

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 8 April 2008

Mr Speaker (The Hon. George Richard Torbay) took the chair at 1.00 p.m.

Mr Speaker read the Prayer and acknowledgement of country.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of Motions

General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) given.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

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

KOREAN SOCIETY OF SYDNEY BOOK LAUNCH

LAW WEEK SCHOOLS IN PARLIAMENT

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE (Strathfield—Parliamentary Secretary) [1.08 p.m.]: I inform the House of two exciting events that I recently had the great pleasure and honour of attending. *Fifty Years of History of Koreans in Australia* was a book launched only through the substantial and painstakingly hard work of the Korean Society of Sydney Compilation Committee. I commend the outstanding efforts of the committee and, in particular, its chair, Mr Dennis Chu, in publishing this wonderful book. The compilation committee consisted of 18 hardworking members, including the former chair, Mr Eun-Taek Chu, and the co-ordinator, Mr Yang Hoon Cho. I also congratulate Mr William Seung, President of the Korean Society of Sydney, and its Vice President, Ms Vivian Pak, who was recently appointed Commissioner of the Community Relations Commission, on their efforts in making this book a reality.

I particularly congratulate Vivian Pak, who is also President of the Strathfield Chamber of Commerce. I believe she is the first woman from a Korean background to be appointed to the Community Relations Commission. This project was financially supported by the Australian Government through the Australian-Korea Foundation and by the Korean Government through the Overseas Koreans Foundation. This 672-page book, with over 400 pictures, is the first of its kind ever published on the theme of Australian immigration by members of the Korean community in their mother tongue. At the launch I met His Excellency Ambassador Chang-Beom Cho and the hardworking Consul-General of the Republic of Korea in New South Wales, Mr Young Kuk Park. Mr Park said:

This book "The Fifty Year History of Koreans in Australia" is a great asset for our people.

It documents the history of many pioneers who survived and succeeded on foreign soil, and recounts the successes of many notable Korean-Australians who have distinguished themselves in many fields of business and artistic endeavour.

This book will serve us as a reference point for our everyday administration and I believe it will provide us with guidance for the future.

I greatly commend the committee members who dedicated their precious time and energy to this worthwhile project, and the many writers who told their personal stories to enable the publication of this book.

In past decades settlement in Australia for Korean people has not always been easy. Many Australians would be surprised to read in this book the somewhat chequered early history of Korean Australian immigration. Fifty years ago, Australia was a very different place. Five decades later, I look around Sydney, and especially around my electorate of Strathfield, and I see the wonderful achievements of our Korean Australians. I see many successful Korean business people and strong community leaders. Recently they celebrated their fabulous lunar

New Year celebrations in Strathfield town centre. Our Korean communities are dynamic. They have a lot of pride and heritage and we all benefit from their contributions. The ties between our great nations have never been stronger and cultural and trade relations are ever increasing.

On reading the recently published 2006 census statistics I was delighted to learn that the number of Koreans born in Australia had grown approximately 36 per cent from the last census in 2001. An amazing 61,000 people have designated Korean as their ancestry. In 1971 only 468 Korean-born Australians were living in Australia. As recently as the early 1980s about 1,000 Korean immigrants had entered Australia. The real and tangible benefits of our diversity are well illustrated through the valuable cultural and business contributions made to New South Wales over the past 50 years by our well-appreciated local Koreans. The Korean Society deserves praise for this outstanding achievement, as does the Korean community as a whole for giving this project its full support.

Last Friday I had the pleasure of opening the 2008 New South Wales Law Week Schools in Parliament. This was the flagship event for Law Week in New South Wales. Law Week promotes a greater understanding of the law, the legal system and the legal profession in our community, and a fabulous job is done. The New South Wales Motor Accident Authority is a longstanding major sponsor. Under the "Arrive Alive" banner, the authority's total sponsorship is \$160,000. This year \$60,000 was paid to facilitate an update of the New South Wales Law Week website and payments of \$50,000 will be made for 2009 and 2010.

Last Friday students found out how laws pass through Parliament by debating the Road Transport (Driver Licensing) Regulation Amendment Bill 2008. The bill proposed to increase the minimum age at which young people can obtain a provisional drivers licence. I am sure the debate was fantastic. I was delighted that students from Homebush Boys High School, in my electorate, actively participated in that presentation of mock legislation. I am sure that the debate promoted much discussion about road safety and the students greatly enjoyed participating in it.

DEE WHY TOWN CENTRE

Mr BRAD HAZZARD (Wakehurst) [1.13 p.m.]: The topic of a new town centre at Dee Why is controversial and challenging. I will be expressing my concerns about the substance of the debate and about the conduct of that debate by a small but influential number of people. The Metropolitan Strategy and the subregional strategy identified Dee Why as a centre for increased densities over the life of the strategy. However, considerable community concern has arisen over a proposal by developers Multiplex and the Vambucca family to develop the Dee Why town centre with buildings of up to 20 floors. At the outset I place on record that whilst I believe democracy should have continued at Warringah Council, I do not doubt the bona fides of the administrator, Mr Dick Persson, particularly on the Dee Why town centre issue. He may come from a different political background, we may differ in our perspectives on certain issues, but he has never displayed other than professional competence in his approach to the welfare of the Warringah community.

One of the first issues I raised with Mr Persson about five years ago, when he was a new administrator, was the need to clean up Dee Why and have it looking a whole lot better. Whether it was a result of my urgings I do not know, but Mr Persson embarked on engaging the Government Architect and others to establish a new vision for Dee Why by providing people-friendly open space to make residents feel better about Dee Why and diminishing the incidence of graffiti and other negative aspects affecting local facilities. The first proposal from the Government Architect involved inadequate open space. A second revised proposal was obtained. I must emphasise that the owners of the land subject to the proposed new town centre have a legal right to develop the site from Howard Avenue through to Oaks Avenue, effectively kerb to kerb concrete on multiple floors—square boxes with little or no allowance for community space.

One issue that has been insufficiently emphasised is that a zoning change limiting development of allowable floor space would open Warringah ratepayers to a massive damages claim by the property owners. Whilst I had no involvement in developing any part of that plan, I have certainly encouraged an action plan for a new heart for Dee Why. Accordingly, Multiplex and Vambucca went about developing a plan in consultation with people who refer to themselves as community leaders. At a meeting about 12 months ago, Multiplex representatives informed me, in private, that one of the most vocal community leaders had indicated strong support for a proposal for buildings up to 18 storeys. I was therefore surprised that protestations about height became public only recently following apparent implicit agreement.

Recently, on the night of a public meeting at council, which I chaired, the council administrator confirmed a private agreement by the small community leaders group on 18-storey buildings. I have since

spoken to another member of that community leaders group and confirmed that support had been given to Vambucca and Multiplex to make plans involving quite high buildings. With council elections to be held in September, it is right and proper to place these matters on public record. Whilst I do not intend to name the person or persons involved, such private encouragement of a major revamp of Dee Why involving high buildings, by those who hold themselves out as community leaders, is not appropriate when they publicly say something completely different.

Whether the council, through the administrator, will recommend a change in zoning to permit 20-storey buildings remains to be determined. Whilst most of our community want a new Dee Why—a Dee Why with an open space heart—we are reluctant to contemplate 18-storey to 20-storey buildings as part of the deal. As a Warringah resident and local member of Parliament I would like to think we could achieve a people's space in Dee Why without having to pay the price of such high buildings. But I have not been privy to the commercial-in-confidence documents that the developers argue indicate the need to build substantially higher than permitted by the current local environment plan, so that they can achieve the same profit as they would get by giving us, legally, kerb-to-kerb buildings, lower but still multiple-storey, with no people space.

I do not envy the administrator's role in making this decision. However, when it comes time to make the decision I would caution him against permitting too great a price to be paid to achieve the open space I believe the community wants. I would suggest perhaps other avenues could achieve the same result—perhaps closing off part of Howard Avenue or Oakes Avenue, and developing pedestrian and community facilities. Recently I was in Church Street, Parramatta—a very good example of what can be done without having to go to high-rise. Church Street has wonderful community facilities, open space, and restaurants. We need to debate this issue objectively and transparently without diminishing ourselves by personal attacks on the administrator or others who speak publicly, substantively and truthfully about their viewpoint.

We must all now take a step back and consider whether we will entertain any increase in height beyond what is allowed by the current local environment plan. If we do not think we are prepared to pay that price, we should state our position courteously, openly and without political game playing. It would then be up to the administrator to either make a decision hopefully reflecting community wishes, or to defer the decision until the elected council is returned. The latter may be the wisest course, to allow full community consultation away from the spectre of a council election when political hopefuls feel pressured to promote the issue as a political football.

BANK PROFITS

Mr PAUL GIBSON (Blacktown) [1.18 p.m.]: I refer to a subject that many of my constituents have talked to me about over the past weeks, that is, bank profits. The Commonwealth Bank, in the six months ending December last year, made a record profit of \$2.37 billion. The National Bank, up until September last year, made \$4.4 billion in profit, a 17 per cent increase on previous years. St George Bank, up until September last, \$1.16 billion, a 13 per cent increase. The ANZ Bank made \$4.2 billion, a 13.3 per cent increase. The Bendigo Bank, for the first half of the year, made \$70.7 million, a 27.6 per cent increase. The Bank of Queensland, for the half year, made \$129 billion, a 40 per cent increase. The ING Bank made a record \$314 million. Westpac Bank made a record \$3.5 billion profit. The list goes on and on.

On the other side of the pendulum, people in my electorate of Blacktown are struggling with mortgage payments in record numbers. Last year the number of writs of possession issued by the Sheriff's Office in Blacktown to homeowners skyrocketed to 84, the most in the State and nearly double the number of the previous year. Only last week, three homeowners in Blacktown lost their homes. Of course, the person who has not helped—the person I call the grim reaper in the mortgage story, and who seems to put bank profits ahead of people—is the Australian banks' bodyguard. He sacrifices battlers so that everyone else can survive in their usual contented way. He was reported in the newspaper last week as saying that the mortgage problem in this nation is overexaggerated by the media and that it is not as bad as it is portrayed. That is insulting to everyone and it is not true.

Of course, I am referring to the unsympathetic and heartless Glen Stevens, the boss of the Reserve Bank of Australia. He has given the banks carte blanche to increase interest rates whenever they want. That is tantamount to hurting the poor to keep the rich comfortable and keep inflation at bay. One might question the fact that increasing interest rates is seen as the only tool to control interest rates. We have seen 12 increases in recent years and we still do not have a real check on inflation. The Reserve Bank does not care that a few hundred people in Western Sydney lose their dreams and their homes; it believes that banks' shareholders should continue to increase their profits.

According to Stevens, lending rates should move only with official rates. The reality is that the banks are not listening to him; they increase interest rates whenever they want. That did not happen under the Howard regime. We must ensure that the banks do not increase interest rates more than the Reserve Bank rate increase. Of course, they do not take a lot of notice of Stevens. After his address to Federal Parliament last week the Commonwealth Bank increased its interest rate by 0.12 per cent, which means an increase of \$25 to \$30 in the average mortgage repayment. The banks are not listening to Stevens and he is not listening—he is not real.

People negotiate their mortgage when the interest rate is at a certain level. Why should the banks be able to go back to the well not once or twice, but 10 or 20 times and increase the debt? That is criminal. The Federal Government must examine that practice very carefully. Banks should negotiate with borrowers and the agreed interest rate should apply for the term of the loan. If that were the case, borrowers would know what their commitment would be next week, next month and next year. As their salary increased, their repayments would become less of a burden. However, we do not have that. We have a greedy banking system that is squeezing the lifeblood out of every borrower in this country. This Government must do something to ensure that stops.

NEWCASTLE AIRPORT

Mr CRAIG BAUMANN (Port Stephens) [1.23 p.m.]: I wish to inform members about recent developments at the State's greatest piece of regional transport infrastructure, Newcastle Airport. Yesterday Minister for Defence Joel Fitzgibbon opened Newcastle Airport's \$10 million apron expansion. This will double the airport's capacity to handle jet aircraft—especially those used by Jetstar, Virgin Blue and Tiger Airways—and provide the airport with the opportunity to handle larger international aircraft such as the Boeing 787. Construction took six months and the structural success of the works was demonstrated by an Antonov AN-124—the second largest aircraft in the world—loading two FA18s for transit to Canada during the opening ceremony.

This year is also the sixtieth anniversary of commercial aviation at Williamstown. Fifteen years ago, the terminal was a very unattractive unventilated shed with blockwork walls, vinyl floors and a tin roof with a few plastic seats that passengers used whilst waiting for their Bandieranti flight to Sydney, via Rutherford, or an all-stops flight to the Gold Coast. Parking was also a problem. If the 12 or so good parking spots against a koppers log were taken, one had to park in the spot that turned into a large puddle after rain. One could buy the newspaper, soft drinks or sweets from a stand that the cleaner ran. However, things have changed. In December 2005, I was privileged to assist in the fourth terminal expansion in 13 years, involving an \$8.25 million investment. That success was confirmed just two weeks earlier when Newcastle Airport was voted the best regional airport in Australia at the Australian Airport Association conference held in Hobart.

I will review the beginnings of this enterprise and thank a few friends along the way. In 1992 the then Federal Minister for Transport, Peter Morris, approached Port Stephens Council to take over the civilian side of Williamstown Airport. We were excited by the offer and the enormous potential benefits to the region, but concerned about the possible financial risks. So we invited Newcastle City Council to join us to share the glory or the blame. Meetings were held between the two general managers—Barrie Lewis and John Walsh—and a joint council committee was formed. John Bartlett and I were enthusiastic members of that committee, which formed Newcastle Airport Limited, a not-for-profit company, limited by guarantee.

A focused group of directors—all of whom were leaders in their own industries—were appointed. They received no remuneration. Air Vice Marshall Richard Bomball, a well-respected and popular former tactical fighter group commander, became chairman and we decided that the councils' general managers should be the sole directors. Although the mayor and lord mayor were observers, we left no possibility of appointing a councillor to the board. Political favours, although not as prevalent as in this place, do exist in local government. In 1995, Deputy Prime Minister Brian Howe opened the new terminal with the then Newcastle Lord Mayor, John McNaughton, and I assisting. Passenger numbers were low but increasing. Every monthly report showed a comparison with Belmont passenger numbers, which remained steady.

The arrival of Impulse saw a leap in numbers as jet aircraft began full-time operations. Qantas also increased its flights. The Ansett collapse saw the decline of Belmont patronage as the remaining airlines determined that the Williamstown facility was Newcastle Airport. When I was elected mayor of Port Stephens just four years ago, 300,000 passengers passed through Newcastle Airport annually. Last December, that annual passenger number reached one million, 700,000 of whom are tourists, not business travellers. Jetstar has developed its new aircraft heavy maintenance base—a \$29million investment—and BAE Systems is looking to extend its existing facility, demonstrating business confidence in the region.

Of the original Newcastle Airport Limited board, all but Geoff Connell have moved on, but we still have a board of industry leaders under the chairmanship of one of the Royal Australian Air Force's most talented and popular leaders, local resident Air Vice Marshall John Kindler. He demonstrates the strong relationship between the airport and our neighbours and landlords, the Royal Australian Air Force. Paul Hughes, who was borrowed from Port Stephens two years ago, heads a team of dedicated professionals in his role as chief executive officer. Where to from here? Land in close proximity to the airport is in the rezoning process to enable more aerospace industry, creating jobs and export dollars. Will we also see 1.2 million passengers in 2008 and scheduled international flights? The sky is literally the limit.

I call on the State Government to assist in the provision of much-needed local infrastructure. Transport to and from the airport is a major concern. The cost of cab fares to and from the airport is prohibitive to families, and bus services provided by local companies, while excellently managed, are minimal. Newcastle Airport needs a dual carriageway to Newcastle and the Pacific Highway and a rail link to service the airport, Tomago industrial lands and RAAF Williamtown. The 3,000 local employees and everything including fuel are transported over two-lane country roads. The airport also needs a sewer service. That would be a minimal investment to support a facility that has blossomed only because of the sublime faith of the owner councils, the airlines, the Royal Australian Air Force, the aerospace industry and the one million passengers who appreciate this fantastic airport.

MERRYLANDS HIGH SCHOOL INCIDENT

Mr DAVID BORGER (Granville) [1.28 p.m.]: I draw to the attention of the House the shocking incident at Merrylands High School yesterday morning. I understand that five youths—none of whom was a student at the school—entered the school grounds at approximately 8.45 a.m. They proceeded to terrorise the students and teachers, who were standing in the parade ground for assembly. The principal and the teachers acted very swiftly in implementing a lockdown procedure. The students were quickly ushered into classrooms and out of harm's way. I am appalled that such an incident has occurred at a school in my electorate, or that it could happen anywhere in Australia. I put on record the electorate's appreciation of the bravery and quick thinking of principal Liliana Mularczyk and her staff, and also the students, who cooperated so well yesterday.

I record my appreciation for the incredibly quick response of the Holroyd Local Area Command to the incident. The police arrived at the school literally within minutes of the attack. A lot of criticism is levelled at the police and education system when there are perceived failures, and many of our friends in the media are very quick to apportion blame to a government system. In this case the system worked: the school had implemented a policy of limiting harm and injury and the students and teachers were well drilled and trained in that policy. That training proved to be a huge success. Luckily and thankfully, the police responded rapidly and were able to settle down the students and staff and arrest the five youths involved.

Eventually parents were able to contact their student children. Some parents were frustrated about the time delay and by having to wait outside the school until access was granted. However, that delay was necessary in order to prioritise the urgency of dealing with the 18 students and one teacher who were injured, and to implement the correct procedure in determining the authenticity of people's claims to be parents. I understand the parents' frustration, but in the circumstances the Department of Education and Training deserves our thanks and our praise for its quick response. Merrylands High School is a proud local high school. Last year I visited the school and was very impressed to see not only the educational performance of the students but also a range of very important programs in place to teach the kids leadership skills. All students at the school are given an opportunity to join a group that will teach them how to take responsibility for their behaviour and to improve the culture and operation of the school.

That lesson is particularly important in Sydney schools that have very high multicultural populations. Diversity is a great strength in our local communities but it also presents the challenge of dealing with and embracing difference. Merrylands High School is a leader in implementing those programs. I hope that yesterday's incident does not reflect on the school in any way locally. I hope that parents will await the outcome of the court process that is to take place—100 charges have been laid against the five youths who entered the school yesterday armed with baseball bats, a machete and a Samurai sword—because the system needs to be worked through and a just conclusion reached.

I acknowledge that the principal and the teachers acted very responsibly. One teacher was bashed on the back of the head while trying to protect young children. The local community should acknowledge that act of heroism. It was a demonstration of the commitment of teachers, particularly those at Merrylands High

School, to the welfare of their charges. Parents and families of students should be assured that the safety and security of students and staff are the highest priorities for the Department of Education and Training. A security review is to be undertaken and we should await its outcome before making assumptions about school security and what needs to be done in future.

Mr STEVE WHAN (Monaro—Parliamentary Secretary) [1.33 p.m.]: I commend the member for Granville for bringing this terrifying issue to the attention of the House. I am sure every member of this House will, as I do, join him in thanking the teachers and students at the school as well as the police and congratulating them on the way they handled that frightening situation. I had hoped that our society would never experience such an incident. The member for Granville is absolutely correct in congratulating the people who responded so terrifically to that emergency. Many schools around the State have developed plans for dealing with lockdowns in just such situations. I commend the member also for reinforcing the statement that because a bunch of morons intended to cause harm to people it does not mean the school does not provide a great education for the kids in the area. Parents and the community should continue to have confidence in Merrylands High School and the education it gives their children.

BURDEKIN PARK, SINGLETON, FLYING FOXES

Mr GEORGE SOURIS (Upper Hunter) [1.34 p.m.]: Burdekin Park at Singleton is one of the most beautiful parks in New South Wales. Situated on the New England Highway within the township limits and about a 2½-hour drive from Sydney, it is a very popular morning or afternoon tea stop for many travellers—and has been for more than a century. For many years the park has suffered from a flying fox infestation: some 2,500 to 5,000 bats have established a colony in Burdekin Park, with the numbers fluctuating in summer and winter. Many trees of significant heritage value, including 100-year-old trees, have been destroyed. The park has been rendered almost useless. Indeed, events are held at the war memorial in the park with some trepidation. On Anzac Day some 5,000 people gather at the memorial, many taking the precaution of bringing their umbrella.

Already many trees have been destroyed, and the devastation is continuing. It will not be long before there are no trees left, in which case the bats will die from heat exhaustion or heat stress. Doing nothing is not an option. Singleton Council, which has been battling this problem for many years, has been urged on and assisted by many local residents, and the local newspaper, the *Singleton Argus*, has conducted a strong campaign on the issue. Last year I raised this matter in a private member's statement. The then Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Water, Phil Koperberg, and the Director General of the Department of Environment and Climate Change, Lisa Corbin, with whom I had spoken beforehand, gave me an undertaking—which I relayed to the House—that they would engage an expert to determine the best solution to the bat infestation and to assist in seeing the problem through to its resolution, with the ultimate relocation of the bats.

The responsibility now transfers to the new Minister for Climate Change and the Environment, Verity Firth. Last year Minister Koperberg appointed Dr John Nelson to report on this matter, and I express my thanks to the Minister for acting so quickly. Dr Nelson's report is now to hand and is publicly available. The report anticipates that it will cost \$298,742 to remove the bats and relocate them to a number of other areas, which have been identified. The report recommends against culling. However, if the bats are left in the park they will die because they will destroy their tree cover. Potential relocation sites have been identified away from residential areas. The relocation could take between one and three weeks. However, if the flying foxes return, relocations will need to occur on a daily basis, and sustained action may be necessary for a year or more.

The cost of relocation is beyond Singleton Council's financial capacity, and funding would be needed from the State Government either to conduct the relocation or to assist the council in conducting the relocation. The relocation will involve the police, the Department of Health, the RSPCA, the Department of Environment and Climate Change, and no doubt many volunteers. I call on the Government to provide some assistance to the council so that the plan produced by the Government-appointed expert can be implemented. All other options, including culling or using Deter chemicals, were canvassed but were considered to be either a waste of time or a waste of money and ruled out. We should take notice of the advice given by the expert and undertake the relocation program as soon as possible. Another Anzac Day is imminent, and the problem will once again be there for all to see and to endure.

LAKE 2020 SUMMIT

Mr ROBERT COOMBS (Swansea) [1.39 p.m.]: An important conference took place on Saturday 5 April that was attended by a number of constituents from the Swansea electorate. The Lake 2020 Summit is a

lead-up to the Australia 2020 Summit that will be held at Australia's Parliament House on 19 and 20 April 2008 to help shape a long-term strategy for the nation's future. The Lake 2020 Summit was held at the Germania Club at Warners Bay and hosted by the Federal members for Shortland and for Charlton, Jill Hall and Greg Combet. It was attended by a couple of hundred people from local commerce, not-for-profit and community organisations, Lake Macquarie councillors and employees, sporting organisations, trade unions and a number of individuals who want to contribute in a positive way to ensure that Australia's community is best placed to tackle the many obstacles of the future.

The Lake 2020 Summit took the form that the Australia 2020 Conference will take in identifying and discussing 10 important issues. They are: a productivity agenda, which is education, skills, training, science and innovation, the future of the Australian economy, population, sustainability, climate change and water, future directions for rural industries and rural communities; a long-term national health strategy, including the challenges of preventative health, workforce planning and the ageing population, strengthening communities, supporting families and social inclusion; options for the future of indigenous Australians; towards a creative Australia, which is the future of the arts, film and design; the future of Australian governance, which includes renewed democracy, a more open government, the role of the media, the structure of the Federation and the rights and responsibilities of our citizens; and Australia's future security and prosperity in a rapidly changing region and world.

National summit participants will be selected by a 10-member non-government steering committee. It will be co-chaired by the Prime Minister and Professor Glyn Davis, who is the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Melbourne. It is expected that the summit will be attended by approximately 1,000 Australians who will be drawn from business, academia, community and industrial organisations and the media, and will include a number of eminent Australians. In addition to those attending the summit, all Australians will be invited to make submissions if they feel it is appropriate to do so. Submissions will be received by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, which will act as secretariat for the summit.

The summit will have the following objectives: to harness the best ideas across the nation; to apply those ideas to the 10 core challenges that the Government has identified for Australia to secure our long-term future through to 2020; to provide a forum for free and open public debate in which there are no predetermined right or wrong answers; for each of the summit's 10 areas to produce options for consideration by government; and for the Government to produce a public response to these options papers by the end of 2008 with a view to shaping the nation's long-term direction from 2009 and beyond. I am informed that local conferences similar to the Lake Macquarie summit took place across the State and were welcomed by communities, providing an important mechanism for people to be involved in decision making for our country.

The ideas and thoughts that emanated from the Lake 2020 Summit will be forwarded to the national summit for consideration. I am sure that all will join in recognising that the national summit is an important development and initiative for this country. I am assured that debate on all issues will take place in an open and transparent way and will be devoid of party political persuasion or direction. For these reasons the Federal Leader of the Opposition, together with State Premiers, Chief Ministers and their Opposition counterparts have been invited to attend the summit. As is often mentioned in this place, the challenges of the twenty-first century will be complex and exhausting. The Australia 2020 Summit will be an important tool for us to understand those challenges so we can put in place the mechanisms necessary to ensure that we are best placed to meet them.

PUBLIC SCHOOLTEACHER TRANSFER SYSTEM

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS (Murray-Darling) [1.43 p.m.]: On 31 March I received a letter from Maureen Clark, Barrier Teachers Association representative of Broken Hill schools, seeking my help in highlighting the detrimental effect a proposed change to the Department of Education and Training teacher transfer system will have on rural and remote communities. Mrs Clark stated that the Barrier Teachers Association's members believe that, although a change from a centralised staffing system to an increasingly localised method will more than likely be welcomed by some principals in more popular areas of the State, schools in the far west are unlikely to find it as easy to obtain experienced, specialist staff for classroom and promotion positions.

Mrs Clark was not the first to highlight this issue with me. Former Broken Hill principal Joe Bosnich, for whom I have a great deal of respect, first alerted me to this matter some time back, saying he thought the new arrangement would disadvantage students in regional, rural and remote areas of New South Wales. Lea Poustie from Hay War Memorial High School also contacted me on 30 March and said that teachers in Hay

were deeply concerned about the State Government's proposal to abandon the present method of staffing public education. Michael Sciffer from Finley contacted me on 5 February and voiced his opposition to the abolition of the centralised staffing system in New South Wales public schools.

It is the responsibility of the State Government to guarantee quality education to students, no matter where they live in our State. A decentralised staffing system may lead to many schools in rural and isolated areas being unable to staff all their classes with qualified and experienced staff in specific subject areas. Many graduates take up their first appointments because they know that one day they will be able to transfer back to their homes on the coast or other areas of the State. Teachers across the Murray-Darling electorate are very angry about the proposed changes. More than 200 attended a stop-work meeting in Broken Hill this morning during a two-hour strike, and other centres across the electorate also had very high attendances at stop-work meetings.

Communities such as Broken Hill, Finley and Hay, to name but a few, would not be able to attract or retain qualified teachers under the Government's proposal to abandon the present system. Country communities deserve to have a qualified teacher in front of every class. The present system delivers this but the proposed system would not, as evidenced by the Western Australian attempt—which has now been abandoned—that resulted in a shortfall of 600 qualified teachers, and by the situation in Victoria, where staffing shortages have occurred in rural areas. I believe allowing principals of easy-to-staff public schools to select their own teachers will reduce the capacity of hundreds of disadvantaged schools in country areas to attract and retain qualified teachers.

Until now, the Department of Education and Training has offered incentives to make sure that schools, particularly in far western areas where there is social instability, were staffed properly. The Government needs to put in place safeguards to prevent teacher shortages in areas such as the Far West and southern Riverina. The Government must look into safeguards such as providing incentives for teachers to work in hard-to-staff schools. On a number of occasions I have asked the Minister for Education and Training to give me assurances on this issue. On 7 February I wrote to the Minister requesting he provide me with the information on which the department's proposed changes were based and the supporting evidence detailing that they will benefit, or not detrimentally affect, rural and regional communities so that I can assure those educators and parents who have brought their concerns about this matter to my attention. I have not received those assurances because I do not believe they exist.

I am totally opposed to the changes to the centralised staffing system and will make every effort to ensure that education services for children in regional, rural and remote areas are not reduced. The New South Wales Teachers Federation wanted to talk to the Minister about this matter, but the Minister opposed the idea. This Government is like a mother who eats her young. That organisation has supported Labor during election campaigns but the Government treats it the same way as it is treating the electricity industry. Once an organisation has served its purpose, this mother will certainly eat her young.

BANKSTOWN-LIDCOMBE HOSPITAL PARKING

Mr ALAN ASHTON (East Hills) [1.48 p.m.]: Today I bring to the attention of the House and the Minister for Health—and I will also write to Bankstown City Council about this matter—the inadequate parking for patients and visitors at Bankstown-Lidcombe Hospital. The parking and traffic situation is dangerous outside and inside the hospital grounds. Some of the examples I will give I have personally experienced and witnessed. My electorate staff have also experienced similar events, and constituents have contacted my office about serious, and indeed dangerous, situations resulting from the unavailability of proper parking. The "Parking Station Full" sign is faulty—as the member for Bankstown, you are probably aware of that, Mr Deputy-Speaker—and has been for some time.

Motorists enter the car park and drive around for five or 10 minutes looking for non-existent parking spaces. They then have to leave and park 500 or 600 metres away—or even further—simply because the sign is not working. When the sign is working and shows that the car park is full, motorists queue to enter the car park, hoping that a car will leave. This leads to a trail of cars along Eldridge Road in both directions, making it impossible for through traffic to enter the roundabout outside the hospital and continue along Bankstown streets. Motorists who cannot find a space in the car park then have to leave the hospital and seek parking sometimes as far as a kilometre away.

Recently a lady had to leave her elderly mother inside the hospital grounds. There is no official drop-off area. When she returned, having parked about 500 metres away, her mother had had a turn, collapsed

and broken her kneecaps. She went to the hospital for a check-up and ended up being admitted as an in-patient. A woman I know personally had to take her elderly father to the hospital last week and could not park inside the hospital car park or nearby. Unable to leave her 83-year-old father inside the grounds, she had to help him walk with a walking frame more than 500 metres. Once inside the hospital he collapsed and was injured in the fall. That is just not good enough. There is no effective set-down area in the grounds where elderly or young patients—especially young mothers pushing babies in prams—can wait until their carer returns from a 500 metre-plus walk because all the parking spaces outside the hospital are occupied. You would be aware of this problem, Mr Deputy-Speaker.

I suggest that the car park sign be fixed. Since the sign has been disengaged, motorists have continued to circle the Eldridge Road roundabout and hospital car park, waiting for a spot to become vacant. This results in confusion, traffic congestion and lengthy delays. I suggest that we re-engage the "Parking Station Full" sign, which hopefully will alleviate part of the problem. We need drop-off areas and we need to look at reorganising the hospital's main entrance. The thoroughfare seems to be too narrow for cars to pass once passengers have alighted, resulting in congestion and confusion—or even injury while people wait unsupervised. The thoroughfare needs to be widened. The hospital needs an emergency entrance. Instead of dropping off their passengers at an emergency entrance, motorists wait in or park their vehicles, which restricts access for other emergency patients. The area must be policed. I am not sure what arrangements the hospital can make on a limited budget, but something must be done.

Additional parking is needed. The car park seemed to be adequate for some time, but now it simply is not. I am advised that Bankstown Senior College, which is across the road from the hospital, is closed every Friday and has an empty car park. Perhaps Bankstown Senior College could be approached, through the Minister for Education and Training, about hospital visitors and patients using the car park on Fridays, which can be a very busy day at hospitals. We need to work on the parking situation in and around Bankstown-Lidcombe Hospital. I bring this issue to the attention of the Minister for Health—I will pass on this private member's statement to her, and I will certainly give you a copy, Mr Deputy-Speaker—and of Bankstown City Council and its traffic committee. Bankstown-Lidcombe Hospital is a great facility that does a great job. But if people cannot park even reasonably close to it we may need to consider introducing a system whereby hospital visitors do not have the same access as those who are being dropped off at the hospital seeking urgent medical attention.

ARMENIAN COMMUNITY IN DAVIDSON

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA (Davidson) [1.53 p.m.]: I wish to speak about one of the multicultural communities in the electorate of Davidson. The Armenian community represents a significant proportion of my constituency. Armenian culture dates back several thousand years. The Armenian people were the first to adopt Christianity as a nation. This was proclaimed by King Dertad in 301 AD. Their traditions date back to around 5,000 BC, and some pagan traditions are still practised in their celebrations today. Armenians are mainly Orthodox Christians, which means that they celebrate Christmas on 6 January. The Armenian alphabet was created in 401 AD and comprises 38 letters. It is written left to right in horizontal lines. Armenians come from all parts of the world, which has caused a number of dialects to emerge in various areas. These are mainly grouped as Eastern Armenian—the authentic, true language—or Western Armenian, which is a more mixed and colloquial language.

Many Armenians revere Mount Ararat as a holy and sacred site: the place where Noah's Ark is said to have rested after the Great Flood. This site is now located in Eastern Turkey due to rezoning of the borders early in the twentieth century. Around the same time a genocide of the Armenian people took place at the hands of the Ottoman rulers. This is commemorated annually on 24 April and was recognised by the New South Wales Government nine years ago, on 5 March 1999, with a dedication and unveiling of the Armenian Genocide Memorial within the grounds of Parliament House. On Sunday 20 April I will attend, as a guest of the commemorative committee, the commemoration at Lindfield of the ninety-third anniversary of the Armenian genocide. On a lighter note, there are many well-known people who would not be recognised today as being of Armenian heritage.

Mr Alan Ashton: Joe Hockey.

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA: Yes, Joe Hockey—and, indeed, Gladys Berejiklian. They also include Charles Aznavour; Artem Mikoyan, the creator of the MiG jet fighter; Garry Kasparov, or Kasparian, the world chess champion and politician in Russia; Andre Agassi, or Agassian, tennis player; Cher; Howard Kazanjian,

the producer of the *Star Wars* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* movies; William Saroyan, who won a Pulitzer Prize for the play *The Time of Your Life*; Steven Zaillian, the screenwriter of *Schindler's List*, *Clear and Present Danger*, *Patriot Games* and *Awakenings*; Raymond Damadian, inventor of the magnetic resonance imaging machine; and Michael Ter-Pogossian, inventor of the positron emission tomography scan. Many Armenians in Davidson are skilled in trades while others are jewellers, real estate agents, engineers, teachers, mechanics, doctors, dentists and are engaged in other professional occupations. Historically, they are well known for their achievements in the fields of art and invention.

I have had the privilege of meeting the Armenian National Committee's representatives who live locally but who also play a leading role within the broader Armenian community in Sydney. Many Armenian students attend the Hamazkaine Arshak and Sophie Galstaun College located at Ingleside in the environs of my electorate. It has 124 primary and 134 high school students who learn bilingual listening, speaking, reading and writing and have bilingual numeracy instruction. The school was opened in 1986 after country music legend Smoky Dawson provided an opportunity to build on his ranch by offering to sell the land to the school at below market price. Smoky Dawson had a long association with the college and always took a keen interest in the students and their progress. Smoky attended many college celebrations over the years.

Some school students took to visiting Smoky at his home in his latter years, when his health was failing. Upon the recent death of Australia's first cowboy at 94 years of age, school principal, Kaylar Michaelian, said of Smoky: "He was dearly loved by the entire community". Many Armenians in the Davidson electorate visit the Armenian Apostolic Church in nearby Chatswood. It is headed by his Eminence Archbishop Aghan Baliozian, Primate of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of Australia and New Zealand, whom I had the pleasure of hosting at last year's New South Wales parliamentary Christian fellowship annual luncheon. I look forward to the ongoing contributions by those with an Armenian background to the community in and around my electorate of Davidson.

GOOD GUYS TAMWORTH COMMUNITY SUPPORT

NEW ENGLAND CREDIT UNION TAMWORTH COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Mr PETER DRAPER (Tamworth) [1.58 p.m.]: Community groups and organisations are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain their current services and virtually impossible to grow their organisations. As members of Parliament, we often pay tribute to volunteers regarding the special roles they play in their communities, but today I would like to take the opportunity to praise the generous contributions of two Tamworth businesses that have stepped in to help local organisations. Tamworth Meals on Wheels has undergone a massive expansion program. It has constructed a totally new kitchen to service its growing clientele, with the finished facilities costing \$2.025 million.

I would like to acknowledge the \$221,000 in funding from the Government towards the project, but unfortunately, this money was obtained prior to the decision to build a new kitchen on a greenfield site. The organisation now has a shortfall of \$420,000, and although Tamworth Regional Council has provided a short-term loan, the organisation faces financial challenges in the future. Additionally, today's *Northern Daily Leader* reports that Tamworth Meals on Wheels has had to increase its driver petrol subsidy three times in the last four years, doubling from 27¢ per kilometre to 55¢. Despite offering to provide meals to outlying providers and recent suggestions that it may, in the future, provide meals for local hospitals, no further assistance has been forthcoming from the Government. An organisation providing an essential community service now finds itself in a very difficult situation.

Travice DeSilva, proprietor of the Good Guys store in Tamworth, recently contacted me asking how his business could support local volunteer organisations. I told Travice that Tamworth Meals on Wheels provide a vital local service delivering meals to the frail, the aged, plus younger people with disabilities who need assistance but want to live independent lives in their own homes. He agreed it was a wonderful organisation and deserved support. The Good Guys Tamworth recently presented Tamworth Meals on Wheels with an initial cheque for \$4,794.40, and hopes to raise an additional \$6,000 over the next 12 months. Living up to its name, the Good Guys Tamworth will donate 20¢ cents from every transaction made in store to Meals on Wheels. The company will also provide the facility for customers to further donate, and will offer other support through fundraising projects and staff engagement. Peter Scorgie, President of Tamworth Meals on Wheels, said that the organisation greatly appreciates the assistance, and is thrilled that a local business has come on board to help. He said:

With increasing demand for our services due to Tamworth's growing and ageing population, the partnership with The Good Guys is very welcome. It will bring much-needed funds to our organisation that will allow many people in our community to lead independent lives. No monetary value can be placed on that.

I hope the Government can consider further assisting Tamworth Meals on Wheels, especially with its request for \$90,000 to help defray the cost of establishing an electrical connection to the kitchen. The second good corporate citizen I would like to acknowledge is the New England Credit Union [NECU]. Recently, NECU Tamworth Branch Manager, Sandra Erich, presented Tamworth and District Highland Society Pipe Band representative Andrew Murray with a cheque for \$500 to help update the band's equipment. The pipe band attends many local functions, and represents the district further afield. Again, the band had been unable to gain the funding needed to maintain its ongoing operations. I wrote to NECU's chief executive officer, Kevin Dupe, seeking help to offset the costs associated with maintaining a first-class pipe band and detailed the band's ongoing support for local events, plus its representation of the Tamworth region at events outside the district. Kevin was pleased to assist the band and noted:

NECU are part of this community. We live here, and we're proud to be associated with local organisations like the Tamworth Highland Society Pipe Band.

The band currently has 24 members including four side drummers, three tenor drums, one bass drum plus pipers. The band recently competed very successfully against 24 bands at an event held in Maclean. Free beginners' classes are held Tuesday evenings at Anzac Park in Tamworth, with general rehearsals held on Wednesday nights. The band is very family oriented, with the Hunt family having Alex playing tenor drum while Jamie and Ben are pipers. The Murray family have dad, Andrew, playing side drum, his wife, Louise, on pipes while their triplets also take part, with Mike on pipes plus Josh and Sarah on tenor drums. It is a real family affair.

Band Secretary, Andrew Murray, told me that it is increasingly difficult to maintain the high quality of uniform and equipment that is expected. He said it was very difficult for smaller towns such as Manilla, to support their bands, so I applaud the New England Credit Union for providing this assistance. I congratulate both the Good Guys and NECU on being outstanding community supporters. Given the importance of volunteer community organisations and the increasing difficulty they face in raising funds, perhaps this Parliament should consider establishing a future fund aimed exclusively at providing assistance to such groups.

DUBBO SHOW 133RD ANNIVERSARY

Mrs DAWN FARDELL (Dubbo) [2.03 p.m.]: This month marks the 133rd annual Dubbo Show, which is ranked among the top five shows conducted in New South Wales. As with any event of that magnitude the Dubbo Show relies on the efforts and contributions of hundreds of volunteers. Because Easter was early this year, the Dubbo Show will start on Friday 25 April—Anzac Day. The Dubbo Show Society has respectfully recognised the sanctity of this day by presenting a photograph of a soldier on guard at an Anzac Day service on the front cover of this year's program. It has also included in its program details of all the Dubbo Anzac Day services as a courtesy to patrons to ensure that they are aware of the times services are being held. I mention this because Anzac Day and the Dubbo Show traditionally are two of the biggest occasions in the city's history and the majority of residents usually attend.

In the past few years, numbers attending the show have been in excess of 30,000; that is three-quarters of the population have turned out for the event. This is quite an achievement and the Dubbo Show Society must be congratulated on its efforts in attracting such a crowd. Similarly, Anzac Day has been enormously well attended in Dubbo and was first commemorated after our troops returned from World War I. In the past few years the number of people attending the Dubbo dawn service has grown to about 1,000 while the number attending the 11.00 a.m. service averages about 7,000. It is wonderful to see children lining Dubbo's main streets to cheer and clap remaining veterans.

I acknowledge also the work of country show societies. Whether the town has a population of 4,000 or 40,000 they have a big job to do and it is getting harder all the time. The past few years of drought have been the most difficult for country shows. In addition, most show societies have suffered huge financial setbacks as a result of last year's horse flu epidemic, in particular, the Parkes Show Society, which suffered enormous loss. The drought and the difficulty in providing top-class entertainment have become a huge impost for most show societies. An added problem is the cost of security imposed on most shows, which now pay New South Wales police to patrol their events.

Other costs include waste disposal. A show the size of the Dubbo Show accumulates a huge amount of rubbish over the weekend. These large costs have to be covered by what is basically a volunteer organisation. The admission price goes some way towards covering the costs but it has become more difficult each year to provide quality entertainment while keeping gate prices at an affordable level. The Dubbo Show will start on Friday 25 April but smaller shows do not often benefit from gate takings. Nowadays country shows have

considerable competition with other forms of entertainment on offer, such as families taking holidays on the coast. Carnival rides and dagwood dogs that 40 years ago were a once-a-year novelty no longer have the same appeal for today's children, who are raised on a regular diet of theme parks and McDonalds.

However, country shows still have one major drawcard up their sleeve—their fireworks displays have taken the place of the cracker nights of old. The banning of fireworks and backyard bonfires has provided a big boost to country shows, allowing them to present large pyrotechnic displays at minimal cost to families. The Dubbo Show golden axe and silver saw championships are highly prized and highly contested by the nation's best axe men and women, and sawyers. In particular, I acknowledge the efforts of Cleve Olsen, his son Robert and wife, Anne, for their ongoing commitment to staging the Dubbo Chops. For many years the Olsen family have been the mainstay of this event, providing all the logs and playing a major role in its coordination. Each year Cleve and Robert prepare several hundred tonnes of logs in storage pits on their property west of Dubbo. This is a mammoth task, requiring the use of large machinery and trucks to get the logs from where they are harvested to the property and then to the showground. The Olsen family does all this free of charge. Payment is the enormous satisfaction they derive from seeing the event maintained.

It is well recognised that the Sydney Royal Easter Show is an iconic event on the social calendar but equally smaller shows across our region evoke the same passion from their communities. The Sydney Royal Easter Show would not be viable without the smaller regional shows that contribute to it. Country people love their show, none more so than the people who organise them. For this reason I acknowledge and congratulate the hardworking volunteers who, each year, keep the spirit of our country shows alive. I acknowledge the great work of Dubbo Show Society Secretary Sue Hood, President Graeme Board, the committee, stewards and volunteers, community participants, stall holders, food van sellers and, in particular, the police citizens youth club. Once again, on Friday evening, I will work with them for about six hours, which I thoroughly enjoy. The Dubbo Show starts on Anzac Day. I suggest that any member who is in the region that weekend call in and have a look. It is one of our best.

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

Private members' statements noted.

[The Deputy-Speaker left the chair at 2.08 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]

SCOUTING CENTENARY

The SPEAKER: I draw to the attention of members that 2008 is the Centenary of Scouting in Australia. Over one million young Australians have joined scout groups, undertaken outdoor activities and bush craft, developed leadership skills, and contributed more than one million volunteer hours to their local community each year. In 2008 over 13,000 boys, girls and young adults in New South Wales, supported by more than 3,500 volunteer leaders, are celebrating the Centenary of Scouting through camps, commemorative programs, outdoor activities and good turns. I commend Scouts Australia and the 14 representatives who are with us in the gallery today for their work in developing healthy, happy, responsible young people, and I thank them for their contribution to the community.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER: I welcome to the Parliament former Deputy-Speaker John Price, who is in the gallery today. It is good to see him. I am sure he cannot believe the good conduct of the House so far today.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of Motions

Government Business Notices of Motions (for Bills) given.

QUESTION TIME

ROYAL NORTH SHORE HOSPITAL CARER AND FAMILY ACCOMMODATION

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: My question is directed to the Minister for Health. How can she justify today's termination of the contract to provide nearby accommodation for the carers and families of critically ill

patients from across the State at Royal North Shore Hospital, a leading State trauma centre, despite the Government's 2006 promise to provide accommodation located "very close to patients", and the Minister's own statement to the House last October?

Ms REBA MEAGHER: I welcome the question from the Leader of the Opposition, and I welcome the opportunity to update the House and the community on what is taking place. I am advised by the Acting General Manager of Royal North Shore Hospital, Mr Frank Bazik, that there has been no interruption to carer accommodation at Royal North Shore Hospital since the closure of Rotary Lodge on Monday 4 September 2006. Alternative arrangements were made at the time to replace Rotary Lodge with a mixture of on-site and nearby off-site accommodation at no extra cost to carers. This included 11 rooms in the main hospital building for the most needy families, which are still available today, and 20 subsidised rooms at a commercial hotel. I understand that the commercial arrangement with the hotel ended on 6 April and that the area health service is pursuing a more suitable alternative arrangement with Blue Gum Lodge at Greenwich Hospital, a nearby facility that has approximately 40 rooms.

Members of my staff spoke with Mr Bazik as recently as 2 o'clock this afternoon. He advised that he was not aware of any carer or family member of a patient at Royal North Shore Hospital who had either been denied accommodation or was not able to access accommodation. He has assured me that if there are such people in need, he will ensure that they have appropriate accommodation provided today. It should also be pointed out that there are longer-term plans. As members would recall—because I have taken the opportunity to remind them on occasion—the New South Wales Government is redeveloping Royal North Shore Hospital to the tune of \$702 million. It is one of the largest hospital redevelopments to be undertaken in this country. The redeveloped hospital will provide on-site accommodation for various groups, including staff, students and carers.

Mrs Jillian Skinner: Point of order, Mr Speaker—

Ms REBA MEAGHER: I had finished my answer.

Mrs Jillian Skinner: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129, which deals with relevance. The question was about nearby accommodation. The Minister is breaking the promise she made to the House. If she thinks Greenwich is nearby—

The SPEAKER: Order! I ask the Deputy Leader of the Opposition to resume her seat. The Minister has concluded her answer.

MERRYLANDS HIGH SCHOOL INCIDENT

SCHOOL SECURITY TRAINING

Mr DAVID BORGER: My question is addressed to the Premier. Will the Premier update the House on school security measures?

Mr Chris Hartcher: Merrylands High.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: For the benefit of the member for Terrigal, I will include Merrylands High. Our schools are sometimes forced to deal with events that are far removed from education. All members would be aware of the very disturbing incident that occurred yesterday when a group of people entered the grounds of a high school in Western Sydney armed with machetes and baseball bats.

Mr Andrew Fraser: Shouldn't this be a ministerial statement?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: No. I am providing an answer to a question. Given that this matter is before the courts, there are constraints about what I can say. But let me at the outset express my appreciation and admiration for the bravery and professionalism shown by the teachers, school staff and police. They acted swiftly to protect students and themselves. They put themselves between the kids and danger, and I thank them for it. I am sure every member of this House would agree with what I have just said and that the teachers, school staff and police are to be applauded for their actions. The school has advised that police arrived two minutes after staff and students called 000. And six minutes after the call, alleged offenders were in custody and their weapons were secured—a magnificent response from the New South Wales Police Force.

A teacher and a number of students were treated for minor injuries as a result of the incident, and we wish them well in their recovery. To help all those involved recover from the incident the Department of Education and Training immediately arranged for counsellors to attend the school and assist students and staff, and a further five counsellors are at the school today. The emergency lockdown procedures that were in place at the school worked exactly as they were designed to work: to protect the students and staff. I strongly sympathise with parents who waited outside during this safety measure. I can only imagine the ordeal they also went through as they waited for information. I quote Sharon Roni-Briggs from the Parents and Citizens Association on ABC radio this morning. She said:

We had all children safe at the time ... and while the delay seemed very laborious, it was necessary ... and the lockdown process has proven to be very thorough and that's what we're looking for ... 100% thoroughness ... it's worth it.

The Department of Education and Training and the New South Wales Police Force will meet this week to gain a debrief from the incident. If there are further measures that can be implemented for students, teachers and parents, they will be implemented. If there are underlying tensions or incidents behind this attack, police will investigate and get to the bottom of it. That is why I can announce today that I have asked the Attorney General to examine creating a new offence. While the law generally provides for increased penalties where an offence is committed in company, the key property offence does not have a higher penalty for offences committed in groups.

I have asked the Attorney General to examine whether a new offence is needed to cover situations of damaging property in company in our schools, which would bring a high penalty. Causing reckless grievous bodily harm is already punishable by 10 years imprisonment and a further four years if the offence is committed in company. Committing any offence in company is an aggravating factor to be taken into account in sentencing. However, I want to see whether more can be done so I have asked the Attorney General to examine the proposal. The safety of our students and staff is paramount. There is no place for violence in our schools. The Government has put considerable resources into keeping our students safe and we have provided strong legislative protection for schools, students and staff.

The Crimes Amendment (School Protection) Act 2002 provides significant penalties for the assault, harassment, stalking and intimidation of students and staff on school premises or while entering or leaving school premises. The penalties were introduced to reinforce the fact that schools must be safe places for our children and teachers. Schools can also apply for an apprehended personal violence order against a person believed to pose a threat. All government schools have developed, or are implementing, anti-bullying plans. New procedures to suspend and expel school students were issued in 2005 to strengthen the authority of principals to take strong action when serious disciplinary issues arise, particularly for incidents involving violence, weapons and drugs. Crime prevention education, delivered jointly by teachers and police officers, has been extended to primary school children. A memorandum of understanding has been developed between the Department of Education and Training and the NSW Police Force to streamline the exchange of information between schools and police.

Since 1995 security fencing has been installed in more than 500 schools, at a cost of \$55 million. In this term the Government will build a further 200 school security fences at an investment of \$39 million. In 2002 the Department of Education and Training established a Safety and Security Directorate. Former Assistant Commissioner of Police, Ike Ellis, who has helped develop emergency management and response plans, leads the Safety and Security Directorate. The unit is dedicated to the safety and welfare of students and staff in the rare circumstance that we saw yesterday. The Safety and Security Directorate runs simulation exercises to give principals realistic opportunities to rehearse and consider their plans and responses. We are thankful that most principals will never have to use this training.

More than 1,600 principals and deputy principals have completed Exercise Socrates and Exercise Satchel. These simulation exercises for high school and primary school principals use specialist education officers and police from the Safety and Security Directorate, as well as local police, and take advantage of leading-edge technology and software. The incident that occurred yesterday was one that our police and education personnel had trained for and the response from our dedicated workforce was outstanding. On behalf of all parents, I thank those on the ground yesterday who worked so well. I offer my best wishes to those who suffered cuts, grazes and bruises as a result of the incident. Despite the rare and unfortunate event yesterday, which is now in the hands of the justice system where it belongs, our schools are, and will remain, among the safest places in our community.

MERRYLANDS HIGH SCHOOL INCIDENT

Mr ANDREW STONER: My question is directed to the Premier. How can the Premier claim that the Government had no warning or intelligence about the gang attack at Merrylands High school when there is

YouTube footage of gang members with guns and knives, when the gang had its own website bragging about its crimes and evasion of police and, despite the Premier's claims about tough bail laws, one of the arrested youths was bailed last week for two alleged armed robberies?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: I was hoping that the Opposition, particularly the Leader of The Nationals, would not descend into the usual partisan political point scoring and make some sort of cheap point.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: In response to the question asked by the Leader of The Nationals, first, I direct him to the comments of the Commissioner of Police in this regard. Second, I direct him to the answer I have just given about the meetings that will take place with police in relation to the point he has raised—

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

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: Third, given that the Leader of The Nationals has raised the issue in this manner, I direct him to his comments on ABC Radio as reported on 24 June last year.

Mr Andrew Stoner: Point of order: I do want to hear my comments—although I am sure they will be very good. My point of order relates to relevance. I asked the Premier a question about the Government's full knowledge of this incident. The Government has said that there was no warning or intelligence.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Nationals will resume his seat. The Premier's answer is relevant to the question asked.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: On 24 June last year, when referring to the training or simulation exercises that I have outlined in my answer, the Leader of the Nationals said:

The training is a smoke screen. We are not hearing of many incidents involving actual intruders into the schools.

That very training simulation exercise was in force yesterday.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: My question is directed to the Minister for Climate Change and the Environment. What is the Iemma Government doing to help business tackle climate change?

Ms VERITY FIRTH: I thank the member for Marrickville for her question and her ongoing interest in environment and climate change issues. Climate change represents one of the greatest threats to the future prosperity and security of not just New South Wales and Australia but also the planet as a whole. The costs of runaway climate change could be so high that a failure to take precautionary measures now would not only be environmentally reckless but would also be economically disastrous. The Government accepts that the costs of early action on the issue are less than the costs of inaction on the issue.

That is why the New South Wales Government's decisive early action to reduce greenhouse emissions and make the transition to a carbon-constrained economy has been so important. New South Wales has been a national and a world leader in tackling greenhouse gas emissions. New South Wales initiated the world's first mandatory carbon emissions trading scheme. The scheme has already cut emissions by more than 60 million tonnes—the equivalent of taking more than 12 million cars off the road for a year. In 2005 New South Wales was the first Australian jurisdiction to set ambitious targets to reduce emissions.

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

Ms VERITY FIRTH: It is unbelievable that members on the other side of the House belong to the party that rejected climate change for 11 years at the Federal level. The former Federal Coalition Government did absolutely nothing on this issue and allowed Australia to fall further and further behind in the eyes of the world. Alternatively, the State Government has always led on these issues. It has understood the significance of climate change from day one and it was the first Australian jurisdiction to set ambitious targets to reduce emissions. New South Wales was the first jurisdiction in Australia to say, "We are going to cut our emissions by 60 per cent by 2050."

Under New South Wales leadership, work has started on a national and emissions trading scheme. The Federal colleagues of the members opposite refused to implement one. Their Federal colleagues said, "We are not going to do anything. There is no issue. We will all hide under a log and hope it goes away." The New South Wales Government talked to the other States and established a commitment for a national emissions trading scheme, which is now being considered as part of developing a truly national scheme.

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

Ms VERITY FIRTH: This Government will continue to take action on climate change. Detailed work is underway on our Energy Efficiency Strategy, which includes phasing out old-style electric hot water systems in favour of cleaner alternatives; requiring the top 200 energy users to implement cost-effective, energy-saving measures; and helping low-income earners to become more energy efficient and save money through an energy-efficient audit and refit program for households. The Government is getting on with the job of implementing the massive \$340 million Climate Change Fund that supports green energy and water-saving schemes for homes, families and business. We are getting on with the job that New South Wales families and businesses want us to do—unlike the Opposition, whom I have not heard talk about climate change. Since becoming a member of Parliament I have not heard the Opposition even mention the environment. It is literally a dead issue for the Opposition.

A key plank of our Climate Change Fund is the \$30 million Green Business Program. I am pleased to inform the House that the first round of energy and water savings projects for New South Wales businesses under the Green Business Program has now been finalised. Some 24 projects will share in a pool of \$11.7 million. Together the projects will help New South Wales businesses save 164 million litres of drinking water a year and 36,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions. There has been a great response by business to the program and a huge range of projects funded. These exciting and innovative projects, which show that New South Wales is again leading the way, include \$1.4 million to the University of Technology to replace the 45 million litres of water currently used in air-conditioning systems with purified recycled water sourced from sewers running under Harris Street and Broadway and treated on site. The member for Albury may be interested in this project—but it seems that he is not. An amount of \$540,000 has been allocated to reduce electricity demand by 80 per cent at a feedlot in Corowa by installing a gas-fired generator.

These projects, which are going out across the State into the electorates of Opposition members to help with energy and water savings, would not have been offered if the Coalition were in government. Under the Green Business Program, \$90,000 has been awarded to install water-efficient spray-cleaning equipment, saving 46 million litres of water at Coles supermarkets. The member for Maroubra will be interested in a \$444,000 grant to Kellogg's in Botany. The member for The Entrance will be pleased to note a \$140,587 grant to Sara Lee at Lisarow. These two grants are to upgrade equipment to improve energy efficiency for these two food manufacturers. A project of interest to our members on the North Coast is \$105,000 to Rous Water, based in Lismore, to work with all its high-using businesses to help them save water. Further, \$1 million will go to Bunnings to upgrade lighting in 16 stores around Sydney, saving 3,384 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions a year.

Mr John Watkins: It is a wonderful package.

Ms VERITY FIRTH: It is a wonderful package of initiatives across the State to support businesses to make them clean and green.

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

Ms VERITY FIRTH: Further, \$256,000 will go to the Dry Cleaning Institute of Australia to help businesses from Sydney to Newcastle reduce energy use and save more than 900 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions a year; \$2 million will go to the Tooheys plant at Lidcombe, which is located in the seat of the member for Auburn, to install a natural gas-fired cogeneration project to generate thermal heat for use in the beer-making process; and, a matter of interest for the member for Parramatta, a \$50,000 grant will help rainwater collection from the roof of Coca-Cola's Northmead plant in Sydney to be reused in the production process. There are many more examples of the Government's proactive initiatives. As the Opposition jeers, the Government is working hand in hand with business to make the environment cleaner and greener. It seems problematic for the Opposition, but I do not see any bad news. For a full list of the grant recipients, members can look on the Department of Environment and Climate Change website to see if businesses in their local communities have been successful. I urge all members who are interested to do so.

The Green Business Program provides vital funding for the industrial and commercial sectors to overcome the major barrier for investment in water and energy saving—that is, the upfront cost rather than savings on bills. The program gives businesses a chance to reduce their greenhouse emissions, clean up their operations and, working with Government, lead by example in the effort to tackle climate change. This is the Government's \$340 million Climate Change Fund in action to help families, businesses and communities of New South Wales fight climate change with practical and simple solutions. The Climate Change Fund is making a real difference to our efforts to combat climate change. I congratulate families, businesses and communities around New South Wales on so willingly embracing it.

CREDIT CARD FRAUD

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA: My question is directed to the Minister for Police. Was his 28 March decision to make up claims of widespread credit card fraud when no such incidents had occurred just another cynical attempt at media manipulation and diversion?

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: Here we go again! The member for Davidson watches the television last night and then wanders in here with a question. This matter was on *Media Watch*. He did not do his own research because of a concern or interest in credit card fraud. He simply plagiarised an item on last night's *Media Watch*. That shows how lazy members opposite are. The Leader of the Opposition, who put the member up to this, has disappeared from the Chamber. He is not here to back the member up. After putting the member up to asking this question, he has run away.

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order. If members do not cease interjecting I will call them to order.

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: I will not apologise in any way, shape or form for raising with people the need to be aware when using their credit cards.

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

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: People need to protect themselves from being ripped off by people who skim their numbers in automatic teller machines or skim their credit card details when they pay for a purchase. They need to protect themselves from people who look over their shoulder to steal their personal identification number when they access an automatic teller machine or who try to defraud them on the Internet. I am delighted to have received this very lazy question from the Opposition because it has given me the opportunity again to point out the importance of protecting credit card details from theft and fraud when using the Internet or automatic teller machines.

Mr Brad Hazzard: Point of order: Standing Order 130 requires that the Minister not debate the question. The Minister should answer why he has involved himself in media manipulation, diversion and misleading the public. That is the question. He should not debate the question; he should just answer it.

The SPEAKER: Order! Has the Minister for Police concluded his answer?

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: This question demonstrates once again that the Opposition's first thought is to protect the banks, retailers and fuel companies. The Government's first thought is to protect working families in New South Wales.

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

WORLD YOUTH DAY

Mr GRANT McBRIDE: My question is directed to the Minister for Transport. Will the Minister update the House on preparations for World Youth Day and the benefits it will bring to New South Wales?

[Interruption]

Mr JOHN WATKINS: We share duties.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Mr JOHN WATKINS: People should not be fooled by the name "World Youth Day". A week-long festival is coming to Sydney in July, with events throughout the central business district and at Randwick. It is a huge event for Sydney. The Sydney Chamber of Commerce estimates that the event will bring a \$230 million benefit to our economy. It will be good for business, but it certainly will not be business as usual. Yesterday I announced significant road closures and special event clearways throughout the central business district and the approaches to the city that will impact on the daily lives of Sydneysiders during the week of the event. From 15 to 20 July there will be significant changes to the way our city operates. To give members a sense of the scale, the road closures will take out about 25 per cent of streets in the central business district, with 300 road closures, and there will be 500 special event clearways.

As was the case with the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation [APEC] meeting, there will be some effect also on the suburbs with special event clearways extended so that traffic can get through and around the central business district. As a result of this event, hundreds of thousands of visitors will flood through the central business district and surrounds for a week. It will bring economic benefit also to centres outside the central business district with 700 sites across Sydney being used to either house some of these visitors or to hold functions. The people of Sydney love to parade their great city. We have proven time and again that we like to show off Sydney's beauty to the world. We love our city and we love people to come and enjoy it. This morning on the bus I saw a young woman—

[Interruption]

Yes, I caught a bus today. I am the Minister for Transport; I should catch a bus.

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

Mr JOHN WATKINS: I make it clear that I have caught public transport every working day I have been Minister for Transport. As I was saying, this morning I saw a girl on the bus with an "I love Sydney" sticker on her bag. That should be compulsory!

[Interruption]

How dare the member for Epping interject on me when today he proposed to house juvenile justice offenders in school properties? Today on Ray Hadley's radio program the member for Epping identified school properties in my electorate to house juvenile offenders. I know the Opposition is getting to the bottom of the barrel when it comes to policy development—

Mr Greg Smith: Point of order—

The SPEAKER: Order! Government members will cease interjecting. I call the member for Bathurst to order.

Mr Greg Smith: World Youth Day is a most wonderful thing. I enjoyed hearing about that, but I did not enjoy hearing about—

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

Mr Greg Smith: My point of order is the Minister is not addressing the leave of the question and is talking about one of his opponents in relation to a totally different topic. His comments are totally irrelevant to the question he was asked.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member's point of order relates to relevance. The Deputy Premier is aware of the question before the House.

Mr JOHN WATKINS: The Opposition is trawling through old episodes of *The Simpsons* for ideas on development policy. The episode of *The Simpsons* where Springfield Elementary raises funds by putting convicted offenders in the storeroom in Mrs Krabappel's classroom must have been on Foxtel last night. That is where the Opposition is going for its policy ideas.

Mr Brad Hazzard: Point of order: Even Bart Simpson would be embarrassed that the Deputy Premier is talking about these sorts of issues when he should be talking about matters relevant to World Youth Day.

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

Mr Brad Hazzard: I ask you to bring the Minister back to the question he was asked about World Youth Day.

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind the Deputy Premier of the question before the House.

Mr JOHN WATKINS: The Opposition will be drilling for oil under schools next. World Youth Day is a great event coming to Sydney. It is for major events like this that we open our doors to the world. It will bring great benefit to our tourism industry with a great follow-up. Many of the people who come to Sydney in July will probably visit many times in their lives because of the experiences they will have in our fair city. The road closures are on an APEC scale, although the nature of the event is entirely different. As the Commissioner of Police said yesterday, this is not a security event and it does not require the city to be shut down. However, it requires us to open up the city in an orderly way to the expected 125,000 international visitors. In addition, there will be domestic visitors not only from New South Wales and Sydney but also from all over Australia. They will come to the city during that week—we are talking about very large numbers of people.

By way of comparison, KPMG undertook a study on the economic impact of the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne in 2006. It found that the Games had injected \$1.6 billion into the Victorian economy over 20 years, with about half of that in the year of the event. The Commonwealth Games in Melbourne had about 117,000 visitors from interstate and internationally—Sydney is expecting about 125,000 international visitors. While the Commonwealth Games attracted 57,000 international visitors and 60,000 interstate visitors, World Youth Day organisers still anticipate the event in July to attract more than double that amount of international guests. It certainly will be on a scale much larger than the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne. Therefore, we can expect a greater economic impact. That is part of the reason we are holding the event.

Much of that benefit will go to local companies. For example, two companies in the Hawkesbury region, Evergreen and Turnpoint Pty Limited, are growing turf to ensure the 2008 Spring Racing Carnival can go ahead as planned. A contract in the order of \$5 million has been let to Turnpoint Pty Limited also to provide turf protection. Temporary stables at Warwick Farm are being provided by an Albury company, Stablecraft, at a cost of \$2.1 million. Synthetic track material for Warwick Farm will be supplied by a Coffs Harbour-based company, Viscoride. Government and church volunteers will be fitted out in uniforms by Kid Crew Express Pty Limited. A bunch of other contracts are bringing benefits to local companies. When I said yesterday that this event is like six daytime New Year's Eves in a row, I was not kidding. It is a massive celebration and it will put a strain on the way our city operates. That is why we are getting the message out about it as clearly and as early as we can. The event will bring great benefit to our great city this year and in the years to come.

PLANNING PANELS APPOINTMENTS

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: My question is directed to the Minister for Planning. With the stench of corruption—

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

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: —around Labor's dollars for deals, why does the Minister propose to personally hire and fire most members of his new planning panels, including the joint regional planning panels, the arbitrators, the planning administrators and the Planning Assessment Commission, at the same time as he refuses to implement the recommendations of the Independent Commission Against Corruption to limit the potential for corruption?

Mr FRANK SARTOR: We have an exposure bill so people have a chance to comment. The bill will be debated in Parliament so people have a chance to discuss the matter. I am happy to answer some of these questions but, in doing so, I say that the Opposition runs a risk of challenging Eliot Spitzer for the prize for hypocrisy. Barry was the Secretary of the Liberal Party—the bagman for the Liberal Party—and there they are going to fundraising—

Mr Brad Hazzard: Point of order: Mr Speaker, I ask you to direct the Minister to refer to members appropriately by their titles. I ask him to apologise for his last silly comment.

The SPEAKER: Order! I uphold the member's point of order. The Minister will refer to members by their correct titles.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: I simply referred to the fact that some time ago—not now—the Leader of the Opposition was the bagman for the New South Wales Liberal Party.

Mr Andrew Fraser: Point of order: Mr Speaker, the Minister is obviously canvassing your ruling. I believe that you need to draw his attention to that fact.

The SPEAKER: Order! I have ruled on the matter. The Minister will address members by their correct titles.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: I will come to the premature debate about the planning legislation in a moment. It is important to put this into context. We saw at the weekend a baseless and scurrilous newspaper article with a chronology—

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

Mr FRANK SARTOR: Those opposite produced a chronology that was, as usual, factually and substantially wrong. It referred to my approving modifications at Rhodes. I did not approve those modifications, my department did. It inaccurately referred also to the lodgement of a development application on a certain date. It was a declaration by the director general. The chronology just did not fit. They probably looked at donations from 20 developers and then the chronology of the assessments and compared them until they found a couple that sort of fitted together.

Mr Brad Hazzard: Point of order: The figure was 48 out of 342, not a couple.

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

Mr FRANK SARTOR: I am relieved that the Greens searched 48 development applications and could find only two in respect of which the chronology matched. The hypocrisy and the lengths to which those opposite are going to smear not only me but also the Government and my department are extraordinary. My department gives impartial and independent advice on these matters. There were grey areas, but in the hypocrisy stakes we know that the Leader of the Opposition is rivalling Eliot Spitzer, the former Governor of New York.

Mr Andrew Stoner: He is canvassing your ruling again, Mr Speaker.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: I am establishing the context and I will squarely address the question. Who else is rivalling Spitzer's hypocrisy? Who threw much of the mud that was thrown on the weekend? Normally it is the Leader of the Opposition, but this time it was Sylvia Hale. Who did the Local Government Pecuniary Interest and Disciplinary Tribunal find in 1996 to have failed to declare a pecuniary interest? It was none other than Sylvia Hale, both on a matter before the council and in her declarations. It was Sylvia Hale, that great defender of morality and ethics in this Parliament. Unlike the Greens and Sylvia Hale, no-one has ever found that I have failed to declare a pecuniary interest. I bet that if the affairs of members opposite were examined closely similar findings would be made. I will refer to the legislation, and I promise the House that I will be briefer than usual.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members should not interrupt the Minister after that comment!

Mr FRANK SARTOR: On the one hand, members opposite want to hold the Government and the Minister accountable for decisions. On the other hand, they want a system whereby everything happens at a distance but the Minister is held accountable if someone fails to do the right thing or whatever. If we are to set up regional panels, someone must appoint them and someone must remove them. Members opposite cannot say that the panels I have appointed and the decisions I have made so far have been anything but balanced and reasonable. I am not in the business of promoting some sort of fix or partial decision making in this area. The Planning Assessment Commission—

Mr Brad Hazzard: The figure is \$4 million.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: What have you raised?

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

Mr FRANK SARTOR: Again, we have the smear. The member is trying to tie Labor Party fundraising to decisions made and work done by my department—an independent civil service. The member for Epping is nodding in agreement. The Minister and probably the Cabinet will appoint a planning assessment commission. It will be responsible for dealing with about 80 per cent of the State-significant developments. There also will be regional panels. Local councils will appoint two of the five panel members and the Minister will appoint the other three.

Mr Brad Hazzard: That is you.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: That is what Ministers do.

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

Mr FRANK SARTOR: Ministers appoint people. A register of planning arbitrators will be established and the councils will choose which arbitrator they want to use. Neither my department nor I will determine who will arbitrate. The Planning Assessment Commission, the regional panels and the arbitrators are all subject to the provisions of the Independent Commission Against Corruption Act. The Government has introduced also a new right of appeal for local communities if an approval is given outside the standards and controls applicable in a particular area. We estimate that that will involve about 25 per cent of cases. The Government is giving people also more flexibility with appeals and reviews. This is twenty-first century legislation that will revolutionise the way people deal with planning in this State.

FIREFIGHTERS TRAFFIC INFRINGEMENTS

Mr RICHARD AMERY: My question—

Mr Andrew Fraser: Bring him back!

Mr RICHARD AMERY: I am here.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Mount Druitt will ask his question.

Mr RICHARD AMERY: My question is addressed to the Minister for Emergency Services.

Mr Andrew Fraser: Leave him alone!

Mr RICHARD AMERY: I am sure he has anticipated this question. What measures have been taken to ensure that firefighters are not fined for traffic infringements incurred when responding to genuine emergencies?

Mr NATHAN REES: I thank the member for his longstanding interest in important matters of public administration. Members would be aware of reports last week claiming New South Wales Fire Brigades members were receiving speeding or traffic light infringement notices while responding to emergency call-outs. The community was understandably concerned and I shared their concern. It defied commonsense. I am pleased to report to the House that actions the Government set in train following these reports last week have yielded commonsense results. First, New South Wales Fire Brigades has advised me that the two cases referred to where an infringement notice had been erroneously issued were immediately rectified and the penalty notices withdrawn once the fire brigade and the State Debt Recovery Office were given the details.

As of last week, when a notice was issued to New South Wales Fire Brigades, the brigade would check its logs immediately and determine whether the vehicle was engaged in an emergency call-out at the time. If so, it would then advise the State Debt Recovery Office and provide a notice to that effect, and the infringement notice was waived. It was as simple as that. However, it is clear that an interpretation of the Road (General) Transport Act also played a role in the few aberrant cases where fines were issued in error to drivers. Section 179 (4) of that Act requires all fleet owners to identify the drivers where an offence has been committed.

In the case of the fire brigade this resulted in a handful of infringement notices mistakenly being issued to drivers even though they had already been shown to be responding to urgent call-outs. I stress that the two cases reported last week were rectified immediately and the notices were withdrawn, as always happens when such errors occur. However, the latest advice makes it apparent that there is no need for this situation to arise.

As of yesterday, the process has been changed. Legal advice from New South Wales Fire Brigades I received yesterday is clear: Given that the vehicle is engaged in an emergency response, no offence is committed by drivers picked up by speed or red light cameras. The Fire Brigades Act 1989 is very clear. Section 11 provides:

When there is an alarm of fire, a fire brigade must, despite anything to the contrary in any Act, proceed with all speed to the fire and try by all possible means to extinguish it and save any lives and property that are in danger.

That is exactly what the excellent men and women of New South Wales Fire Brigades do day in, day out to an internationally recognised standard. I am delighted to report to the House that even this handful of cases where erroneous fines were issued will not happen from now on. Henceforth—

Mr Alan Ashton: Be careful around Coffs Harbour, there are a lot of fires there.

Mr NATHAN REES: There are fires in Coffs Harbour, but that is the responsibility of the Rural Fire Service. As soon as the brigade establishes that the vehicle was on a genuine emergency call-out, it will advise the State Debt Recovery Office accordingly and the drivers will not be identified. That is the end of that matter. Obviously, any Fire Brigades members who commit traffic offences while not on emergency duty are subject to the traffic laws the same as everyone else. In those cases, the drivers will be identified and they will receive fines like any other driver. No-one would seriously argue against that. While I am on the topic of our world-class fire services, I inform the House that following—

[Interruption]

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind members that this is a serious matter.

Mr NATHAN REES: While I am on the topic of our world-class fire services, I inform the House that following the tragic fatal fire last week in Hamilton, New Zealand, the national commander of New Zealand Fire Services, Mr Mike Hall, has approached us and requested that one of our most experienced fire investigators, Inspector Robert Alexander from the New South Wales Fire Brigades Investigation and Research Unit, travel to Hamilton to assist New Zealand authorities to investigate the fire and explosion that killed a senior fire officer and injured a number of others. Mr Alexander is internationally renowned in the field of fire investigation, as this request shows. It is a tribute to him and the New South Wales Fire Brigades that such international requests are made. I am advised that he left yesterday to lend every possible assistance to our New Zealand colleagues.

I am sure I speak for all members in this place in extending the heartfelt condolences of this House to the family of Senior Station Officer Derek Lovell, who tragically passed away. His death is a sobering reminder of the extreme dangers routinely faced by our terrific fire and other emergency service workers. I advise members that New South Wales Fire Brigades stations flew their flags at half-mast yesterday and that they are doing so again today in honour of their New Zealand colleague.

TRANSPORT WORKERS UNION INDUSTRY TRAINING, EDUCATION AND INDUSTRIAL RIGHTS FUND

Mr ANDREW STONER: My question is directed to the Premier. What actions have the Premier and his industrial relations Minister taken to assure themselves that Labor Ministers and members who accepted improper donations from the Transport Workers Union had no knowledge about the way the Transport Workers Union's industry training, education and industrial rights fund was being operated?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: There he goes again—up he gets and smears more people in the Government. If he has an allegation to make, he should make it; take it to the ICAC or the police.

Mr Andrew Stoner: Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129. There was absolutely no smear or allegation. The question is how the leader of the Labor Party satisfied himself that members did not know how that fund was being operated. Why won't you answer it?

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of The Nationals will resume his seat. The Leader of The Nationals will direct his comments through the Chair.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: I am satisfied with the integrity of my Government and my Ministers. I repeat: if the member has information and he wants to make an allegation, there is the forum. He should take 10 steps outside the door and name who it is he is alleging has done something wrong. He should take it to the ICAC, show some ticker and back it up.

[*Interruption*]

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of The Nationals has asked his question.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: If he is referring to matters that have been raised in public and in the media about the Transport Workers Union, I refer him to what has been said in the past in relation to that matter. However, if he wants to name a Minister or make an allegation, he should take the 10 steps to the door and say it publicly or, if he is too gutless to do that go to the ICAC and the police.

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

DISABILITY RESPITE SERVICES

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: My question is to the Minister for Disability Services. Will the Minister update the House on the Government's increased respite services for people with a disability and their carers?

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: I thank the member for Macquarie Fields, who is an advocate for people with a disability in his electorate. We know that one in 10 people in the New South Wales community is a carer, looking after—

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

[*Interruption*]

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

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: We know that one in 10 people in the New South Wales community is a carer, looking after a family member or a friend—most often an adult or a child with a disability or a frail older person. Caring for a person you love can be immensely rewarding but it also can be quite isolating and frustrating. That is why carers need care too. They need to know that society—the community—recognises their important role and they need to know that they have support. The Iemma Government is delivering an important service to carers in the form of respite, which is a service that enables carers to take a break from their caring role while the person they care for is looked after by a support worker. Respite care can be provided as flexible, in-home support or it can be provided in a four- or five-bed centre where a person with a disability can stay for a short while.

From time to time respite beds become blocked when a person with a disability overstays his or her allotted time in respite. This can occur for various reasons, such as family breakdown. It is important to note that when a respite bed becomes blocked, up to 12 families cannot access regular respite care. The Iemma Government is delivering for carers. Currently, more respite places than ever are available and the number of blocked beds is at a lower point than at any time in a decade. The number of blocked beds in the respite system is at a 10-year low and it is getting lower. Claims by the Opposition that there is an ever-expanding number of respite beds—

Mr Andrew Constance: Point of order: I refer to Standing Order 129. The Minister is making a statement that is misleading the House.

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

Mr Andrew Constance: There are 19 vacant group properties—

The SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The member for Bega will resume his seat. I will not tolerate frivolous points of order.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: Thank you for that very good ruling. Claims by the Opposition that there is an ever-expanding number of blocked respite beds are simply not true. They are not borne out by the facts. I am advised that in 1997 187 respite beds were blocked. I am advised that today in the Department of Disability and Home Care respite services 36 respite beds are blocked. Further, and significantly, we have plans

for 32 of the people occupying 36 of the beds to move into better, long-term supported accommodation. For some people it might include more support so that they can move back home with their families, for some it means moving into disability supported accommodation, and for others it means that we are purchasing, modifying and constructing new supported accommodation to enable them to move into better long-term care. We are working with the remaining four people, their families and carers to ensure that they, too, have better long-term options than a blocked respite bed.

The member for Bega has said that one-third of all respite beds in New South Wales are blocked. Not only is this not true, but it is not that hard to work out that it is not true. If the member for Bega applied the same minimalist research tactics as the rest of his frontbench colleagues—that is, if he read the *Daily Telegraph*—he would know the number of blocked respite beds is at a 10-year low and he would know of the significant resources we committed to supporting people with a disability and supported accommodation in respite. But, he does not know. The Opposition has gone for years without a policy in disability services. The Opposition has failed to promise one new policy. It is time for the Opposition to come clean. It is time for members of the Opposition to tell the people of New South Wales whether they support our plan, Stronger Together—\$1.3 billion for disability services.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting. There is too much audible conversation in the Chamber.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: Those opposite simply are not interested in disability services. This is why they have not been able to produce one policy on disability services since John Ryan left Parliament.

Mr Brad Hazzard: Point of order: I hate to interrupt the Ohio hard-hitter, but Standing Order 130 requires the Minister not to debate the issue. If she wants to debate it, she should do so by way of substantive motion and we will be happy to discuss it.

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

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: I thought that perhaps the member for Goulburn had been researching disability policy during question time. She has not stopped texting and looking things up on her Blackberry for the whole of question time.

Mr Brad Hazzard: Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 59. The Minister is demonstrating remarkable tedious repetition. She should stick to the issue and answer the question under Standing Order 129.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Wakehurst will resume his seat. There is no point of order. The Minister has the call.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: I know one person that the member for Goulburn was not texting. When travelling around and meeting people in disability services, one meets a lot of fascinating people who have innovative ideas about disability services and who are interested in disability services policy. The other day I met one such person and I thought, "What a pity a person like this cannot be elected to Parliament." But I suppose the Liberal Party has no place for Martin Laverty in this House. Will the Opposition endorse the 1,062 new respite places that we have introduced in the last 18 months? Does the Opposition endorse the 791 respite places we have introduced for older parent carers? Will the Opposition commit itself to the significant resources we are directing in Stronger Together, the 1,400 new supported accommodation places and intensive in-home support?

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Coffs Harbour will cease interjecting.

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY: Or just maybe the Opposition will stand by the one idea that the member for Bega has managed to bring before the House. As the member for Bega advised the House on 9 May, "It is time to consider whether the Government should opt out of the provision of accommodation services altogether." It is a brave idea; it is a courageous idea, but it is not an idea the Iemma Government is going to adopt. We are going to continue to deliver the long-term help and the practical support that people with a disability, their families and carers want and need through our historic plan, Stronger Together.

Question time concluded.

NATIONAL PARKS AND WILDLIFE SERVICE STAFF COMMENDATION

Ministerial Statement

Ms VERITY FIRTH (Balmain—Minister for Climate Change and the Environment, Minister for Women, Minister for Science and Medical Research, Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Cancer)) [3.22 p.m.]: I commend staff from the Central Coast-Hunter Range region of the National Parks and Wildlife Service who attended a serious incident whilst undertaking a hazard reduction burn in the Hunter region on Saturday. The incident involved a woman who suffered severe burns at her home. These burns were unrelated to the hazard reduction being undertaken nearby. My understanding is that the woman was holding a petrol can when the vapours caught alight. The woman received extensive burns to her face. Her partner raised the alarm with the National Parks and Wildlife Service staff working in the area.

National Parks and Wildlife Service staff Lee Turbayn and Alan McDonough, who were working on the ground, contacted the incident controller of the hazard reduction, Tony Horwood, who immediately dispatched a helicopter to the scene. The helicopter pilot, Dave Clifford, and crew, Heath Jones, were able to assess the woman's condition and apply a special burns mask. The woman was then airlifted to meet a Westpac rescue helicopter several kilometres away. It was the quick thinking and response of these National Parks and Wildlife Service officers that helped to make this woman's journey to hospital quicker and less painful than it might otherwise have been. The partner of the woman has since been in contact with the local parks office to express his gratitude to the staff involved.

National Parks and Wildlife Service staff work extremely hard to keep our national parks and reserves safe and accessible to the public. These hazard reduction burns involve highly skilled and sometimes dangerous work. The brave men and women who undertake this work receive few public accolades for their efforts. This incident shows the entire community the calibre of the National Parks and Wildlife Service staff working in this State. I applaud the staff involved in this impromptu rescue operation. They went well above and beyond the call of duty to attend to this serious incident. I send the best wishes of the House to the woman involved, who, I believe, is still in a relatively serious condition in Royal North Shore Hospital, and wish her a speedy recovery.

Ms PRU GOWARD (Goulburn) [3.25 p.m.]: On behalf of the Opposition I support the sentiments expressed by the Minister for Climate Change and the Environment. The staff of the National Parks and Wildlife Service go above and beyond the call of duty, and heroism, which is without gender, as has been highlighted on this occasion, should always be acknowledged. We must not forget that this is not the first, nor will it be the last, time and the House applauds their efforts.

LEGISLATION REVIEW COMMITTEE

Report

Mr Allan Shearan, as Chair, tabled the report entitled "Legislation Review Digest No. 4 of 2008", dated 8 April 2008, together with minute extracts regarding Legislation Digest No. 3 of 2008.

Report ordered to be printed on motion by Mr Allan Shearan.

PETITIONS

Edgecliff Interchange Upgrade

Petition requesting the upgrading of Edgecliff interchange, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Pymont and Ultimo Bus Services

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

CountryLink Pensioner Booking Fee

Petitions requesting the removal of booking fees charged to pensioners on CountryLink services, received from **Ms Katrina Hodgkinson** and **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

Hornsby and Berowra Railway Stations Parking Facilities

Petition requesting adequate commuter parking facilities at Hornsby and Berowra railway stations, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

CountryLink Rail Services

Petition opposing the abolition of CountryLink rail services and their replacement with bus services in rural and regional New South Wales, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

Public Library Funding

Petitions requesting increased funding for public libraries, received from **Mr Donald Page** and **Mr John Turner**.

Breast Screening Funding

Petition requesting funding for breast screening to allow access for women aged 40 to 79 years, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

Hornsby Palliative Care Beds

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

Lismore Base Hospital

Petition requesting funding for stage 2 of the Lismore Base Hospital redevelopment, received from **Mr Donald Page**.

Licence Laws for Older Drivers

Petitions asking for an inquiry into licence laws for older drivers and the implementation of a suitable licensing system for senior citizens, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**, **Mr Andrew Stoner** and **Mr John Turner**.

Senior Drivers

Petition opposing any driving regulation changes that will be detrimental to senior drivers, received from **Mr John Turner**.

Pet Shops

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

Whale Protection

Petition requesting the protection of whales in Australian waters, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

Electricity Infrastructure

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

DISABILITY RESPITE SERVICES

Personal Explanation

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE, by leave: During question time today the Minister for Disability Services sought to impugn my reputation by selectively quoting from *Hansard*. I draw to the attention of the House that she purposely took out of context my comments in a matter of public importance that was discussed in May last year, and because she is so quick she sought to raise the matter today. She selectively quoted from

the *Hansard*. I make it clear that the Opposition suggested the community have a future debate about respite and supported accommodation in this State, an area in which the Iemma Government is failing badly.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Suspension of Standing Orders: Bills

Mr JOHN AQUILINA (Riverstone—Leader of the House) [3.28 p.m.]: I move:

That standing orders be suspended at this sitting to permit the resumption of the adjourned debate and passage through all remaining stages of the following bills:

Local Government Amendment (Elections) Bill 2008
Housing Amendment (Tenant Fraud) Bill 2008

Mr BRAD HAZZARD (Wakehurst) [3.28 p.m.]: The Leader of the House has given the Opposition no notification of these proposals. Last week the House adjourned early on two nights on which the Government had said it would sit until 7.00 p.m. The House adjourned at about 6.00 p.m. and 6.15 p.m. We know that the Government does not have its act together on legislation or time for debate on the big issues—transport, hospitals and policing. It does not give the Opposition sufficient time to raise necessary issues, yet it expects the Opposition to accommodate it when it introduces bills at the last minute.

The Opposition has plenty of big issues that it would like to debate, and it would like the Government to give it sufficient time to represent the community's concerns. The community is concerned about everything the Government is doing. There is the stench of corruption around both the Government and local government. Wollongong council is just the tip of the Government's iceberg. Corruption is occurring at levels unprecedented in government. In addition to the stench of corruption, there is incompetence. How many times have we heard major announcements made by the Government? When the Premier occasionally wakes up we suddenly hear another announcement about public transport—

Mr Steve Whan: We constantly make major announcements. We are a busy Government.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Busy government? Busy doing dirty deals for dollars—that is what you are doing. You are an expert at doing deals for dollars! The Opposition wants time in a democratic system to debate the issues and not have to stand by as the Government changes the rules to suit itself. We received no notification today. We would like to have some time to debate on behalf of the public what the Government is failing to do in hospitals right across the State—

Mr Steve Whan: What are you going to say?

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

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: You can talk about your deals for dollars in your electorate of Monaro but the truth is we need ordered time in the House to enable debate of corruption and incompetence. The Opposition totally opposes the Government's duckshoving us with standing order suspensions to bring on legislation about which we have been given no notification. If you want to come and talk to us, do so. If you want to allow proper debate, do so. We all know that the State's transport system is falling apart; that the Government makes repeated announcements about a rail system for Sydney's north-west sector that, once announced, like a phantom train never appears; that land in Sydney's south-west is allegedly being released yet not one block of land has come on the market; that section 94 levies are being swallowed by State Treasury, and probably disappearing, thus preventing local government providing necessary infrastructure; that there is no partnership between the State Government and local government, which is at the coalface of providing the facilities the community wants.

So we say to the Government: It is time to take stock, smell the stench of corruption around the State, and start talking to the public about new ways of transparency. In question time today the Minister for Planning said he was not going to have his fingerprints all over the various people appointed to his planning panels, the joint regional planning panels, the Public Accounts Committee, or the administrators. Those people will have Frank's fingerprints all over them. Whether it is hospitals, public transport or the education system, everything is failing because this State Government is incompetent. Worse still, the stench of corruption emanates from every level of the Government's activities. The Opposition opposes any tomfoolery from the Government about what we should be debating.

Mr Steve Whan: You oppose anything.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: We oppose you because you unfortunately lack an interlock to prevent unsafe operation. You guys should take up logging in your electorates because you would certainly add to the profit margin.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Monaro will cease interjecting. The member for Wakehurst will direct his comments through the Chair.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: When the log fell forward I just could not help it, Mr Speaker. We oppose the motion put by the Leader of the House. I make it very clear to the Leader of the House that the next time he wants to get away from his Government's incompetence and corruption and come over to our side for a chat, we will be happy to talk about it—but on this occasion, no way.

Mr JOHN AQUILINA (Riverstone—Leader of the House) [3.32 p.m.], in reply: The Government always subjects itself to this compulsory five-minute tirade, most of which is grossly irrelevant to the issue on hand. Nobody on my side, nor the great bulk of Opposition members, believes I am that bad a guy—

Mr Barry O'Farrell: Can we quote you on that?

Mr JOHN AQUILINA: —or that we are not doing a reasonable job. Even that interjection is a sign of a bit of humour. The Minister's second reading speech has been available for several days. The detailed legislation has been on the table of the House for some days and the Opposition has had plenty of opportunity to study it to understand the Government's intent. That is why we want to get on with the job today.

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

Motion agreed to.

CONSIDERATION OF MOTIONS TO BE ACCORDED PRIORITY

Royal North Shore Hospital Carer and Family Accommodation

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai—Leader of the Opposition) [3.34 p.m.]: I wish the Minister for Disability Services could be believed when she said in question time that carers need care too, but on the record of the Government she cannot be. In 2006, the Rotary Lodge accommodation for carers and families at Royal North Shore Hospital had to be demolished for the renovations. The commitment from the then Minister for Health was to provide accommodation on-site; and 11 rooms were provided, with 20 other rooms very closely located—to use his words—"within walking distance". As a result, for the past two years the Greenwich Inn—a five-minute walk from the hospital—has been available for the families and carers of patients in Royal North Shore Hospital. These people come from city and country areas throughout this State, such as the family of the national parks worker who was caught in a fire, the families of people suffering horrendous injuries who are being treated in the State's leading trauma centres, and those families who are wondering whether their relatives are going to live or die.

When Rotary Lodge was located on-site, in an emergency it took families less than two minutes to be at the bedside of a relative. From the 20 rooms in Greenwich Inn—terminated today by the State Government—families could be at the bedside of a relative within five minutes. In October last year the Minister for Health said that the accommodation would continue, just as the former Minister for Health said it would be provided. If the Government had the interests of families and carers at heart and focused on the needs of patients, it would not make these decisions but would ensure that its commitments, which it trots out time and time again—in 2006, to provide accommodation within walking distance of the hospital, and last October in the statement by the Minister for Health—continue. The Government is all about addressing media headlines and not fixing the fundamental problems. That is why I do not believe the Minister for Disability Services can be believed.

The alternative accommodation referred to today by the Minister for Health is down River Road in Greenwich. River Road makes the Kokoda Track look like Macquarie Street. There is no transport to get people to and from the hospital. To a family that is critically concerned about a loved one in emergency care in Royal North Shore Hospital, who may be dying on a ventilator, the Government offers no alternative to the accommodation that has been provided over the last two years at Greenwich Inn. This morning we finally saw—15 days after the Premier had his road to Wollongong conversion on political donations—the long-awaited meeting between Karl Bitar, the General Secretary of the State Labor Party, and Martin Laverty, the Acting State Director of the Liberal Party. Mr Bitar said:

Our purpose is to end the perception that money can buy political favours.

There you have it. Once again, this is not about doing what is right, raising standards or addressing concerns about the money that is washing around in New South Wales politics but—in the words of Mr Karl Bitar—it is about ending the perception of corruption. This comes from a State Government that in Question Time today could not answer a question in relation to the Minister for Police.

Mr Alan Ashton: Point of order: The motion to be accorded priority is about the Royal North Shore Hospital carers' accommodation, the Government and spin, but it is not about the General Secretary of the New South Wales Labor Party. If you want to take the matter outside Parliament, do it by substantive motion.

The SPEAKER: Order! I extend a degree of latitude to members during these debates.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: The best thing the Labor Party did for the teaching profession was to get that bloke in here and out of classrooms. The Minister for Police today could not answer a question about why he sought to alarm thousands of credit card holders across the State with a false, deceptive, unsubstantiated claim about information falling into the hands of the wrong people. It was just another attempt to divert attention away from the State's problems. This Government is a mob that has no commitment to fixing the State's problems. This Government has no compassion or understanding and does not care about the consequences of failing services and standards for families across New South Wales. This Government is not interested in raising standards in public life. Otherwise, Ministers who did not fulfil commitments they have made, such as to Rotary Lodge and political donation reform, would be sacked. This Government is not interested in raising living standards for people across the State by ensuring they get a fair deal. That is why the Government deserves to be condemned.

Events New South Wales

Mr PHILLIP COSTA (Wollondilly) [3.39 p.m.]: The Leader of the Opposition took some time to get to the point of his motion. It took a little while for me to get a grip on it. My motion should be accorded priority because it refers to issues of a positive nature. My motion refers to the Government's events planning, which shows that we are moving forward and making progress. All we get from the Opposition is gloom and doom. They say that the Government does not have positive ideas and things are not happening. In fact, they are. My motion should be accorded priority because it refers to past events and future events to be held throughout the State. My motion refers to the positive contribution of the Government to the community of New South Wales, particularly Sydney.

Mr Andrew Fraser: You actually have some.

Mr PHILLIP COSTA: We do indeed. Obviously more than the member for Coffs Harbour is aware of. That is why my motion should be accorded priority. Great events are coming to this city.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: More to come?

Mr PHILLIP COSTA: There are more to come. We will receive great international accolades for the events, particularly World Youth Day. Therefore, my motion, which addresses those matters, should be accorded priority.

Question—That the motion of the member for Ku-ring-gai be accorded priority—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 37

Mr Aplin	Ms Hodgkinson	Mrs Skinner
Mr Baird	Mrs Hopwood	Mr Smith
Mr Baumann	Mr Humphries	Mr Souris
Ms Berejiklian	Mr Kerr	Mr Stokes
Mr Cansdell	Mr Merton	Mr Stoner
Mr Constance	Ms Moore	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 Piper	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mrs Hancock	Mr Provest	Mr George
Mr Hazzard	Mr Richardson	Mr Maguire

Noes, 51

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

Question resolved in the negative.

Question—That the motion of the member for Wollondilly be accorded priority—put and resolved in the affirmative.

EVENTS NEW SOUTH WALES**Motion Accorded Priority**

Mr PHILLIP COSTA (Wollondilly) [3.52 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) congratulates the Government on continuing to attract major events to Sydney and regional New South Wales;
- (2) notes that Sydney will host two international soccer fixtures in May and June this year;
- (3) commends Events NSW for its ongoing work in aggressively pursuing event hosting opportunities for New South Wales; and
- (4) calls on the Opposition to stop talking New South Wales down and get on board the Government's efforts to promote the State as the best place to host events in the country.

There is very strong national and international competition between nations and cities to acquire major events. This competition reflects growing international recognition that major events can generate benefits for host communities as we in Sydney have experienced, particularly with the Olympics. As Australia's only global city and hub for business, sport and tourism, Sydney is the perfect place to hold major events in this country. We have the best facilities and the best minds, so Sydney is, of course, the logical choice for people looking to host a major event in Australia. In order to compete on the world stage and to help promote the best city in the world, the Premier set up the New South Wales Major Events Corporation, Events NSW, bringing together some of Sydney's greatest reputations in sport and business.

Headed by John O'Neill, Managing Director and former chief executive of the Australian Rugby Union, Events NSW is charged with making sure that every time we put in a bid for a major event in the city we make a gold medal effort in driving a more aggressive approach to attract big-name events to Sydney. The establishment of the Major Events Corporation was a critical element of Mr O'Neill's review of New South Wales' major events capabilities and convention and exhibition infrastructure, of which we have some great resources. Sydney already has an impeccable reputation when it comes to hosting major international events, built on the back of the best Olympic Games ever, the success of the Rugby World Cup and a smooth-sailing Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation [APEC] forum. This success has also seen Sydney win the rights to arguably the world's largest event—World Youth Day—and we are all looking forward to it. Activities relating to the event have commenced already across this great State of ours.

From 15 to 20 July, Sydney will host World Youth Day, which is expected to attract upwards of 125,000 international visitors—more than the Sydney Olympics. World Youth Day brings young people of the Catholic faith together for a week-long series of events, finishing with a final mass attended by the Pope. The event is held internationally every three years and this year it will be held in Sydney. Sydney will welcome Pope Benedict XVI on his first visit to Australia. His Holiness will participate in key events from 17 to 20 July, including a papal boatercade and motorcade to mark his arrival and welcome, an evening vigil and the celebration of the final mass.

Advice from the Department of State and Regional Development is that World Youth Day 2008 will directly benefit the Sydney and New South Wales economy to the tune of \$193 million, and that does not include the flow-on effects from additional tourism and future business generated from the international media coverage. The Sydney Chamber of Commerce estimates that the benefit to the economy is more likely to be \$231 million, when taking into account the time spent by visitors prior to and after the main World Youth Day week. But it goes beyond economic benefits: it is the bringing together of our people, our collective will and the good things that come out of such an event as World Youth Day that give our community a sense of wellbeing.

World Youth Day is a six-day-long festival drawing people, mostly between 16 and 35 years of age, from all over the world. It will culminate in a final mass to be held at Randwick racecourse on Sunday 20 July. It is expected that up to 500,000 people will attend this event, making it the largest gathering of people in one place in Australia ever. We are all looking forward to that great day. The expected attendance of people from overseas is likely to be well in excess of 100,000 as the event coincides with peak holiday times in the United States of America and Europe. July is traditionally a slower tourism month in Sydney and the event is expected to increase tourist visits both in the short and long term. Our reputation and hard work has also seen Sydney win the hosting rights to two major international soccer fixtures: Australia's Socceroos will take on emerging African powerhouse Ghana and the might of China over the coming months right here in Sydney. I am looking forward to those events.

Mr George Souris: What competition is the China match?

Mr PHILLIP COSTA: The World Cup qualifier. We are going to make it, despite some comments made in the local press. I will come to that in a moment. Sydney has an international reputation and an enormous capacity for hosting major sporting and cultural events. We have made real progress in attracting major events to New South Wales, such as the Men's Australian Open Golf Championship for the next three years; securing the NRL Grand Final for six years to 2012; the Rosemount Australian Fashion Week through to 2010; the Havaianas Beachly Classic in 2006-2008, an elite women's event and the richest on the women's world professional surfing tour; Surfest in Newcastle, Australia's largest professional surfing contest; the A1GP, the World Cup of Motorsport, at Eastern Creek; support for the Western Sydney International Dragway to develop a world series of drag racing events; and the Paris Opera Ballet in June 2007.

In addition, the Iemma Government has attracted some of the world's most prestigious conferences that have brought hundreds of thousands of visitors to our fine city. Not only are there immediate tourist dollars from hosting such conferences but also future opportunities to bring investment to this State when companies see for themselves the great benefits of Sydney as a place to do business, and the development of links between international delegates and New South Wales delegates. Already we are seeing benefits from the International Congress on Obesity in 2006, which attracted more than 2,000 international experts to our shores to develop ways to tackle this growing societal problem. The 18th World Congress of Neurology brought together more than 5,000 of the finest minds in the field, and we have won the rights to host the Lions Club International Convention, which will bring 25,000 Lions from all over the world to Sydney in 2010, as well as the Rotary International Convention in 2014, which will attract another 22,000 visitors. As a Rotarian I am looking forward to attending that convention.

The work of the Iemma Government and Events New South Wales does not stop there. We will not rest on our laurels; we are planning for solid gold bids for major world events, including the Fifteenth World Conference on Lung Cancer. Just last week the Premier and the Minister for Health met with the organising committee for this important international conference to put Sydney's case. The conference will go for three days and will attract between 6,000 and 8,000 people. The purpose of the conference is to promote the study of the prevention, diagnosis, treatment and all other aspects of lung cancer and to disseminate information about lung cancer to the members of the International Association for the Study of Lung Cancer, the greater medical community and the general public. Previous hosts include Denmark, Tokyo and Vancouver.

Sydney is one of five major Asian cities to be shortlisted for the event, which could attract more than 15 million visitor dollars to New South Wales. But while the Iemma Government is working to attract new investments, to create jobs and to build an international reputation for Sydney, the Opposition tends to shun what we try to do. On the one hand, our Premier has been working very hard hosting a few world figures and working with them to make sure they know Sydney is the best place in the world for hosting major events, while on the other hand some members of the Opposition, unfortunately, talk Sydney down. I refer to complaining—

[*Interruption*]

I might be in a moment. They are not offering a single idea. One need only consider the reaction of the member for Upper Hunter.

Mr George Souris: I knew you would do this.

Mr PHILLIP COSTA: The member knew I would do this. I refer to the FIFA World Cup. I am disappointed because I am a soccer fan. The Premier has committed to working with Prime Minister Kevin Rudd—another visionary leader. I have been reliably informed that the member for Upper Hunter has been quoted in the *Hornsby Advocate* as saying, "It really isn't feasible for Australia to bid to host the World Cup. Australia did not qualify to play in the recent World Cup and it is not likely to in the future." How disappointing. This Government has every confidence in the Socceroos, and I am looking forward to watching the team play in the FIFA World Cup. It is shameful that not all members are getting behind our teams to drive events in this State. The Iemma Government is always confident in Sydney's ability to perform on the world stage. That is why it has invested \$85 million. This State is open for business. [*Time expired.*]

Mr GEORGE SOURIS (Upper Hunter) [4.02 p.m.]: There is no way that I was going to interrupt—

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! I am pleased that you did not need to.

Mr GEORGE SOURIS: I just come humbly forward. If I were in government I would have waited a little longer, until I had a few runs on the board, before I started boasting. The long list of losses and failures of this Government is appalling. In fact, I will probably reflect more on the previous 13 years than I will on the work of the Major Events Board, which I support. I support John O'Neill, whom I have known for a long time. I had dealings with him when I was the Minister for Finance and he was the chief executive of the Bank of New South Wales. I respect his ability, which has been demonstrated in the various positions he has held. He has led both the Australian Rugby Union on two occasions and the Football Federation Australia. Now, at last, we can have some confidence that our pursuit of major events will have a decent focus. Unfortunately, under the premiership of Bob Carr and the early premiership of Morris Iemma that was certainly not the case.

This State has lost one event after another. The flavour of the Carr Administration was especially obvious when that Government was first elected and the 500cc motorcycle grand prix was moved from Sydney to Melbourne without the Government's knowing the bid process was underway or that the event had been lost until it read about it. This year's Rugby League World Cup final will be held in Brisbane. It is ridiculous that in the centenary year of rugby league that the world cup final is being held in Brisbane and not Sydney, which is the birthplace of rugby league. Sydney was host to two rounds of the V8 Supercars event. With the intended closure of Oran Park Raceway, one of those rounds was to be held elsewhere. Sadly, Sydney lost out to a provincial city—Townsville.

What kind of effort went into that bidding process? We know that the Government thought for a brief moment that Homebush Bay would be able to provide a very interesting street circuit. It certainly would have been fabulous. However, the Premier felt that there was not enough in it for New South Wales and that it was as well that this State did not take the bid seriously. He was happy to farewell the event to Townsville with his blessing. It was awful to see two Bledisloe Cup matches moved to Brisbane and Melbourne. Sydney went two years without a Bledisloe Cup match. The upcoming event will be the first to be held in Sydney for three years. It did not take much to win those events. One wonders what effort the Government made to retain those fixtures or to win them back from Brisbane and Melbourne. Even the deciding 2006 Rugby League State of Origin match was played in Melbourne.

[*Interruption*]

If the rugby union administrators were serious about rugby union in Victoria, a Super 14 franchise may have been awarded to that State. Having awarded the franchise to Western Australia, why would the

administrators hold the Bledisloe Cup match in Melbourne? It was done for a small amount of money. It cost \$3 million, and most of that was in kind involving access to Victorian schools for coaching and exhibitions. New South Wales let one of the great events slip away for such a small amount. About 10,000 visitors came from New Zealand to attend the Bledisloe Cup. That is a significant event to lose.

[Interruption]

I sat peacefully while members opposite spoke. I made one request, which the Minister fulfilled. He should now just be quiet. The Government's performance does not affect only sporting events. Theatre performances are another very sad story. It is important to hold the premiere of a theatre event. International visitors—especially New Zealanders—and interstaters prefer to attend premieres. The repechage performance in the second city does not attract as many international or interstate visitors. We have lost *Miss Saigon*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *Wicked*—which will premiere in Melbourne later this year—and Broadway sensation *Jersey Boys*, which will be performed next year.

Wicked and *Jersey Boys* will have blockbuster premiere runs in New York and one will go to the West End and another will go to Melbourne. The West End show will also go to Melbourne. Sydney will get the repechage events. The *Phantom of the Opera* is about to open in Sydney. It has been on in Melbourne already and New Zealanders wanting to see the show will have already done so and they will have stayed in Melbourne hotels. The premiere run is the best run to achieve and we certainly have not had a premiere run of a blockbuster musical or theatrical event in Sydney for a long time. We also lost the 2007 FINA World Championship to Melbourne and the Formula 1 Grand Prix is also held in Melbourne. Is Sydney bidding for a Formula 1 grand prix? We shall see.

Mr Phillip Costa: Ask Bernie Rich.

Mr GEORGE SOURIS: If the member is referring to Bernie Ecclestone, I would not trust him as far as I could kick him.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! The member for Upper Hunter will address his remarks through the Chair.

Mr GEORGE SOURIS: Sorry to cut you out, Mr Deputy-Speaker.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! I am referring to the standing orders.

Mr GEORGE SOURIS: I understand that and I will certainly be more inclusive. Melbourne recently obtained a five-year extension as the site for the Australian Tennis Open Championships. I am sure that you, Mr Deputy-Speaker, would be aware of that. It did not even lodge a bid. New South Wales was not even at the table when Melbourne obtained that extension. John O'Neill's report pointed out a significant inadequacy in this State. Given its regional status and size, it is amazing that Sydney does not have sufficient conference facilities. It is astounding to note that all but one ClubsNSW annual conference has been held at the Gold Coast Convention Centre. On one occasion it was held at Albury. Queenslanders are very proud of that convention centre and it is used to great effect in attracting major conventions and conferences. That is a benchmark with which we cannot compete. We cannot even accommodate the association representing New South Wales clubs when it holds a conference!

The Major Events Board has pointed to a significant need for investment in conference facilities. I did not hear the member for Wollondilly talk about investment. Hundreds of millions of dollars is required, but there was no mention of it. The member made a couple of idle references to some sporting fixtures that were going to be held here anyway. The Festival of Sydney is here already; it is home grown. The member should stop boasting about it. It is worth boasting about, but he should not boast that this Government attracted it to Sydney. It grew from very humble beginnings to an international event of which we can be proud. It is really quite astonishing, after a 12-year period of failure, and after some events that were coming to Sydney anyway, that the member for Wollondilly has claimed some kind of credit.

The O'Neill report pointed to 494 events lost to New South Wales in the immediately preceding five-year period. Members should not kick an own goal. They should not boast when there are statistics like that. They should take note of those statistics. They have ignored them and not come to grips with them. Those statistics are damning of the office they have occupied for such a long time—a period of inadequacy and

inaction. In budgetary terms, New South Wales does not have a hope against Victoria—\$28.3 million per annum versus \$67.5 million per annum. Until the Government addresses the budgetary shortfall and the inadequacy of the New South Wales major events budget, New South Wales will go down to Victoria and Melbourne every time.

Mr GEOFF CORRIGAN (Camden) [4.12 p.m.]: I will leave the member for Wollondilly to address some of the concerns raised by the member for Upper Hunter in his reply. I hope that the member for Pittwater can raise valid concerns in his contribution. Sydney and New South Wales are among the world's most appealing destinations for major events, with a host of first-class venues and services. The ability of this State to deliver major international events has been proved time and again, from the 2000 Olympic Games and the 2000 Paralympic Games, to the Rugby World Cup in 2003. Sydney and New South Wales are the home to internationally renowned tourist attractions and a diversity of cultural centres, restaurants, shopping precincts, beaches and parks.

These are reinforced by high standards of service provisions and infrastructure. I congratulate the Iemma Government on continuing to provide critical operational and logistical support for major events to Sydney and regional New South Wales. Further to this, the coordination of New South Wales Government agencies continues to be invaluable to the delivery of major international events. One of the highlights of the 2008 events calendar for this State includes a Socceroo double announced by the Premier last week. I am sure the member for Upper Hunter will be there. The Sydney Football Stadium will host the visit of Ghana on 23 May and the final World Cup group qualifier against China is planned for ANZ Stadium on 22 June. In addition, New South Wales will join forces with the other States and Territories of Australia to bid for the 2018 FIFA World Cup, with New South Wales well poised to play a major hosting role for this iconic sporting event.

Sydney and New South Wales possess a stock of world-class venues. Further upgrades to our existing venues will only strengthen this position. From 15 to 20 July Sydney will host World Youth Day, which is expected to attract upwards of 125,000 international visitors, more than the Sydney Olympics. World Youth Day brings young people of the Catholic faith together for a week-long series of events, finishing with a final mass attended by the Pope. Over the past two weeks it has been my pleasure to attend events in my electorate celebrating the arrival of the cross and the icon. I hope all members have as good a time as I have had at those days. I am sure the member for Upper Hunter will enjoy them.

In 2009 Sydney will host the World Masters Games, referred to by the Premier as, "The biggest mass-participation, multinational, multisport festival on earth". If I had any skill, I would love to participate in those games now. No other multisport event in the world attracts as many participants as the World Masters Games. It will be in its seventh year in 2009. "Masters" speaks of an age destination not a level of proficiency, meaning that a participant simply needs to satisfy the age criteria for their sport. Twenty-eight diverse sports will be on offer at the Sydney 2009 World Masters Games, including archery, diving, rowing, sailing and lawn bowls—there is a chance for us all. Sydney Olympic Park will be the home of the World Masters Games, but competitions will extend across the greater Sydney metropolitan area.

Many event organisers are keen to select New South Wales as a host for major events due to the inherent beauty and natural wonders of this State, including the wonderful wineries in the Hunter. The NAB Beachley Classic in Manly, organised by our very own world surf champion Layne Beachley, is held at Manly beach. The Ironman Australia Triathlon, which attracts almost 2,000 competitors from over 30 countries, is held in Port Macquarie—and what a coincidence that the member for Port Macquarie is in the Chamber. New South Wales has long played host to national and international events of this standard. The Government's establishment of Events New South Wales has worked to further revitalise our events calendar.

Events New South Wales continues to attract a wide range of events to this State, from sporting and cultural to those for business. The company has identified and nurtured events that will bring economic and community benefits to both Sydney and regional New South Wales. An example of this is the partnership between Events New South Wales and leading racing industry stakeholders, which has resulted in a significant revamp of this State's Autumn Racing Carnival. After the outbreak of equine influenza, I am sure we wish the racing industry success. This year will see 116 race meets held over 50 days of racing from 22 March to 10 May. For the first time, this will bring metropolitan and regional racing under one umbrella campaign. The Autumn Racing Carnival aims to harness the combined strengths of an industry to generate more visitors and more tourist dollars.

I could go on, but I will not ask for an extension of time. We call on the Opposition to get on board and join the Iemma Government's efforts to promote our State as the best place to host events in the country. I am sure the member for Upper Hunter will do that, and I am sure the member for Pittwater will as well. I look forward to his constructive comments. The Iemma Government and the people of New South Wales are proud of this State. We are honoured to continue hosting some of the best events the world has seen.

Mr ROB STOKES (Pittwater) [4.17 p.m.]: I am delighted that members of the Government are so pleased with themselves. It truly pains me to rain on their parade. It certainly counts for little when a government congratulates itself, so it is up to us on the Opposition benches to determine whether we should join in congratulating the Government on this matter. Bouquets should be freely given by others, not awarded to oneself. The member for Upper Hunter and I discussed whether to join in congratulating the Government but, for two reasons, we thought we would not. First, we would like to have a Minister for Tourism to congratulate, but I note he is not in the Chamber.

The second matter, as John O'Neill pointed out, is that over the past four years 494 events have been lost to New South Wales. That is hardly a matter for which congratulations should be given. It is unique arrogance for the Government to claim credit for the great work being done by local communities around the State to attract important events to be held in their communities—events such as music events, festivals, country shows, wine fairs, street parades and those sorts of things. They may not be major events on the metropolitan scale but they are certainly major events to those local communities.

The second part of the motion notes that Sydney will play host to international soccer fixtures in May and June this year. Again, why are we not calling it "football"? It is retrograde and discriminatory to be calling it "soccer". We should be calling it "football" because that is what it is. Third, according to the motion, we should commend Events New South Wales. It certainly is a great organisation, but no thanks to this Government. When I was preparing for this speech I looked on the website for tourism events. I noticed that of the major so-called flagship events in regional New South Wales, only one is being held this month. It is—I note the presence of the member for Bathurst in the Chamber—to be held in Lithgow. There are only 23 flagship events all year.

The events website does not mention Anzac Day and the important commemoration that involves. There is no mention of the Australian Surf Life Saving Championships because they are being held in Western Australia, not New South Wales. There is also no mention of the netball championships because, again, they are being held in Western Australia and not in New South Wales. Of the major flagship events in regional New South Wales, nothing at all is being held south of Jervis Bay. That is not something to congratulate oneself about. I refer to a major event happening in my community of Pittwater later this year: the World Mounted Games. It is a major international equestrian event to be held at Narrabeen. When I entered that into the New South Wales Government website the inquiry came back with, "No results matching search criteria." So it appears that the Government is not even aware of a major international equestrian event happening in the great city of Sydney.

The fourth paragraph of the motion is upsetting and hurtful. The Opposition is not talking down New South Wales. It is a fabulous place to live and visit, but this is due to the great work of our forebears and local communities. It is not thanks to this stale, tired, old Government. New South Wales is a great place to hold events, no thanks to the Iemma Government. I can give some examples. Instead of safeguarding some of our greatest natural assets, the Government is developing them. I need go no further than my own community of Pittwater and the great natural heritage bushland site of Currawong, which this Labor Government wants to flog off and build mansions on. That is not preserving a great community asset for major events in the future. I refer also to Sandon Point, a great coastal environment also being developed. Such development undermines the tourist value of the New South Wales coast.

Mr Gerard Martin: You are anti-development, are you?

Mr ROB STOKES: The member for Bathurst asks whether I am anti-development. I am anti bad development and inappropriate development. New South Wales will always lose out on major events while Victoria spends three times as much as we do on attracting major events.

Ms DIANE BEAMER (Mulgoa) [4.22 p.m.]: Tourism is a \$24 billion industry in this State and major events are an effective tool in attracting people to Sydney and New South Wales, then getting them to stay longer and spend more. This allows us to capitalise on growth and create more jobs and investment. Major events represent an integral piece of the overall tourism pie, making a significant contribution to the State's

economic development and providing economic and social benefits for the community. Events are a major element of the overall tourism industry; they play a significant role in supporting the delivery of the Iemma Government's State Plan objectives to increase business investment, increase tourism by 10 million visitor nights by 2016 and increase business investment in rural and regional New South Wales.

Traditional tourism seasons are extended by the scheduling of major events in off-peak periods. One out of every 12 jobs is in the tourism industry, so any extensions to the tourism season allow for improved job security for these existing jobs and also provide opportunities for job creation. Sydney and New South Wales have an enviable record in hosting or winning major, world-class events, including the highly successful Olympic Games, the Rugby World Cup and the upcoming World Youth Day, which is expected to draw crowds of at least 125,000 to Sydney. However, the extended promotion of annual Sydney events has also succeeded in attracting visitors from well beyond the traditional source markets for those events. The member for Upper Hunter referred to the Sydney Festival. Tourism New South Wales initiated a \$570,000 campaign to attract United Kingdom and Ireland residents to the 2008 Sydney Festival, based on positive results from the inaugural campaign the year before.

Working in partnership with the *Times* in London, the promotion of the event was extremely successful, with bookings from Ireland and the United Kingdom increasing by 46 per cent for December and January compared with the same period in 2005-06. Indeed, about 30 per cent of the 3,728 international ticket sales for the Sydney Festival 2007 were from the United Kingdom and Ireland. International promotion of Sydney events has also been extended into Asia for the Royal Easter Show. It has proven to be a successful hook in attracting visitors from Asia, who are keen to have an authentic Australian experience. We are attracting people to Sydney and getting them to stay longer and to spend more. We are creating more jobs and investment. Promotion into North Asia and South-East Asia for this year's Royal Easter Show resulted in at least 2,000 Chinese, Koreans and Malaysians—or five full jumbos—coming to Sydney to experience the show. This has had a significant impact on increasing the visitor spend and dispersal into regional New South Wales.

Another example of how major events can be a significant driver of economic benefits into the regions was demonstrated during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting in 2007. Tourism New South Wales joined with industry to undertake a campaign entitled the Bonus Long Weekend Getaway aimed at encouraging Sydneysiders to explore regional New South Wales. This initiative resulted in more than \$15 million being spent by visitors throughout regional New South Wales. The election commitment of the Iemma Government to further maximise the benefits of major events to Sydney and New South Wales is vital to the overall New South Wales tourism industry, and the establishment of the \$85 million Events Corporation marks an essential step in growing tourism in Sydney and New South Wales. Sydney, being Australia's only global city, must be the nation's leader for major events, and significant investment is essential if we are to achieve this goal. It is vital that we do not simply focus on the impact of major tourism events in Sydney and New South Wales, but recognise and understand how major events fit into the overall tourism industry. As well as promoting Sydney and New South Wales for tourism, major events promote them as places to visit, invest, live and do business.

Mr PHILLIP COSTA (Wollondilly) [4.27 p.m.], in reply: I thank the member for Upper Hunter, the member for Camden, the member for Pittwater and the member for Mulgoa for their contributions to the debate. It is obvious that we are one voice in highlighting the greatness that this city has to offer. Therefore, we must not lose sight of the fact that this city and State have the capacity to deliver outstanding events. Working together, we must encourage future events—and the allocation of \$85 million by the Iemma Government towards such events for New South Wales is a good start. I commend John O'Neill and his team for the great work they are doing. We must not lose sight of the fact that every event that comes to this city or to this great State will contribute significantly to the economy and the wellbeing of the people. Therefore, I commend my motion to the House.

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

Motion agreed to.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! It being almost 4.30 p.m., I interrupt business in accordance with the sessional orders.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AMENDMENT (ELECTIONS) BILL 2008

Agreement in Principle

Debate resumed from 4 April 2008.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER (Terrigal) [4.29 p.m.]: The Local Government Amendment (Elections) Bill 2008 was introduced on Friday 4 April 2008, which is a day not set aside for Government legislation. It was

introduced by the Minister for Local Government at 11.32 a.m. At 3.30 this afternoon the Leader of the House moved suspension of standing orders to require the bill to be brought on for debate at 4.30 p.m. The bill was introduced on Friday without warning, without notice, and now debate is forced on the House, virtually as soon as question time has concluded. The bill is extensive, comprising 10 pages. Mr Deputy-Speaker, I draw your attention to the fact that the bill is not even on the table of the House. Where is the bill?

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: It is in your hands.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, this is my copy. Where is the House copy?

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: It is on its way.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Where is it?

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! The Clerks have informed me that the bill is on its way to the Chamber.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: It shows the extent to which the legislation is being rushed through the Parliament when the bill is not even on the table of the House when it is called on for debate. The bill was introduced without notice last Friday and debate on it was forced upon members this afternoon following the suspension of standing orders. Yet the bill extends for many pages, the Minister's agreement in principle speech is long and detailed, and the bill covers many aspects of local government. Even though it is called the Local Government Amendment (Elections) Bill it deals with many aspects other than elections.

The bill deals with ward boundaries, councillor numbers, and whether the director general can act as an administrator. It also deals with who can be appointed as an administrator in the event that a council is dismissed. The Minister drew attention to legal principles relating to conflict in the holding of office. It is extremely wide-ranging legislation, yet it is given a misleading title. In his agreement in principle speech the Minister remarked that reviews of local government elections have been going on since the local government elections in 2004 and that the bill arises from that. The Minister also said:

Submissions received from individual councils, local government groups, candidates and electors have been considered in the course of the review coordinated by the Department of Local Government.

That review has never been tabled. The Minister went on:

The department has also consulted with the Electoral Commission and the Local Government and Shires Associations.

Nowhere in his speech did the Minister say that the Local Government and Shires Associations support the legislation; he simply said that the department had consulted with them. About what aspects of the bill has the department or the Minister consulted with the Local Government and Shires Associations? We do not know. One wonders what sort of government is the New South Wales Government, which, since 1995, has sacked 11 councils and is now in the process of investigating Shellharbour council. The Government sacks one council a year and it is investigating yet another council. It takes very little action against councils that scream out for attention, such as Canada Bay council, and it takes no action at all against Canterbury council, whose meetings average 10 minutes duration, because both of those councils are Labor controlled. However, the Government is more than prepared to take action against any council it gets in its sights that is not Labor controlled.

The way in which the legislation is now being rushed through the Parliament, the misleading title of the bill, and the Government's failure to properly consult on the bill, simply demonstrate the Government's slap-happy approach to local government. One would hope that the new Minister for Local Government, the Member for Liverpool, as a former mayor of Liverpool and a former chairman of the Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils [WSROC], would have taken a more sympathetic attitude towards the problems of local government. Some of us have long memories. I remember that some years ago when the Fahey Government was in power, WSROC made a submission—a very eloquent submission—at a local government conference. A person who was then the Mayor of Liverpool delivered the submission. We sat and listened to him. Indeed, I was so impressed that, had he not decamped from the meeting early, I was going to congratulate him on his presentation.

Mr Paul Lynch: And we both could have sued.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: And we both could have laughed. I was impressed by the fact that he had a strong sympathy for, and commitment to, local government. The only time we ever see that now, however, is when the Minister for Local Government is addressing a local government conference—but then he also decamps very quickly at the end of the meeting.

Mr Paul Lynch: That is not correct.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I attended the last local government conference when they complained that he did not stay around. That was the very point they made.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister for Local Government will stop provoking the member for Terrigal.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: They said, "Chris, you're here." They used first names; they did not use the Minister's title. They said, "Frank arrived, gave his speech, and then left under a police escort." They then said, "We had Paul here yesterday, and he didn't last very long either." That was the empathy and sympathy the Minister for Local Government showed to the local government conference that was held in the north of the State.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is too much audible conversation in the House. I cannot hear the member for Terrigal.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The issues addressed by the legislation are quite complex. Firstly I thank the Electoral Commissioner, who provided me with a briefing about the work his office is doing on local government elections. I think everyone would be impressed by the Electoral Commissioner's determination to ensure that local government elections are run efficiently. The Electoral Commissioner explained to me that the Electoral Commission seeks to approach local government elections in a professional manner. That is to his credit and the credit of his staff, which is only small but, as we see at State elections, extremely effective.

I will now address some of the issues the bill seeks to resolve. The Minister said that the local government elections system should be brought more in line with the Legislative Council's election system. Obviously, that is a good thing. As far as we can understand, given the rushed way in which the legislation has been presented, it is important that the voters get used to electoral systems. Voters are already confused by the fact that there is optional preferential voting at a State level and compulsory preferential voting at a Federal level; that confuses many people at each election. It is also confusing when the system of choosing local government is at variance with the system of choosing State Parliament. It is important that if there is to be a proportional representation system that that system be consistent with other voting systems. Therefore, bringing local government elections into line with Legislative Council elections is to be supported, if that is the effect of the legislation. It is not clear from the legislation that that will be the effect of it.

Given that the legislation is being rushed through the Parliament and that there has been no opportunity for proper consultation on the bill or for an analysis of it, the Coalition parties reserve their right with regard to supporting, opposing or moving amendments to the bill when it is debated in the Legislative Council. The Coalition will certainly urge the Legislative Council not to allow the bill to be rushed through that House in the cavalier manner in which it has been rushed through this House. One has to ask: What is the dreadful urgency in debating the legislation? The last time the Minister for Local Government introduced local government legislation in the House the purpose of it was to bring forward the date of local government elections to 13 September. Surely the Minister had ample opportunity at that time to seek to change the election system. But he did not; he said nothing about it at that time. Indeed, when the Minister introduced that legislation he was extremely determined that there would be no debate about any local government issue other than changing the election date.

As a result of that legislation, local government elections will now be held on 13 September, and the present legislation is important with regard to some aspects of local government elections. However, it is not important that the legislation, with its misleading title, suddenly be presented to the House with regard to the so-called "clarifying" amendments. In his agreement in principle speech the Minister said there are three final clarifying amendments proposed under the bill, the first relating to ward boundaries and the second relating to the appointment of the Director General of the Department of Local Government as an administrator of a local council. We will have more to say about that aspect.

The Minister said councils dismissed for poor performance should be kept under close supervision by the appointment of experienced public administrators. The Minister has therefore widened the debate to include discussion about councils dismissed for poor performance. It is relevant because the Minister raised it in his second reading speech and the Minister's amendments address the very issue. The Minister then goes to the role of the director general and eligibility to nominate for office. The Minister introduced wide-ranging legislation that did not have to be passed urgently before the local government elections because it relates to the powers of the Minister once it has been decided to dismiss a council.

Mr Paul Lynch: Read the bill properly.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I have read the bill properly. The Minister is the one now trying to clarify the powers of the Director General of the Department of Local Government and the one who admits that the previous action in appointing the Director General of the Department of Local Government who, if I recall correctly, was appointed to Tweed council, was in breach of the fundamental precepts of the common law.

Mr Paul Lynch: That is not what I said.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Minister said it himself in his second reading speech:

The convention is that when the director general undertakes such an appointment, the deputy director general takes on the director general's functions ... Also, from time to time during the course of an administrator's appointment the administrator may become unavailable because of personal commitments or because they may have a conflict of interest in relation to a particular matter before the Council. ... It has been suggested that the director general cannot be both an administrator of a council and the Director General of the Department of Local Government.

The Minister then said—and this is the point I am making:

This is because of a common law doctrine of incompatibility of office ...

The member for Liverpool has been the Minister for Local Government for some time and he has been appointing directors general to these offices. He only now discovers—lawyer and former mayor that he is—the common law doctrine of incompatibility of office, but to his credit he has set it out in his second reading speech. In other words, in the disguised bureaucratic ease in which second reading speeches are written, the Minister has made his confession—

Mr Paul Lynch: You are delusional again. It is not a second reading speech; it is an agreement in principle speech.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: —that he has been acting in contravention of the fundamental common law principle. It is the second reading speech in the tradition of the Parliament. It may now be called an agreement in principle debate but it is what everybody understands to be a second reading speech in the tradition of the House of Commons for 300 years and the tradition of this House for 150 years. The legislation is extensive, so let us look at the justification for it. First, justification is unexceptional as far as it appears to bring the proportional system in line with the Legislative Council system. It is essential to ensure that voters understand and get used to electoral systems. The Minister has advanced no justification as to whether wards can be abolished by councils without a constitutional referendum: he just does it. One is entitled to ask what the justification for it is. This is where the views of the Local Government and Shires Associations of New South Wales are important.

The next point is to allow councils for a limited period to apply to reduce the number of councillors without having to conduct a constitutional referendum of electors. Once again that is simply stated and no justification for the so-called change. The Minister alluded, though not in the House, to savings that he said councils would be able to make if they reduced the number of councillors. The savings are not significant because the whole idea of local government is to have representation to ensure that members of the community have access to councillors with whom they can raise local government issues in their areas. The Minister holds it out as a great advantage that councils might save, for example, \$27,000 for Auburn, \$16,000 for Bourke and \$13,000 for Dubbo. That is the price the community has to pay for having less access to their elected representatives in council.

Of course, local government is expensive and it may well be cheaper if we were to abolish it altogether. We often hear the argument that State Government should be abolished because it would save large amounts of money, but democracy comes at a price. The price for ratepayers in local government, or taxpayers in State Government, is to ensure that they have direct representation in the making of laws or council regulations. The

Minister has allowed a system whereby councillor numbers can be trimmed, and presented this as a great saving to the ratepayers, when it is a minimal saving and cuts down community access to elected representatives. It is similar to the spin that the Labor Party again and again tries to put on changes that are not in the public interest, and which it cannot justify, but which it always says will result in great savings for the community.

It is similar to the so-called family friendly hours that were introduced simply as a device to cut the Parliament's budget; they had nothing to do with families because they had no regard to members who live outside metropolitan Sydney—they cannot go home at 7 o'clock at night. Family friendly hours were a smokescreen devised to conceal a cut to the Parliament's budget. We will now have the so-called family friendly councillors because there will be fewer of them. Councils will save enormous amounts of money. For example, a council as large as Dubbo will save \$13,000, but the Minister has given no justification for change. If there were a reason we would love to hear it. How is the Minister bringing about the change? He is doing it by denying the community the right to have a referendum on it.

In other words, he is saying, "I am not going to let the community be consulted. I am going to allow this to happen without a referendum of the electors." The Minister is denying the community the right to make the decision and, in effect, vesting that decision solely in the councillors of the time. Nothing cries out that this is a justified or necessary change. No argument has been introduced as to why it is necessary. Nothing said by the Minister in his agreement in principle speech would commend the change, other than he simply does it. He does it because he can. He does it because he has the numbers in the Legislative Assembly to force the legislation through and he hopes he has the numbers in the Legislative Council to similarly force the legislation through.

I will not refer to the various technical amendments relating to the types of elections and the way the Electoral Office will—as the Minister says—streamline and improve electoral procedures. Everything is always presented as though it is a great advance. The agreement in speech is magnificent like that. "Streamline and improve" are the words that stand out, but there is very little justification for the so-called streamlining and improving. It is a question of trying to find the right adjective or verb to buzz it up and make it look exciting. I have dealt with the various amendments to the voting system. The Minister then referred to the clarifying amendments. The first clarifying amendment dealt with boundaries. The next related to the appointment of the director general. One has to ask why the Minister has been appointing the director general as an administrator of local councils when there are hundreds of thousands of people who could be appointed as administrator? The inference one is entitled to draw as the reason is that the director general acts at the direction of the Minister. That is in the Act.

Mr Paul Lynch: Are you really saying that about Garry Payne?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am not impugning Garry Payne's integrity. I am not talking about Garry Payne; I am talking about the Minister.

Mr Paul Lynch: You are talking about Garry Payne.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am talking about you. The Minister is trying to hide behind Garry Payne. Under the Act, the director general acts at the direction of the Minister. He is the one person who acts at the Minister's direction. An administrator does not act at the direction of the Minister. An administrator is accountable to the Minister, but he does not act at his direction in the same way as the director general. Through the director general, the Minister is ensuring that he controls the council. That is the bottom line. The Minister removes the council and, in effect, acts as the new council through the director general, who has been appointed as administrator by the Minister. The director general is responsible to the Minister and must respond to the Minister's directions. The bill ensures that the Minister's powers, as they relate to the director general, cannot be challenged and allows the Minister to override the common law doctrine, which he acknowledges, of incompatibility of office.

The bill is part of the overall power grab that has been exercised by the Government in relation to local government. The Government has had a cynical attitude to local government over the years. If the Government really believed in local government being responsible and accountable it would ensure that elections took place within a reasonable time after a council has been removed from office. Therefore, the Wollongong and Port Macquarie council elections would be held in September 2008, not at a later date. The people of Warringah have been without a council for five years, since 2003. There is no justification for such a lengthy period and the Minister has never been able to adduce reasons for it. This flawed legislation has been forced upon the House. It

has been brought before the House without justification. It is simply an assertion of the Government's power and does nothing to advance local government in New South Wales. As I said in my earlier remarks, the Coalition reserves its rights when the legislation is debated in the Legislative Council.

Mr ALAN ASHTON (East Hills) [4.52 p.m.]: Although the member for Terrigal, the leader of the equivalent of the Terrigal faction in the Opposition, made some valid points, he said that the legislation was a power grab by the Minister to throttle the life out of local government. If that were the case, it is one of the weakest grabs for power I have ever seen. It is a power grab with kid gloves because the legislation does not contain any controversial amendments. Previously I have seen the member for Terrigal motivated and fired up. Today he was not. He made a benign and passive attempt to occupy some time and oppose the Government.

An important aspect of the Local Government Amendment (Elections) Bill 2008 relates to a reduction in the number of councillors. Previously the Government allowed councils to reduce the number of councillors. At one stage the City of Sydney Council had 28 councillors and for many years Bankstown City Council had 12 councillors and Parramatta City Council 15. Many councils reduced their number of councillors to nine or even seven. A reduction is appropriate if councils can operate efficiently with fewer councillors. Too many councillors can create too much debate without any result. The bill reflects the Government's commitment to the ongoing review and reform of the Local Government Act 1993. When I was a councillor on Bankstown City Council I did not agree with many provisions of the Act, which had been introduced by the Greiner Government. If ever an Act constrained the powers of local councillors that legislation did.

Prior to 1993, as the Acting-Speaker, the member for Mulgoa, would know from her role as the Mayor of Penrith, councils had a great deal of power. They appointed the town clerk and senior officers. They had a great deal of authority over staff appointments and the system seemed to run well. Although it may not have been the most efficient way to manage council, it was beneficial to the public because councillors could ask the general manager or engineer to report on a matter and within a couple of weeks footpaths or roadworks would be underway. Today the process is delayed, but there is more accountability and transparency and a more efficient and effective local government.

I address, in particular, the proposal to offer councils and their communities a second opportunity to reduce their councillor numbers without the need for costly constitutional referenda. It should not be necessary in an area such as Bankstown with 170,000 people to spend a couple of hundred thousand dollars to reduce the number of councillors from, say, 12 to 10 or to change the ward boundaries. Councils should be able to reduce councillor numbers, following consultation and a recommendation from the council to the Minister. Members may recall that this opportunity was first offered in amendments to the Act in 2005. The scheme was very successful and will take effect at the ordinary elections on 13 September 2008 when 47 fewer councillors will be elected across New South Wales, at an estimated saving to ratepayers of nearly \$600,000. Pursuant to the bill, all councils, in consultation with their communities, will be able to apply for a councillor reduction without the need for a constitutional referendum. It does not mean that councils have to reduce councillor numbers, but they have the opportunity to do so.

This second opportunity, which will also take effect at the 2008 ordinary elections, will deliver efficiencies and cost savings for councils and ratepayers. The bill builds on the success of the 2005 councillor reduction scheme and responds to the continuing interest expressed by councils and their communities to reduce councillor numbers. The findings of the Sproats inquiry of 2001 and the experience of councils that have reduced councillor numbers indicate no detriment to the efficient operation of local government where councillor numbers have been reduced. When I was a councillor no-one raised the matter with me. Many members on both sides of the House have been councillors in local government. Only the member for Mount Druitt is proud of the fact that he has never served on local government.

Mr John Williams: It's a great training field.

Mr ALAN ASHTON: It is a great training field for people to serve at that level and then to move down the pecking order and become members of State Parliament. From past referenda we know that communities are generally in favour of fewer rather than more councillors. For example, just before the 1999 State elections this House went from 99 seats to 93.

Mr John Williams: Nick Greiner reduced the numbers.

Mr ALAN ASHTON: The Greiner Government reduced the number of seats from 109 to 99, and we took it to 93. Given a chance, we may take it to 55, so long as the 55 are on this side of the House. The

amendments in the bill will greatly benefit councils and ratepayers alike, facilitating improvements in the efficient conduct of local government elections and reducing election costs. Recently I heard a councillor say that he had been elected to council to assess matters before council, not to assist residents and ratepayers.

Mr John Williams: Are you going to name the councillor?

Mr ALAN ASHTON: I am not giving any names or addresses. All councillors—whether they are past, current or future—work closely with their community. Councillors assess matters, but they are elected mainly to assist people. I believe I speak for most members when I say that probably 30 or 35 per cent of the people who come to our offices raise an issue about council. They are not all complaints. But they feel that their State member is higher up than council, so they come to us to make an inquiry or to get an answer about a council meeting or whether they were given a fair go. As State members we all know a fair bit about local government, and I think that is only fair.

The member for Terrigal said this is the end of the world as we know it. There are about 15 changes—it could be as few as 12, depending on how they are listed—but it is important to note that we support mayoral elections being held within the period of the election being declared. While we have in many councils a publicly elected mayor who will serve often for the whole term of the council, I am aware of many councils that still elect 9, 12 or 15 councillors and then choose a mayor. I think it is reasonable that that be done within three weeks and without a mayor, who may have lost his or her position on the council or may face the imminent loss of the mayoral position. There does not need to be a four- or five-week delay while the council gets everything fixed up and the outgoing mayor enjoys the trappings of office.

I also believe the introduction of mobile pre-polling is an important initiative. In State and Federal elections we all know how important it is in our areas to visit hospitals, retirement villages and the like to get people to vote. I assume the member for Murray-Darling is still sitting in the Chamber because he wants to say something later rather than continue the little chat he likes to have with me when I am speaking. I am not complaining about him, but I am not encouraging him either. In an area as big as Murray-Darling he would have to at least welcome mobile pre-polling at appropriate places. Maybe I should not presume too much but in rural and regional areas that is important. I noticed in the last Federal election, despite the caretaker principles, it finally came out that lots of money was being pumped into many electorates three weeks before the election.

Mr John Williams: Where?

Mr ALAN ASHTON: With five minutes and 56 seconds remaining for my contribution, I do not have time to list all those places. But it certainly did not work, did it? The six-week caretaker provision is very important because it means that people can focus on the policies and record of the council, the previous councillors and the candidates seeking election, rather than the mayor and the councillors using the opportunity to make full-on policy announcements on actions they are going to take even though, obviously, many of those councillors may not be returned. I like the idea of displaying in the polling booths also—as they do in the council chambers—the background and history of the candidates seeking election to council.

I know this is always subject to budgetary constraints and that makes it a little bit difficult, but while most people recognise that voting for local government is compulsory and has been since 1977 or before, I hope there is a campaign, especially at school level, to encourage people to realise that voting at all levels of government in Australia is compulsory. Despite disagreements at times and the fact that Australia may be one of the few countries that have compulsory voting, we are a more peaceful country generally because we are forced to at least turn up to the polling booths to vote. Many people still think they have to be a ratepayer to vote. I am sure the Minister will make a note of that and I hope that in the course of the publicity surrounding the elections in September he will make sure that people realise that if they are over 18 they should be on the electoral roll, and they get a vote whether they pay rates or whether they own a home.

If people are resident in a local government area they are entitled to vote. I believe that will produce much more transparent elections and people will have a much better chance to complain about the standard of their council or the standard of their politicians if they actually vote. It does not matter who people vote for, but I do not like hearing people say, "I do not vote; it is hopeless. Why bother?" I would rather people say, "I am not going to vote for you", or "I voted for the Opposition Whip rather than the Labor candidate." Fair enough. At least people have had their say: they have had their vote. In this way people then have a right to complain rather than just abrogate their responsibility in our democratic system.

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck) [5.04 p.m.]: I listened to the Minister for Local Government last Friday when he delivered his agreement in principle speech on the Local Government Amendment (Elections) Bill 2008. We gave him leave for the early introduction of the bill because there was nothing else on the table. But I am astounded that once again the Government has introduced a bill and does not adhere to the five-day rule. We had this debate on Friday when the Legislative Review Committee brought down its report. The chairman of the committee, the member for Londonderry, sat in the Chamber and nodded his head when I said to him, "You must make sure that this Government adheres to the five-day rule from now on, otherwise your entire committee will be made a mockery of." Here we are on the very first parliamentary working day after that committee report was brought down and, once again, the Government is not adhering to the five-day rule and is rushing these bills through.

What is wrong with adhering to the five-day rule—which this place is supposed to implement—for a bill as significant as this, which affects hundreds of councillors across the State and will affect every single person enrolled to vote across the State? The chairman of the Legislative Review Committee also nodded his head in agreement when I said that he should publicly challenge the Premier and the Minister responsible when five-day rules are not adhered to in this place. We do not have time to consult properly with our councils, and members on the other side of the Chamber do not have time to properly consult with their councils. I have not had a chance to run this piece of legislation across my councils. My electorate covers Young Shire Council, Yass Shire Council, Harden Shire Council, Boorowa Shire Council, Upper Lachlan Shire Council, Weddin Shire Council, Cowra Shire Council, Gundagai Shire Council and Cootamundra Shire Council and part of Junee Shire Council. That area involves a lot of mayors, a lot of councillors and a lot of bureaucrats to consult with.

I have already had preliminary discussions with the Mayor of Weddin Shire Council, Councillor Maurice Simpson, who raised this issue with me when I met with him last Sunday week. He had some concerns about the proposed legislation. I said, "I am sorry, I cannot discuss with you what your concern is with this bill because I have not seen it yet. But let me assure you, Councillor Simpson, as soon as I see this bill I will send it to you so you can tell me which parts of the legislation you are not happy with. Then when I contribute to this debate I will be able to do so in an informed way, knowing that there are councils in the western part of my electorate that have genuine concerns, and I will be able to pass this on to the Minister responsible in the Chamber." But I have not been given the opportunity to do that because when we commenced debate on this bill this evening the bill was not even on the table in the Chamber.

The Legislation Review Committee has rushed together a paper so quickly that it does not even have its traditional yellow cover it is just a blatant photocopy. The original signature of the Chairman is on the cover; I probably got the very first copy that has just been approved for this debate. It is a dreadful contribution from the Legislation Review Committee, and it is basically just a reprint of what is in the bill anyway. I feel a great deal of sympathy for Catherine Watson, who probably spent all weekend typing it out, but I have had no time whatsoever to put together a considered response to this very complex piece of legislation. The Legislation Review Committee stated, under the subheading "Issues Considered by the Committee":

The Committee has not identified any issues under s 8A (1) (b) of the *Legislation Review Act 1987*.

How can we be told that a piece of legislation this significant and this big has no issues worth noting by the Legislation Review Committee? There are several issues that will need investigation but because the five-day rule has not been adhered to in this place once again we do not know what those issues will be. All we can do is have a cursory glance at the proposed legislation—and it contains many complicated and complex things. One of the things I noticed at first glance that is quite significant and has been an issue—and one that I would have liked to discuss with my councils—is the change in the legislation to the number of councillors.

In one local council at the last local government elections in the Burrinjuck electorate, by 4.00 p.m. on the day of nominations of the councillors the number of positions had not been filled in. Someone in the know within the council established that an insufficient number of nominations had been lodged by 4.00 p.m. That person telephoned a retiring councillor who was not going to recontest the election, because he had not done a good job and he did not think he would be re-elected, and told him to nominate because he would be successful—he would get a second chance. He was not a good councillor in the first place. Why is that allowed? Is there corruption? I suspect there is.

[*Interruption*]

It was a Labor councillor. I suspect that is why it happened that way. I know that councils are concerned. Councillor Simpson expressed his preliminary concerns to me. I am sorry that he did not have the

opportunity to examine this legislation before it was introduced. I am disappointed for all my councillors because they work very hard for their constituencies. They would have liked the opportunity to review the legislation before it was introduced in this place. They would have liked to convey their ideas and suggestions about this legislation, which, as I said, will affect every voter in the State—and that is a significant number of people. Once again the five-day rule has been broken and members on this side of the House have not been able to consult properly about this legislation. Government members also have not been able to consult their constituencies. I imagine that most members opposite did not see the legislation in its final form before it was introduced. It was done in a very hasty manner. This reeks of government corruption. This Government cannot adhere to the rules of the Parliament. If members opposite cannot adhere to the rules—

Mr Gerard Martin: What a ridiculous statement!

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON: Why does the member say things like that when his councillors are as affected as mine? He does not care about his rural councils. If the Government continues to break the five-day rule—

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order! The member for Bathurst will come to order.

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON: The member for Londonderry should complain publicly. He should also be participating in this debate and raising his concerns about the five-day rule, because he knows how poor this is for the citizens of this State.

Mr GERARD MARTIN (Bathurst) [5.13 p.m.]: I am very happy to support the Minister for Local Government and the Local Government Amendment (Elections) Bill. We have had the usual whingeing and carping from members opposite. It started with the member for Terrigal saying that the bill was misnamed and was not really about elections. It is all about elections and it is not particularly complicated. The member for Burrinjuck may not be aware, but the Government consulted an organisation called the Local Government and Shires Associations of New South Wales. The member spoke about the number of councillors. That issue was stressed with the Minister and it has been addressed in the legislation. While Opposition members have been wallowing, the Minister has been consulting with local government authorities around the State and they have had input into this legislation. It addresses 12 or 13 major points with commonsense measures. I had 25 years in local government before I was elected to this place.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order! The member for Burrinjuck will cease interjecting.

Mr GERARD MARTIN: Many of these issues have been bobbing around all that time. It has been an evolutionary process. This is about ensuring that the local government election process is more aligned with both the Federal and State processes. The member for Terrigal referred to people being confused about differences between optional and compulsory voting, and so on. This legislation will align the various voting systems and increase the State Electoral Commission's control over the process. It will ensure greater parity between the three voting systems. Interestingly, The Nationals have been trying to defend local government. I will give members opposite a little history lesson. I remember that in 1987 both Federal and State Labor governments tried to give local government constitutional recognition.

John Howard was the Federal Leader of the Opposition at the time and he supported the Hawke Government's legislation to achieve that aim. As we rolled on towards the election and the referendum The Nationals got the wobbles. For some reason they complained to the Liberal Party and, typically, it backed down. After having initially supported the enabling legislation, because of the wailing whingeing of The Nationals, John Howard went to water—as he was wont to do—and opposed it and the referendum was defeated. The Opposition wails about being responsive to local government, but when it had the chance to extend constitutional recognition it went to water. Of course, John Howard was as weak kneed in opposition as he was as Prime Minister.

My colleagues and the Minister have addressed many of the issues raised about this legislation. It will bring local government processes more into line with Federal and State government processes with regard to the caretaker conventions. That has been missing in local government for some time. Some councils—probably those white shoe brigade councils in north-west Sydney—need this legislation to make them behave more responsibly in the lead-up to elections. I support the bill because it contains various measures that make the administration of local government and election procedures more efficient and transparent. That is what this legislation is about. That has escaped the member for Burrinjuck. If she were to sit down in the calm light of day to consider it she would realise that.

The legislation also reflects the Government's policy objective of ensuring that council elections follow as closely as possible the practices and procedures of State elections. While I support each of the proposals in the bill, I will refer in particular to the inclusion of a new principle in the local government charter under section 8 of the Local Government Act 1993. The charter comprises a set of guiding principles for councils in the carrying out of their functions. The proposed new principle will provide that councils are to execute their functions responsibly, including during the lead-up to ordinary elections, and to observe caretaker conventions issued under the guidelines prepared by the director general of the department. This proposal aims to promote transparent and accountable local government and to increase community confidence in councils. That is very important and it is something that this Minister has tried to achieve.

Caretaker conventions are honoured by State and Federal Governments. Of course, because of its grassroots nature, we often hear the cliché that local government is closer to the people. For that reason it is important that it has transparent and solid guidelines for caretaker conventions. As we know, decisions made by councils potentially impact more readily and more often upon local communities. Caretaker conventions assist governments at all levels to act responsibly. They represent a clear reference point for decision-makers by setting out those actions and decisions that should be avoided, particularly when they could be perceived as intending to influence voters or to bind a newly elected governing body. That is very important.

In a desperate attempt to stay in power, the former Federal Government did not observe the proper caretaker provisions in the lead-up to the last Federal election. As a result, the new Federal Government has had to take a couple of good and brave actions to rescind some irresponsible decisions, particularly in relation to the broadband contract. The Government does not want that to happen in local government. It wants to make the situation as transparent as possible and to provide guidelines to ensure that councils know the rules. The Nationals have had close associations with councils on the North Coast over the years. They particularly need those conventions spelt out for them. For those reasons—particularly that last point—I commend the Minister for bringing this legislation to the House. As he knows, a lot of these issues have been around a long time. They have been discussed with the Local Government and Shires Associations and there has been consultation with representatives of local government. This legislation makes eminently good sense and I commend it to the House.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS (Murray-Darling) [5.19 p.m.]: It is interesting that the member for Bathurst has said that we have nothing to fear with this legislation, that it is fine. This is a man who said the Bathurst hospital only has teething problems. It is an amazing admission that something may be amiss here. I support the member for Burrinjuck. I represent 13 councils and shires in my electorate and I am concerned about the backlash that I am going to get with these changes. They may have been consulted on at a certain level but when they rill down to the local government areas, councils may have concerns and it will be too late to address them because we have not conducted the consultation required with local government to educate them to the changes and to give them the opportunity to review those changes and see how they will work in the elections.

One of the biggest problems I deal with in shires in my electorate comes from the belief that, having seen the changes, people want the Electoral Commission to conduct local government elections. While that is a good idea, it does not alleviate cost to local government in conducting those elections. The historic approach to conducting elections is if it ain't broke don't fix it, but bigger metropolitan councils are required to adhere to the Electoral Commission's guidelines on conducting elections. The Berrigan shire in my electorate is concerned about spending in excess of \$50,000 to conduct a council election when historically it was a shared responsibility. Councils swapped general managers and scrutineered the vote. It was not a complicated matter. In due course those who were elected were regarded as fairly and squarely elected, and I believe it was a transparent process. The other concern I have after seeing the dismissal of Broken Hill council, and this point is not covered in the legislation, is how willing are people to represent their communities as councillors?

I believe many people are being elected to council for the wrong reasons. They do not understand their responsibilities as councillors. They walk into that elected position and presuppose what their responsibilities are and straight away we see a breakdown of the code of conduct that has been set up for local government to adhere to. Apart from not knowing anything about the code of conduct, they have their own axe to grind and believe the way they behave in local government is in the best interests of the community when often it is in their own best interests. Prior to any council election we should know the state of preparedness of those people who nominate for council, and whether they are capable of adhering to the code of conduct and fulfilling their roles within the guidelines set down for local government councillors.

With Broken Hill not having a local government election until December 2009 we have an opportunity to reflect on what has happened in council in the past, how councillors have conducted themselves and the level

and standards we need to aspire to in local government. I suppose most people come into the job with the best of intentions but unfortunately sometimes those intentions are not in the best interests of the local government organisation. We see a breakdown, and ultimately that breakdown results in the dismissal of that council and the appointment of an administrator. The role of the director general of the department in operating a council is a concern. The Government needs to be at arm's-length when appointing an administrator. Administrators should not be traditional Labor hacks but people from the broader community with no political intent who can perform in the role of administrator in the best interests of the community and spend local government funds in a fair and equitable way.

Elections will occur on 13 September. I hope the changes will not cause me to have to deal with issues that come back from councils. I am sure the Minister well knows that councillors are good at identifying potential problems and some of the issues. I put it on record for the councillors I represent that with the fast-tracking of this legislation I have not had enough time to consult with them. The way this legislation is being rushed through we will have to hope and perhaps mop up afterwards.

Mr PAUL PEARCE (Coogee) [5.26 p.m.]: I support the Local Government Amendment (Elections) Bill 2008. The bill seeks to make a number of amendments to the Local Government Act. The amendments are listed in the explanatory notes and cover the following areas:

- to make it clear that an alteration of the number of a council's wards does not require approval at a constitutional referendum of electors,

- to allow councils, for a limited period, to apply to reduce the number of councillors without having to conduct a constitutional referendum of electors,

- to provide that the optional preferential voting system applies to elections where only one position is to be filled, and that the proportional voting system applies to elections where 2 or more positions are to be filled,

- to provide expressly for the use of mobile pre-polling booths in accordance with the regulations,

- to express electoral functions as being exercisable by the Electoral Commission rather than the Electoral Commissioner,

- to transfer certain electoral functions from returning officers to the Electoral Commission,

- to permit the Electoral Commission to appoint a returning officer for more than one local Government area,

And it goes on. I shall comment upon the significance of a number of these proposed changes. The flexibility suggested for councils to address the numbers of wards in a council area without a constitutional referendum, as is otherwise prescribed under the Act, is a sensible proposition. The current system is essentially a duplication of process in so far as there is a requirement of public consultation, with the proposed boundaries being prepared in consultation with the Electoral Commission. The proposed change, however, does not permit a council to change wards in a manner that would in effect abolish wards. This proposition would still require a constitutional referendum.

The bill also seeks to simplify the process by which a council may reduce the number of councillors. I refer here to amended section 224A. Restrictions will continue to apply as to the minimum number of councils and the position of a popularly elected mayor in calculating the total number on a council. I make no secret that in general I think the arguments advanced for the reduction of the number of councillors, with due respect to the Minister, are specious. Some years ago, when local government underwent radical reform in New Zealand, one professional body—my recollection is it was the Engineers Society—did an exercise in determining the cost of democracy and came to the extraordinary conclusion that significant cost savings could be achieved if elections were abolished.

I am not suggesting that this is where the Minister is coming from. However, I raise this issue simply to emphasise that it is important that there be adequate numbers of elected persons on councils to ensure that democratic control of local agendas remains the norm. From my experience in local government, the main proponents of reduction in the number of councillors tend to be the senior officers. Having said that, the proposal contained in the bill placing time limitations on council resolution will give flexibility, particularly to rural councils, to address this issue. Knowing the Minister, I am confident that abuse of process will not be permitted.

I support new section 285—and the Government deserves credit for it—which relates to the expansion of the use of proportional representation as an election model to wards of two or more councillors to be elected. Local government, unlike State and Federal government, is not essentially representative in nature. In many

ways, both in relation to election and by utilisation of structures such as local precinct committees, local government has many elements of a participatory or direct democracy, and so it should be at a local level. No doubt there will be criticism of this change from some section of local government. However, I hold also that at a local level it is essential that as many points of view be represented on the local council as can be adequately accommodated.

Anyone who has been in local government will be aware that the exclusion of a local view at a councillor level will inevitably lead to external action, whether from resident action groups or elsewhere. During the Liberal control of Waverley Council between 1983 and 1987, the right-wing leadership of that group adopted a conscious policy to exclude all other viewpoints from the debate. It failed and failed miserably such that the good residents of Waverley—half of which sits in the seat of Vacluse—have not risked a Liberal mayor for the last 21 years. I am confident that there will not be a Liberal mayor after 13 September 2008.

The final matter I WILL comment upon is a proposal under new section 8, relating to the council's charter, to institute a caretaker period of some six weeks prior to a local government election. Again, I draw on my experience of a council that attempted to ram through controversial development applications on the eve of an election. A council meeting was called on the Thursday evening prior to the Saturday election. As I recall, it failed to obtain a quorum due to the wisdom of one of the Liberal councillors in not entering the room. This is a very sound proposition. It is entirely inappropriate for a council to attempt to contractually bind an incoming council in this manner so close to an election. Similarly, it is an abuse of process to make a permanent appointment of a general manager in that period. I have no doubt that some general managers will oppose this change. However, it is a very wise move by the Government and I congratulate it. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS (Hawkesbury) [5.32 p.m.]: I speak on the Local Government Amendment (Elections) Bill 2008. As a current councillor on Baulkham Hills Shire Council and the State representative for Hawkesbury, which covers three local government areas, I do not oppose streamlining processes or improvements. However, when bills are introduced into the House at the eleventh hour, one must question the Government's motives, especially as the Local Government and Shires Associations and councils have not had an opportunity to comment on the bill. I wonder about the Government's agenda because of its lack of consultation.

The Baulkham Hills shire has 160,000-plus ratepayers who I know would have liked the opportunity to consult on the amendments contained in the bill, particularly if local government will be further stripped of powers or if funding mechanisms such as section 94 contributions will be removed. This is of particular interest to Baulkham Hills Shire Council, which has responsibility for large north-west growth centres. The council should have been consulted about the proposed changes, particularly as proposed changes by the Minister for Planning have caused considerable angst in the local community.

Mr Paul Lynch: Point of order: The bill relates to a number of things but not to section 94 contributions, which are within the administration of the Minister for Planning. I thought the member for Hawkesbury was making a passing reference but he now appears to be doing more than that. He should be instructed to return to the leave of the bill.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! I am certain that the member for Hawkesbury was making a passing reference and will address the bill.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: That is the point. The bill has come before the House at the eleventh hour and prevented members from undertaking appropriate consultation with council. Councils were given that opportunity with the proposed planning changes but whether the Government will take the submissions of council and members of the public on board is questionable. Debate on that will take place in the Chamber very shortly. The Government did not consult on the amending bill, which could have a significant impact on the 160,000 ratepayers in my area. Indeed, in the past councils have been adversely affected by the State Government's policy of cost shifting. Ratepayers could incur further costs as a result of amending legislation.

In fact, the cost of local government elections will now be passed on directly to ratepayers. Elections will cost ratepayers hundreds of thousands of dollars. It is shifting further costs onto ratepayers, who are already picking up costs for social and cultural plans—millions of dollars that could be directed towards local roads, footpaths and playing fields. As a representative of a council that covers large and new growth areas, I know only too well the costs associated with providing that infrastructure. Adding additional costs, such as the cost of elections, will upset ratepayers, particularly as they have not been consulted.

Residents in the local government areas of Wollongong and Hastings will not even be able to exercise their democratic right to vote. This is a smack in the face for them. Every local government area would be concerned about amendments that change wards or involve constitutional referendums. The comment has been made that the measures will make the process more efficient and transparent. It may be true that the process will be more efficient, but it cannot be suggested that it will be more transparent when the bill has been introduced at the eleventh hour. That is hardly transparent! Members have not had time to dissect the bill to see the effect of these amendments. They should have had the opportunity to discuss this matter with their local councils.

Certainly I will put this before Baulkham Hill Shire Council tonight on my way back to the electorate. Unfortunately, by that time the bill may have passed through this House. Fortunately, it will be debated in the other place and by then hopefully we will have had some feedback from local government as to its likely effect. The process is not transparent and I doubt it will provide the solid guidelines it purports to. I am very concerned that the amendments have come forward at the eleventh hour without giving any time for the Opposition or local government to dissect them. I hope the amendments will be dealt with in the other House.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD (Wakehurst) [5.38 p.m.]: I speak on the Local Government Amendment (Elections) Bill 2008. What a contrast! I well recollect that when the Local Government Bill 1993 was introduced, the Coalition was in government and Minister Gerry Peacocke went to great trouble to consult with the local government sector to ensure that the legislation that was eventually introduced reflected what the community needed. There was opportunity for debate. There was opportunity for consultation with each of the councils and, of course, the Local Government and Shires Associations of New South Wales.

Today is another example of the arrogance of a Labor Government that has been in office for too long. A bill that seeks to amend the substantive 1993 legislation was introduced last Friday and today is Tuesday. We have had less than three business days to consider the amending bill. The local government association is not enamoured with the Labor Government. The association, representing 152 councils, and local communities are concerned about the way the Government has gone about making changes to the planning laws and proposing changes to various aspects of planning without appropriate consultation. The association is upset that the Government announced without discussion changes to section 94 contributions, it is upset about aspects of infill development, it is upset about the lack of support for infrastructure in local government areas by the Government and it is upset that the Government has failed to consult on almost every aspect of what councillors are required to achieve in their areas. The Government has shown a total disregard for a partnership with local government.

With that background, a bill is effectively being rammed through the New South Wales Parliament that seeks to make a number of amendments, some of which the Government would say are simply administrative matters. The Minister's speech sought to downplay any of the amendments as being of great import. Doubtless there is an agenda on the face of it to do with the impending September local government elections. The bill deserves proper scrutiny. The bill comes on the back of appalling levels of inappropriate activity in Wollongong Council—a Labor dominated council. The bill comes on the back of allegations of corruption involving developments and the Independent Commission Against Corruption hearings involving Mr Scimone and others. The bill comes on the back of issues that the community is rightly concerned about. What do we start to smell about the way the legislation has been introduced? I think it is reasonable for the community to start querying whether the Government is being, at the very least, too smart by half or whether the bill perpetuates the stench of corruption that the Government already has surrounding it mixed with incompetence.

The Opposition is not in a position to have begun to undertake serious consultation as individual members with our local councils. As the member for Hawkesbury pointed out, he has involvement with and represents an area that covers three separate councils. Quite properly the member for Hawkesbury would like to have consulted with his councils. There are Labor members—although not too many—in the Chamber. Presumably they are indicating that they are quite comfortable with the bill. Presumably the members opposite do not think it is necessary to consult their local councils, which is unfortunate. Whenever we do not consult our constituent groups, we end up with a disaster under this Government. What have we got? The member for Macquarie Fields is in the Chamber. He is a current medical practitioner—I believe he does a good job as a medical practitioner but, sadly, he chose to get ensconced with the Labor Party. We know that hospitals are a disaster area at the moment. We know the lack of consultation on the bill is similar to the crisis of Bathurst hospital, where there was a lack of community consultation. There was lack of consultation with fire officers to ensure that a fire station was built appropriately.

The Local Government Amendment (Elections) Bill should be withheld until it is possible for each member to engage in consultation with the 152 councils. The bill should be postponed until the Local

Government and Shires Associations of New South Wales has been able to properly consider all aspects of it. It should ensure that each of the matters referred to in the bill improves the opportunities for local government members to properly represent their constituencies. The Minister for Local Government came into this place with grand visions of being a man for the people—a member of the Left. How can he justify ramming legislation such as this through the House? He may have been tainted by the overriding influences of the Right in his party. Every member of this place should be entitled to go forth and consult with his or her local government colleagues to ensure that this is not just more incompetence by the State Government or a conduit to further corruption by the Government.

I raise specifically the removal of the need for a referendum on ward changes. New section 210 seeks that there can be an alteration to the number of council wards and boundaries without the requirement for approval of a constitutional referendum of electors. That issue may or may not be one that finds acceptance across the board with the local government association or local councils, but it is one that is certainly an issue for the community. The community would generally like to know what its elected officials are doing. The community would generally like to have the opportunity to have a say as to what its elected officials are doing at all levels.

There is arrogance about the State Government, with no transparency or opportunity for people to have a say any more. But in local government—the form of government closest to the people—I suspect a lot of the community would say, "Why can this be done without us having a say in the issue?" I would like to hear from the Minister in reply as to why he thinks the community should be excluded from having a say. If the Minister is seriously a member of the Left in the Labor Party of New South Wales, at least on the face of it he should argue for democracy and ask for voters to have a right and a say. Why is it that the Minister is prepared to ram this legislation through and not address what I believe is a substantive issue for the electorate? The bill deals with quite a few other matters. Some of them may be technical, but they also may have another agenda. It is impossible to know with a government that has the stench of corruption hanging around it. I ask the Minister to take the bill off the agenda and to allow us time to properly consult with the electorate.

Mr GREG APLIN (Albury) [5.48 p.m.]: I protest the rushed nature of the Local Government Amendment (Elections) Bill, which was introduced last Friday. The bill has clearly not sat on the table for the requisite five days. One has to ask the Minister for Local Government to justify the rushed nature of the bill. Why is it so urgent that the bill be forced through, breaking the standing orders of the House as to the requisite five days? By ramming the bill through the House this afternoon, the Minister is denying members from both sides the opportunity to have an input following consultation with their local councils.

Consultation with local councils has been almost impossible, given the short time since the bill was introduced last Friday. I represent the councils in the southern part of New South Wales—Albury city, Corowa shire, Tumbarumba shire and the Greater Hume shire. I am concerned that when I contacted council representatives this afternoon, I was unable to secure any comments from them on the bill because they were unaware of it. Government members said that local government, possibly the Local Government and Shires Associations, had been contacted and consulted on the bill. I am surprised that, in turn, they have not contacted their constituent members. As a result, in the short time available, members have been unable to contact many councillors and the offices of local government to seek their comments on the bill.

Local government representatives are always concerned when changes occur at a State level. Far too many mandates have been thrust upon them. They always exclaim that they have not had time to consult and to work out systems with Government when forced mandates are applied to local government. Councils have said that the cost of running elections have escalated enormously under the proposal that local government elections be run by the Electoral Commissioner. They have great concerns in this regard. Therefore, it is all the more incumbent on the Minister and the Government to consult with local councils that have expressed concerns and discuss how to ameliorate their concerns. Local government representatives who attended recent discussions in Sydney were irate at some of the issues that were raised.

Their concerns relate to the need for real consultation, not the lip service we so often hear, and the opportunity for discussion and input. That has been denied to both sides of the House by the rushed nature of this bill. Recently the Minister attended several meetings with local government. As the Minister acknowledged at the time, I attended a meeting for the G division of the Shires Associations at Tumbarumba on 21 February. That meeting would have been an ideal opportunity for the Minister to consult and speak at length about these issues and enter into discussions with members and councillors. Unfortunately, the opportunity did not arise for due consultation. That was an opportunity lost and goes once again to the point that insufficient time has been provided to consult, to consider and to represent. That leaves us with one conclusion about the forced nature of the bill. One is left with no option other than to say that the Government is displaying a degree of arrogance or ineptitude in forcing the legislation through Parliament with so little consultation and input.

Mr GREG PIPER (Lake Macquarie) [5.53 p.m.]: I speak on the Local Government Amendment (Elections) Bill 2008 as Mayor of Lake Macquarie and as the member for Lake Macquarie. I do not take an adversarial approach to the bill. However, I have concerns about the timing and the inappropriate or inadequate consultation, particularly about the needs of local government. I have spoken to the Minister for Local Government about this. I have read through the information that I have been able to avail myself of and only recently read through the draft bill. I support most of the amendments that have been incorporated in the bill. I speak from my experience in local government since 1991. I cannot reasonably purport to speak for others in local government within my or adjoining local government areas.

I am concerned about the lack of consultation. The bill includes changes to the voting system and the introduction of an optional preferential voting system. Although I do not believe those amendments present any real problems, I can assure the Minister that some councils and councillors will raise concerns about them. I support those amendments. The changes to the lead-up time to an election and the introduction of basically a caretaker role for council are prudent and appropriate for good governance of councils generally. Opposition members have spoken about hypersensitivity in local government to amendments by the State Government to the Local Government Act.

It would be most prudent of and a great opportunity for the Government to take a deep breath and allow a short period of serious consultation. I would expect such consultation to have a time limit because the amendments would have to be implemented before the 13 September local government election. I do not speak against this raft of generally minor amendments. However, proposed legislation can result in unintended consequences. It would be regrettable if unintended consequences from these amendments caused problems because inadequate time had been provided for consultation. I ask the Government and, in particular, the Minister to take heed of my request.

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA (Davidson) [5.57 p.m.]: Although I do not oppose the Local Government Amendment (Elections) Bill, I concur with the sensible suggestions made by the member for Lake Macquarie. I add my voice to the chorus of objection about the lack of time that has been made available to consult on the bill, particularly with my local government representatives, who serve the local community well. I served as a councillor on North Sydney Council from 1991 to 1995. North Sydney Council prided itself on public consultation, participative democracy and proper process. The Government clearly does not adhere to similar standards.

Mr MALCOLM KERR (Cronulla) [5.58 p.m.]: The Local Government Amendment (Elections) Bill is very important legislation. As previous speakers have said, local government is closest to the people in respect of its effect on people and the local environment. Therefore, it is essential to consult with local government representatives before these wide-ranging changes take place. I support the sensible remarks made by the member for Lake Macquarie. I refer to the history of the passage of the bill. Last Friday standing orders were suspended to allow the agreement in principle speech. Why did that speech not take place earlier in the week? There was ample time for the speech to be made, the House having adjourned early on Tuesday and Wednesday nights. If the bill had been introduced earlier, members would have had the opportunity to speak to their local communities and councils about these important changes.

The bill refers to the conduct of local government elections, the alteration of ward boundaries, the reduction of councillor numbers and the role of councils during election periods. These amendments are by no means insignificant: they go to the heart of the conduct of elections and local democracy. The member for Lake Macquarie mentioned that it is quite possible that unintended consequences could flow from these amendments; consequences that could have been avoided had greater consultation taken place with those who are informed about these matters. This matter is very important because elections will be held in September. No doubt all members who read this morning's edition of the *St George and Sutherland Shire Leader* would have noted with interest the discussion of the role of parties in local government—

Mr Barry Collier: The Liberal Party has collapsed; it is all gone.

Mr MALCOLM KERR: It is very interesting that the member for Miranda mentions that arguments have been put forward that it would be better if political parties did not play a role in local government. After all, the argument could be mounted that there are no great philosophical divisions when it comes to deciding whether a pothole should be filled in or whether a swimming pool should be built.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! The member for Cronulla has the call. He does not need the assistance, passive or otherwise, of the member for Miranda.

Mr MALCOLM KERR: Mr Acting-Speaker, I am very appreciative of your assistance in restraining disorderly conduct in this debate and ensuring that this disgusting behaviour is not tolerated under your watch. The role of parties should be debated and the people of the Sutherland shire should have the opportunity to determine whether the party system is applicable to local government and whether town planning and development issues should be determined in accordance with party policy or with town planning principles. The people of New South Wales are entitled to consider these serious and relevant issues because, to a large extent, they relate to the conduct of elections and the bill will determine how the voice of the people is heard. There is a serious debate in Sutherland shire as to the role of parties in local government and whether the people of Sutherland shire will have the opportunity to determine whether their lives are going to be ruled by party chieftains or whether at a local government level independent, civic-minded people can come forward to bring about a new age in the Sutherland shire to enable the magnificent municipality to achieve its potential at last.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! I have listened to the interjections with some amusement. The member for Cronulla will continue without the encouragement of Government members. The member for Cronulla will return to the leave of the bill.

Mr MALCOLM KERR: I am not at all offended by the encouragement of members on the other side of the House and by their enthusiasm for what I am saying. I certainly hope that that enthusiasm will continue. I hope it is not necessary for any of us to suffer from any premature adjudication on your behalf in this matter. The role of local government is pivotal, but the issue before us is the way the bill could have been improved by taking the people of New South Wales into the confidence of the lawmakers and giving them a fair opportunity. No reason has been given for the rush to legislation in this critical matter nor why the Government has ignored the wise counsel that could have been provided.

Mr PAUL LYNCH (Liverpool—Minister for Local Government, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Mental Health)) [6.05 p.m.], in reply: I acknowledge the contributions of the members for Terrigal, East Hills, Burrinjuck, Bathurst, Murray-Darling, Coogee, Hawkesbury, Wakehurst, Albury, Lake Macquarie, Davidson and Cronulla. I particularly thank Government members for their support of the Local Government Amendment (Elections) Bill 2008. I note that we have seen a classic example of the behaviour that members of the Opposition inflict upon the House: When they do not have anything to say they whinge about the process on far too many occasions. It is a matter of extreme regret to hear Opposition members say there has been no consultation. They clearly do not talk to local government, and they certainly do not talk to the Local Government and Shires Associations.

The most significant element in the bill is the reduction in councillor numbers for councils that want it. I cannot talk to Bruce Miller, the President of the Shires Association, without him hammering me about when I am going to introduce that provision. Members of The Nationals and the Liberal Party representing country councils ought to go out and find out what on earth it is the Shires Association is saying. The Shires Association is talking to me—it is pretty clear it is not talking to The Nationals or the Liberal Party in this place—about whether these things need further discussion. The reduction in councillor numbers is a repeat of the scheme we had a couple of years ago. How much discussion is needed for that? The reduction is applicable to councils that want it. Councils that are interested will apply for it; those that are not interested will not apply for it. I do not believe a five-year consultation process is needed to determine that.

Proportional representation versus optional preferential was subject to quite significant debate in the upper House in 2000 and has been an ongoing debate in local government for some time. There is no need to consult every council about it: it applies to only 11 councils in the State, and that includes Wollongong. It seems the rhetoric we have heard from members of the Opposition simply highlights the fact that they are too lazy, too disorganised and too incompetent to either understand the bill or to talk to local government; if they did they would not have continued with this nonsense.

I will go through some of the more specific arguments put forward by the member for Terrigal. His major objection seemed to be that the title of the bill was wrong. Granted the bill is about elections, I do not know quite what he expected us to call it. Frankly, the name is not all that significant; it is more the substance of the bill. Despite all his protestations about not having much time to consider it, my office specifically gave him copies of the bill on Friday. We went to some trouble to make sure he got a copy of the bill because we introduced it, by leave, on Friday. I also note his admission in response to interjections that he had indeed read the bill properly, which suggests to me that most of his complaints subsequently have no substance at all.

The member for Terrigal made a number of other comments. He said that the Labor Government does not take any action against Labor councils. We are investigating Shellharbour; we sacked Wollongong and we

sacked Liverpool. I wonder what planet that bloke is on. He also said that we have taken no action on Canada Bay council. That is a lie as well: we are conducting a Better Practice Review in relation to Canada Bay this year. He also carried on his rather bizarre and childish campaign against Canterbury council, which I will now address in a bit more detail.

According to the minutes of Canterbury council, from June to December 2007 the length of the meetings averaged between 30 minutes and one hour, and three councillors were absent from two meetings and one counsellor from five meetings. I consider the number of councillors present at each meeting was sufficient to facilitate proper and efficient decision making. Councils are able to operate a number of advisory committees whose recommendations are considered and adopted by council general meetings, and Canterbury council does that. It is an efficient way of running one's business; it means one does not have to spend hours and hours in full meetings. This process can contribute to the condensing of a general council meeting, as much of the background information has already been presented to councillors.

In addition, Canterbury council uses workshops to educate councillors on the issues, thus reducing debate. Workshops can be useful for briefings of councillors on particular issues but should not be a substitute for debating items at formal council meetings. Council also operates an Independent Hearing and Assessment Panel to assist with the development control process by reviewing and making recommendations on more significant or contentious development applications and on council's own development applications. All these measures are put in place to create a more professional environment for councillors and to ensure they are well briefed. These measures can, quite logically, sensibly and properly, lead to shorter meeting times. I believe Canterbury council has strong, experienced leadership, as highlighted in the March 2007 Better Practice Review conducted by the Department of Local Government. A couple of comparatively minor matters were noticed in that review and those matters are currently being attended to.

The member for Terrigal seemed to argue that reducing councillor numbers was a direct assault on democracy—the end of western civilisation as we know it—and a massive power grab by me. It is worth pointing out that reducing councillor numbers is something that will happen only if the local community through its local council resolves to do that. I am not about forcing councils to downsize. The bill is about extending an option to councils if they wish to pursue it. Largely, country councils and shires will take up this option, because they have approached me for another opportunity to reduce their numbers—an opportunity some did not take up when it was extended previously. They thought about it and through proper democratic processes they decided to adopt that option. Moree Plains Shire Council particularly raises this with me every time I attended a shires conference or event. It is not an attack on democracy; it is rolling out democracy—doing what local councils and shires specifically want me to do. It has been raised with me several times by Bruce Miller, the President of the Local Government and Shires Associations.

The member for Terrigal made an outrageous attack on the Director General of the Department of Local Government. I thought the director general had support from both sides of the House over a long period of time. He is a fine public servant, as that phrase correctly implies. I believe the Liberal Party originally appointed the director general. Other comments by the member for Terrigal indicate to me that he does not understand the Local Government Act. If he read the Act to see what councils are supposed to do and what administrators can do in their place, he would see that his argument has no substance. I noted also his eloquent argument that Wollongong City Council should be able to participate in the elections this year. Frankly, that would allow systemic corruption to continue—essentially that is the argument the member for Terrigal puts forward.

The member for Terrigal said also that Port Macquarie-Hastings Council should be able to participate in the September elections. Perhaps he should read the comments of Messrs Vaile and Stoner because his position is slightly different to his conservative colleagues. The moral to the story is that perhaps he should engage his brain before he opens his mouth. The member for Burrinjuck's major concern was that a particular document did not have a yellow cover on it, and she then proceeded to verbalise the member for Londonderry. The member for Burrinjuck told us also an interesting story about what she thought was corruption in a council election process. She did not report it to the Independent Commission Against Corruption, as I understand. Therefore, it seems to me that either she has misled the House or she has committed an offence against the Independent Commission Against Corruption Act. Perhaps she should work out exactly what she is saying and what she is doing before someone refers her to the Independent Commission Against Corruption.

The member for Murray-Darling also ranted and raved about the horrors of the director general being an administrator. I am astonished that he, together with the member for Terrigal, raises that issue now when it

has been happening for so long. That procedure has been followed for ages and all of sudden they take issue with it. One serious point the member for Murray-Darling made—as opposed to much of what much other Oppositions members said—deserves a serious response because I believe he raised it with the best of intentions. He referred to the preparedness of people running for council election: that is, understanding their responsibilities. I have two comments to make about that. Undoubtedly it is the case that the overwhelming bulk of people who seek election to council do so for the best of all possible reasons. Incidents of corruption and bad behaviour notwithstanding, the vast majority of people enter local government with the best of intentions. That probably is not said as often as it should, but it is worth placing it on the record.

Following the Brewarrina Shire Council inquiry the Government introduced a process of councillor training that will be compulsory for all councillors elected in September this year. The training aims directly at dealing with the issue the member for Murray-Darling raised about preparedness—people running for council understanding their role. Certainly that issue should be dealt with appropriately and our compulsory training will address that. The members for Hawkesbury and Wakehurst carried on with their usual conspiracy theories in their contributions to the debate. The member for Cronulla, apart from some very entertaining discussions about internal Liberal Party disputes, maintained his flawless record of never having read a bill before speaking in this place.

In conclusion, I thank the New South Wales Electoral Commission and the Local Government and Shires Associations of New South Wales for their input on various items in the bill and for their consultation with us. The proposed amendments will improve the conduct and efficiency of local government elections and the effectiveness of local government. They will ensure also that the procedure for local government election remains, as far as practicable, consistent with State election procedures. The initiatives in the bill will contribute to significant election cost reductions. They will provide consistency and certainty in clarifying and streamlining electoral procedures, and will enhance community confidence in council decision making during election periods. The final comment I make is that I assure the member for Coogee I am not an engineer and that is not how I approached the issue of councillor numbers. I commend the bill to the House.

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

Motion agreed to.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Passing of the Bill

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

FOOD AMENDMENT (PUBLIC INFORMATION ON OFFENCES) BILL 2008

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

HOUSING AMENDMENT (TENANT FRAUD) BILL 2008

Agreement in Principle

Debate resumed from 3 April 2008.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER (Terrigal) [6.16 p.m.]: Before I commence my contribution to the debate on the Housing Amendment (Tenant Fraud) Bill 2008 I congratulate you, Mr Acting-Speaker [Mr Wayne Merton], on your 20 years of service to this House. It has been a long record of distinguished service. I am sure your electorate appreciates all your endeavours on their behalf.

Mr Barry Collier: Hear! Hear!

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I note too that my congratulations have bipartisan support from the member for Miranda, the member for Wollondilly, the member for Newcastle, the member for Swansea, and the member for Smithfield. The member for Kogarah does not wish to give bipartisan support, but the Minister for Housing does!

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! I thank the member for Terrigal. I note that you, too, recently achieved a similar record.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Minister for Housing introduced the bill on Thursday 3 April without warning and without notice. The Minister then proceeded to give his agreement in principle speech on the same day and then was party complicit to the suspension of standing orders to force the bill through tonight. That is typical of the operation of the House and the conduct of the Government in New South Wales to seek to avoid public scrutiny of its activities at every level. The bill could have been debated in accordance with parliamentary procedure; there is no reason to force it through or to suspend standing orders to achieve that. The bill does not address any urgent need and is not a matter of high priority.

The situation the bill purports to address has existed for some 12 years, and I shall deal further with that in a few moments. One must ask why a Minister has to resort to this form of conduct of abuse of parliamentary procedures, why he does not allow greater public scrutiny and why he does not allow greater opportunity for participation in parliamentary debate. Those questions lay at the door of the Minister. The Government will have the numbers to force the bill through the Legislative Assembly, but the Coalition reserves its position on whether to amend, support or not support the bill in the Legislative Council. If not for the Legislative Council, the Government would treat Parliament as a meaningless institution, which it attempts to do anyway.

The history behind the legislation is not without its significance. In 2005 the previous Minister was asked a question about the Department of Housing under the heading "Department of Housing Corruption Prevention Strategies". In 2005 the member for Coffs Harbour asked the Minister why his department paid \$58,000 for a three-page report on corruption prevention when 73,000 people were waiting for public housing. The Government paid \$58,000 for a three-page report on corruption prevention. That was \$58,000 wasted. It received the report—all three pages—and did nothing. That was in June 2005 and it is now 2008. The then Minister replied:

The report of Mant Consulting entitled *Corruption Prevention and Fraud in the Department of Housing* says that the strategies of the Department of Housing for dealing with corruption complaints are working well.

That is not what the current Minister for Housing said in his agreement in principle speech or in reply to the Dorothy Dixier that he arranged to have asked. Minister Tripodi continued:

Since the report was released the Department of Housing has stepped up its corruption prevention activities, with improved analysis and risk assessment based on statistics from its fraud prevention hotline, quarterly meetings with the Independent Commission Against Corruption, and regular feedback sessions.

The Hon. Joe Tripodi was a Minister on the go; he was tackling corruption prevention. However, this Minister has acknowledged that fraud is costing the State \$53 million a year. The Hon. Matt Brown has blown out of the water the Hon. Joe Tripodi's smooth and soothing comments made in 2006 after he paid \$58,000 for a three-page report. Who would not like to get \$58,000 for producing a three-page report? I could write a three-page report in 10 minutes, and I would not mind the State Government throwing me \$58,000 for it. The Hon. Joe Tripodi continued:

Investigations are now completed more quickly, and staff have easy access to information about corruption prevention.

If that is the case, why is this Minister amending the legislation two years later to provide greater access to corruption prevention measures? Who was telling the truth, the Hon. Joe Tripodi in 2006 or this Minister in 2008? The former Minister for Housing went on to say:

A corruption prevention and ethics committee was set up to ensure that all complaints are investigated properly and staff are kept up to date on corruption prevention strategies.

In June 2006 everything was under control in corruption prevention in the Department of Housing. It is now April 2008 and suddenly the Government has discovered that \$53 million is being lost each year as a result of fraud. The Minister's agreement in principle speech and his reply to the Dorothy Dixier all give the lie to what the Hon. Joe Tripodi said. That says a lot about this Government. We heard soothing words in the lead-up to the 2007 election as the waiting lists continued to blow out and thousands of people were waiting for public housing—everything was under control. However, now that the election is out of the way the Minister says that that is not true and that we need new measures, new legislation and new powers to ensure that corruption is detected and prevented. Minister Matt Brown should talk to Minister Joe Tripodi. The Department of Housing's website tells us that everything is under control. As of today it states:

The Housing Act prescribes severe penalties for wilfully making false statements. The maximum penalty is \$2,200.

In some circumstances, where there is a lawful reason to do so or where an exemption has been granted the department can undertake investigations. And what powers it has to conduct those investigations. It can make inquiries of the tenant's employer or alleged employer, neighbours, supply authorities, real estate agents, the police and any other likely sources of relevant information. The department has a power that no private landlord has; no private landlord has the power to go to the police, supply authorities, the tenant's employer or alleged employer or, that great phrase that governments love, "any other likely sources of relevant information". That could be anyone—the Australian Taxation Office, the Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation or any other organisation. Private landlords do not have any of those rights. However, the Government has not been able to do what private landlords do more effectively: manage housing stock and prevent fraud.

According to the department's website, it has all sorts of powers, but it needs additional legislation to access more organisations and material. So much for the Privacy Act and the right to privacy. The department boasts on its website that it already has extensive powers. One cannot get more extensive powers than the authority to obtain information from the police, real estate agents, the suppliers of gas, electricity, water and telephones, and neighbours. Departmental officers can knock on neighbours' doors and approach employers or obtain—I love it—"any other likely sources of relevant information". It cannot do better than that. However, the Minister says that he intends to extend the department's powers to make inquiries.

What has the Minister been doing, given that he has only now discovered this massive fraud? His own figures indicate that up to \$53 million a year is lost to fraud. How did he arrive at that figure? It is an enormous amount. He says that the loss is the equivalent of the cost of 200 houses. That is the annual figure, not the total. If one were to extrapolate that figure over 12 years of Labor government, one would find that the loss equates to the cost of 2,500 houses. Waiting lists would be substantially reduced if this Government had addressed this issue. Housing fraud also undermines confidence in the government process. People are aware that fraud is taking place; they know a neighbour has a job because they see that neighbour regularly going off to work or engaging in home activities that bring in money. I know that these things are reported to the department because they are reported to members of Parliament, including me. Public housing tenants are very observant of activities in their neighbourhood, as we all should be. That is the idea behind Neighbourhood Watch.

Mr Malcolm Kerr: It is being civic minded.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: As the member for Cronulla says, it is called being civic minded. Clearly, the department has ignored those reports. It has built up a large database about fraud in which it has no interest. I will provide an example from the Minister's press release, which was a classic. This Minister is tough. He was not at Allen Allen and Hemsley for nothing; he does not run a Mexican restaurant for nothing; he does not own 11 properties for nothing. No, he is a tough man. The press release refers to real examples of serious fraud that the legislation is intended to address. The second example states:

A professional couple who owned two properties moved in with Tenant B, and stayed for a 12 year period.

In other words, that was going on not for 12 days, 12 weeks or 12 months, but for 12 years. That goes to show that the Minister was really on the ball. Either it took 12 years for the department to uncover this fraud, or the department was aware of it for 12 years but did nothing about it. How did the Minister get that figure? He has obviously had the information for a long time. His own example proves that. Another example refers to a Department of Housing tenant who owns 16 properties. How long did it take before the Minister and his department discovered that? Substantial roting has been taking place about which zero action has been taken. Who pays the price? Not the Minister. The people who pay the price are those in New South Wales who wait in queues to obtain public housing.

If there is one good thing that can be said about the Department of Housing, it is that its staff are to be commended. The department's Gosford staff I have had contact with from the time I was elected to this place have been absolutely outstanding. They do an extremely difficult job very well and they are highly respected in the local community. They deserve the community's praise and commendation. Based on my own experience, I cannot speak highly enough of them. The member for Kogarah, who is present in the Chamber, also has a case to answer because she was the Minister for Housing when all the rotings were taking place. She preceded the Minister for Small Business, Joe Tripodi, in holding the Housing portfolio. While she was Minister for Housing no action was taken to either detect or prevent public housing fraud.

Despite that, no doubt in a few minutes she will make a contribution to the debate and say what a great bill has been introduced by the Government, what a wonderful Minister we have, and how, at each new dawn,

the people of New South Wales should give thanks. But at the end of the day, at the very least the member for Kogarah has a case to answer for her inactivity as a former Minister for Housing. Systemic public housing fraud has been costing taxpayers millions of dollars and has caused lengthy delays for people who wait in public housing queues. This legislation is being touted as the solution for all that. It is not without significance that when the Minister arranged his Dorothy Dixier, he chose the member for Kogarah to ask the question, which was so classical: What is the Government doing to crack down on fraud in public housing? I will not repeat the Minister's answer in full because the House has already heard it.

Mr Malcolm Kerr: Oh, go on!

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, I will not. The member for Cronulla wants it to be read aloud, but I will read it to him privately so that we can both have a good laugh. The Minister stated, in response to the arranged question asked by the member for Kogarah, that the Government will give Housing NSW the authority to prosecute offences for tenancy fraud. The Department of Housing already has power to do that and the penalties are stated on the department's website. This legislation merely changes the penalty from a maximum of \$2,200 to a maximum of three months imprisonment. But the Minister was being inaccurate. The classic statement is that the power will circumvent the need to refer matters to the Director of Public Prosecutions or NSW Police. The bill is intended to cut out NSW Police and the Director of Public Prosecutions who, under the Crimes Act, have always had power to take action against those who obtain a benefit by deception. The Minister is a lawyer and is well aware of section 178BA—

Mr Barry Collier: Of the Crimes Act.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Yes, section 178BA of the Crimes Act. The Minister is aware of that, as is the member for Miranda. Section 178BA, which could not be more apt in its application to Department of Housing fraud, states:

Whosoever by any deception dishonestly obtains for himself or herself or another person any money or valuable thing or any financial advantage of any kind whatsoever shall be liable to imprisonment for 5 years.

The section has been in operation since 1900, and police have always had the power to take action against tenancy fraud. But instead of a penalty of five years, the Minister will impose a penalty of three months. Oh, the Minister is a hard man! It is no wonder the Department of Housing staff quake at the very thought of his ruthlessness. I can just imagine the hundreds of prosecutions he will launch. What classic window-dressing. I ask the Minister in his reply to state the number of prosecutions that have been undertaken under the present law that provides a penalty of \$2,200 and how many cases the Minister ensured would not be referred to the police for prosecution under section 178BA. The Minister has already admitted that the purpose of the legislation is to exclude the police so that section 178BA will not be applied and so that the crooks can run riot.

The Minister will claim that those offences will be dealt with under the new and tougher legislation that provides for a penalty of three months. The Minister will claim he wants to amend the penalty of five years to avoid prosecuting in the District Court and to substitute a penalty that can be dealt with in the Magistrates Court. But section 178BA offences can be dealt with summarily. The Minister has no excuse. The Minister has decided to introduce legislation that does not have real penalties to address fraud. He intends to substitute this legislation for the New South Wales Crimes Act. He is window-dressing by providing a penalty of three months and pretending that the legislation is a great advance, whereas his intention is to do nothing to address public housing fraud. The member for Miranda, who is not a bad criminal lawyer—

Mr Malcolm Kerr: But he is a criminal lawyer.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Yes, he is a criminal lawyer.

Mr Barry Collier: Point of order: I ask the member for Terrigal to rephrase his statement and say "a practitioner in criminal law before the courts".

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I do not think that is much of a point of order.

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

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: If the member for Miranda takes points of order when I praise him, imagine what his reaction would be if I were to insult him.

Mr Barry Collier: You are insulting me now.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, I do not wish to insult him. I think he is a reasonable criminal lawyer. I have heard his speeches on criminal law, and I would be interested in what he has to say about prosecutions under section 178BA, which has existed in the Crimes Act since 1900. Despite that, the Minister deceived the House on 3 April by saying that the power will circumvent—what a wonderful word—the need to refer matters to the Director of Public Prosecutions or NSW Police. How often are we told that the New South Wales Government will circumvent NSW Police? How often are we told that the Government will not use its existing powers under the Crimes Act to introduce a penalty that amounts to a slap on the wrist under amendments to a principal Act, the Housing Act? The Government is pretending to be tough but actually is weakening powers that are designed to detect and prevent fraud by introducing legislation that will exclude certain courses of action.

Often it is what is omitted from legislation that is most revealing. This legislation does not apply to a major part of the activities of the Department of Housing, such as Aboriginal housing. Why is Aboriginal housing excluded? Why are people to be allowed to make false statements about or practice fraud on the Aboriginal Housing Office and escape liability or penalty? No explanation has been provided. All we know is that Aboriginal fraud is excluded from the bill. Does that mean that it will be open slather, or does that mean that the Crimes Act will apply? The Minister's failure to address that issue speaks volumes. As I said earlier, the Minister's claim that this legislation will create a criminal offence is wrong, because the criminal offence already exists. All that this legislation does is change the penalty.

The Minister claims that the Government will allow Housing NSW to access certain registers, such as those held by the Roads and Traffic Authority, Maritime New South Wales, New South Wales Lands and the Office of Fair Trading—a privilege that is not extended to any private landlord and a privilege that the Government, according to the Department of Housing website, is already able to exercise. The legislation will permit Housing NSW to recover debts by reducing or removing a rental rebate. Significantly, the legislation allows for a three-month amnesty. However, the amnesty will not begin when the legislation commences. It will not begin until 1 July, so everybody who is practising fraud will have plenty of warning. The amnesty of three months will commence on 1 July and will extend to the end of September. It will be advertised by the department. The Minister will probably feature in the advertisements and the advertisements will probably be very snappy, with lots of smiling people with the Minister outside a Department of Housing residence.

Mr Malcolm Kerr: Or outside a Mexican restaurant.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Or, as the member for Cronulla says, outside a Mexican restaurant, with the Minister saying, "We just want you to come forward and correct the record." Who is going to be prosecuted? Absolutely no-one. These new powers are giving a general amnesty for three months to anyone to change their particulars and all will be forgiven. The Minister is not serious. He is not going to recover any money. Where is the money he is going to recover under this legislation? The Minister himself interjects, "Show me the money." He is just like the character in the American movie he is quoting. He cannot produce the money because he is not going to save taxpayers anything. He is going through a pretence, a simulated action to prevent fraud, while he is reducing the effect of the legislation, giving himself powers far greater than anyone else has.

He has not said anything about the size of his detection unit. He has not said anything about the number of prosecutions he has launched. He has not said anything about how he intends to act after the amnesty period expires. He has not said anything about what money he will recover, if any, through the amnesty. He has simply engaged in a massive exercise in window-dressing. It achieved its purpose. It enabled him to answer a question in Parliament. It gave him an agreement-in-principle speech. It gave him a brief grab on television the other night, and everybody thought, "There is the Minister, doing his job, cracking down hard on Department of Housing fraud." Let us look at the effect of this amnesty. The department's website provides that the new amendments will, among other things:

Allow for a three month Amnesty to encourage any tenant incorrectly claiming a rental rebate to have their circumstances reviewed without fear of criminal prosecution or the need to repay the rental debt.

Tenants could have engaged in fraud over a long time, and ripped off tens of thousands of dollars, but will not have to pay a penny back. Not only will there not be a criminal prosecution but also there will be no need to repay the rental debt. It is all there on the Minister's website. His words are coming back to haunt him.

Mr Malcolm Kerr: Hoist with his own petard.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: As I think the member for Cronulla meant to say, the Minister is hoist on his own petard. Corruption is rampant in certain levels of the department. The *Daily Telegraph* said on 15 March 2007:

The State Government is facing yet another corruption scandal just nine days before the election with the discovery of an alleged "housing for cash" scheme operating out of the Housing Department.

The Independent Commission Against Corruption is investigating a public housing official who is claimed to be pocketing up to \$1800 a pop to fast-track applications.

The scam is another blight on Housing Minister Cherie Burton, who is the subject of an ICAC investigation into whether she followed correct procedure in the reporting of another fraud case in her own office.

So, there is the *Daily Telegraph*—

Ms Cherie Burton: Point of order: Apart from this amazing filibuster rubbish that is coming out of the mouth of the member for Terrigal—he will soon start reading his favourite recipe—I ask him to withdraw those comments. They do not relate remotely to the bill and this is just another chance for him to take an unsubstantiated swipe at someone. I ask him to withdraw the comments and return to the leave of the bill.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I cannot withdraw them, I am reading from the *Daily Telegraph*. If the member does not like it, she should take it up with the editor of the *Daily Telegraph*. It is relevant to the bill because the bill is about corruption in the Department of Housing.

Ms Cherie Burton: No, it is not.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The legislation relates to corruption in the Department of Housing.

Ms Cherie Burton: Point of order—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Why are you so worried, Cherie?

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! The member for Terrigal has been a member of this place long enough to know he is out of order.

Ms Cherie Burton: This bill is about fraud by tenants. If the member for Terrigal has any allegations to make he should refer them to the correct authorities. I do not care what the member is reading from, he is making aspersions in Parliament that are incorrect, and they have nothing to do with the bill.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: You are a very sensitive. Why are you so sensitive?

Ms Cherie Burton: Because they are lies, and you are repeating them and peddling them in this place. It is an absolute disgrace and you should be ashamed of yourself.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! The member for Terrigal is an experienced parliamentarian and debater. I remind him that attacks on other members should be by way of substantive motion.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Absolutely, and I am not making any. I am quoting from the *Daily Telegraph* of 15 March last year.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! That the member for Terrigal is quoting from the *Daily Telegraph* does not give him licence to attack the member for Kogarah.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Mr Acting-Speaker, I accept your ruling. You also are a very experienced member in this House, and we can engage in mutual praise.

Mr Matt Brown: Aren't you good mates!

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): It is a Central Coast thing. The member for Terrigal will return to the leave of the bill.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: We have corruption in the department, which has been attested to. We have fraud by tenants, and that was all revealed in 2007. What action was taken over 12 months ago? Nothing at all. We have seen nothing from the Minister for Housing about corruption in his own department. Who suffers from that revelation of corruption through the ICAC? The ones who suffer are those hundreds of poor, unfortunate tenants who were waiting their turn in the queue. They were the ones suffering and they are the ones who will continue to suffer under this Government. Let us look further into the legislation that the Minister has been pleased to bring to the House.

New section 72A provides, under the heading "Persons living with tenants liable to repay certain amounts", that the legislation extends to a person living with tenants if the improper rental rebate was obtained and if the person obtained a concession they were not entitled to, was over the age of 18 years at the time the tenant became liable to pay the amount, and knew or should reasonably have suspected that the tenant was improperly obtaining the rental rebate or any other advantage or concession. Nothing was said by the Minister in his agreement-in-principle speech about the extent of this practice or about why the department would need the power extended to it to go after not just the tenant—although the legislation is supposed to be aimed at tenant fraud—but beyond the tenant. Section 72A is an extraordinary section. In landlord and tenant law the landlord has no power to go after people living with the tenant. The landlord's powers are confined to the contract between the landlord and tenant.

Mr Matt Brown: Correct.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Minister says that is correct, and that has also been the case with the Department of Housing. Now, without any warning, without any indication in his press release, without any indication in his Dorothy Dixier, without any indication in his press conference, he has introduced a whole new concept into relationships between the Department of Housing and its tenants in that the persons living with tenants can now be sued by his department. That is an extension of law outside normal contract law. It is a statutory power, once again, that the Minister claims for himself but which is not granted to anyone else in the community, and for good reason.

In the normal landlord and tenant situation the landlord assesses the tenant and enters into an agreement with the tenant. If that agreement is breached, the landlord takes action against the tenant. Yet here the Minister is giving himself power to take action wider than the power given under contract. What justification does the Minister have for that extremely wide power? Why did he not state that in answer to the Dorothy Dix question, in his agreement-in-principle speech or in his press conference?

Mr Matt Brown: I did.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: You did not. We can go on for hours, but I did not hear you. We have a Minister who now violates the contract that exists between tenants and the department and who has done nothing that I or anyone else is aware of to address the housing for cash scandal revealed in his department. Is the Minister going to report to the Parliament on the ICAC inquiry? Is the Minister going to take any action to implement the recommendations of the ICAC inquiry?

Mr Ninos Khoshaba: Point of order: I apologise for interrupting the member's contribution but he keeps referring to corruption and is straying from the bill. I ask you to bring him back to the bill.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): The member for Terrigal has the call.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I thank the member for Smithfield for his contribution; it is always welcome. This Minister has brought to Parliament legislation that he says is designed to address housing fraud, yet it does a number of things: it cuts the police out of the process, and he admits that. The Minister now says it does not. He admits in his own statement that it "circumvents". What does circumvent mean? It means to go around—around the police and the Department of Public Prosecutions. The Minister has cut out the police and pretends he is taking action against fraud when there are already powers under the Crimes Act to do that. The Minister is changing the contract between landlord and tenant to enable him to chase after other people who are living with the tenant.

The Minister is giving himself extraordinary powers to go to a range of government departments, neighbours and supply authorities—powers not granted to any other landlord—so that he can become the grand inquisitor of Department of Housing tenants. The Minister is allowing an amnesty to take place under the pledge

that even people who have rorted the system for tens of thousands of dollars will not be called to account. Yet this Minister pretends he is reforming and improving the condition of the Department of Housing. The Minister admits there are 340,000 people living in public housing in New South Wales but does not tell the House about the tens of thousands waiting for a long time in queues to get Department of Housing accommodation. Why is there no accounting for that? Is he prepared to say in his reply what action he is taking to bring down the numbers on that list, because by the Minister's own admission he will not be able to build 200 houses a year?

This legislation may look good but it is flawed. It is an excuse for the Minister's inactivity on rorting in the department. It is not a proactive approach; it is just an excuse for him to pretend he is doing something by introducing legislation. I would like him to say how many prosecutions he anticipates in a 12-month period. How many people have been detected? Give us the figures and let the people of New South Wales know where the effectiveness of this legislation will lie. So far it is a futile exercise in window-dressing by a Government that favours spin over substance and loves window-dressing. It has had a whole series of Ministers in this portfolio, the most recent being the members for Fairfield and Kogarah, none of whom has addressed housing fraud detection. We are about to hear the contribution of the member for Kogarah, which will be as pious as it usually is.

Mr Matt Brown: That is not fair.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I withdraw the word "pious". The bottom line is this is not an effective tool to end housing fraud because the only effective tool is for the Minister to establish a strong unit in his department to campaign against housing fraud. The information is all there.

Mr Alan Ashton: That is what he is going to do.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No figures are given and there is no budget. There are no numbers in the bill. Where are the numbers for the housing fraud detection unit? Where is the budget? How much money is the Minister going to allocate to it? What measures will the Minister take to enforce the bill? There is none of that in the second reading speech or in the Minister's press conference. The big point he made at his press conference was that he was going to have an amnesty and that people need not pay the money back. It was going to be well publicised.

We are not happy with this bill and we are not impressed by it. We reserve our rights in respect of it. We think the legislation will go nowhere and that housing fraud will continue in the Department of Housing. The Government has once again chosen spin over substance. The people who will miss out are the tens of thousands waiting, in some cases for five or 10 years, for accommodation in departmental housing. The Minister himself admits hundreds of houses could have been built if he had had the money. He does not have the money, he is taking no action to recover the money and the taxpayers of New South Wales and those in Department of Housing queues will be the ones to suffer.

Ms CHERIE BURTON (Kogarah) [6.55 p.m.]: That was nothing short of a rant that we have had to endure for the last 40 minutes from someone who is not across the Housing Amendment (Tenant Fraud) Bill. It is pretty clear it is time someone considered retirement. I thought the member was going to give us his favourite recipes and talk about how he likes to plant vegetables in the garden. It was quite ridiculous. As usual the Opposition are all over the place. They are so desperate for something to say that they quote irrelevant lies and propaganda from the *Daily Telegraph*. Let us look at the Opposition's history on public housing. Its policy was to get out of public housing completely and it was a case of every person for themselves. That side has absolutely no credibility. Furthermore, for the last 11 years while the Howard Government was running the show—their mob—there was not a single phone call to Canberra to say, "Stop ripping the guts out of the housing budget." They took \$850 million out of the last one when I was involved with housing. The whole of the member's speech was a joke. It was not related to the bill.

Mr Thomas George: Point of order: I have listened to this for some two minutes now and I ask you to draw the member back to the leave of the bill.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! As the member for Kogarah has been speaking for only two minutes, I will hear more of her contribution before ruling on the point of order.

Ms CHERIE BURTON: Basically it was a waste of the time of the House, which was the objective of the member for Terrigal because he is approaching retirement. He should retire. I am pleased to support the

Minister for Housing in introducing this important legislative reform to crack down on housing cheats and ensure precious housing resources are delivered to people who need them most. The Iemma Government is focused on providing shelter and support to those most vulnerable in the community. The majority of public housing tenants are honest and decent people. The majority of them rely on the stability offered by public housing to ensure they can access other government agencies, improve their lives and move on. I know from my involvement with Mental Health that the housing program provides the stock and Mental Health provides the support for people who suffer from mental illness. That is one program run by the Government where housing is extremely important.

I join with taxpayers and those waiting for accommodation in being outraged when scarce public housing resources are used by people who do not need them and are not entitled to them. The eligibility criteria to access public housing are strict and they need to be because public housing exists to help the most vulnerable in the community. Those most in need should be assessed on a fair and equal basis. Unfortunately a very small minority of people will deliberately lie and cheat in order to obtain a benefit. It is these people that this legislation will target. Deliberately receiving a benefit by lying about your household income is a crime and needs to be recognised as one. This bill will give the department the power to prosecute. It is not about diverting the police; it is about saying to police, "You go and catch the crooks and we will pursue our own fraud cases instead of sucking up your resources."

Pursuant to sessional orders business interrupted to permit the adjournment of the House.

Item of business set down as an order of the day for a future day.

The House adjourned at 7.00 p.m. until Wednesday 9 April 2008 at 10.00 a.m.
