owners being refused entry and offers no guarantees. Some of my elderly constituents have been unable to visit sick relatives because they could not leave their pets at home alone overnight and could not afford alternatives to public transport. Other constituents tell me they cannot get their pet to a vet because they do not have a car.

Last week, dog owner advocate Eedra Zey of Barking Mad was arrested for taking her dog on a bus. Although the bus driver allowed them to board, inspectors arrived and phoned the police when Eedra refused to leave on their request. This approach is archaic, anti-animal and frustrating. It seriously disadvantages pet owners on low incomes and it does not promote responsible pet ownership. Taking a pet on public transport should be a normal part of life, particularly given the need to reduce reliance on private motor vehicles. In Melbourne pets can travel free of charge on trains, trams and buses. On trains pets must be in a suitable container or on a lead and large dogs must be muzzled. Other cities such as San Francisco, Berlin, Paris and London have similar provisions.

The high proportion of renters and strata title residents adds additional barriers for inner-city pet owners in Sydney. Strata plans and leases often impose bans on pets. While it is reasonable to take action

against problem animals, most pet owners are responsible. Some constituents have told me about secretly keeping pets in apartments and rental properties with no negative impacts on other residents. Other jurisdictions provide good examples of legislation that promotes pet ownership in apartments and rental properties. In New York pet bans in apartments are legally waived if a pet is openly kept in an apartment for more than three months without complaints, and the New York State Assembly is considering a Democrat-sponsored bill to ban evictions and tenancy refusals of people 62 years and over solely because the person owns a pet. By law, strata developments in California must allow owners to keep at least one pet, subject to certain rules. In Western Australia pet bonds are available to give property owners assurances when taking on tenants with pets.

Urban density policies and reduced housing affordability are increasing the proportion of apartment residents and rental tenants. Rescue groups say that this is causing more people to reluctantly give up their pets. My Animals (Regulation of Sale) Bill 2007, which is currently before the Parliament, aims to reduce the number of abandoned pets caused by impulse buying, but legislative support is needed to help people who want to keep their pets when their living arrangements change. Responsible dog ownership requires giving pets adequate exercise and outdoor time. Veterinary evidence shows that dogs who have this opportunity are better behaved when they return to an enclosed space or are confined in an apartment or terrace house. Access to public open space is vital for inner-city pet owners with little or no private open space.

The City of Sydney has consulted about increasing the number of off-leash parks and their times of operation. We will, I hope, make another 29 parks and open spaces permanent off-leash areas. The City of Sydney's Companion Animals Policy encourages and supports responsible pet ownership by balancing the rights and responsibilities of pet owners and their pets with the rights and responsibilities of others in the community. The policy focuses on support of responsible pet ownership through education and information. We conduct free microchipping and free dog obedience training. This year low-income earners and pensioners will benefit from heavily subsidised cat desexing and pet taxi services. We are also running a number of education programs. I call on the Government to acknowledge the benefits of responsible pet ownership and work to support and promote it.

ELECTRICITY INDUSTRY PRIVATISATION

Mr GREG PIPER (Lake Macquarie) [5.20 p.m.]: The proposal to privatise the New South Wales power industry, and the way in which it has been forced onto the public, is regarded as one of the most undemocratic actions taken by any New South Wales government. I welcome the decision to allow Parliament to debate the matter. However, I am still concerned that Government members in this House may not be able to truly represent the wishes of their constituents. Well-publicised comments by the Premier and the Treasurer have made no secret of their desire to deliver the coup de grace before the party that put them into power gets to debate the issue at its annual conference, which is just eight weeks away.

Concern about the state of our infrastructure and the need for a new baseload power station raises the question as to what successive governments have been doing to fund depreciating assets and to plan for future needs. These assets have been returning significant annual dividends, and sufficient funds should have been set aside for just these needs. The public has been told that \$7 billion would be invested in the intergenerational fund with the interest earned being used to fund infrastructure projects. If this amount were invested at a safe rate of 6 per cent, it would yield an annual return of \$420 million, which is \$80 million less than the current dividends of our power generators. To maintain the true value of the fund, some of this annual return would need to be reinvested. If the fund's earnings were spent on construction, this reinvestment would need to be significantly higher simply to maintain the useful value of the fund.

Mr Matt Brown: Point of order: I am reluctant to rise on a point of order during private members' statements. However, Mr Acting-Speaker, I draw your attention to the member not referring to his electorate and entertaining a policy debate that is not before the House. Even if it were, he would still not be able to address the general policy of electricity. This is time for private members' statements.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! I uphold the point of order. Certain remarks are outside the scope of private members' statements. Members must relate their private members' statements to a matter relevant to their electorates. As I have reminded the member for Lake Macquarie of the standing orders, I will allow him to continue.

Mr GREG PIPER: I will refer specifically to my electorate. Many of my constituents have asked me to raise this matter in the House. My constituents are concerned about the changing world of carbon emissions.

No-one yet knows what the costs of producing carbon dioxide will be. A basic scenario is the Commonwealth Government's commitment to a 60 per cent reduction in carbon dioxide emissions by 2050. Other reputable commentators say that that is not a large enough reduction. Potential lessees of power generators are in no position to evaluate the costs of operating into the future unless they can be compensated for additional costs.

Another issue of concern to my constituents relates to the Victorian power privatisation, which has been hailed as a successful model. However, any success is dubious and certainly overstated. Industry observers report that private companies can maximise their financial returns by controlling the availability of the generators. If a company withholds the output of one power station from the market, the price of electricity will rise almost instantly and the company's other generators can make a greater profit. If manipulation of the energy market has kept prices high in Victoria, the beneficiaries have been the private operators, not the public.

In her book *Power Play*, Sharon Beder states that private energy companies are less prepared to reinvest in infrastructure and maintenance, which resulted in the widespread blackouts in Victoria and South Australia in 1999. Maintaining the assets in running order was not a high enough priority, and one company even argued that "customers need to experience some disruptions" so that they appropriately value their electricity supply. Many voices have been raised against privatisation around the State and certainly in my electorate, which has significant links to power generation and distribution. People do not believe that an essential utility such as power generation should be in private hands. There are good examples reinforcing those concerns. The spectacular failure of privatised energy with the Longford gas explosion in eastern Victoria in 1998—

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! The member's time has expired.

Mr GREG PIPER: Can I ask for an extension?

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! The standing orders do not provide for an extension of time in debate on private members' statements.

Mr GREG PIPER: You should know that I have tabled a petition today.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): I thank the member for Lake Macquarie for his contribution.

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

Private members' statements noted.

The House adjourned at 5.25 p.m. until Friday 7 March 2008 at 10.00 a.m.
